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FROM THE IDEA OF THE GOOD TO THE DARKNESS OF TYRANNY: A READING OF POLITICS THROUGH PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE AND THE ANALOGY OF THE DIVIDED LINE

DA IDÉIA DO BEM À ESCURIDÃO DA TIRANIA: UMA LEITURA DA POLÍTICA ATRAVÉS DA ALEGORIA DA CAVERNA DE PLATÃO E DA ANALOGIA DA LINHA DIVIDIDA

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Abstract: This article argues that Plato's political philosophy in the *Republic* is inseparable from his epistemology, using the Allegory of the Cave and the Divided Line as a framework to diagnose political decay. The ideal state, an aristocracy ruled by philosopher-kings, represents the pursuit of truth. However, this ideal is presented as contentious, with critics like Karl Popper identifying it as a "totalitarian" project designed to arrest all political change. The article examines the tension of the philosopher's compulsory return to the cave—a necessary but tragic duty to rule those in darkness. The decline through timocracy, oligarchy, and democracy is cast as a progressive retreat from reason, culminating in tyranny. This final stage is the ultimate enslavement to ignorance, which, as critics note, perversely mirrors the "closed society" of the ideal state in its most malignant form. Thus, Plato's work is analyzed not just as a utopia, but as a profound, and potentially dangerous, argument about the volatile relationship between knowledge and political power.

Keywords: Allegory of the Cave. Analogy of the Divided Line. Republic. Political Decay.

Resumo: Este artigo argumenta que a filosofia política de Platão na *República* é inseparável de sua epistemologia, usando a Alegoria da Caverna e a Linha Dividida como uma estrutura para diagnosticar a decadência política. O estado ideal, uma aristocracia governada por reis-filósofos, representa a busca pela verdade. No entanto, esse ideal é apresentado como controverso, com críticos como Karl Popper identificando-o como um projeto "totalitário" destinado a impedir todas as mudanças políticas. O artigo examina a tensão do retorno compulsório do filósofo à caverna — um dever necessário, mas trágico, de governar aqueles que estão na escuridão. O declínio através da timocracia, da oligarquia e da democracia é apresentado como um recuo progressivo da razão, culminando na tirania. Este estágio final é a escravidão definitiva à ignorância, que, como observam os críticos, reflete perversamente a "sociedade fechada" do estado ideal em sua forma mais maligna. Assim, a obra de Platão é analisada não apenas como uma utopia, mas como um argumento profundo e potencialmente perigoso sobre a relação volátil entre conhecimento e poder político.

Palavras-chave: Alegoria da Caverna. Analogia da Linha Dividida. República. Decadência Política.

1. Introduction: The Reflection of Philosophy in the Mirror of the Republic

Throughout the history of philosophy, few thinkers have so profoundly influenced and shaped the world of thought as Plato. This great genius of Ancient Greece produced groundbreaking ideas not only in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, but also in political philosophy. His most famous work, *Republic*, is not only a search for an ideal social order (Pappas, 2003, p. 18), but also a comprehensive presentation of the philosophical principles underlying this order, especially his understanding of knowledge and existence. For Plato, politics is not a pragmatic field independent of philosophy; on the contrary, it is a field where philosophy, especially the search for truth, is manifested at the most concrete and highest level (Yunis, 2007, p. 1). In the *Republic*, Plato not only presents a constitutional outline, but he also grounds the question of why a just life is the best life for both the individual and society (Annas, 1981, p. 11). The health of the republic is directly proportional to the closeness of its rulers and citizens to the truth.

The main problematic of this article is to explain how the Allegory of the Cave and the closely related Analogy of the Divided Line, which Plato presents in the seventh book of *Republic*, not only provide an epistemological and ontological framework (Reeve, 2006, p. 55), but also to show how they form the philosophical basis of the cycle of forms of government from the ideal state (Aristocracy/Monarchy) to tyranny discussed in the eighth book, and how the corruption in this cycle is essentially a consequence of moving away from knowledge and truth. In other words, this study will argue that Plato's political philosophy cannot be separated from his epistemology, and that the journey "out of the cave" is not only a process of individual enlightenment, but also a prerequisite for the establishment and maintenance of a healthy political structure. Zamosc (2017) emphasises that the Allegory of the Cave has not only an epistemological but also a deep political meaning (p. 237). The path from the "cave to the palace" is a path illuminated by the light of truth; however, when this path is deviated from, the fall into the darkest dungeons of the palace, namely tyranny, becomes inevitable. As a matter of fact, some commentators see Plato's *Republic* not only as an attempt to understand how an ideal society should be, but also as an endeavour to understand why and how existing societies deteriorate (Popper, 1947, p. 36).

To this end, we will first examine Plato's Allegory of the Cave and the Analogy of the Divided Line in detail, revealing his epistemological and ontological hierarchy. We will then consider how these philosophical foundations shape the structure of the ideal state and its central role in the education of philosopher kings. Finally, we will analyse how the forms of government

presented in the eighth book of the *Republic* (Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny) deviate from Aristocracy and degenerate, with each stage of degeneration representing a step backwards or a break with the truth in the Allegory of the Cave. This analysis will reveal that, in Plato's eyes, political decadence cannot be separated from moral and epistemological decadence (Voegelin, 1999, p. 126).

2. The Allegory of the Cave and the Divided Line

In the seventh book of the *Republic*, Plato focuses on the "Allegory of the Cave", one of the most important and well-known metaphors in the history of philosophy. This powerful and multi-layered allegory is not only a storytelling, but also a summary of Plato's complex philosophical system. The allegory of the cave helps to explain the foundations of both his epistemology and ontology, and even his entire conception of philosophy (Pappas, 2003, p. 145). Through this allegory, Plato dramatically portrays the human condition, the darkness of ignorance, the nature of knowledge, the difficulties of the enlightenment process, and what it means to reach the truth. Some scholars have even discussed the possibility of tracing the origin of the allegory to real places, such as the cave of Vari on Mount Hymettus, which Plato is thought to have visited in his youth (Wright, 1906, p. 141). Again, it would not be wrong to argue that one of the main functions of the allegory of the cave is to explain the "Analogy of the Divided Line" that the Plato elaborates in the sixth book (Dorter, 2004, p. 15). These two concepts are intertwined in Plato's philosophy; while the Divided Line presents the hierarchical structure of knowledge and existence in an abstract scheme, the Allegory of the Cave transforms this scheme into a concrete, liveable and dramatic narrative. According to Annas (1981), The Cave is not only a picture, but also a narrative that complements and deepens the argument of the Divided Line (p. 252). Before explaining this relationship, it will be useful to briefly analyse the allegory of the cave in order to make sense of this relationship.

In the allegory of the cave, Plato takes us to a gloomy cave underground. Here, a group of prisoners are depicted, who have lived in this cave without ever seeing daylight since their birth. These people have only known this dim environment all their lives. Their situation is quite pathetic; their necks and legs are secured with chains so that they cannot turn to their backs or sides, they can only look in front of them, at the inner wall of the cave. These chains symbolise not only physical restraint, but also mental and sensory restraint. They are incapable of questioning their situation or imagining an alternative reality (Reeve, 2006, p. 60).

Behind the prisoners, a little higher than them, there is a fire burning constantly. This fire is the only source of light in the cave, but it is not the pure and illuminating light of the Sun, but a flickering and deceptive light. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a path and a low wall running along it, like the curtain that puppet-players put between them and the audience. Behind this path is a group of people who carry in their hands, statues and figures of various objects - people, animals, trees and all sorts of other things. These objects are held so that they are visible over the wall. By the light of the fire, the shadow of these statues falls on the wall in front of the prisoners. In Plato's cave there is not only light and shadow, but also sound and echo; the prisoners hear the voices of the puppeteers and think that these voices come from the shadows (Østergaard, 2019, p. 21).

This is the whole reality of these prisoners. The only thing they have seen all their lives are the shadows of artificial objects reflected on the wall by the light of the fire. Since the sounds made by the puppeteers are also reflected from the wall and reach them, they think that the sounds come from these shadows. Since these shadows are the only thing these captives see, these shadows are the greatest, even the only reality for them. When they talk to each other about people, trees, horses, they are not talking about the realities of these objects, but about their vibrating, two-dimensional shadows on the wall (Plato, 2004, 514a-515c). Their world is a world of illusions; it is the world of a pale imitation, a shadow of reality. According to Plato, this situation represents the general condition of uneducated humanity; it is the condition of people who are trapped in the sensory world, who think that what is seen is real, who are not aware of the truth (Zamosc, 2017, p. 240).

3. Breaking the Chains: The Painful Path of Enlightenment

According to Socrates, if a prisoner is freed in this situation - either by his own effort or by external intervention - a painful and difficult process will begin for him. Firstly, the prisoner who is freed from his chains will feel great pain when he is forced to stand up and turn his head, his eyes will resist unfamiliar movements and light. He will notice the fire and the statues behind him. At first, these objects will seem less real to him than shadows, because his eyes and mind are used to shadows. He will be dazzled by the brightness of the fire and will find it difficult to understand what the statues are. When he is told that the shadows he has seen before are actually reflections of these statues, he will have difficulty believing it and will claim that the shadows are more real (Pappas, 2003, p. 147).

Then, as his eyes become accustomed to the fire and the statues, he will gradually realise the truth and understand that everything he accepts as real is actually a copy, an imitation of reality. At this second level, the prisoner thinks that fire and statues are the greatest reality. He no longer recognises the existence of shadows, but of the objects that make up the shadows. This is an advance to the level of perceiving concrete objects in the sensory world, but it is still not the whole truth. Because these statues are only copies of the real beings outside the cave. The prisoner is still inside the cave, and although it is not the greatest illusion, it is still at the level of illusion. However, beyond this stage, that is, beyond the cave, a greater reality awaits him (Plato, 2004, 515d).

If the prisoner is taken out of the cave, the journey will be even more difficult. He will suffer and resist as he is pulled up the steep and steep slope of the cave. When he first comes out into the daylight, the light blinds him and he cannot see anything. It will take time for his eyes to get used to this intense light. Plato describes this acclimatisation process as gradual: The prisoner can first look only at shadows, then at reflections in the water, and finally at real objects, that is, at the real objects (people, trees, animals) of which he first saw the shadows of their copies and then their copies in the cave (Plato, 2004, 516a-b). This symbolises the difficulty of the transition from the sensory world (the cave) to the conceptual world (outside the cave) and that this transition must take place step by step.

When the prisoner's eyes are fully accustomed to the light, he looks up at the sky, sees the stars, the moon and finally the sun. When he sees the sun, he realises that it is not only the source of light that illuminates everything, but also the one that regulates the seasons, the years, and is in a sense the cause of everything in the visible world. He realises that the sun is the cause of everything he can see around him and that this is how he can see flowers, trees and all objects (Plato, 2004, 516c-e). The sun represents the idea of the good, which is the highest reality in Plato's philosophy (Reeve, 2006, p. 68). The idea of the good is the ultimate source of both existence and knowledge. Just as the sun both makes objects visible and enables them to exist, the idea of the good both makes all other ideas (forms) intelligible and gives them their existence. The prisoner who comes out of the cave is the philosopher who has reached this ultimate truth. However, this journey is not only an intellectual but also a spiritual transformation and every step is painful (Annas, 1981, p. 254).

In the light of all these, it is possible to make sense of the relationship between Plato's Allegory of the Cave and the Analogy of the Divided Line, which is the subject of his sixth book. The Divided Line is an abstract scheme in which Plato explains the levels of existence and knowledge in a hierarchical structure (Dorter, 2004, p. 2). In the analogy of the divided line, Plato

first divides the world into two as the visible world (*horaton*) and the intelligible world (*noeton*) (Plato, 2004, 517b-d). This distinction directly corresponds to the distinction between inside and outside the cave in the Allegory of the Cave. The inside of the cave is the transient, ever-changing "visible world" perceived by the senses. The outside of the cave, on the other hand, is the eternal and unchanging "intelligible world", the world of Ideas, which can only be grasped by reason (Pappas, 2003, p. 140).

Of these two worlds, the visible world corresponds to *doxa*, the lower level of knowledge, i.e. "what seems to be", while the intelligible world corresponds to *episteme*, i.e. "geniuine knowledge". According to Plato, our knowledge of the visible world can never reach the level of *episteme*, because its objects are constantly changing and cannot be fully "known", but only "supposed". True knowledge can only be about unchanging Ideas.

Plato divides these two main stages of knowledge into two parts and identifies four levels of knowledge in total. This is a four-part scheme obtained by dividing a vertical line first into two parts and then dividing these two parts into two again. Dorter (2004) states that these four divisions represent not only an epistemological but also an ontological hierarchy (p. 5). If we need to order them hierarchically from bottom to top:

Eikasia (Εἰκασία): This is the lowest level and literally means "mere imagining". This is the level of understanding images, shadows, reflections and works of art. It is the darkest and most obscure region of the Divided Line.

Pistis (Πίστις): It means "common sense" or "belief". This is the type of knowledge that deals with understanding concrete objects in the visible world (animals, plants, man-made things). It is clearer than *eikasia*, but it is still in the realm of *doxa* because it is based on sensory perception of objects. These first two levels, *eikasia* and *pistis*, together constitute *doxa*.

Dianoia (Διάνοια): It can be translated as "deduction" or "discursive reasoning". This is the type of knowing related to ideas or forms, such as mathematical objects, geometrical shapes, etc. At this level, reason tries to reach the ideas by using objects in the intelligible world as hypotheses or steps (Reeve, 2006, p. 58). However, it is still dependent on hypotheses and cannot fully reach the first principle. This is the lower level of *episteme*.

Noesis (Νόησις): It is the highest level and means "cognition" or "direct intuition". This is the highest type of knowledge that deals with the highest Ideas, especially the idea of the good, the source of all things. At this level, the intellect, free from hypotheses, directly grasps the Ideas and their interrelationship by means of dialectics alone, and ultimately reaches the Idea of the good. *Dianoia* and *noesis* together constitute *episteme*.

The stages in Plato's Allegory of the Cave correspond perfectly to these four types of knowledge in the Divided Line (Pappas, 2003, p. 150; Reeve, 2006, p. 63): The lowest level of knowledge is described as *eikasia*. This corresponds to the state of prisoners who can only perceive the shadows of copies of real objects within the cave. At this stage, individuals are content with the most deceptive aspects of the sensory world, mistaking mere reflections and shadows for reality. As the prisoners are freed within the cave, they progress to *pistis*, the level of belief. Here, they begin to see the actual copies of objects, such as sculptures and shapes, rather than just their shadows. This stage involves perceiving concrete objects within the sensory world. However, since the prisoners remain inside the cave, any truths they grasp are still confined to *doxa*, which represents the knowledge of appearances. Upon exiting the cave, an individual ascends to a higher level of knowledge called *dianoia*. At this juncture, they encounter the real objects from which the shapes and sculptures inside the cave originated, first as reflections and then as the objects themselves. This marks the initial foray into the world of Ideas. Yet, there remains a dependence on the intelligible world (through reflections and shadows), and the highest principle has not yet been fully grasped. This is comparable to how mathematicians utilize drawings to comprehend abstract concepts (Dorter, 2004, p. 19). Finally, when the freed captive's eyes fully adjust to the sun, they look towards the sky and behold the Sun itself. The Sun, in this allegory, represents the ultimate source of light and knowledge, enabling the perception of all things. This pinnacle of understanding is known as *noesis*, signifying the direct realization of the Idea of the Good and the zenith of philosophical knowledge. This ultimate stage, along with *dianoia*, completes the comprehensive stage of *episteme*.

This pairing shows how integrated Plato's understanding of knowledge and being is. The cave is not only a metaphor, but also a dramatic presentation of the Divided Line. Both concepts tell us that truth is not on the surface and that reaching it requires effort, education and philosophical transformation. As Strauss (2014) states, "The cave is not only an epistemological situation, but also a political one; it is the 'world of opinions' in which people live" (p. 165).

4. The Rise of the Philosopher: Education, Ideal Government and Return to the Cave

For Plato, the Allegory of the Cave not only describes the epistemological and ontological state of man, but also determines the purpose of education and politics (Zamosc, 2017, p. 248). The stages of the cave are also the stages of life; it is an ascent from ignorance to knowledge, from supposition to truth. The only way to reach these higher stages is through education, but only

through a correct education as Plato understood it. In this context, the purpose of education is not to fill the soul with knowledge, but to turn the soul's already existing potential for seeing in the right direction, that is, towards truth and the idea of the good. Storey (2021) notes that this metaphor of "turning the soul" is central to Plato's philosophy of education and is often misunderstood (p. 18). The cultivation of these turned souls and their governance of the state forms the basis of Plato's ideal state.

According to Plato, education is not, as is generally believed, the process of filling an empty vessel with knowledge. The soul has the ability to know by nature. The problem is that this faculty is turned in the wrong direction, that is, towards the deceptive shadows and transient whims of the sensory world. In this context, the aim of education is to take every human being out of the cave as much as possible. Education should not be limited to imparting knowledge to the soul, but should endeavour to direct it towards the right desires. Education is the art of turning the soul's eye from darkness to light, from the visible to the comprehensible. In this context, Socrates refers to the distinction between reason and vision and says the following:

"But here is what our present account shows about this power to learn that is present in everyone's soul, and the instrument with which each of us learns: just as an eye cannot be turned around from darkness to light except by turning the whole body, so this instrument must be turned around from what-comes-to-be together with the whole soul, until it is able to bear to look at what is and at the brightest thing that is—the one we call the good. Isn't that right?" (Plato, 2004, 518c-d).

This quote reveals the idea at the centre of Plato's conception of education; education is a transformation; it is a change of orientation of the soul (Storey, 2021, p. 23). This transformation is not only an intellectual endeavour, but also a moral one. Orienting the soul towards the good is synonymous with making it virtuous. Therefore, in the ideal state, education is one of the most important public duties and the survival of the state depends on the existence of a correct education system (Reeve, 2006, p. 210).

5. Tools of the Philosopher: Arithmetic and Dialectics

In the last part of the seventh book, he addresses the issue of how to raise philosophers or, in other words, philosopher kings, whose duties he has explained so far. Plato argues that some sciences are more effective than others in this process of transforming the soul. When this section

is read, we see that two basic sciences rise above the others and gain importance in the training of a philosopher; these two sciences are dialectics and arithmetic.

Socrates also mentions which sciences and arts are important in raising philosophers and good citizens, and why they should not be used. According to Plato, disciplines that do not have the potential to draw the soul from the visible world to the perceived world are insufficient for philosophical education. For example, according to Socrates, the science that can be the basis of all sciences cannot be gymnastics because gymnastics deals only with the being that is born and dies, that is, the body (Plato, 2004, 521e). Although gymnastics is necessary to discipline the body, it does not have the power to raise the soul to the ideas. Again, it cannot be music, because music can only impart good habits, not knowledge, and its function is to teach harmony and order. Music is an important means of harmonising the soul, but by itself it does not lead to truth. Finally, it cannot be art because there is nothing high about art (Plato, 2004, 522b). Since Plato generally sees art as a copy of reality, he regards it as the discipline furthest from truth (Pappas, 2003, p. 185).

As a result of this reasoning, Socrates identifies arithmetic as the basic science, which he defines as the science above all sciences, common to all sciences and arts, and the science that everyone should learn first (Plato, 2004, 522c-d). Arithmetic and its related geometry and astronomy are the first steps that separate the soul from the intelligible world and lead it to abstract thinking (Sedley, 2007, p. 268). Numbers and geometric shapes, although they appear to be sensory objects, are actually mental, abstract entities and draw the soul towards the Ideas.

Socrates identifies dialectics as the other basic science required for the education of good citizens and philosophers. Dialectic is the summit of Plato's philosophical method. Some objects drive us to think and some do not; the objects that drive us to think are always those that leave two opposite impressions on the senses and cause duality, that is, dialectics (Plato, 2004, 524b-526a). For example, the fact that an object appears to be both "one" and "many" prompts the soul to think to resolve this contradiction. According to Socrates, the one does not lead us to the truth, while the two pushes us to think, makes the soul pause, and activates the impulse to think. Based on such contradictions, dialectics is the method that tries to grasp the Ideas and their highest principle, the Idea of the Good, directly, without relying on assumptions, by questioning and overcoming hypotheses. According to Zhi et al. (2023), through dialectics, the philosopher king learns to think critically, question assumptions, and attain true knowledge (p. 165). Socrates defines the importance of dialectics as follows: "dialectic is the only investigation that, doing away with hypotheses, journeys to the first principle itself in order to be made secure. And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric bog, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upward,

using the crafts we described to help it and cooperate with it in turning the soul around" (Plato, 2004, 533c-e).

The fields that constitute the two wings of the education of the guardians, who will eventually rise to the ruling class and become philosopher kings, to reach the ideal of the good are arithmetic and dialectics (Reeve, 2006, p. 75). This will draw the soul from the world of appearances to the world of realities, from what is seen to what is grasped. Dialectics will lead them to the truth by transcending sense perceptions. This challenging education process is designed for carefully selected individuals. In the context of the importance he attaches to dialectical education, Socrates does not hesitate to describe the people to whom this education will be given as the most durable, the most valiant, the most beautiful. The people who will receive this education should be those who are suitable for education, that is, those who have the power of understanding, do not get bored quickly, do not forget what they have learnt, and really love the education they will receive (Plato, 2004, 535a-538a, pp. 257-260). It is also critical that this education is given at the right time. Socrates also sets an age for those who will be trained in dialectics, and this age is thirty. It is inconvenient for a person under the age of thirty to learn dialectics, because those who are not ready for dialectics may see it as a game of conflict and use it not in the search for truth, but for the purpose of justifying themselves (Plato, 2004, 538a-e). It is clear that Socrates here refers to the Sophists, whom he thinks do not use their philosophical knowledge and dialectical method for truth. Sophists, according to Plato, are people who use dialectics not to reach the truth, but to prevail in debates and to gain personal benefit, and who argue that knowledge is relative, which is the opposite of Plato's understanding of education and philosophy (Pappas, 2003, p. 39).

6. Ideal Government and the Philosopher King

At the summit of Plato's ideal republic are the philosopher kings who have completed this difficult education process, emerged from the cave and grasped the idea of the good. According to Plato, those most worthy of ruling the state are those who know the truth (Beere, 2023, p. 215). Only they can truly know what is "good" in the state and govern society according to this "good". However, this was seen by critics such as Karl Popper (1947) as an indication of Plato's "historicism" and "totalitarian" tendencies. According to Popper, Plato tried to stop change and create a closed society based on the absolute rule of an elite few (pp. 86-89). Popper states: Plato's political programme, taken together with his analysis of the design of the best state, has only one

aim: to stop change. This is to restore the best state by reversing the previous development of decaying states. This is a general demand of historicism. The aim is to stop change (Popper, 1947, p. 86).

Despite these criticisms, Plato's intention is that the rule of those who know the truth will provide the fairest and best order for all. Plato does not make an essential distinction between aristocracy (the rule of the best) and monarchy (the rule of the single best) as the best form of government and considers both of them of equal value (Reeve, 2006, p. 185). What is important is not the number of those at the head of the government, but the fact that they are "the best", that is, that they are wise and virtuous. This form of government is the government of knowledge, i.e. *episteme*. Philosopher kings use power for the good of the state and all citizens, not for their personal interests or for glory and honour. Their rule is just and orderly because it is based on the idea of the good. This is the ideal situation in which the "palace" is ruled by the philosopher coming out of the cave and the light of truth is reflected in the political sphere. However, Leo Strauss is sceptical about whether Plato actually presents the ideal state as a viable project and argues that the *State* is more of a *city in speech*, exploring the nature and limits of philosophy (Klosko, 1986, p. 276).

However, leaving the cave and seeing the Sun, that is, reaching the idea of the good, is not the end of the philosopher's journey. Plato imposes an important task on the philosopher: To return to the cave. Zamosc (2017) argues that this return (*katabasis*) is central to the political meaning of the allegory (p. 251). Once they have achieved this, that is, once they have reached the highest stage of the idea of the good, the duty of the citizens, who can now be considered philosophers, is to return to the cave (Plato, 2004, 519d). This may seem contradictory at first glance. Why would someone who has reached the light want to return to the darkness, to the cave where illusions and ignorance reign? The philosopher will have to endure the darkness of the cave and the ridicule of the people there. Since his eyes are no longer accustomed to the darkness, he will appear incompetent in his work inside the cave and may even be perceived as mad or dangerous. Voegelin (1999) characterises this as the tragedy of the philosopher in the political sphere (p. 98). Annas (1981) states that one of the most controversial points of the *Republic* is whether the philosopher's return is voluntary and whether Plato forces philosophers to rule (p. 262).

However, Socrates argues that this return is necessary. Regarding the need for philosophers, those who have reached the idea of the good, to return after travelling so far from the cave, Socrates says that our aim is to make the whole republic happy, not a group. Therefore,

the happiness of the whole is more important than the happiness of philosophers. The philosopher kings owe their happiness in the republic to the republic's means of educating them in the cave, and therefore they owe it to the city (Plato, 2004, 520b-d). The philosopher owes his enlightenment to the state because the ideal state has provided his education. Therefore, the philosopher's duty is to help the prisoners in the cave, to try to tell them the truth, and to endeavour to enlighten them. Most importantly, by governing the state, he is to make life in the cave as fair and orderly as possible (Reeve, 2006, p. 225).

In the end, philosophers, who have been trained and educated for many years with appropriate education, should return to the cave in the metaphorical sense and deliver the truth to the people, even at the cost of their lives, and pay their debt to the ideal state that provides them with this education. Socrates concludes the seventh book by saying that philosophers will do this task not for glory and honour, but for the good of the people (Plato, 2004, 539a-540c). This return shows the unbreakable link between knowledge and action, theory and practice in Plato's philosophy (Zamosc, 2017, p. 255). Philosophy is not only an abstract activity of thought, but also a way of life that includes the responsibility to transform and improve society. The philosopher should use his wisdom not only for himself but for the whole society.

7. Deviation from the Ideal: The Cycle of Governmental Corruption and the Departure from Knowledge

Plato's *Republic* not only describes how to establish an ideal state, but also analyses how this ideal is deviated from and how states become corrupt (Weiss, 2007, p. 103). It is possible to identify a different theme in each book of the *Republic*; in the eighth book, the subject that is particularly emphasised is the forms of government. In this context, Plato identifies five basic regimes. These regimes follow the following hierarchical order from the ideal to the worst, representing the stages of departure from knowledge and truth:

1. Aristocracy/Monarchy: The best government based on knowledge and virtue (the government of those outside the cave, those who see the sun).
2. Timocracy: Rule based on glory and honour (rule of those who take their eyes off the Sun and focus on objects outside the cave).
3. Oligarchy: Rule based on wealth (rule by those who go back into the cave and value replicas/sculptures).

4. Democracy: A government based on freedom and equality (but, according to Plato, chaotic) (the government of those in the cave who do not distinguish between shadows and copies, who see every delusion as equal).
5. Tyranny: The arbitrary and oppressive rule of a single person (the rule of those in the darkest corner of the cave, in the most twisted shadows).

This process of degeneration is not an inevitable fate, but according to Plato it is quite possible due to the weaknesses in human nature and social structure (Pappas, 2003, p. 165). Each form of government arises from the growth of a "disease" within the previous one, and each transition reflects a change of values in the psyche of society and individuals, especially a shift away from wisdom and the idea of the good. Voegelin (1999) describes this cycle as the manifestation of the sickness of the soul in the political sphere (p. 130). Popper (1947) claims that this cycle reflects Plato's "hostility to change" and his theory of "historical decadence", arguing that any change inevitably leads to decay (pp. 37-39).

The subject of good and bad governments, which Socrates and Glaucon leave for later in Book Five when Polemarchus and Adeimantos change the subject, finally emerges in Book Eight. Socrates begins the eighth book by saying that in the state that wants to reach the best order, women and children should have a common share in education and even in all the work undertaken in war and peace, and adds; the citizens who excel in both philosophy and war will also be at the head of this state (Plato, 2004, 543a). This is a reminder of the ideal state (Beere, 2023, p. 200). Socrates again touches on some important points about the soldiers in the ideal state before addressing the main topic of governance forms and emphasises the importance of the soldiers living in common houses where no one owns anything and everything belongs to everyone. This reinforces the idea that the ruling and protective class should be free from the ambition of personal property and wealth. Socrates says that he has finished what he has to say on these subjects and that he wants to return to his main subjects and tells Glaukon to return to his main subject. In this context, Glaukon mentions the topics to be discussed in this book as follows: "That is not difficult. You see, much the same as now, you were talking as if you had completed the description of the city. You were saying that you would class both the city you described and the man who is like it as good, even though, as it seems, you had a still finer city and man to tell us about. But in any case, you were saying that the others were defective, if it was correct. And you said, if I remember, that of the remaining kinds of constitution four were worth discussing, each with defects we should observe; and that we should do the same for the people like them in order to observe them all, come to an agreement about which man is best and which worst, and then

determine whether the best is happiest and the worst most wretched, or whether it is otherwise. I was asking you which four constitutions you had in mind, when Polemarchus and Adeimantus interrupted. And that is when you took up the discussion that led here." (Plato, 2004, 544a-b).

In the quotation from Glaucon, Socrates mentions that there are four other forms of state besides the best form of state he has defined so far. Socrates claims that there are as many forms of state as there are kinds of people, and in this context, the forms of state emerge from the predominant dispositions of citizens. This is an important point where Plato emphasises the parallel between politics and psychology: The state is a large-scale reflection of the individual's psyche, and the deterioration of the state results from the disruption of the balance in the psyche of individuals (Reeve, 2006, p. 245; Annas, 1981, p. 146). Of the five forms of government that correspond to the five kinds of people, of course, the form of government that corresponds to the good man, or rather the best man, is aristocracy. Since Socrates or Plato, who gives voice to Socrates in the parts of the book up to this point, think that they are describing aristocracy while describing the ideal state, they do not deal with the subject of aristocracy again in the eighth book and start the subject directly by describing timocracy, which is a corrupted form of aristocracy.

Socrates says that the form of government he calls the state of glory and honour can be called timocracy. Timocracy is modelled on city-states such as Crete and Sparta, where honour, courage and military power are seen as the highest values. As we have already mentioned, each form of state is a corruption of another form of state, and in this context, timocracy is a corruption of aristocracy. So how can a perfectly designed ideal state become corrupt? According to Socrates, the main cause of change is those at the top, and this kind of negative change also occurs when there is dissension among those at the top (Plato, 2004, 545d-e). We can say that Socrates considers this first corruption, that is, the transition from aristocracy to timocracy, more precisely, from the ideal state to the state of glory and honour, as the most difficult of corruptions. Because, in the end, the ideal state, whose form of government can be considered as aristocracy or monarchy, was a state that was thought out to the finest details and all the qualifications of the rulers were carefully determined. However, even in such a state, Socrates says that " everything that comes-to-be must decay" (Plato, 2004, 546a), and that even the states that we think and construct to be in the best structure will eventually deteriorate and degenerate. Fossati (2023) states that this decadence is caused by the deterioration of the elements that make up the positive cycle that connects the good nature of the guardians of *Kallipolis* and the good quality of their education (p. 55).

He explains this deterioration in a complex passage. In short, if rulers fail to make the right matches at the right time, that is, if they lose sight of the mathematical and cosmic harmony

governing reproduction, generations begin to deteriorate. He says that everything will have sterile and fertile periods and that states and people will not be able to escape from this. According to Socrates, the generations that will grow up in such an unpredictable barren period will corrupt the state (Plato, 2004, 546b-d). According to Socrates, this generation is inherently evil, will not fulfil their duty to protect people when they take over the government, and will raise a less knowledgeable and less intelligent generation by giving importance to gymnastics, that is, the body (courage, strength), rather than music and, in connection with it, the soul (reason, wisdom) (Plato, 2004, 546d-e). This is the disruption of the hierarchy in the soul: The head (the golden lineage) is replaced by the heart (the silver lineage) (Pappas, 2003, p. 166). Strauss (2014) states that timocracy is a regime in which the hearty (*thymos*) part of the soul, i.e. honour and ambition, prevails over reason (p. 188).

In this generation, there will be no distinction between the gold, silver and bronze lineage, and these lineages will mix with each other, resulting in injustice and disorder. As a result of this disorder, the iron and bronze lineages (labourers and artisans) will follow the path of profit and go after gold and silver; the gold and silver lineages, who, according to Socrates, carry the true wealth within themselves, will try to preserve the old order by following the path of virtue. As a result of these conflicts, a government emerges between aristocracy and oligarchy, which has aspects of both, but also has its own unique aspects (Plato, 2004, 547d). This is timocracy. Fossati (2023) argues that timocracy is therefore a combination of elements of three different regimes characterised by a "fragmented regime" (p. 55).

Although this state bears similarities with the old state in aspects such as the respect of statesmen and the importance attached to war exercises, according to Socrates, in this new state it will be feared that philosophers will come to power, and rude and dashing people who are more useful for war than peace will gain value. The highest value will no longer be wisdom, but glory and honour. According to the Socrates, such people, as in the oligarchic states, will be caught up in the passion for wealth and at the same time hide their money and become stingy. However, when it comes to the property of others, such as the property of the state, they will spend it carelessly (Plato, 2004, 548a-d). Fossati (2023) states that this "secretive and stingy" attitude of the timocratic rulers towards money does not contradict the honour-centred structure of the regime, but rather is part of this inherent tension (p. 69). Therefore, in this state, the primary aspect that emerges will be the fondness for glory and honour and the passion for wealth and miserliness. Timocracy is the first deviation from the ideal; it is the turning away from the Sun (the idea of the good) and turning towards more concrete but less valuable goals (honour, glory) outside the cave.

When discussing the type of person suitable for this state, Adeimantos claims that Glaucon would be a suitable example, at least in terms of his passion for ascension. Socrates, on the other hand, says that he may be similar in this respect, but that he will be different from Glaucon in other respects. Socrates lists the traits of people suitable for this form of state as being overconfident, being far from muses (wisdom and art), not knowing how to speak well, being harsh towards slaves, respecting only those in high positions, ambition for high position, relying only on military and war power (Plato, 2004, 548a-b). These people lack music and reason, which are the best guards, and for this reason, their intrinsic value is corrupted. Their soul is dominated by the heart, not the mind (Pappas, 2003, p. 167).

So far, we have presented the transition from Aristocracy to Timocracy, the values and human structure that come first in Timocracy in the context of Plato's thoughts. If we need to address Socrates' and in this context Plato's ideas on the transition from Timocracy to Oligarchy; this transition is primarily a corruption, a degradation, as in the transition from Aristocracy to Timocracy. The hidden passion for wealth within the Timocracy becomes dominant over time (Weiss, 2007, p. 110). He defines oligarchy as a form of state based on income superiority, where the rich rule and the poor do not interfere at all (Plato, 2004, 550d). According to Socrates, what destroys Timocracy is that everyone hides their money and ignores the laws by breaking them in order to spend these hidden money comfortably. Money replaces glory and honour. The increase in the value given to money causes the value given to truth and virtue to decrease. Socrates defines the relationship between wealth and righteousness as follows: "Or isn't virtue so opposed to wealth that if they were set on the scale of a balance, they would always incline in opposite directions?" (Plato, 2004, 550e).

Thus, glory and honour, the primary values in Timocracy, are replaced by wealth and money lust. From now on, people start to pursue wealth, not glory and honour. Value judgements are based entirely on material foundations. As a result of all this, the law that determines the limits of those who will be in power in the Oligarchy emerges: this limit is based on a certain income superiority, and this superiority varies from oligarchy to oligarchy. Citizens who have not reached a certain income cannot enter state affairs (Plato, 2004, 551a-e). This means that the government is based on a completely meritless basis, namely wealth. This is an important step in the return to the cave; now even the goals outside the cave have been abandoned, and the "statues" inside the cave, i.e. material beings have started to be worshipped (Reeve, 2006, p. 250). Wealth completely replaced knowledge and virtue.

Socrates lists the defects related to the oligarchy form of government between 551c-552d of the eighth book, and when these defects are analysed, it is possible to identify seven basic defects:

1. Principle Failure: Governance is based on wealth, not merit. Just as a ship should be led by the best captain and not by the richest person, a state should be led by the wisest person.
2. Division: The inevitable division of the state into two hostile camps, the rich and the poor. This state is at war within itself.
3. Defence Vulnerability: The fear of the rich to arm the poor (fear of rebellion), and at the same time their stinginess to spend money for war.
4. Stinginess: Refraining from spending money for the general needs of the state.
5. Lack of Specialisation: The same people engaged in many different occupations (agriculture, trade, war), a violation of the ideal state principle of "every man for himself" (Annas, 1981, p. 302).
6. Property Problem: The fact that people can sell all their possessions and become poor, creating a dysfunctional, parasitic class in society.
7. Crime and poverty: the emergence of this dysfunctional class ("drones"). This class becomes either beggars (stingless drones) or criminals (stinging drones) (Pappas, 2003, p. 168).

After listing the bad characteristics of oligarchy, Socrates finally discusses the human being corresponding to this form of state. Socrates deals with the man corresponding to the oligarchy through a father-son relationship. In this context, Oligarchy is the son of the man of Timocracy. This son sees his father lose his fortune and perhaps his life in his pursuit of glory and honour. Under the influence of these disasters, Oligarchy lives in fear and replaces the ambition to gain honour and rise, which are the aspects specific to Timocracy, with the ambition to make money. Desire (especially the desire for money), which is the lowest part of the soul, takes the place of reason and spirit. Again, he does not attempt to do good deeds with his money in order not to awaken in him ambitions for glory and honour, and therefore he is stingy. Finally, this person assigns the mind and the heart as two slaves, one of them with the task of increasing earnings and the other with the task of admiring wealth and clinging to the ways of earning (Plato, 2004, 553c). The oligarchic man may be honest in appearance, but this is not out of virtue, but out of fear of losing his money. His soul is enslaved to compulsive desires (making money) (Voegelin, 1999, p. 132).

8. The Illusion of Freedom: The Birth of Democracy

After describing the characteristics of the human being corresponding to the oligarchic form of state, Socrates discusses the democratic form of state. The greed for excessive wealth in oligarchy and the growing discontent of the poor sow the seeds of democracy. According to Socrates, the transition from oligarchy to democracy is the result of the rulers' desire to enrich themselves by encouraging the people to spend their money. They push young people into luxury and debt. Spending uncontrollably, the people eventually become penniless and unemployed and begin to resent those who take away their property and each other. Rich people ignore these unhappy people and think of nothing but lending and taking interest (Plato, 2004, 556a). Rich rulers do not try to prevent these people from spending their money, nor do they enact a law to prevent corruption, as this would contradict their own interests. As the difference between the rich and poor classes grows and the number of the poor increases, the republic is shaken for the smallest reasons, civil war begins in this fight, when the poor defeat their enemies, democracy is established (Plato, 2004, 556e-557a). The poor overthrow the rich by using their numerical superiority and establish democracy where everyone has equal rights and freedom is considered the supreme value. At the end of such a civil war, those who will take office are no longer determined by the abundance of money or honour, as in the old orders, but mostly by lot or equal distribution.

According to Socrates, in a democratic state, citizens speak freely, do what they wish freely and everyone is free. Everyone can choose the lifestyle they want, do the work they want, and even participate in governance. However, Socrates does not find this structure favourable; on the contrary, he sees many dangers in such an order. Plato defines democracy as "the most beautiful" but at the same time "the most chaotic" form of government (Pappas, 2003, p. 170). Socrates sees such a state as a cloak painted in various colours that gathers different people together and says: "(…) like women and children looking at embroidered objects and actually judge it to be the most beautiful " (Plato, 2004, 557c). Arlene Saxonhouse (1998) argues that at the centre of Plato's critique of democracy is its tendency to "equalise everything". Democracy equalises not only people, but also desires, values and lifestyles, which is diametrically opposed to Plato's hierarchical and form-based conception of order (Saxonhouse, 1998, p. 273). In this passage, Plato shows that although he assigns certain roles to women in the ideal state and considers them equal to men in many respects (Beere, 2023, p. 205), he still considers them inferior to men in terms of reason and making the right decisions. In this context, democracy is only a seemingly good government and

can only deceive those who are deceived by appearances. Again, according to him, democracy is a fair of order and therefore a real order cannot be established (Plato, 2004, 557e). In democracy, everything is free, but this freedom leads to a relativism in which good and evil, right and wrong, knowledge and delusion are not distinguished. This is a reflection of the situation in the cave, where every shadow, every reflection, every puppet is considered equally "real" (Reeve, 2006, p. 251). The search for truth is abandoned; in its place comes the legitimisation of all kinds of *doxa*.

Socrates lists the negative aspects of democracy as follows:

1. Lack of merit: The people who can do things best may not choose to do them because there is no compulsion. Management is often determined by lottery or popularity, not knowledge.
2. Lack of discipline: Since there would be no obligation to participate in wars or obey orders, citizens would act as they pleased.
3. Disorganisation: While everyone is trying to keep the peace, individuals may work to disrupt it. There is no common goal.
4. Lawlessness: Even if the law does not authorise people to do things, they can do them. The law is flexible and not taken seriously.
5. Moral decadence: In the ideal state, moral values are ignored. All lifestyles are equally accepted. As Saxonhouse (1998) puts it, "the democratic spirit is a spirit without 'ideals'; it is not bound to anything, it tries everything and is not permanently attached to anything" (p. 280).
6. Populism: It is not enough for the statesman to be knowledgeable or virtuous, but to be a "friend of the people" (Weiss, 2007, p. 112).

As can be understood, Socrates and, in this context, Plato have a very negative view of democracy and claim that its good aspects are a deception. After listing these bad aspects, Socrates discusses the characteristics of the citizen in a democracy. The democratic man is freed from the stinginess of the oligarchic father, but has completely lost the hierarchy in his soul. While defining this citizen, Socrates emphasises the importance of desires. According to the thinker, desires are divided into two as compulsory and unnecessary desires. Necessary desires are those that one cannot get rid of or are useful (such as food, shelter). Unnecessary desires, on the other hand, are the desires that we can save ourselves, especially in our young age (Plato, 2004, 559a-c), which do not bring benefit to man and even bring evil (such as excessive luxury, unnecessary spending) (Plato, 2004, 559a-c). While the oligarchic man is content with only his compulsory desires, the

democratic man sees all compulsory and non-compulsory desires as equal. There is no order in his soul; one day he philosophises, the next day he drinks, the next day he deals with politics. He submits to every desire momentarily. Socrates says that the man who is identified with the drone is the man who succumbs to these empty desires and follows them, whereas the man of oligarchy, who knows his job, is content with only his necessary desires. The replacement of necessary desires, which previously determined the transition from oligarchy to democracy, with unnecessary desires also shows the characteristics that determine the human in democracy (Plato, 2004, 560a-561a). This is a complete anarchy in the soul and the basis of anarchy at the state level.

9. The Darkest Corner: The Coming of Tyranny

Finally, Socrates analyses the regime of tyranny, which he ironically describes as "the finest constitution and the finest man" (Plato, 2004, 562a). According to Plato, every form of government collapses because of the excess of what it values most. He claims that there is a similarity between the transition from oligarchy to democracy and the transition from democracy to tyranny. In this context, according to the thinker, the passion for excessive wealth, which was the passion that founded oligarchy, was also the cause of its destruction; similarly, it is freedom, which is the thing it values most, that both builds and destroys democracy. " As I was about to say, then, isn't it the insatiable desire for this good and the neglect of other things that changes this constitution and prepares it to need a dictatorship?" (Plato, 2004, 562c). Voegelin (1999) interprets this situation as "the self-destructive excess of freedom" (p. 135).

The desire for unlimited freedom in democracy creates discontent against all kinds of authority and order. This change begins as a result of the inability of those who govern the people to give them the freedom they want. In such a transition, citizens who do what the statesmen say are denounced as inferior, slave-like people. People who give orders instead of obeying are admired and praised (Plato, 2004, 562d-e). Plato and Socrates go quite far in their criticism, claiming that the equality and freedom between slaves and masters and between men and women at the last point of democracy will go too far and accelerate destruction (Plato, 2004, 563b). In this anarchy, society is divided into three classes: Rulers, the wealthy and the most populous class, the people. The rulers attack the rich, confiscate their wealth and distribute it to the people in order to attract the people to their side. In this environment of conflict, the people look for a "leader" who will protect them from the rich. This leader is the tyrant himself (Pappas, 2003, p. 172). With the conflicts between these three classes, the transition from democracy to tyranny begins. The rulers

incite the people against the wealthy. The people choose one of these demagogues as their "protector". This protector initially appears to be a friend of the people, but in time he consolidates his power. According to Socrates, “And after that, isn’t such a man inevitably fated either to be killed by his enemies or to be a tyrant, transformed from a man into a wolf?" (Plato, 2004, 566a).

To maintain his power, a tyrannical ruler constantly creates enemies, wages wars, increases taxes and, most importantly, destroys everything that is "good" in society. He asks the people for protectors against enemies who would try to overthrow him. Citizens of this state are impoverished by taxes and become unable to keep their heads from work, while wars are used to destroy obstinate people (potential rivals) (Plato, 2004, 567a-b). According to Socrates, there is a great cleansing process in such a state, and this cleansing is the opposite of the body cleansing performed by physicians. "The opposite of the one doctors perform on our bodies. They draw off the worst and leave the best, whereas he does just the opposite!" (Plato, 2004, 567c). The tyrant surrounds himself with the worst and most immoral people, because only they will obey him. The state becomes a prisoner in the hands of a tyrant and his slave-like followers (Weiss, 2007, p. 115). Although Popper (1947) sees tyranny as the opposite of Plato's ideal state, he argues that both are based on the ideal of 'stopping change' and 'closed society', but in tyranny this is manifested in the most malignant form (p. 49).

As a result of these developments, the tyrant will need more guards to protect him, more soldiers and therefore more money to wage wars, and as a result of all this, he will have to turn to the people for more money. This will lead to the collapse of tyranny. Because the people realise that the tyrant they initially supported is in fact their own undoing. But it is too late. The tyrant is now stronger than the people themselves and it has become impossible to overthrow him. The people have fallen into the heaviest slavery while seeking freedom. Tyranny is the deepest, darkest corner of the cave. Here there is neither knowledge, nor virtue, nor order; there is only a hell where the wildest desires, fear and oppression reign. This is the farthest point from the idea of good; it is the bottom of political and moral collapse (Reeve, 2006, p. 253). The tyrant himself is in fact the unhappiest and most enslaved person, because he is a slave to his own desires.

10. Conclusion: Plato's Cycle of Regimes as an Epistemic Journey

This cycle of forms of government that Plato presents in the *Republic* is not merely a historical analysis or a political classification; it is a profound philosophical argument (Voegelin, 1999, p. 125). This argument is closely linked to Plato's Allegory of the Cave and the Analogy of

the Divided Line. Plato's basic thesis is that the health of a state is directly related to the proximity of its rulers and inhabitants to knowledge, truth and the idea of the good (Pappas, 2003, p. 175).

The journey out of the cave forms the basis of the Aristocracy, the rule of philosopher kings. This is the ideal state dominated by episteme and reason, illuminated by the light of the Sun (the ideal of the good). However, every deviation from this ideal is a step back towards the cave: Plato's theory of political decay illustrates a progressive descent away from the light of reason and back into the darkness of the cave. The decline starts with timocracy, which turns away from the Sun of knowledge to pursue earthly honor and ambition (Fossati, 2023, p. 56). This is followed by oligarchy, which retreats further into the cave to worship the "copies" of reality in the form of material wealth, allowing greed to replace reason. Democracy accelerates this decay by erasing all distinctions between the cave's shadows and its copies, treating all opinions (doxa) as equal and thereby dissolving the search for truth into a state of chaotic freedom (Saxonhouse, 1998, p. 281). The descent culminates in tyranny, the ultimate enslavement to the cave's darkest corner, where the most deceptive shadows—representing the most primitive desires—reign supreme and reason is completely extinguished.

For Plato, political decadence is basically an epistemological and moral decadence (Kosman, 2007, p. 118). States become corrupt when they cease to regard truth and wisdom as the highest value and replace them with lower values such as glory, money or unlimited freedom. The Allegory of the Cave therefore provides a powerful and timeless key metaphor for understanding not only the process of individual enlightenment but also the political destiny of societies (Zamosc, 2017, p. 260). Plato's message is clear: A society that turns away from the light of truth is inevitably doomed to political darkness and the chains of tyranny. The ideal state can only be established and preserved by philosophers who manage to come out of the cave, who are enlightened by the Sun of truth, and who assume the responsibility of carrying this light back to society (Reeve, 2006, p. 230). This journey is arduous and, as critics such as Popper (1947) point out, potentially dangerous, but according to Plato, it is the only way for both the individual and society to achieve true happiness and justice. Whether Plato's *Republic* is read as a utopia or as a critique, as in Strauss' interpretation, it remains a fundamental text that allows us to continue thinking about the inseparability of politics from philosophy and the central role of knowledge in political life.

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