

Plato's *Republic* (514a - 516c) =  
Supplemental Text for Workshop One: "Out of the Cave"

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

GLAUCON: I am imagining it.

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

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

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

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

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

GLAUCON: Of course.

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

GLAUCON: They would have to.

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

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

GLAUCON: I do not, by Zeus.

10

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

c

GLAUCON: That's entirely inevitable.

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

5

d

5

GLAUCON: Much more so.

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

e

GLAUCON: He would.

5

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

516a

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

2

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

5

b

GLAUCON: Of course.

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

5

GLAUCON: Necessarily.

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

10

c