



Book VII- The Allegory of the Cave

Returning to the Cave

Now suppose our former cave-dweller returned back to the cave. They wouldn't be able to see anything very well in the shadows-- and all the other cave-dwellers would ridicule them:

“Wouldn't it be said of he had returned from his upward journey with his eyes ruined, and that it is not worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And as for anyone who tried to free the prisoners and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?” (516e-517a)

The Journey to the Intelligible Realm

“This image, my dear Glaucon, must be fitted together as a whole with what we said before. The realm revealed through sight should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the first inside it to the sun’s power. And if you think of the upward journey and the seeing of the things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you won’t mistake my intention ...” (517a-b)

The Duty of the Guardians

“It is our task as founders, then, to compel the best natures to learn what was said before to be the most important thing: namely, to see the good; to ascend that ascent. And when they have ascended and looked sufficiently we must not allow them to do what they are allowed to do now.” (519c)

“What’s that?” (says Glaucon)

“To stay there and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labors and honors, whether the inferior ones or the more excellent ones.” (519d).

The guardians, having seen the true world, have a duty to return back to the cave (where they will be ridiculed, etc.) Glaucon complains that this isn’t fair, to which Socrates replies, again, that we aren’t setting out to make specifically the guardians happy, but rather the whole city happy.

Puzzlement and the Dialectic

“But if something opposite to it is always seen at the same time, so that it no more appears to be one than the opposite of one, then there would be a need at that point for someone to decide the matter. And he would compel the soul within him to be puzzled, to inquire, to stir up the understanding within itself, and *to ask what the number one itself is.*” (524e, emphasis added.)

The Dialectic

The dialectic is a *process*-- of asking and answering questions. Through it, we *discover*-- or perhaps *uncover* is better--"things" in the intelligible realm; "by means of the power of dialectical discussion" we can test our guardians to see who "can relinquish [their] eyes and other sense, and travel on in the company of truth to what itself is." (537d). This (*dialectic*) is the "capstone we have placed on top of the subjects." (534e).

Five Kinds of Constitutions

The discussion of the five kinds of constitutions, abandoned at the beginning of Book V, is now resumed.

The considerations here will “close the case” against the challenge of Thrasymachus and prove that it better to be just than unjust.

Essay 2

Discuss the following passage in a 3-5 page essay (due Friday 02/28/2020). Your answer should “walk us through” the *Republic* so you can adequately answer the question.

“But, Socrates, that question seems to me, at least, to have become ridiculous, now that the two have been shown to be as we described. Life does not seem worth living when the body’s natural constitution is ruined, not even if one has food and drink of every sort, all the money in the world, and every political office imaginable. So how-- even if one could do whatever one wished, except what would liberate one from vice and injustice and make one acquire justice and virtue-- could it be worth living when the natural constitution of the very thing by which we live is ruined and in turmoil?” (445a-b).