



Republic

— BOOK VI —

“Well then, Glaucon,” I said, “after conducting quite a lengthy enquiry, we have, with some difficulty, discovered those who are philosophers and those who are not.” 484 a

“Yes,” he said, “perhaps it would not have been easy to shorten it.”

“Apparently not,” I replied. “And yet I still think the discovery would have gone better if we only needed to talk about this topic and we had no need to discuss a host of outstanding issues if we are going to discern the difference between the just and the unjust life.” 484 b

“What do we need to discuss after this?” he said.

“The next issue in due sequence,” I replied. “What else? Since philosophers can apprehend that which is always the same as it is, while those who cannot do so are not philosophers but wander instead amid multiplicity and variety, which of them should actually be rulers in the city?”

“How may we give an adequate response to this question?” he said.

“Whichever sort proves capable of guarding the laws and the proceedings of the city are the ones to appoint as guardians,” I replied.

“Quite right,” he said. 484 c

“Well,” I said, “is it obvious whether it is a blind man or a keen-sighted man who should keep watch over something?”

“Of course it is obvious,” he said.

“Well then, do these people seem any better than blind men? I mean, are these people blind who are, in truth, deprived of the knowledge of what anything is, who have no evident pattern in their soul and are unable to look towards perfect truth, as a painter looks at a model, always referring to that realm and contemplating it with the utmost precision, and who cannot establish regulations concerning beauty, justice and goodness in this realm, if they are needed, or act as guardian saviours of what is already in place?” 484 d

“No, by Zeus,” he said. “They are not much different from blind men.”

“So, shall we install these men as guardians in preference to those who know what each thing is, and are not lacking in practical experience compared to the others or inferior to them in any other aspect of excellence?”

“It would be most strange,” he said, “to choose anyone else if the philosophers, in fact, lacked none of the other qualities. For the particular quality in which they excel is really the most important one of all.” 485 a

“Well, should we not explain how the same people will be able to possess these qualities and the other qualities?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“We said at the beginning of this discussion that it is necessary to understand their nature first, and I believe that if we come to a satisfactory agreement on this, we shall also agree that the same people can possess both sets of qualities, and these must be the rulers of the city and not anyone else.”

“How?”

485 b “Well, let us agree something about the philosophic natures. Let us agree that they always love any learning, which would reveal to them something of that being which always is, and does not wander in subjection to generation and decay.”

“We should agree on that.”

“And what is more,” I said, “they will love all of it and will not willingly dismiss any part, be it small or large, honourable or dishonourable. They are just like the lovers of honour and the flattering lovers we described earlier.”

“What you are saying is correct,” he said.

485 c “Here is something else you should think about. Consider whether people who are going to conform to this description must have an additional characteristic in their nature.”

“What sort of characteristic?”

“Freedom from falsehood. They will never willingly accept the false; they hate it and love the truth.”

“Quite likely,” he said.

“Oh it is not merely likely, my friend, but absolutely necessary for someone, who is by nature lovingly disposed to anything, to cherish all that is kindred and related to the beloved.”

“You are right,” he said.

“Now, could you find anything more closely related to wisdom than truth?”

“No, how could you,” he said.

485 d “And is it possible for the same nature to be both a lover of wisdom and a lover of falsehood?”

“Not at all.”

“So, the genuine lover of learning must strive to the utmost for all truth from his youth upwards.”

“Entirely so.”

“However, when desires are strongly inclined in a single direction, we surely understand that they are weakened in the other directions, just like a stream which is diverted to a particular place.”

“Of course.”

486 e “Now, those who are inclined towards the objects of learning and everything like that would, I believe, be concerned with the pleasure of soul just by itself and would forsake the pleasures of the body, if the person is to be truly a philosopher and not artificially so.”

“This must necessarily be so.”

“Indeed, such a man is sound-minded and in no sense a lover of money. In fact, it is not appropriate for him to be involved in the concerns of money and its objects, and its enormous extravagance.”

“Quite so.”

486 a “Yes, and there is something else you must consider if you are going to distinguish the philosophic nature from the unphilosophic.”

“What is it?”

“Be on the lookout for any involvement in slavishness. For presumably, petty-mindedness is utterly inimical to the soul, which intends to strive always for the whole and entire, of both the divine and the human.”

“Very true,” he said.

“Now, do you think that a mind endowed with magnificence, and a vision of all time and all being, could regard human life as something important?”

“Impossible,” he said.

486 b “And a man like this will not think that death is something terrible, will he?”

“Not in the least.”

“Then, it seems a cowardly and slavish nature would have no involvement in true philosophy.”

“I do not think so.”

“Then again, is there any way that someone who is well behaved – not a lover of money, or slavish, or boastful, or cowardly – could be unjust or difficult to deal with?”

“There is not.”

“Well, when you are considering whether a soul is philosophic or not, you will enquire whether he was just and gentle from his youth upwards, or unsociable and wild.”

“Yes, indeed.”

“And I think there is one more consideration you should not omit.”

486 c

“Which is?”

“Whether he learns easily or with difficulty. Or do you expect that someone would ever really love an activity when its performance caused him pain, and after much difficulty he accomplished little?”

“No, he would not.”

“And what if he could preserve nothing of what he learned, being full of forgetfulness? Could he avoid being empty of knowledge?”

“No, how could he?”

“Now, as his labour accomplishes nothing, do you not imagine he will be driven finally to hate both himself and this sort of activity?”

“That is inevitable.”

“So, we should not ever admit a forgetful soul into the ranks of those competent for philosophy, but we must search instead for a retentive soul.”

486 d

“Yes, entirely so.”

“What is more, we would say that a person of unharmonious and deformed nature is drawn to mis-measure, and to nothing else.”

“Of course.”

“And do you think truth is akin to measure or to mismeasure?”

“To measure.”

“So, we should look for a mind which naturally exhibits measure and good grace in addition to the other qualities, a mind whose own nature allows it to be led easily to the form of anything that is.”

“We should, of course.”

“Well then, do you think that the qualities we have listed are in any way unnecessary, or incompatible with one another, for a soul which intends to apprehend ‘what is’ adequately and comprehensively?”

486 e

“They are absolutely necessary,” he replied.

487 a

“Now, is there any way you could criticise a pursuit like this, which no one would be able to engage in properly unless he were naturally retentive, a good learner, magnanimous, gracious, and a friend and relation of truth, justice, courage and sound-mindedness?”

“Not even Momus¹ would criticise an activity of that sort,” he said.

“Then,” I said, “would you not entrust the city to such people, once they have been perfected by education and the passage of years?”

Then Adimantus said, “Socrates, no one would be able to contradict you on these matters. However, your hearers have a particular kind of experience every time they hear what you are saying now. They think, due to their inexperience in questioning and answering, that with every question, they are being led a little astray by the argument. But when the little steps are gathered together at the conclusion of the arguments, the defeat proves to be enormous, and quite contrary to the initial assertions. And just like draughts players who are finally boxed in by clever opponents and do not know what move they should make, your hearers are also finally boxed in and do not know what they should say in this quite different

487 b

487 c

¹ Momus was the personification of satire and mockery. His name is associated with blame and disgrace.

game of draughts, played not with counters but with words. However, they have no better knowledge of the truth on account of this process.

“I am speaking in the context of the present discussion. For someone may now say that they cannot oppose you in argument based upon each individual question, but that you should look at the facts. Those who venture into philosophy, not taking it up in their youth for educational purposes and then being free from it, but engaging in it for a long period of time, become for the most part very odd or, we could even say, utterly debased. There are others who seem completely reasonable, except that they are rendered useless to their cities through their encounters with the very subject which you commend.”

Having listened to all this, I replied, “Do you think that the people who make these statements are lying?”

“I do not know,” he said, “but I would be glad to hear your opinion.”

“Then I will tell you. In my opinion, they appear to me anyway to be speaking the truth.”

“In that case,” he said, “how is it appropriate to say that the cities will have no relief from evils until the philosophers rule in them, when we agree that such people are useless to these cities?”

“The question you have asked,” I replied, “needs an answer expressed by means of an image.”

“And I suppose you are quite unaccustomed to speaking in terms of images!” he said.

“Very well,” I said. “Are you mocking me now that you have landed me with a proposition which is so hard to prove? Anyway, listen to the image so that you may get a better appreciation of how sparingly I make use of images. Indeed, the plight which the most reasonable ones experience at the hands of their cities is so grievous that there is not a single predicament like it. Rather, it is necessary to draw numerous sources together to develop an image of their condition and conduct a defence on their behalf, like the painters who draw goat-stags and hybrid creatures of that sort.

“So, imagine something like this taking place on numerous ships or on a single ship. The captain, though he exceeds everyone on board in size and strength, is, on the other hand, somewhat deaf, his eyesight is also poor, and his knowledge of navigation is not much better. Now, the sailors are arguing with one another over the steering of the ship, each believing that he should steer, though he has not ever learned the skill nor is he able to indicate who his own teacher was, nor when it was that he studied with him. What is more, they assert that the subject is not even teachable, and they do not hesitate to cut into pieces anyone who says that it can be taught. They throng about the captain himself, imploring him and doing anything so that he will turn the helm over to them. Sometimes, if they do not prevail and others are preferred, they kill these others or throw them out of the ship. And having entangled the noble captain with drugs or drink or something else, they assume command of the ship, make use of its contents, and sail on, drinking and feasting in the manner you expect from such people. As well as this, they praise anyone who is clever at working out how they can gain power by either persuading or overpowering the captain, and they refer to such a person as navigator, helmsman or professor of nautical affairs, and anyone who is not like this they dismiss as useless. But they do not want to hear about the true helmsman, that he must make a study of the year, the seasons, the sky, stars and winds and everything appropriate to this skill, if he really intends to govern a ship. And they do not believe it is possible to be skilled and practised in taking the helm regardless of the wishes of anyone else, and be a skilled helmsman at the same time.

“Now, since this is what is happening on board the ship, do you not think the true helmsman will indeed be called a star-gazer, an idler, and a useless person by the mariners on ships which are organised in this way?”

“Very much so,” said Adimantus.

“Now,” I said, “I do not think you will require detailed scrutiny of the image to appreciate that it

resembles the disposition of the cities towards the true philosophers. I think you understand what I mean.”

“Very much so,” he said.

“Then the first thing is to teach this image to the person who is amazed because philosophers are not honoured in the cities, and try to persuade him that it would be much more amazing if they were honoured.” 489 b

“Yes, I shall teach him,” he said.

“And therefore, what you are saying is true, that the most reasonable of those who engage in philosophy are useless to the multitude. However, tell him that the people who do not make use of the philosophers are responsible for their uselessness, and not those reasonable men. For it is not natural for the helmsman to implore the sailors to be ruled by him, or for the wise to go to the doors of the wealthy. No, whoever invented that ingenious expression was lying. The truth of nature is that whether you are rich or poor you must go to the doors of the doctors when you are ill, and all who wish to be ruled must go to the doors of those who can rule. The ruler must not implore his subjects to submit to his rule if he is to be of any use at all. But you will not be wide of the mark in comparing the politicians who are ruling now to the sailors we described earlier, and those whom they refer to as useless and as star-gazers to the true helmsmen.” 489 c

“You are perfectly right,” he said.

“Well, under these circumstances and in these situations, it is not easy for philosophy to be esteemed as the paramount activity by people who are acting in opposition to it. But by far the greatest and most intense detraction of philosophy owes its origin to those who claim to be engaging in philosophic activity. Indeed, you said that the critic of philosophy maintains that most of those who embark upon its study are utterly debased, while the most reasonable are useless, and I admitted you were speaking the truth. Is this so?” 489 d

“Yes.”

“Did we not explain the cause of the uselessness of those who are reasonable?”

“Very much so.”

“Do you want us to go on and explain the inevitable debasement of the majority? And if we are able, should we try to demonstrate that philosophy is not responsible for this either?” 489 e

“Yes, certainly.”

“Then let us listen, and let us speak, once we have reminded ourselves of where we described the sort of nature with which someone who is to be noble and good must be endowed. First, if you recall, it was truth that guided him. He had to pursue it comprehensively by every means, or being a pretender, have no involvement whatsoever with true philosophy.” 490 a

“Yes, that is what was said.”

“And is not this one quality, the pursuit of truth, in stark contrast to the opinions currently expressed about him?”

“Very much so,” he said.

“Now, shall we not put up a reasonable defence by saying that someone who actually loves learning would naturally strive towards ‘what is’, and would not dwell upon each of the many things which seem to be? Rather, he would go on, without blunting his love or relenting in it, until he had grasped the nature of what each thing is in itself, with that part of the soul best fitted to apprehend this, the part which is kindred to it. Once he had drawn close to what actually is, and consorted with it through that part of the soul, having given birth to reason and truth, he would know, and live truly and be nourished, and in this way and in no other would his travail cease.” 490 b

“Nothing could be more reasonable,” he said.

“Well then, will he share any love of falsehood, or, on the contrary, will he hate it?”

“He will hate it,” he said. 490 c

“So once truth is leading the way, I presume we would never say that a chorus of evils could follow it.”

“How could it?”

“But what will follow is a healthy and just character accompanied by sound-mindedness.”

“Correct,” he said.

“And, in fact, why should it be necessary to arrange the rest of the chorus belonging to the philosophic nature all over again from the beginning? For presumably you do recall that courage, magnanimity, ease of learning and memory turned out to belong to such a nature. And you objected that everyone would indeed be forced to agree with what we are saying, and yet if they set the arguments aside, and looked at the people we are referring to, they would say that some of them are seen to be useless, while the majority are bad in every way. In considering the cause of this criticism we have come to a question. Why precisely are the majority bad? And now, on account of this question, we have taken up the nature of the true philosophers once more and we are compelled to define it.”

“So it is,” he said.

“Then,” I said, “we need to look at the corruption of this nature and how it is destroyed in most cases, with few exceptions – a few who are, of course, referred to not as debased, but as useless.

And after that we should look in turn at those who imitate this nature and set themselves up as practitioners of it. When souls of this nature encounter an activity of which they are unworthy, and which is greater than themselves, they constantly fall into error and bring upon philosophy the reputation you describe, in all sorts of ways and in front of everyone.”

“What is the corruption you refer to?” he said.

“I shall try to explain this to you if I am able,” I said. “There is one point on which I think everyone will agree with us. A nature like this, possessing all the qualities we prescribed just now for a perfect philosopher, will be few in number and will develop infrequently in people. Do you agree?”

“Yes, definitely.”

“Now consider the many significant causes of the destruction of these few.”

“What causes?”

“Well, the most amazing thing of all to hear is that each of the qualities which we praised in that philosophic nature destroys the soul that possesses it, and tears it away from philosophy. I am referring here to courage, sound-mindedness, and all the qualities we described.”

“That is very strange to hear,” he said.

“Yes,” said I. “And in addition to these, all the so-called goods corrupt and tear one away from philosophy: beauty, wealth, strength of body, strong family relationships within the city, and everything associated with these. Now you understand the kind of thing I am referring to.”

“I understand,” he said, “and I would love to hear what you have to say in more detail.”

“Then,” I said, “comprehend it correctly in its entirety and it will appear quite clear to you, and the previous statements about these goods will not seem strange.”

“What are you telling me to do?” he said.

“In the case of all seeds, or any growth either in the earth or in animals, we know that whatever does not encounter appropriate nourishment, or climate, or location, feels a lack, and the more vigorous it is the more it feels the lack of what is appropriate to it. For badness is more opposed to good than to that which is not good.”

“Of course.”

“Now, it stands to reason, I believe, that the best nature turns out worse than the ordinary nature under nurture which is alien to it.”

“It does.”

“And,” said I, “will we not say, Adimantus, that the same applies to souls? Those with the best

natural endowments will become especially bad on encountering bad instruction. Or do you think that enormous injustices and unadulterated baseness originate in an ordinary nature rather than in a high-spirited nature corrupted by its nurture? Will a weak nature ever be responsible for any great good or any great evil?”

“No,” he said, “the situation is as you describe it.”

“Then, I presume, the nature we designated as philosophic must develop and attain complete excellence if it obtains the proper instruction. However, if it is not sown, planted and nurtured in the proper manner, it attains the very opposite instead, unless one of the gods happens to come to its aid. 492 a

“Or do you also believe, as many do, that some young people are corrupted by sophists, and that certain sophists, operating in private, are a corrupting influence of any significance? 492 b Rather, is it not the very people who make these statements who are the greatest sophists, who educate young and old, men and women, to the utmost, and fashion them according to their will?”

“When does this happen?” he said.

“Whenever many people sit down together in large numbers in the assembly,” I said, “the law court, the theatre or a military camp, or some other crowded public forum, and with much commotion they censure some things that are said or enacted, and praise others, both in excess. They cry out and applaud, and the rocks and the very place they are in echo with them and redouble the din of their censure and praise. Now, in such a situation, how do you think the young man’s heart will fare? What private education will withstand this, and not be swept away by this sort of censure and praise, and be gone, borne away by the flood to wherever it may lead? Won’t he declare that what is beautiful or ugly is just what they say it is? Won’t he behave as they do and be just like them?” 492 c

“Yes, Socrates,” he said, “he must.” 492 d

“And yet,” I said, “we have still not mentioned the most powerful compulsion.”

“What is that?” he said.

“The compulsion which these educators and sophists employ through their actions when they fail to persuade with words. Or do you not realise that they punish people who are not persuaded, through loss of status, fines and death?”

“Yes, most definitely,” he said.

“So what other sophist, or what sort of private principles, do you think will prevail in a struggle against such people as these?” 492 e

“I do not think there is one,” he said.

“No, there is not,” I said. “And even the attempt would be utter folly. For there is not, nor has there been, nor indeed will there ever be, a character distinguished in excellence who has been educated in the system which these people provide, not among humanity anyway, my friend. Of course, according to the proverb, we should make an exception in the case of the divine. For we need to appreciate that if anything is saved and develops as it should, when cities are in such a predicament as this, it is the providence of God that saves it. If you say this, you will be speaking no evil.” 493 a

“Well, that is how it seems to me anyway,” he said.

“Then,” said I, “there is another proposition you should also accept as well as these.”

“What is it?”

“Each of the private hirelings, whom certain people call sophists and regard as their professional rivals, do not teach anything other than the doctrines of the masses, the opinions that they form when they are gathered together. And the sophists call this wisdom. It is as if a huge powerful beast was being nurtured and someone made a careful study of its appetites and desires: how it should be approached and how it should be touched; when it is at its most difficult or when it is most docile; how these moods arise, and, indeed, what sounds it usually utters in either circum- 493 b

stance, and what sounds uttered, in turn, by others make it gentle or wild. Suppose having learned all this through years of experience of being with the creature, he called it wisdom, set it up as a skill, and turned to teaching it. Without knowing if any of those doctrines or desires was beautiful
 493 c or ugly, good or bad, just or unjust, he would decide everything according to the opinions of the huge animal. Whatever pleased it he would call good, whatever upset it he would call bad, and this is the only argument he would have on the matter. Whatever was necessary he would call just and beautiful, without having seen the nature of the necessary and the nature of the good, and the extent to which they really differ, or being able to demonstrate this to anyone else. Now, by Zeus, do you not think a person like this would be a strange educator?"

"I think so," he said.

"Well, is there any difference between this man and someone who believes that discerning the
 493 d mood and pleasures of these numerous, variegated gatherings of people is wisdom, whether it concerns painting, music or even politics? For regardless of how someone deals with them, whether he presents poetry or some other product or service to the city, once he turns the multitude into his masters beyond the limit of necessity, the so-called 'necessity of Diomedes'² compels him to produce whatever they praise. But have you ever yet heard someone make the case that these produc-
 493 e tions are in truth good and beautiful, based on an argument which was not utterly laughable?"

"No, and I do not think I ever shall," he said.

"Well, now that you have understood all this, let me remind you of something. Is there any way
 494 a that the masses will accept or believe that there is such a thing as beauty itself, rather than many beautiful things, or anything 'by itself', rather than many particular things?"

"Not in the least," he said.

"So it is impossible for the multitude to be a philosopher," I replied.

"Impossible."

"And so those who engage in philosophy must be censured by the multitude."

"They must."

"And, of course, by those private educators who associate with the crowds and who long to please
 them."

"Obviously."

"Now, do you see any salvation for the philosophic nature emerging from all this, so that it will
 494 b persist in its activity and reach its objective? Think in terms of what was said earlier. We did agree that ease of learning, memory, courage, and magnanimity belong to this nature."

"Yes."

"Will not a person like this, from his very childhood, be the first among them all in everything,
 especially if his body also develops like his soul?"

"He must be," he said.

"Then his associates and fellow citizens will want to make use of him for their own purposes, once
 he comes of age."

"How could they do otherwise?"

"So, they will fall at his feet, and petition him and honour him, laying on their flattery as they
 494 c anticipate his impending power."

"That is what tends to happen, anyway," he said.

"Now, what do you think a person like this will do under such circumstances," I said, "especially
 if he happens to belong to a great city in which he is wealthy and of noble birth, and he is tall and
 good-looking besides? Will he not be filled with unbounded confidence, believing himself com-
 494 d petent to manage the affairs of the Greeks and non-Greeks? Will he not exalt himself on account
 of this, and be loaded with pretension and empty thinking which is devoid of reason?"

"Yes, very much so," he said.

“Well, if one were to approach a person in such a predicament gently and tell him the truth – that there is no reason in him but he does need reason, and that anyone who does not have it must work like a slave to acquire it – do you think it would be easy for him to hear this in the midst of such corrupting influences?”

“Far from it,” he said.

“What if one such person somehow becomes aware of philosophy,” I said, “turns to it, and is drawn there on account of good rearing and an affinity with reasoned arguments? How do we think the others will respond when they presume that they will lose his influence and companionship? Will they not do anything, or say anything, through private conspiracies and public confrontations to prevent him from being persuaded, and to prevent the persuader from succeeding?” 494 e

“Yes, they must,” he said. 495 a

“Then is there any way that such a person will enter into philosophy?”

“Certainly not.”

“Do you see now that we were not far wrong when we said that the very qualities of the philosophic nature, once they encounter bad nurture, are in a way responsible for making a man give up the activity? And the same goes for the so-called goods, such as wealth or any acquisition of that sort.”

“Yes, what was said was correct.”

“So, wonderful friend, such is the extent of the corruption, and the sort of destruction, which afflicts the very best nature with regard to this supreme activity, and we assert that this nature is a rare occurrence in any case. And, indeed, from the ranks of these men come the people who inflict the greatest evils on cities and individuals, and the greatest good too should they happen to be inclined in that direction. But a weak nature never does anything significant, either for a city or for an individual.” 495 b

“Very true,” he said.

“And now that these people who are most suited to philosophy have gone away like this, they leave it alone and incomplete, while they themselves live an unseemly and untrue life. Philosophy, on the other hand, is like an orphan without relatives. Unworthy characters arrive on the scene and they subject it to shame and derision, levelling the sort of criticisms you describe, that some of its associates are worthless, while most of them are responsible for countless evils.” 495 c

“Well, yes, that is what they say anyway.”

“And what they say is quite reasonable. For other puny specimens of humanity observe that this place is becoming empty, though it is full of fair titles and reputations. Like men who flee from prison to take refuge in temples, those who happen to be cleverest in their own little subject are glad to jump from their professions into philosophy. Nevertheless, philosophy, in spite of its predicament, retains a most worthy reputation in comparison with the other occupations. So of course many people whose nature is undeveloped aspire to this, but their souls are stunted and crushed by vulgarities, just as their bodies are deformed by their professions and occupations. This is inevitable is it not?” 495 d
495 e

“Very much so,” he said.

“Now,” I said, “do you think they are any different to behold than a small, bald-headed bronze-worker who has acquired some money, has recently been freed from bondage, washed himself at a bathhouse, is wearing a brand new garment, and is decked out like a bridegroom, intending to marry his master’s daughter because she is poor and abandoned?”

“No, there is not much difference,” he said. 496 a

² The phrase ‘necessity of Diomedes’ or ‘diomedan compulsion’ is thought to have come from a Homeric story according to which Diomedes, a great warrior, who had prevented Odysseus from killing him, decided against punishing Odysseus. Since Odysseus was so central to the defeat of Troy, the phrase came to refer to one who foregoes personal gain in the interest of the greater good.

“And what sort of offspring are such unions likely to bring forth? Will it not be illegitimate and ordinary?”

“It really must be.”

“Well then, what sort of ideas and opinions would we say are produced when those who are unworthy of education draw near to philosophy and consort with it when they do not deserve to? Would it not be best, in truth, to call them sophisms, possessing nothing genuine or worthy of true intelligence?”

“Entirely so,” he said.

496 b “Well, Adimantus,” I said, “what is left is some tiny remnant of those who are worthy to consort with philosophy, perhaps a noble and well-reared character who has suffered exile, has no access to corrupting influences and remains naturally by its side. Or sometimes a great soul may grow up in a small city, show no respect for the affairs of that city and may see beyond them. Or perhaps some few with natural endowments may come to it from other professions, for which they rightly show an appropriate disregard. The bridle of our friend Theages³ may also be able to restrain someone. Yes, 496 c indeed, all other factors in Theages’ life gave him cause to give up philosophy. However, his inclination to physical illness keeps him out of public affairs and acts as a restraint. But my own sign,⁴ the daimon, is not worth mentioning, for I believe it has happened to scarcely anyone else before.

496 d “Now, those who belong to this small group have tasted the sweetness and blessedness of this possession, and can also see the madness of the multitude quite well, realising that in a sense no one does anything reasonable in the conduct of civic affairs, nor is there an ally with whom a man could go to the aid of justice and still survive. Instead, he is like a man who has fallen in with wild animals, has no desire to conspire in wrongdoing but is not up to the task of resisting all their savagery, a man who will perish before he is of any benefit to the city or his friends, and would be of no use to himself or anyone else. Having understood all this through reflection, he is at peace and attends to his own affairs, like a man in a storm of wind-driven dust and rain who crouches 496 e beneath a low wall. And seeing that all else is crammed full of lawlessness, he is content if somehow he can live this life here purified of injustice and unholy deeds, and take his departure with good hope, gracious and kindly as he goes.”

497 a “But surely,” he said, “if he were to depart, having accomplished this, it would be no mean achievement.”

“Nor the greatest possible achievement either,” I said, “unless he encounters a form of government which is propitious. For he himself will develop fully in a propitious city, and will save what is public and what is private.

“And now the origin of the slanders against philosophy and the injustice of the charges have, in my opinion, been properly explained, unless you have anything else to say.”

“No,” he said, “I have nothing else to say on this topic. But which of the present forms of government is propitious to philosophy?”

497 b “None whatsoever,” I said. “That is the very accusation I am making. Not one city of those presently in existence is worthy of the philosophic nature, and therefore it is contorted and altered. Just as an alien seed planted in foreign ground tends to be overpowered and fades into the local countryside, this type, in like manner, no longer holds onto his own capacity, but degenerates into a character which is not his own. However, if he encounters the most excellent form of government, 497 c as excellent as himself, then it will be evident that this type is truly divine, while the others are human both in their natures and in their activities. Obviously the next thing you will ask is what this form of government is.”

“No, you are wrong,” he said. “I was not about to ask you that, but rather whether this is the very form of government we have been describing whilst establishing our city, or a different form.”

“In general terms, it is that form,” I said. “However, it was also stated earlier that there must always be one person in the city possessing the same understanding of the form of government which you, the lawgiver, held when you were instituting the laws.” 497 d

“Yes, that was said,” he replied.

“But this was not made sufficiently clear,” I said, “because we were afraid of your objections which show that the proof of this is long and difficult. Indeed, what now remains is not at all easy to recount.”

“What does remain?”

“The manner in which a city practising philosophy may avoid destruction. For obviously all great undertakings are prone to failure, and it is a true saying that ‘hard is the good’.”

“But we should bring the proof to a conclusion anyway by making this point clear.” 497 e

“It is not lack of will,” I said, “but lack of ability, if anything, which may prevent this. And since you are here you will see how eager I am. Behold the impetuosity and rashness with which I now declare that the city must take up this philosophic activity in the opposite manner to the present manner.”

“How?”

“Nowadays,” I said, “those who take up the subject are youths just out of childhood, before they turn to household affairs and money-making, who get close to the most difficult aspect of the activity and then give up. I am referring to those with the greatest philosophic pretensions. And when I mention ‘the most difficult aspect’, I mean reasoned arguments. Subsequently, if they are invited by others who engage in philosophy, they prefer to participate as listeners, and they think that this is significant for they regard it as a necessary pastime. But in their later years, save of course for a few, they are extinguished more comprehensively than Heraclitus’ sun,⁵ insofar as they are never again rekindled.” 498 a

“What should they do?” he asked. 498 b

“The complete opposite. When they are youths and children, they should engage in a youthful form of education and philosophy, and at a time when their bodies are developing and reaching manhood, these should be very well cared for in order to procure a servant for philosophy.

“But once they reach the age at which the soul starts to become mature, they should intensify the exercises of the soul. And later, when the strength abates and they become unfit for political or military affairs, at that stage they should be left to indulge in philosophy without restraint and do nothing else unless as a pastime, if they are to live happily, and when they die, crown the life they have lived here with a propitious destiny beyond.” 498 c

“Socrates,” he said, “it really does seem to me that you have, at best, spoken enthusiastically. However, I think that most of your listeners are resisting you with even greater enthusiasm and will not be persuaded at all, beginning with Thrasymachus.”

“Do not speak ill of me and Thrasymachus,” I replied. “We have only just become friends, not that we were enemies before that. For we shall not give up this effort until we either persuade him and the others, or make some preparation for that life wherein they come into being once more and encounter arguments such as these.” 498 d

“You are referring to quite a short time period,” he said.

“Yes, but it is really nothing in relation to all time,” I replied. “However, the fact that most people are not persuaded by what is being said is no wonder at all. For they have never beheld what is

³ The phrase ‘bridle of Theages’ later became proverbial for an undesired but perhaps fortunate restraint from doing something. See also the dialogue *Theages*.

⁴ Socrates tells us in the *Apology* (31c–32a) that his daimonic sign only admonished him not to do certain things.

⁵ It was reported that Heraclitus believed that the sun is new every day (Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 355a14).

498 e now being described. No, just a lot more expressions of this sort, which cohere with one another due to contrivance rather than the chance occurrence which happened just now. But they have never yet seen a number of men, or even one man, who is perfectly balanced and coherent in virtue
 499 a as far as this is possible, in both word and deed, holding power in a city which is just like himself. Or do you think they have?”

“Not at all.”

“Nor, blessed friend, have they listened properly to beautiful and free discourse, of a kind which exerts itself in every way to seek truth for the sake of knowledge, showing only a distant regard for clever and argumentative words whose aim, both in law courts and in private gatherings, is nothing except reputation and contention?”

“No, they do not have this experience, either,” he said.

499 b “Well,” I said, “on account of these issues, and anticipating them, at the time we were afraid. But nevertheless, under the compulsion of truth, we said that neither a city, nor a form of government, nor an individual person either, would attain perfection until some necessity, perchance, compels those few philosophers – who are not corrupted but who have just been referred to as useless – to take responsibility for the city, whether they want to or not, and also constrains the city to heed
 499 c them. Or, until a true love of true philosophy, through some divine providence, inspires the sons of our present kings or potentates, or even the men themselves. And I am saying that there is no reason why either or both of these outcomes is impossible. For in that case, we would rightly be laughed at for uttering nothing but empty pieties. Is this not so?”

“It is so.”

499 d “Then, if some necessity had arisen for those at the very pinnacle of philosophy to take charge of a city, in the boundless ages of the past, in some foreign land which is somehow far beyond our view, or there is such a need at present, or if this will ever happen in future, then I am prepared to uphold the argument that there has been a form of government such as we have described, and there is and will be such a form whenever the Muse of philosophy has come to power in a city. For it is not impossible to bring this into being, neither are we describing impossibilities, but we do acknowledge that it is difficult.”

“And that is how it seems to me too,” he said.

“And would you agree,” I said, “that this is not how it seems to most people?”

“Perhaps,” he replied.

499 e “Blessed friend,” I said, “do not level undue criticism at the masses in this manner. They will hold a different opinion if you are encouraging, rather than adversarial, as you undo this slander against
 500 a the love of learning. Show them the people you call philosophers, and define their nature and the activity just as you did before, so that they will not think you are referring to the people whom they themselves regard as philosophers. And once they see this, surely you agree that they will hold a different opinion and respond differently. Or do you think that anyone gets angry with someone who is not being angry, or acts grudgingly towards someone who is ungrudging and is a generous, gentle person? Actually, I shall anticipate your answer and say that it may happen in a few cases, but in most cases such an angry nature does not arise.”

“And I agree with you, of course,” he said.

500 b “And will you not also agree that the angry disposition of most people towards philosophy is caused by those outsiders who rush in wildly where they do not belong, abusing one another, possessed by a love of adversity, always framing their arguments in relation to other people, an activity utterly inappropriate to philosophy?”

“Very much so,” he replied.

500 c “Yes, and surely you would also agree, Adimantus, that someone whose mind is truly directed towards things that are, has no time to look down upon the affairs of men and do battle with them,

filled with envy and hostility. No, he looks towards things which are in their assigned place, which are always the same, and seeing that these neither act unjustly nor are treated unjustly by one another, but are completely ordered and in accord with reason, he imitates them and becomes as like unto them as possible. Or do you think there is any way that a person who delights in something, and consorts with it, can avoid imitating it?”

“Impossible,” he said.

“Then the philosopher, consorting with the divine and the orderly, becomes as divine and orderly as is possible for a human being. But there is enormous prejudice from all quarters.” 500 d

“Yes, entirely so.”

“Now, should some need arise for him to practise instilling what he sees in that place into the private or public affairs of humanity, and not merely to work upon himself, do you think he would prove to be a poor artificer of sound-mindedness and justice and the sum total of public excellence?”

“Not in the least,” he said.

“But if the masses actually realise that we are speaking the truth about the philosopher, will they still be angry with the philosophers, and disbelieve us when we say that a city will not ever be happy at all unless it is drawn by draughtsmen who have recourse to the divine pattern?” 500 e

“They will not be angry once they realise this,” he said. “But what manner of drawing are you referring to?” 501 a

“Having taken the city,” I said, “as if it were a writing tablet, and the customs of humanity too, they would first make them clean, and this is no easy task. But in any case, you know that they would immediately differ from others in this respect; they would not be prepared to take responsibility for a person or a city, or write laws, unless these were either clean when they received them, or they themselves made them clean.”

“And rightly so,” he said.

“And after that, do you not think they would sketch an outline of the form of government?”

“Of course.” 501 b

“Then, I presume, they would turn their gaze in both directions as they filled in the details, looking towards what is naturally just and beautiful and sound, and everything of that sort, and towards their counterpart in the realm of humanity. Mixing together and blending various activities, they would fashion the likeness of a man by referring to what Homer calls ‘the form and image of God arising in human beings’.”⁶

“Correct,” he said.

“And I imagine they would erase one feature and then draw in another feature, until they had made the character of humanity as beloved of God as it can possibly be.” 501 c

“The picture could scarcely be more beautiful,” he said.

“Now,” I said, “are we somehow persuading the people who are ‘rushing at us in battle array’ that this is the sort of draughtsman of forms of government we commended to them earlier? They were angry because we were going to hand the city over to this man, but are they any gentler now that they have heard this?”

“Very much so,” he replied, “if they are sound-minded, anyway.”

“Yes, but how could they dispute this? Would they say that the philosophers are not lovers of truth and ‘what is’?” 501 d

“That would indeed be strange,” he said.

“Or that their nature, as we have described it, is not akin to the very best nature?”

“They cannot say that either.”

⁶ *Iliad* i.131 and *Odyssey* iii.416.

“Well then, will they say that such a nature, encountering the appropriate practices, will not be perfectly good and philosophic, if any nature can? Or will they say that the people we have excluded have a better chance?”

“Certainly not.”

501 e “So, will they still be angry when we say that until the philosophic type assume power, there will be no cessation of evils for cities or for citizens, nor will the city which we are describing in fabled words ever be perfectly realised in action.”

“Perhaps they will be less angry,” he said.

502 a “May we say not that they are less angry, but they have become completely gentle and have been persuaded, so that they are inclined to agree with us, even if only from shame?”

“Yes, certainly,” he said.

“Then let us assume,” I said, “that they are persuaded of this. Is there anyone who will argue nevertheless that there is no chance of the offspring of kings and potentates turning out to be philosophers by nature?”

“Not a single person will argue that,” he replied.

502 b “Can anyone maintain that such people absolutely must be destroyed once they do come into being? We do agree of course that they are difficult to save, but is there anyone who would contend that throughout all time not even one of them has ever been saved?”

“How could anyone maintain that?”

“But surely,” I said, “if one such person comes into being, and the city is co-operative, that is sufficient to accomplish everything which is now cast into doubt?”

“Yes, it is sufficient,” he said.

“For I presume,” said I, “that once the ruler has set down the laws and practices we have described, it is certainly not impossible for the citizens to be willing to enact them.”

“No, not at all.”

502 c “Well then, would it be any surprise if others held the opinions which we hold, or is this impossible?”

“Well, I do not think so anyway,” he said.

“And, indeed, in my opinion we have provided sufficient evidence already that these arrangements, if they are possible, are the very best.”

“Yes, quite sufficient.”

“Well now, it seems we are coming to the conclusion that when it comes to the enactment of laws, the arrangements we are describing are the best, if they can be enacted. However they are difficult, but not impossible, to implement.”

“Yes, that is what we are concluding,” he said.

502 d “Therefore, since this issue has with some effort reached a conclusion, we should of course go on and discuss whatever remains: the manner in which the saviours fit into our form of government, the subjects and activities upon which this is based, and the ages at which they will take them up.”

“We should indeed discuss this,” he said.

502 e “And nothing came of my earlier cleverness,” I said, “in passing over the difficult question of the possession of women, the begetting of children, and the appointment of rulers. I knew that the completely true version would attract hostility, and is also difficult to implement, but now it proves necessary to give an account of it in any case.

503 a “Well, matters relating to women and children have been concluded. However the question of the rulers must, in a sense, be dealt with from the beginning. We said, if you recall, that they must prove themselves to be lovers of the city, tested both in pleasure and in pain, and must show that they never set aside this principle in the face of hardship, or fear, or any adversity whatsoever. Those who cannot do this must be rejected, while anyone who turns out to be entirely pure, like gold tested in the fire, should be installed as a ruler and be accorded honours, both in life and after

death, yea, and prizes too. These were the sorts of things we were saying while the argument turned aside and hid itself for fear of initiating this particular discussion.”

“What you are saying is very true,” he replied. “I do remember.”

503 b

“Yes, my friend. I was reluctant to say what I have just dared to say,” said I, “but now we should have the courage to declare that philosophers must be appointed as guardians, in the strict sense of the word.”

“Yes, we should say so,” he replied.

“Now, bear in mind that they will probably be few in number. For the various qualities of the nature we described must be applicable to them, and those qualities are seldom inclined to develop together in the same person, but are usually dispersed throughout the population.”

“What do you mean?” he said.

“You know that ease of learning, memory, sagacity, acuity, and whatever is associated with these, along with spiritedness and magnificence of mind, tend not to develop along with a desire to live an orderly life in peace and constancy. Rather, such people are borne by their own brilliance wherever chance may lead, and all constancy goes out of them.”

503 c

“What you say is true.”

“On the other hand, do not characters that are constant and not easily swayed, in which we place more trust, that are unmoved in the face of terrors on the battlefield, also act in just the same way when faced with things to be learned? They are hard to move and hard to teach, as if they had been paralysed, and are full of sleep and yawning if they must apply themselves to such a task.”

503 d

“That is what happens,” he said.

“But we stated that a person must partake of both characters in proper and fair measure, or else he should not be given a share of education in the truest sense, or of honour, or of rule.”

“Correct,” he said.

“Do you not think that this will be rare?”

“How could it not be?”

“Then they should be tested under the hardships, fears and pleasures we described earlier. And there is also the point we just mentioned, which we passed over before, that they should be put through exercises in many branches of learning to see if they will be able to endure the most important subjects, or will prove to be cowards, just as people also prove to be cowards in the other situations.”

503 e

“Yes of course,” he said, “it is quite appropriate to consider the matter in this way. But what sort of important subjects are you actually referring to?”

504 a

“You remember, I presume,” said I, “that once we had distinguished three parts of soul we came to conclusions about what justice is, and about what sound-mindedness, courage and wisdom each is.”

“Well,” he said, “if I did not remember, I would have no right to hear the rest of this discussion.”

“Do you also remember what was said before that?”

“What sort of thing?”

“I believe we said that in order to obtain the clearest possible view of these, another longer, circuitous route would be necessary, and they would become apparent to someone who took that route. However, we said we could add proofs which follow from the previous discussion, and you agreed that this was sufficient, and what was said was said on this basis, though it seemed to me to lack precision. But whether it was satisfactory to you is for you to say.”

504 b

“Well, to me it was satisfactory in some measure, and the others seemed to think so too.”

“But, my friend,” I said, “in such matters a measure which leaves out any aspect of ‘what is’ does not act as a measure at all, for nothing incomplete is a measure of anything. However, it does sometimes seem to some people that enough has been achieved already, and it is not necessary to search any further.”

504 c

“Yes, lots of people feel like this due to laziness,” he said.

“But this feeling has no place whatsoever in a guardian of the city and the laws.”

“That is reasonable,” he said.

504 d “Then, my friend,” I said, “the longer route must be taken by someone like this, and he should devote just as much labour to learning as to gymnastics. Otherwise, as we just said, he will never attain the objective of the greatest and most important subject.”

“So, is there something greater than justice and whatever else we described?” he asked.

“Are these not the greatest?”

“There are greater,” I said, “and in those cases we must behold no mere outline as we did just now. No, we cannot avoid giving a complete and comprehensive account. Would it not be ridiculous to
504 e make all these efforts to achieve the utmost precision and clarity in issues of little significance, and in contrast deem the greatest issues unworthy of the greatest precision?”

“Very much so,” he said. “But do you think that anyone will let you go without asking what the greatest subject is, and what it deals with?”

505 a “Not at all,” I said, “you should ask. You have heard the answer often enough, that is for sure, but now either you cannot think of it, or alternatively you intend to make work for me by raising objections. And I suspect it is more the latter, since you have often heard that the form of the good is the greatest subject, and that justice and the others become useful and beneficial through recourse to this. You know quite well that I am going to talk about this, and will also say that our knowledge of it is inadequate. And if we do not know this, but have comprehensive knowledge of other matters
505 b without knowing this, you know it is of no benefit to us, nor is anything else we acquire, without acquiring the good. Or do you think there is any advantage in acquiring everything without acquiring the good? Or in understanding everything else except the good, but understanding nothing fair and good?”

“By Zeus, I do not,” he said.

“Well now, you also know that to most people pleasure seems to be the good, but to the more refined people it seems to be understanding.”

“So it does,” he said.

“And you know, my friend, that those who believe this are unable to indicate what this understanding is. Rather, they are finally compelled to say that it is understanding of ‘the good’.”

“Yes, it is quite comical,” he said.

505 c “Isn’t that inevitable,” I said, “if they criticise us because we do not know the good while talking to us as if we did know it? For they say that it is understanding of the good, as if for our part we follow what they are saying whenever they utter the phrase ‘the good’.”

“Very true,” he said.

“And what about those who define pleasure as the good? Are they any less adrift than the others? Are they not also compelled to agree that there are bad pleasures?”

“Definitely.”

“In that case it follows, I presume, that they are agreeing that the same things are both good and bad. Is this so?”

505 d “Of course.”

“Is it not evident then that there are many intense disputes about it?”

“Inevitably.”

“What about this? Is it not evident that many people would choose whatever seems to be just and fair when it comes to actions, possessions, or reputations, even if these are not actually just and fair? But no one is ever satisfied with acquiring what seems to be good. No, they search for things that are good, and in this case they utterly despise seeming.”

“Very much so,” he said.

“So, there is something that every soul pursues, and for the sake of which it performs all actions, possessing an intuition that there is such a thing. But it is perplexed, and cannot apprehend precisely what it is, or resort to a stable belief as it does in other pursuits, and on this account it loses any benefit from the other pursuits. Now, would we say that our guardians, the very best people in the city, to whom everything is entrusted, should be in such dark ignorance about something as important as this?” 505 e 506 a

“Least of all,” he said.

“Anyway,” I said, “I suspect that when there is ignorance as to how exactly the just and fair are also good, they will obtain a guardian who is not good for much, since he will be ignorant of this issue. And my intuition is that no one will have adequate knowledge of the just and the fair, until the good is known.”

“A sound intuition indeed,” he said.

“Will not our form of government attain perfect order if a guardian such as this, someone with knowledge of these matters, watches over it?” 506 b

“It must,” he replied. “But, Socrates, are you saying that the good is knowledge or pleasure, or something else besides these?”

“What an excellent man you are,” I said. “Indeed, it has been evident for some time that you would not accept the opinions of others about this.”

“Yes, Socrates, it does not seem right to me to be able to express other people’s opinions but not your own, when you have been engaged in these issues for such a long time.” 506 c

“Then what about this?” I said. “Does it seem right to you for someone who does not know to speak as if he knows?”

“He certainly should not speak as if he knows,” he replied. “But he should be prepared to state what he believes as if he believed it.”

“Yes, but have you not observed that opinions devoid of knowledge are all disgraceful? That the very best of them are blind? Or do you think that those who form true opinions, devoid of reason, are any different from blind men travelling along the right road?”

“Not one bit,” he replied.

“So, would you like to contemplate the disgraceful, the blind and the deformed, when it is possible to hear what is bright and beautiful from other sources?”

“By Zeus, Socrates,” said Glaucon, “do not give up when you are almost at the end. Indeed, we shall be satisfied even if you give an account of the good, in the same way that you also gave an account of justice, sound-mindedness and the others.” 506 d

“And so shall I, my friend,” I said, “I shall be quite satisfied. But I fear that I shall not be able, and in my enthusiasm I shall disgrace myself and incur ridicule. Instead, blessed friends, let us set aside for now this question of what precisely is the good, for it appears to me that to attain what I now have in mind is beyond this current endeavour. However, I am prepared to describe something which appears to be the offspring of the good, and to resemble it very closely, if that is acceptable to you. Otherwise, let us leave it.” 506 e

“Just speak,” he said. “You will repay the story of the father some other time.” 507 a

“I wish that I could give you this,” I said, “and that you could receive it and not the mere ‘interest’⁷ I am giving you now. Anyway, you should certainly accept this interest and offspring of the good itself. However, be careful, in case I somehow deceive you unintentionally with a false account of the interest.”

⁷ The Greek for ‘interest’ and ‘offspring’ is the same. Socrates plays upon the dual sense of the word here. The pun extends to the end of Socrates’ statement where he plays upon the word ‘account’ as being either an interest calculation or the expression of a philosophical position.

“We will be as careful as we can,” he said. “Just speak.”

“I will begin,” I said, “once I have come to an agreement with you and reminded you of what was said previously, and has often been said on other occasions too.”

“What are you referring to?” he asked.

507 b “We say,” I said, “that there are many beautiful things, many good things, and so on, and we define them in words.”

“Yes, that is what we say.”

“And we say there is beauty itself and good itself, and the same applies to everything else we then designated as many. Furthermore, based upon a single form belonging to each multiplicity, designating the form as being one, we refer to it as ‘what each is’.”

“This is so.”

“And we say that the many are seen but are not known by reason, while the forms are known by reason but are not seen.”

“Entirely so.”

507 c “Now, with which of our faculties do we see visible objects?”

“With sight.”

“And with hearing we hear whatever is heard, and with the other senses we perceive all that is perceived. Is this so?”

“Of course.”

“Now,” I said, “have you thought about the great extravagance with which the artificer of the senses fashioned the faculty of seeing and being seen?”

“Not much,” he replied.

507 d “Well, consider this: do hearing and sound require another factor so that the one can hear, and the other be heard, a third element in the absence of which hearing will not hear and sound will not be heard?”

“They require nothing,” he replied.

“Yes,” I said, “and I believe there is no such requirement in most other instances, though I do not wish to say there are none at all. Or do you have any examples?”

“No, I do not,” he said.

“But do you realise that the faculty of sight and visibility does have this requirement?”

“How so?”

507 e “Sight is presumably present in the eyes and their possessor attempts to make use of it. Colour is present too, but in the absence of a third factor naturally adapted to the particular purpose, you know that sight will see nothing, and colours will be invisible.”

“What factor are you referring to?” he asked.

“It is what you call light,” I replied.

“What you are saying is true,” he said.

508 a “Then, the sense of sight and the capacity to be seen are yoked together by a bond, more noble in no small measure than other combinations, since light does not lack nobility.”

“On the contrary,” he said, “it is far from ignoble.”

“Now, can you say which lord of the gods in heaven is responsible for this light, by which our sight can see so clearly and by which the visible things can be seen?”

“I can say what you or anyone else can say, for obviously you are asking about the sun.”

“Well, is there a particular natural relation of sight to this god?”

“How is it related?”

“Neither sight itself, nor the eye in which we say sight arises, are the sun.”

508 b “No, they are not.”

“And yet I believe the eye, of all the organs of sense, is most like the sun in form.”

“Very like.”

“And is not the power it possesses acquired as an influx dispensed from the sun?”

“Yes, entirely so.”

“In which case the sun is not sight. However, being the cause of sight, is it seen by sight itself?”

“Quite so,” he replied.

“Then you should realise”, I said, “that what I am describing is the offspring of the good, which the good itself generated in a particular relation to itself. Insofar as the good, in the realm of reason, relates to reason and whatever is known by reason, so does the sun, in the realm of sight, relate to sight and whatever is seen by sight.” 508 c

“In what way?” he asked. “Tell me more.”

“You know,” I said, “that whenever the eyes are no longer turned to objects whose colours receive the light of day, but to objects in the dim light of the night, their keenness is blunted, and they almost seem blind as though there is no clear vision in them.”

“Very much so,” he replied.

“And yet, I believe, when they turn to objects on which the sun shines, they see clearly, and it appears that there is vision in those same eyes.” 508 d

“Of course.”

“Then, you should also understand the condition of the soul in the same way. Whenever it rests on something upon which truth and ‘what is’ shine, it reasons and knows it, and appears to possess reason. However, when directed to something compounded with darkness which comes into being and is destroyed, the soul forms opinions, sees dimly, changes its opinions back and forth, and in this situation seems not to possess reason.”

“Yes, that is how it seems.”

“Then, you should declare that the form of the good bestows truth upon whatever is known, and confers the power of knowing on the knower. Being the cause of knowledge and truth, you should think of it as knowable. However, although knowledge and truth are both beautiful, you would be right to regard this as different from them, and even more beautiful than both of them. And just as in the previous case, it is right to regard light and sight as resembling the sun in form, but it is not right to believe they are the sun, so also in this case it is right to regard knowledge and truth as both resembling the good in form, but it is not right to believe that either of them is the good. No, the character of the good should be accorded even greater honour.” 508 e

“You are speaking of an unparalleled beauty,” he said, “if it bestows knowledge and truth, and exceeds them in beauty. For you are surely not saying that it is pleasure.”

“Please show respect,” I said, “and consider a further aspect of its image.”

“In what way?”

“I assume you will agree that the sun bestows not only the ability to be seen upon visible objects, but also their generation and increase and nurture, though the sun itself is not generation.” 509 b

“How could I disagree?”

“Then not only does the knowability of whatever is known derive from the good, but also what it is, and its being, is conferred on it through that, though the good is not being, but is even beyond being, exceeding it in dignity and power.”

Then Glaucon exclaimed quite hilariously, “By Apollo, it is utterly supernatural!” 509 c

“Yes,” I said, “and you are responsible for making me express my opinions about it.”

“And you should not stop at all,” he replied. “At least give us more details about this simile of the sun, if there is anything you are leaving out.”

“In fact,” I said, “I am leaving out quite a lot.”

“Well, you should not omit even a little,” he said.

“I think I shall omit a lot,” I said. “Nevertheless, to the extent that it is possible at present, I shall

not leave anything out deliberately.”

“Then do not,” he said.

509 d “Keep in mind what we have been saying, that there are two things, one having lordship of the realm and kind known by reason while the other is lord of the visible realm. Now, I hope you do not think I am just playing with words,⁸ but do you now understand that there are these two kinds, one known by sight and the other by reason?”

“I understand that.”

“Then, take a line which has been divided into two unequal sections, one corresponding to the kind known by sight, and the other to the kind known by reason. Divide each section once more in the same ratio, and you will have an expression of their relative clarity and obscurity in the 509 e realm of sight. There, one section consists of images, and by images I mean shadows first, and 510 a then appearances produced in water, and in anything dense, smooth and polished, and indeed everything else of that sort. Do you understand?”

“I do understand.”

“Then you should designate the other section as that which the first one resembles – the animals around us, everything that grows, and the entire class of inanimate objects.”

“Very well,” he said.

“And would you also be prepared to say that this division makes a distinction involving truth and its absence, for as an object of opinion relates to an object of knowledge, so also does a likeness relate to whatever it is like?”

510 b “I would indeed,” he replied.

“Now, you should go on to consider how the section known by reason is to be divided.”

“Yes, in what way?”

“In this way. In one of the sections, the soul is compelled to search, based on hypotheses, using as images what had previously been imitated, and proceeding not to a first principle but to a conclusion. In the other section however, it also goes on from hypothesis to an un-hypothesised first principle, and based upon forms themselves, it conducts its approach through them, without the images used before.”

“I don’t really understand what you are saying,” he said.

510 c “Then I will try again,” I said, “for you will learn more easily from these preliminary examples. Indeed, I am sure you appreciate that those involved with geometry or calculation, or such subjects, hypothesise the odd and the even, the various shapes, the three kinds of angles, and other kindred hypotheses, depending on the particular approach. They assume that these are already known, turn them into hypotheses, and see no value in giving an account of them, either to themselves or to 510 d anyone else, since they are obvious to everyone. Beginning from these, they proceed with the remaining issues, and arrive at consistent conclusions about the matter they set out to investigate.”

“Yes,” he said. “I certainly know this.”

“In that case, you also appreciate that they make use of the visible forms, and construct their arguments in relation to them, although it is not the visible forms that they have in mind but the things which they resemble. They construct their arguments with an eye to the square itself, and the diameter itself, and not the one in the diagram. The same applies to the other instances. They take the 510 e objects which are fabricated or drawn, objects which have shadows, and images in water, and use 511 a them in turn as images, seeking to discern the entities themselves, which may only be discerned through thought.”

“What you are saying is true,” he said.

“Well, this is the form I described as ‘known by reason’. However, the soul is compelled to employ hypothesis in its investigation of it, not proceeding to a first principle, since it is unable to transcend any higher than hypotheses. Instead, it employs as images the very objects which are imitated in

the lower division, objects which are regarded as clear and worthy of honour when compared to their images.”

“I understand that you are referring to the province of geometry and related subjects,” he said. 511 b

“Then you should appreciate that I am referring to the other division of the realm, known by reason, as what reasoned argument itself attains through the power of dialectic. It does not turn the hypotheses into first principles, but into actual underpinnings, like steps or points of attack, so that it may go as far as the un-hypothesised, to the first principle of all. Having attained that, and proceeding once more to follow whatever depends on that, it descends in this way to a conclusion, having no recourse whatsoever to any sense object, but to forms themselves – through forms, to forms, and ending in forms.” 511 c

“I appreciate that,” he said, “but not very well, for you seem to me to be describing a vast undertaking. Anyway, you wish to establish that the realm contemplated by the knowledge of dialectic, the realm of ‘what is’ and what is known by intelligence, is clearer than what is contemplated by what we call skills. In skills, the hypotheses are the first principles, and those who discern their objects, despite the fact that they must see them through understanding rather than through the senses, enquire on the basis of hypotheses. However, because they do not ascend to a principle, you do not think they employ intelligence in relation to these objects, even though they are objects of intelligence associated with a principle. And you seem to me to be calling the faculty of geometers and the like not intelligence, but understanding, since understanding is something in between opinion and intelligence.” 511 d

“You have given a very competent exposition,” I said. “And corresponding to the four sections, you should assume four qualities arising in the soul: intelligence corresponding to the highest, and understanding to the second, assign belief to the third, imagination to the last. And arrange them in proportion, accepting that these partake of clarity insofar as their objects partake of truth.” 511 e

“I understand,” he said, “and I agree. And I am arranging them as you suggest.”

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⁸ There is a play here in the Greek text upon the words for sky and visible which is hard to capture in English and is omitted from this translation.