I replied; ‘but now let me be brave and say that our Guardians, in the fullest sense, must be philosophers.’

‘So be it.’

‘Think how few of them there are likely to be. The elements in the character which we said they must have don’t usually combine into a whole, but are normally found separately.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Readiness to learn and remember, quickness and keenness of mind and the qualities that go with them, and enterprise and breadth of vision, aren’t usually combined with readiness to live an orderly, quiet and steady life; their keenness makes such temperaments very unpredictable and quite devoid of steadiness.’

‘True.’

‘And again, steady, consistent characters on whom you can rely, and who are unmoved by fear in war, are equally unmoved by instruction. Their immobility amounts indeed to numbness and, faced with anything that demands intellectual effort, they yawn and sink into slumber.’

‘That’s all quite true.’

‘But we demand a full and fair share of both sets of qualities from anyone who is to be given the highest form of education and any share of office or authority.’

‘And rightly.’

‘So the character we want will be a rare occurrence.’

‘It will.’

‘And we must not only test it in the pains and fears and pleasures we have already described, but also try it out in a series of intellectual studies which we omitted before, to see if it has the endurance to pursue the highest forms of knowledge, without flinching as others flinch in physical trials.’

‘A fair test; but what,’ he asked, ‘are these highest forms of knowledge?’

‘You remember,’ I answered, ‘that we distinguished three elements in the mind, and then went on to deal with justice, self-control, courage and wisdom.’

‘If I didn’t remember that,’ he said, ‘I shouldn’t have any claim to hear the rest of the argument.’
'Then do you remember what we said just before we dealt with these subjects?\(^{147}\)

'What?'

b We said that a really clear view of them could only be got by making a detour for the purpose, though we could give some indication on the basis of our earlier argument. You said that was good enough, and so our subsequent description fell short, in my view, of real precision; whether it was precise enough for you, is for you to say.'

'I thought you gave us fair measure, and so, I think, did the others.'

c 'My dear Adeimantus, in matters like this nothing is fair measure that falls short of the truth in any respect,' I replied, 'You can't use the imperfect as a measure of anything — though people are sometimes content with it, and don't want to look further.'

'Yes, but it's usually because they're too lazy.'

'A most undesirable quality in a Guardian of state and laws.'

'A fair comment.'

d 'Then he must take the longer way round,' I said, 'and must work as hard at his intellectual training as at his physical; otherwise, as we've just said, he will never finally reach the highest form of knowledge, which should be peculiarly his own.'

'The highest?' he asked. 'But is there anything higher than justice and the other qualities we discussed?'

'There is,' I said. 'And we ought not to be content with the sight of a mere sketch even of these qualities, or fail to complete the picture in detail. For it would be absurd, would it not, to devote all our energies to securing the greatest possible precision and clarity in matters of little consequence, and not to demand the highest precision in the most important things of all?'

'Quite absurd,' he agreed. 'But you can hardly expect to escape cross-questioning about what you call the highest form of knowledge and its object."

'I don't expect to escape from you,' I returned; 'ask your questions. Though you've heard about it often enough, and either don't understand for the moment, or else are deliberately giving me trouble by your persistence — I suspect it's the latter,'
but that no one is satisfied to have something that only appears to be good, but wants something that really is, and has no use here for appearances?"

‘Absolutely true.’

“The good, then, is the end of all endeavour, the object on which every heart is set, whose existence it divines, though it finds it difficult to grasp just what it is; and because it can’t handle it with the same assurance as other things it misses any value those other things have. Can we possibly agree that the best of our citizens, to whom we are going to entrust everything, should be in the dark about so important a subject?”

“It’s the last thing we can admit.”

‘At any rate a man will not be a very useful Guardian of what is right and valuable if he does not know in what their goodness consists; and I suspect that until he does no one can know them adequately.’

‘Your suspicions are well founded.’

‘So our society will be properly regulated only if it is in the charge of a Guardian who has this knowledge.’

‘That must be so,’ he said. ‘But what about you, Socrates? Do you think that the good is knowledge or pleasure? Or do you think it’s something else?’

“What a man!” I exclaimed. “It’s been obvious for some time that you wouldn’t be satisfied with other people’s opinions!”

“But I don’t think it’s right, Socrates,” he protested, “for you to be able to tell us other people’s opinions but not your own, when you’ve given so much time to the subject.”

“Yes, but do you think it’s right for a man to talk as if he knows what he does not?”

“He has no right to talk as if he knew; but he should be prepared to say what it is that he thinks.”

“Well,” I said, “haven’t you noticed that opinion without knowledge is always a poor thing? At the best it is blind – isn’t anyone who holds a true opinion without understanding like a blind man on the right road?”

“Yes.”

“Then do you want a poor, blind, halting display from me, when you can get splendidly clear accounts from other people?”
third element is present which is specifically and naturally adapted for the purpose.

'What is that?' he asked.

'What you call light,' I answered.

'True.'

'Then the sense of sight and the visibility of objects are yoked by a yoke a long way more precious than any other — that is, if light is a precious thing.'

'Which it most certainly is.'

'Which, then, of the heavenly bodies do you regard as responsible for this? Whose light would you say it is that makes our eyes see and objects be seen most perfectly?'

'I should say the same as you or anyone else; you mean the sun, of course.'

'Then is sight related to its divine source as follows?'

'How?'

'The sun is not identical with sight, nor with what we call the eye in which sight resides.'

'No.'

'Yet of all sense-organs the eye is the most sunlike.'

'Much the most.'

'So the eye's power of sight is a kind of infusion dispensed to it by the sun.'

'Yes.'

'Then, moreover, though the sun is not itself sight, it is the cause of sight and is seen by the sight it causes.'

'That is so.'

'Well, that is what I called the child of the good,' I said. 'The good has begotten it in its own likeness, and it bears the same relation to sight and visible objects in the visible realm that the good bears to intelligence and intelligible objects in the intelligible realm.'

'Will you explain that a bit further?' he asked.

'You know that when we turn our eyes to objects whose colours are no longer illuminated by daylight, but only by moonlight or starlight, they see dimly and appear to be almost blind, as if they had no clear vision.'

'Yes.'
'Now, don’t blame me,' I protested; ‘it was you who made me say what I thought about it.'

'Yes, and please go on. At any rate finish off the analogy with the sun, if you haven’t finished it.'

'I’ve not nearly finished it.'

'Then go on and don’t leave anything out?'

'I’m afraid I must leave a lot out,' I said. 'But I’ll do my best to get in everything I can in present circumstances.'

'Yes, please do.'

6. The Divided Line

The analogy of the Divided Line is, Plato makes clear, a sequel to the Sun simile, its purpose being to illustrate further the relation between the two orders of reality with which the Sun simile dealt. But it does so from a particular point of view, that of the states of mind (pathēmata: 511d) in which we apprehend these two orders or realms. The purpose of the Line, therefore, is not, primarily, to give a classification of objects. Both of the two states of mind correlated with the intelligible realm deal with the same kind of object (the forms), though each deals with them in a different way; and though in the physical world there is a difference between physical things and their shadows, that difference is used primarily to illustrate degrees of ‘truth’ or genuineness in what is apprehended – we know very little about a thing if our knowledge is confined to shadows or images of it or, for that matter, to its superficial appearance. The simile may be set out in the form of the table overleaf.

Broadly speaking, the mental states comprised by the four sub-divisions are: (A) Intelligence. Full understanding, culminating in the vision of ultimate truth. This understanding is reached by philosophy, or as Plato often calls it ‘dialectic’; a term whose modern associations are quite misleading in interpreting the Republic, but which, with that caution, remains a convenient translation. (B) Reason. The procedure of mathematics, purely deductive and uncritical of its assumptions. (C) Belief. Commonsense beliefs on matters both moral and
The Philosopher Ruler

To look forward for a moment, Plato is not entirely consistent in his use of terms (see Part VIII, note 23). In Part VII, section 2.1 ff. the contrast is frequently between doxa and gnosia, another word for knowledge. Noēsis is sometimes used of sub-section A of the Line, but, perhaps because the content of the whole 'region' AB is called noēton, it is also used of intellectual operations more generally. And at one place (534a) epistēmē is used of sub-section A. The content of CD, commonly referred to in the Line as to horaton, the visible, is in this diagram also called the physical world. Though there is an emphasis in the simile on purely visual terms, Plato instances animals, plants and manufactured objects as examples in sub-section C, and for example a donkey eating hay in a barn is not a purely visual object. Besides, it is made quite clear in Part VIII that CD is the world perceived by our senses (aisthēton), the world of material change (genesis). The diagram assumes that both noēsis and dianoia deal with forms and that dianoia has no separate type of object. It is sometimes claimed that Plato implies that there are special mathematical objects in sub-section B; but his language at 510d suggests rather that the mathematicians deal with forms, but in a not fully adequate way. See also Part VIII, note 9.

This brief dogmatic summary can hardly do justice to the problems raised by the Line and its two companion similes and to the controversies which they have occasioned. Some suggestions for further reading will be found in the endmatter (References and Sources, see especially Cross and Wootzley, Chs. 9 and 10). But the reader should first study what Plato himself has to say about the way in which the similes are to be interpreted and linked: see especially 517b–d, and note 78, 53a–53b and cf. Appendix I.

'You must suppose, then,' I went on, 'that there are these two powers 57 of which I have spoken, and that one of them is supreme over everything in the intelligible order or region, the other over everything in the visible region — I won't say in the physical universe or you will think I'm playing with words. 58 At any rate you have before your mind these two orders 59 of things, the visible and the intelligible?'

'Yes, I have.'