

Ἄνα τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον The Divided Line and Allegory of the Cave Revisited

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ABSTRACT

Answering articles by Smith (*PJ* 18) and Matoso (*PJ* 22) about the Divided Line, I argue that the problems Smith raised and Matoso took himself to be solving don't exist in a proper reading of the analogy and the ensuing allegory of the cave in light of one another and stem from a misunderstanding of the expression ἄνα τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον at *Rep.* VI, 509d7: the λόγος to be used to split both segments is *not* the one used to split the line in the first place, and it is *not* a numerical ratio, but a logical rationale.

Keywords: Plato, Plato's Republic, Divided Line, Allegory of the Cave, Forms, Ideas

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In an article published in volume 22 (2021) of *Plato Journal*, Renato Matoso (2021) claims to provide a solution to a problem raised by Nicholas Smith (2018) in an earlier article published in volume 18 (2018) of *Plato Journal* about the Divided Line. The problem appears, according to Smith, when trying to make sense of what the respective lengths of the four subsegments of the line are supposed to illustrate while taking into account what Socrates says about the proportions between these subsegments, which, so he claims, change between book VI and book VII, causing him what he calls a “nightmare”. In this article, I intend to show that the problem raised by Smith stems from a faulty understanding of the expression ἄνα τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον at 509d7, common to most if not all scholars, including Matoso, regarding the meaning of both αὐτὸν and λόγον, and that the conclusion drawn by Matoso from his argument to solve the non-existing problem raised by Smith, that “the mathematical property of the line that [Smith] considers troublesome [is] entailing one of the most important pieces of doctrine behind this passage. This is the idea that the world of sensible things holds a dependance upon the world of Forms in the same way the shadows and reflections depend on the things that are shadowed and reflected.” (Matoso 2021, p. 26), is unwarranted by a proper reading of both the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave in light of one another, because the reason why Socrates chooses shadows and reflections as *examples* of what he calls “images” in introducing the bisection of the segment of the visible is not the fact that “shadows and reflections depend on their models for their existence in a manner that statues and paintings do not depend” (Matoso 2021, p. 23) but the fact that they are *natural*, as opposed to man-made, and *moving* images,

preparing us to generalize to the fact that *all things* sight allows us to see, represented by the shadows in the Allegory of the Cave, are *images* formed in the eyes of what we see, be it an “original” or a shadow or reflection or a statue or painting.

Before addressing the problems posed by the expression ἄνα τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον, I will first provide an outline of my understanding of the Divided Line and Analogy of the Cave to serve as a needed background for my line of reasoning in this article.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

The key to understanding the Allegory of the Cave lies in the four occurrences of the word ἄνθρωπος,¹ always in the plural (ἄνθρώπους, 514a3 and 514b8; ἄνθρώπων, 514b5 and 516a7), to which should be added the ἀνδριάντας of 514c1. According to what Socrates tells Alcibiades at *Alc.* 1, 130c5-6, that “ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος”, ἄνθρωπος in the allegory refers to the human soul, either as capable of learning and possibly knowing or as object of knowledge for those learning souls supposed to abide by the Delphic precept γνῶθι σαυτόν dear to Socrates. The learning souls are depicted by the prisoners (ἄνθρώπους, 514a3) presented as spectators of some sort of puppet show (the world) when Socrates likens the wall above which objects project shadows to “the fences put in front of men (ἄνθρώπων, 514b5) by wonderworkers, above which they display their wonderworks”.² The souls as objects of knowledge are, within the cave but hidden by the wall, the “men (ἄνθρώπους, 514b8) carrying implements of all kinds rising above the wall and statues of men (ἀνδριάντας) and other living animals made of wood and stone and fashioned in all possible ways”, invisible

to the learning souls inside the cave (souls are not visible to the eyes), and, outside the cave, the ἄνθρωποι (ἀνθρώπων, 516a7) whose shadows and reflections on waters the freed prisoner just out of the cave would first look at before being able to see them αὐτά (516a6-8). The bodies that these souls use as tools (σκεύη, 514c1) are depicted by the ἀνδριάνται listed among the objects that the animating souls hidden by the wall raise above it, using a word, ἀνδριάς, the root of which, ἀνήρ, hints at the distinction of sexes, which is relevant only to material bodies, not to souls as such. A clear distinction between the learning souls and the souls as objects of possible knowledge is made by the verb used by Socrates in each case to refer to their ability to talk: for the prisoners, that is, the learning souls, he uses the verb διαλέγεσθαι (515b4), implying λόγος conveying meaning, whereas for the hidden souls as objects of possible knowledge, he uses the verb φθέγγεσθαι (φθεγγόμενος 515a2; φθέγγαιτο, 515b8; φθεγγόμενον, 515b9), the primary meaning of which is “utter a sound” and which can be used about human beings as well as animals and inanimate things, that is, a verb depicting speech as a mere physical phenomenon implying only sound.

If we relate this to the Divided Line, the cave corresponding to the segment of the visible, and the outside to the segment of the intelligible, we see that in both there are two stages, a first stage dealing with shadows and reflections, a second one dealing with their originals, but all relating to the same “objects”, primarily ἄνθρωποι, only considered under different guises which shed light on the four παθήματα associated by Socrates with the four subsegments of the Line. Focusing on ἄνθρωποι, the shadows of the ἀνδριάνται inside the cave correspond to the visible *images* of their material bodies produced by sight in their

eyes, object of εἰκασία, and this should make us understand that what Socrates had in mind in talking about images for the first segment of the visible was not limited to shadows and reflections in the usual sense, but was primarily meant to prepare us to understand that *all* that we see with our eyes, shadows, reflections, statues, paintings, as well as their originals, are (natural) *images* formed in the eyes of what we are looking at.³ Regarding reflections, the allegory switches to a different kind of reflections, no longer in the visible register, but in the audible register with the echo (ἡχώ, 515b7) of the sounds produced by some of the bearers behind the wall, that is, the physical manifestation of the λόγοι of these ἄνθρωποι, inviting us to generalize and understand that everything that we grasp with our senses is but an “image” of sorts of that from which it comes. The visible originals, objects of πίστις, are the material objects above the wall producing shadows on the wall of the cave, including, regarding ἄνθρωποι, the ἀνδριάνται, and what makes the difference between εἰκασία and πίστις is whether we have come to realize that *everything* we grasp through sight is but an *image* of what acts on our eyes (the πᾶγμα causing the πάθημα), in which case we are at the level of πίστις,⁴ or we “hold as the true nothing but the shadows of the implements” (515c1-2), that is, we think that things are exactly as we see them, in which case we are in εἰκασία. Outside the cave, everything that could be seen inside the cave, that is ἄνθρωποι and the rest (τῶν ἄλλων, 516a7), is replicated, but now as intelligible and no longer visible, and it can be grasped first through shadows and reflections, then directly.⁵ Intelligible shadows and reflections, objects of διάνοια, refer to words and λόγοι, as the mention of the echo inside the cave has prepared us to understand, shadows being the words and λόγοι uttered

by the person whose “shadow” they are, and reflections being the words and λόγοι uttered or written by others about this person. In other words, words in the intelligible realm are the equivalent of images in the visible realm, in that words are not what they are supposed to name, but something standing for them.⁶ And it is only at the level of νόησις that we can grasp the ἄνθρωποι and the rest “*themselves*” (αὐτά, 516a8), but on this, Socrates doesn’t elaborate since elaborating could only be done with words, which means falling back at the level of διάνοια. Thus, moving from διάνοια to νόησις implies understanding “what λόγος itself can reach through the power of τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι” (511b4), that is, understanding how the λόγος can give us access to more than words, what it gives us access to and what are its power *and limits*.⁷ This is the δεύτερον πλοῦν Socrates refers to in the *Phaedo* (*Phd.* 99d1) when he says that, for fear of being blinded by “looking πρὸς τὰ πράγματα with the eyes and each one of the senses trying to grasp them” (*Phd.* 99e3-4), he felt obliged, “taking refuge εἰς τοὺς λόγους, to examine in them the truth about beings” (*Phd.* 99e5-6), after having been deceived by Anaxagoras who, after stating that “νοῦς is what brings order and [is] cause/responsible of everything” (*Phd.* 96c1-2), was leaving no place for the good in his explanations, that is, had been unable, “going all the way to τὸ ἀνυπόθετον (that is, the idea of the good), toward the (leading) principle of the whole (ἡ τοῦ παντός ἀρχή), having grasped it, [to]deriv[e] in return from it all that can be derived” (*Rep* VI, 511b6-8).

ἌΝΙΣΑ

But, before going further about εἶδη/ιδέαι, we must return to the cave and what’s left to be

seen outside, namely the heavens and the stars, the moon and the sun. This pictures in the allegory the ιδέαι, which cannot be reached by the senses, not only the ιδέαι of such abstract notions as “good”, “just”, “beautiful” and the like, but the ιδέαι, as principles of intelligibility, of everything there is in the cave as accessible to sight and the other senses, which is replicated outside the cave as intelligible. In other words, it pictures “things” that can only be “seen” outside the cave. This means that the intelligible includes both an intelligible counterpart of all that’s inside the cave (in the visible) *individually* (each one of the ἀνθρώπων mentioned at 516a7, each horse, each bed...) *and* “things” that can *only* be “seen” there, and thus, is “larger” than the visible. Accordingly, Socrates doesn’t have to know what their respective size or the proportion between both are to ask Glaucon to divide the line into two *unequal* (ἄνισα) segments. This confirms once and for all the reading ἄνισα.

ΑΥΤΑ, ΙΔΕΑΙ, ΕΊΔΗ

If I used the word ιδέαι and not the word εἶδη to characterize what the stars stand for in the allegory, it is because, in my opinion, these two words are not synonymous for Plato, at least in certain contexts, especially this one, and are not synonymous with αὐτό τὸ *** (the *** itself) or, in the plural, τὰ αὐτά. The best place to start an investigation of the meaning of these words is *Rep.* X, a6-7, the preamble to the discussion about the three (in fact four) sorts of beds:⁸ “we are, methinks, in the habit of positing some εἶδος, unique in each case, for each of the many [things] upon which we impose the same name” (εἶδος γάρ πού τι ἐν ἑκάστων εἰώθαμεν τίθεσθαι περὶ ἑκάστα τὰ πολλά οἷς ταῦτὸν ὄνομα ἐπιφέρομεν). Socrates

introduces this as a starting point for an investigation of μίμησις for which the discussion about the various sorts of beds which follows immediately is only a prelude, calling it not “his”, but “the usual manner of proceeding” (ἐκ τῆς εἰωθυίας μεθόδου, 596b5-6), and it can almost be seen as a “definition” of what he means by εἶδος, the first word of the sentence. An εἶδος is what we assume to be common to all things we call by the same name. But then, we must remember what Socrates says in the Allegory of the Cave about the chained prisoners: “now, if they were able to διαλέγεσθαι with one another, don’t you think that, the same [things] being around [again], they would take the habit of giving names to those [things] they see?” (εἰ οὖν διαλέγεσθαι οἱοί τ’ εἶεν πρὸς ἀλλήλους, οὐ ταῦτ’ ἡγῆ ἅν τὰ παρόντα αὐτοὺς νομίζεν ὀνομάζειν ἅπερ ὁρῶεν, 515b4-5, reading of manuscript A).⁹ In other words, some names are given by chained prisoners based only on what they deem common to a plurality of *shadows*, that is, based only on *visual* resemblances in the outer appearance of what they name.¹⁰ And this is no surprise if indeed, as ἄνθρωποι, they are able to διαλέγεσθαι, since they need words to do it. But then, should εἶδος be understood here in its usual, not supposedly “technical”,¹¹ meaning? That would be strange in an introduction to a discussion dealing with εἶδη and ιδέα of tables and beds where these words seem to be used in what scholars would consider a “technical” sense, even though some of them have a hard time accepting an εἶδος or ιδέα of table or bed in that “technical” sense. Besides, in the Divided Line, Socrates uses successively within a few lines the words ὁρωμένοις εἶδεσι (510d5) and νοητὸν εἶδος (511a3), suggesting that he is talking about two kinds of *the same thing*. Some light might be shed on these two kinds of εἶδη by the choice of examples made

by Socrates in the ensuing discussion: at first, at 596b1, he mentions two types of furniture, κλῖναι (beds) and τράπεζαι (tables), and he associates what he now calls a unique ιδέα rather than εἶδος with each type, one for tables and one for beds (596b3-4), which the maker of such objects looks at, though he is not their maker (meaning it is not the blueprint he or someone else has made in advance to guide his work), when making either a table or a bed (596b6-9); but then, he abandons tables and keeps only beds for the rest of the discussion. Now, if we notice that τράπεζα means etymologically “having four feet/legs” while κλίνη is derived from the verb κλίνειν, meaning “make (someone) to lie down” and in the passive “lie down”, we realize that τράπεζα suggests *visual* features of what it names, while κλίνη suggests what the *function* of what it names is.¹² Now, the ιδέα the maker is looking at to design an item of furniture (or whatever he intends to make), if he truly is a maker and not simply a copier or a subordinate working from blueprints drawn by someone else, is not something which only suggests its external appearance and says nothing of its intended purpose, but something which tells him what the thing is supposed to be used for, what its ἀρετή (“goodness/excellence/perfection”) is, thus making him able to make beds (or whatever) resembling none of those he has seen so far and yet usable as beds. Thus, κλίνη (bed) is a better pick than τράπεζα (table) to make the point about ιδέα since the ιδέα associated with κλίνη is almost built into the word, which is not the case with τράπεζα (a bed too may have four legs).

Following these leads, I suggest that Plato specialized the word ιδέα, whose usual meanings are very close to those of εἶδος, to refer to a kind of εἶδη (in the sense of *Rep.* X, a6-7) exclusively based on criteria of intelligibility.¹³

Thus, *ιδέαι* in that sense are a subset of *εἶδη*, what Socrates calls *νοητά εἶδη* in the analogy of the line at 511a3. And if Socrates doesn't call them *ιδέαι* right away, it is because he is more concerned at this point with stressing the *continuity of meaning* from the sensible to the intelligible than with highlighting the difference, which is sufficiently outlined by the contrast between *ὁρώμενα* and *νοητά εἶδη* and wouldn't appear if he changed words at once from the one to the other. Yet neither the *εἶδος* nor the *ιδέα* is the *** itself (αὐτό τὸ ***): they are what an *ἄνθρωπος* can grasp from the world around with one's senses and *νοῦς*, with their built-in limits and the specific limits they further have in each individual and thus, there is no way we can know for sure that we grasp them as they are: if *ἄνθρωποι* had no sense of smell, they couldn't know that flowers and other things have a distinctive smell!¹⁴ But this doesn't mean that they are totally subjective since they are determined by the objectivity of what acts (*πράττειν*) upon them, the *πράγματα*, so that there is on the one hand objective *εἶδη* and *ιδέαι*, which depend only on the *πράγμα* and the power of the specific human sense or *νοῦς* designed to grasp it supposed at its best, and on the other hand, subjective *εἶδη* and *ιδέαι*, which are what a specific individual at a given time of one's life can grasp from these objective *εἶδη* and *ιδέαι* based upon the specific limitations of one's senses (for instance being color-blind or myope in the case of sight, or being hard on hearing in the case of hearing) and intelligence (*νοῦς*). These "subjective" *εἶδη/ιδέαι* are all that is available to us as individuals different from one another in the quality of their senses and intelligence. They evolve all through our life from the exclusively visual/sensible *εἶδος* we associated with each word we learned as young children learning to talk

toward *ιδέαι* devoid of sensible references as we grow and better understand the world around us. The "objective" *ιδέαι* are the upper limit of what we can grasp as embodied souls. It is precisely the fact that knowledge is the result of a *process* taking place all through life, which is used by the Stranger from Elea in the *Sophist* to counter the Friends of *εἶδη*. Indeed, he shows them that, if they grant *οὐσία* only to "some intelligible (*νοητά*) and incorporeal *εἶδη*" (*Sph.* 246b7-8), refusing them "the ability to be affected (*πάσχειν*) and act (*ποιεῖν*)" (*Sph.* 248c7-9), they are throwing the baby with the bathwater by making knowledge of *οὐσία* impossible. Indeed, "if to get to know (*γινώσκειν*) is some sort of acting (*ποιεῖν*), the [fact of] being known (*τὸ γινωσκόμενον*) necessarily on the contrary turns out as being affected (*πάσχειν*), so that the *οὐσία*, according to this *λόγος*, being known (*γινωσκομένην*) through the investigation leading to knowledge (*ὑπὸ τῆς γνώσεως*), to the extent it is known (*γινώσκεται*), to this extent is moved (*κινεῖσθαι*) by the fact of being affected (*διὰ τὸ πάσχειν*), which we say cannot occur along with the [fact of] staying put (*τὸ ἡρεμοῦν*)" (*Sph.* 248d10-e5).

This means that, as I said earlier, there is continuity of meaning for *εἶδος* from the visible to the intelligible. The key difference in meaning is between an individual meaning (its primary sense) and a derived *collective* meaning, *not* between a meaning or range of meanings both individual and collective restricted to the visible/sensible and another dedicated to the intelligible. In the individual meaning, *εἶδος* refers to the outward appearance of some *unique* thing or person, a meaning in which, as we have seen, it comes close to that of *εἰκόν* once we have understood that sight only grasps *images* of what is seen (the shadows in the cave). In the derived *collective* meaning,

it refers to what is common to a plurality of things sharing a similar visual/sensible appearance or, by generalization, having something, sensible or intelligible, in common, hence the meanings of “form, sort, kind, class, species”. In the meaning supposedly dedicated to the intelligible (the “technical” meaning it takes in the so-called “theory of Forms”), it would end up meaning the exact opposite of what it originally means in the visible/sensible realm: what is the ultimate unchanging “reality” as opposed to what is a mere appearance, something having no more consistency than shadows and reflections.

In this perspective, it is worth looking more closely at *Rep.* X, a6-7. An εἶδος is associated with a name and refers to something common to the πάντα to which this name applies. Socrates doesn’t say what is common to them all, if that’s purely sensible features or intelligible ones or a mix of both, but we know from the Cave that names given by the prisoners can only be based on features of the shadows, that is, on the visible/sensible appearance of what the name applies to. He doesn’t even say that the εἶδος is assigned to the name by the initial creator of the name alone. In fact, the “we” of “we are in the habit of positing some εἶδος” (εἰώθαμεν τίθεσθαι...) suggests the opposite, that all of us are doing this for all the names we are using. And indeed, this is the case since it is the unconscious process through which we are making sense of the words we use from the time in early childhood when we learn to speak¹⁵ on, starting, as chained prisoners inside the cave, with εἶδη relying exclusively on the visible/sensible appearance of that to which the name applies (the primary meaning of εἶδος), and enriching and correcting these εἶδη as we grow and move toward the outside of the cave and the light of the sun, until they

become, outside the cave, ιδέα giving us access to the intelligibility of what we are talking about, even if the names don’t change through this process. And in this process of carving (διατέμνειν, *Phdr.* 265e1) εἶδη from the mass of what we perceive through the senses and mind, especially in the early stages, we may behave like the bad butchers Socrates alludes to at *Phdr.* 265d3-e3, who don’t do it “along the natural joints” (κατ’ ἄρθρα ἢ πέφυκεν), as might be for instance the case with a young child using the word “dog” for both dogs, wolves and coyotes before learning the difference among them because they are so close from one another in outward appearance.¹⁶ It is only through the complementary “synthetic” process (συννοῶντα, *Phdr.* 265d3) of bringing together scattered particulars under what can only be an ιδέα if it is to give us the intelligence of them that we might eventually correct the bad carving with which we started.¹⁷

A confirmation of the subjective character of this carving of εἶδη is found in the verb used by Socrates, τίθεσθαι, which implies not the discovery by some smart name creator of transcendent unmovable external “beings” which require to be named in a process devoid of errors, but a willful action on the part of the one assigning an εἶδος of one’s own making to a name (preexisting in most cases), further stressed by the use of the middle form τίθεσθαι.

But, once again, this “subjective” character of εἶδη and ιδέα for each one of us doesn’t mean that Protagoras is right when stating that things are for each one as one “sees” them, because, for Plato’s Socrates, they are produced by the αὐτά acting upon us through senses and mind, but fully “visible” only by the gods in the ὑπερουράνιον τόπον (*Phdr.* 247c3) he describes in the myth of the winged chariot at *Phdr.* 246d6-249c1, which means that they

are not perceived in a completely different manner from the one to the other¹⁸ and are “regulated” by the πράγματα at the origin of the παθήματα they impose upon us.

In fact, what Socrates hints at in this description of the role of εἶδη is a process which is at the root of λόγος, the ability of the human mind (νοῦς) to selectively recognize resemblance (“same”) and difference (“other”) in what it grasps by senses or by itself, in a recursive process in which sensible resemblances lead to εἶδη which may in turn be subjected to the same process of finding resemblances and differences between them recursively (for instance, red, blue, green, yellow... being recognized as colors, or horse, cow, dog, cat... being recognized as animals, or as mammals which along with fish, birds, insects..., are recognized as animals). And this process is selective in more than one sense: not only does it select what it considers as *one* element to be isolated from the rest, but it also selects which criteria are to be taken into account to evaluate relevant resemblances and differences and is capable, from the *same* such element to isolate simultaneously multiple “components” leading to different εἶδη, for instance, from a single sequence of sounds when hearing an opera aria, to distinguish melody, lyrics, rhythm, performer, individual instruments or groups of instruments, each one with its own melodic line, and so on. It is this process and the importance of the role the notions of “same” (ταυτόν) and “other” (θάτερον) play in it that Plato has in mind when he makes them part of the μέγιστα γένη, which the Stranger from Elea uses along with ὄν, κίνησις and στασις in the *Sophist* (*Sph.* 254b8, ssq.) to demonstrate that not all combinations of words/εἶδη are acceptable, thus opening the door to ψευδὴς λόγος.¹⁹ And it is that same process which he has in mind when he has Timaeus describe in

his likely myth the manufacture of the human soul by the δημιουργός from, among other components, “same” (ταυτόν) and “other” (θάτερον) (*Ti.* 35a1-b4; 41d4-8).

And the first thing that should be noticed regarding this process of carving εἶδη and associating them with names by identifying resemblances and differences is that what is *always* ignored is position in space and time: resemblances and differences are either between perceptions coming from different places at the same time or from the same place at different times, or from different places at different times, or between εἶδη that are already devoid of references to space and time and, to recognize them, position in space and time must be ignored. Thus, it is *by construction* that εἶδη and ἰδέαι are “outside” space and time. Not eternal, which still implies time everlasting in the mind of most people, but *outside* space and time, which simply means that location in space and time have no place in them, are irrelevant to what they are. When Socrates says a god is the maker of “what is bed” (ὃ ἔστιν κλίνη, *Rep.* X, 597c9), what he means is that the ἰδέα/notion of “bed” is implied in his making of ἄνθρωποι needing rest regularly in a lying position on some roughly horizontal surface proportionate to one’s size and having smooth enough a texture to allow them to fall asleep. In other words, the demiurge doesn’t make a bed independent of everything else as would a human bed-maker, but makes a whole in which the ἰδέα /notion of bed finds its logical place in relation with other parts of this creation which give it intelligibility, independent of the fact that actual human beings have already appeared in this creation at that time and have come up with the idea of manufacturing actual beds for their use rather than resting on the ground, and have decided to give these artefacts the

name “κλίνη”, or “κοίτη”, or “εὐνή”, or “*cubile*”, or “bed”, or “couch”, or “*lit*”, or “*couche*”, or “*cama*”, or “*bett*”, or “*letto*”, or some other name still.

THE HEAVENS AND STARS

With this in mind, we may return to the last steps outside the cave, the sight of heavens and stars which represent *ιδέαι*. Only two stars are identified by name: the sun, which, by Socrates own “decoding” of the allegory, pictures the idea of the good (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ *ιδέα*, 517b8-c1), and the moon. Noticing that the only kind of beings mentioned by name in the first part of the progression of the freed prisoner outside the cave, when he is only faced with the intelligible counterpart of what is inside the cave, are ἄνθρωποι (ἄνθρώπων, 516a7), considered first through their shadows and reflections, next in themselves, we may make the assumption that the moon stands for the idea of Ἄνθρωπος, which indeed should be the one occupying the largest place in our thoughts if we abide by the γνώθι σαυτόν, as does the moon in heaven at night. But this is only guess-work and there is much more to be learned from the image of the heavens and stars picturing *ιδέαι*. One is that, aside from the sun and the moon, all stars look alike, as tiny dots of light, in much the same way as *ιδέαι*, when we envision them one at a time, independently from one another, end up being nothing at all: if we are trying to figure out what the *ιδέα* of square is independently of the *ιδέαι* of “figure”, “side”, “angle” “surface”, “plane” and the like, since an *ιδέα* is nowhere in space and has no specific dimensions or color, there is nothing left for us to think about and we are left with only a name, which tells us nothing by itself about what it names. And

there is no difference in this respect between the *ιδέα* of square and the *ιδέα* of circle, or that of horse or of dog or you name it, except for the name, which is different by our own choice. In much the same way we cannot recognize a star while ignoring all the other stars, but can only recognize it through its position relative to other stars grouped in constellations, we can only understand *ιδέαι* (and the words they are associated with) through the *relations* they entertain with other *ιδέαι* (and words), which indicates that names taken individually teach us nothing or next to nothing (in the case of derived words like φιλό-σοφος) about what they name and start producing meaning only when assembled together in “constellations” called λόγοι, abiding by certain rules imposed by the πράγματα they purport to describe. This is the reason why, in the allegory, Socrates is careful to mention not only the stars, but also the heavens, that is, the whole of which stars are parts. But in most cases, due to the innumerable number of stars in the heavens and the fact that most of them don’t shine brightly, locating one star by simply mapping its position relative to two or three neighbor stars as difficult to precisely identify as the one we are trying to locate is not enough and we need to map more precisely its whole environment to locate it with precision. This is what Socrates does in the so-called “aporetic” dialogues, where he is not looking for an Aristotelean “definition” replacing one word by a few words as problematic as the one being defined, but exploring neighbor *ιδέαι* through multiple examples to better understand the boundaries (the original meaning of ὅρος, the word also meaning “definition”) between them. This is why it is a mistake to think that those dialogues fail. What Socrates is after is not words but a clearer mental representation of the *ιδέα* in discussion and, from this standpoint, they

are all successful, even if this representation remains fuzzy in certain corners.

In the allegory, stars produce reflections (explicitly mentioned about the sun at 516b5) but no shadows. It is because they don't talk and can only be talked about: these reflections are the λόγοι produced by cities and individuals about them (for instance the λόγοι produced by a city about the good, or the just, or man), which can be reproduced by citizens who don't understand them and stay at the level of διάνοια, thinking that words alone make us know what they designate.

ΑΥΤΟΝ

We may now return to the expression ἄνα τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον at 509d7. What scholars seem not to have seen is that αὐτὸν ("the same") can be understood in two ways: it may mean either (1) "along the same λόγον as the one used to split the line into two segments" or (2) "both along the same λόγον but not necessarily the one used to split the line". If (1) implies (2), the reverse is not true. And it is important to notice that the proportions that Socrates states at *Rep.* VII, 534a4-5, that what νόησις, here associated with the segment of the intelligible (I) is to δόξα, here associated with the segment of the visible (V), ἐπιστήμη (I2) is to πίστις (V2) and διάνοια (I1) to εἰκασία (V1),²⁰ that is, $\frac{I}{V} = \frac{I2}{V2} = \frac{I1}{V1}$, which gives nightmares to Smith, is true in both (1) and (2) no matter what the ratio used to split both I and V is, so long as it is the same! Indeed, let r be the ratio used to split both I and V in two. By hypothesis, $I2 = r.I1$ (r is the ratio used to split I) and $I2 + I1 = I$ (the two subsegments add up to I) on the one hand, $V2 = r.V1$ (r is also the ratio used to split V) and $V2 + V1 = V$ (the two subsegments add up to V) on the other hand. Now, $I2 + I1 = I$

leads to $I1 = I - I2$ and, replacing $I1$ in $I2 = r.I1$ by $I - I2$, we get:

$$I2 = r.(I - I2) = r.I - r.I2, \text{ hence}$$

$$I2 + r.I2 = (1 + r).I2 = r.I, \text{ thus}$$

$$I2 = \frac{r}{1+r} I.$$

The same reasoning on V2 relative to V leads to:

$$V2 = \frac{r}{1+r} V, \text{ hence}$$

$$\frac{I2}{V2} = \frac{\frac{r}{1+r} I}{\frac{r}{1+r} V} = \frac{I}{V}.$$

A similar reasoning to express now I1 in proportion of I and V1 in proportion of V leads to

$$I1 = \frac{I}{r+1} \text{ and } V1 = \frac{V}{r+1} \text{ hence}$$

$$\frac{I1}{V1} = \frac{I}{V}.$$

Most, if not all, scholars understand the expression in sense (1), as does Smith when he writes on page 102 of his paper

$$I1 + I2/V1 + V2 = I2/I1 = V2/V1,$$

but now that we know that Socrates doesn't know what the numerical ratio between V and I is, but only that I must be larger than V since everything sensible in V is replicated as intelligible in I, which also includes ιδέαι found only there, there is no reason to assume that the two segments have to be split ἄνα τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον *as the λόγον used to split the line*. Hence, ἄνα τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον must be understood in sense (2): the same λόγον must be used to split both segments, but it is not the one used to split the line. Hence, we are left with two sets of equalities:

$$(1) \quad \frac{I2}{I1} = \frac{V2}{V1} \quad (\neq \frac{I1+I2}{V1+V2})$$

$$(2) \quad \frac{I1+I2}{V1+V2} = \frac{I}{V} = \frac{I2}{V2} = \frac{I1}{V1}$$

and Smith is wrong when he writes “Plato has interchanged the place of I1 and V2 in the proportions given” and everything he deduces from this falls apart, ending his “nightmare”.²¹

ΛΟΓΟΝ

But then, what is this λόγον? The second mistake which must be avoided here is to think that, since the analogy uses a geometrical guise, λόγον must be understood as meaning “numerical ratio”. In fact, this geometrical guise is a trick to give the analogy a scientific touch, but λόγον must be understood as meaning “logical rationale”. The “logical rationale” used to split the line into two unequal segments in the first place, no matter in what proportion, has been given in the previous section, and the “logical rationale” to be used to split each segment in two is given early in the analogy, at 510a9-10: it is the relation between what is made similar (τὸ ὁμοιωθὲν) and what it is made similar to (τὸ ὃ ὁμοιώθη), in other words, the relation between an image/resemblance (in a broad sense) and its original. And indeed, we have seen that in the visible, the split is between the images produced by sight (and the other senses) and what they are images of, and in the intelligible, between words, considered as a kind of “image” of what they name, and what they pretend to represent. And this has nothing to do with the logical rationale which presided over the splitting of the line, the one justifying Socrates’ “ἄνισα” as explained above.

And when Socrates tells us that the split “will be according to the σαφήνεια καὶ ἀσάφεια of the ones with regard to the others” (509d9) and that “it’s divided with regard to ἀλήθεια τε καὶ μῆ” (510a8-9), another source of Smith’s concerns when he tries to “measure” theses

and comes to the conclusion that “Plato seems to be somewhat less than clear in telling us precisely what truth and clarity are supposed to measure”, he doesn’t mean that we should come up with some “unit” of measurement for σαφήνεια (whatever exact meaning we give to this word) or truth that we could then use to measure the amount of σαφήνεια and/or truth of each “thing” we want to ascribe to one or the other of the four subsegments, since this would imply that all four subsegments are populated with different “things” and that a “thing” can only be in one subsegment, whereas we have seen that the same “things” are found (under different guises) in either the four subsegment (all the visible/sensible) or two of them (the ἰδέαι, found only in the two subsegments of the intelligible). What he means is that, *for any single “thing” that we consider*, the “view” we have of it gets clearer and clearer, or more and more distinct, and closer to the truth as we proceed from subsegment to subsegment, starting, for visible/sensible “things” with εἰκασία all the way to νόησις/ἐπιστήμη and getting help, once outside, from the ἰδέαι they relate to: we have a very limited understanding of an ἄνθρωπος when all we know of him/her is his/her visual appearance (the shadow inside the cave in the allegory, the stage of εἰκασία in the Line); we get a better understanding once we realize an ἄνθρωπος is more than his/her visual appearance and we take into account the whole of his/her material bodily nature (the ἀνδριάντας of the Cave; the stage of πίστις in the Line); we get a still clearer and more complete “view” of him/her when we take into account what he/she says and what others say about him/her (shadows and reflections outside the cave; the stage of διάνοια in the Line); and we get still closer to the truth about him/her if we can “see” his/her soul itself (the ἄνθρωποι

outside the cave; the stage of ἐπιστήμη in the Line); and all that progress, once outside the cave, can be helped by the “sight” of ἡ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἰδέα, either through its reflection in the words of other ἄνθρωποι (the stage of δianoia for this idea) or, closer to the truth and clearer, directly as the moon (or some star) in heaven (the stage of ἐπιστήμη for this idea). When read this way, none of the problems raised by Smith about “Plato’s proportions” exist since he is not interested in “proportions” in the mathematical sense. Taking two subsegments at a time simply means that we have moved from one to the next and *added* the extra information grasped in the second one on top of what we had grasped in the first one, which doesn’t disappear because we have moved upward, but can be better understood in light of what we grasp in the second one and put at its proper place (the shadows look dimmer once we have looked at the ἀνδριάντες in the light of the fire, and the ἀνδριάντες dimmer once we have seen the ἄνθρωποι or even only their shadows and reflections outside). So, yes, V1 + V2 is indeed clearer and also truer than either V1 or V2 *with regard to any given “object”* which can be grasped in all four segments (that is, all the visible), but not because of “the specificities of the kinds of images that Plato uses to populate V1”, as Matoso claims, not because “the objects of V2 are direct cause of the objects of V1”, which implies that there are different objects in V1 and V2, but because V1 and V2 (and I1 and I2) are different *and complementary* ways of grasping *the same objects*.

ἌΝΘΡΩΠΟΙ

Regarding Matoso’s claim that “the world of sensible things holds a dependance upon the

world of Forms in the same way the shadows and reflections depend on the things that are shadowed and reflected”, the problem is that, with this reading of the Line and Cave, we don’t know which question he claims to answer. Indeed, reformulated in the terms of the Allegory of the Cave, there are three questions his claim might seem to answer: (1) Are the ἀνδριάντες(-bodies of ἄνθρωποι) an image of the ἄνθρωποι(-souls), invisible inside the cave but visible outside ? (2) Are they an image of sorts of the moon or some star(-ιδέα of ἄνθρωπος) ? (3) Are the ἄνθρωποι(-souls) “visible” only outside the cave, that is, in the intelligible realm, directly or through shadows or reflections, an image of sorts of the moon or some star(-ιδέα of ἄνθρωπος) ? Which leads to a fourth question: (4) In what sense can shadows and reflections of ἄνθρωποι(-souls) outside the cave, that is, if I am not mistaken in my interpretation, λόγοι, be said to be “images” of ἄνθρωποι(-souls)? Tackling these questions would lead us beyond the limits imposed on such a paper, but as a first step through an example toward answering the fourth one, I suggest tackling the following question: are Plato’s dialogues a faithful reflection (in the sense of φαντάσματα at 510a1 and εἰδωλα at 516a7)²² of Socrates’ soul or a shadow of Plato’s soul, or both?

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ENDNOTES

- 1 I prefer not to translate controversial words such as ἄνθρωπος, λόγος, εἶδος, ἰδέα, διάνοια...and let their meaning(s) come out of the argument.
- 2 All translations of Plato are mine.
- 3 If Plato doesn't use the word εἰκόν in the physical explanation of sight at *Ti*. 45c2-d3, it is because he soon after (46a2-c6) proposes an explanation of visible images as opposed to originals so that using the same word in both cases would have been confusing. But its explanation implies something which materializes at the level of the eyes, different from what causes it but having some likeness/resemblance (ὁμοιότητα, *Ti*. 45c7) with it.
- 4 Πίστις, that is, "trust/confidence", indicates that, though we have come to realize that our senses only give us an "image" of the world around, we deem these images good enough for us to trust them in everyday life to find our way in this world without bumping into walls or falling into pits.
- 5 That it is indeed *everything* seen in the cave which can also be found outside the cave, in the intelligible, is confirmed in the recall of the allegory at VII, 532a1-d1, first at 532a3, where ζῷα replaces ἄνθρωποι, then at 532b9, where φυτὰ are added to ζῷα. And the discussion about the three sorts of beds at the beginning of book X confirms that there are also εἶδη/ιδέαι of such σκεύη as tables and beds, implying they are also intelligible individually.
- 6 In the *Cratylus*, the word εἰκόν is used 19 times by Socrates to refer to the relation between a word and what it designates.
- 7 The important part in διάνοια is the prefix διά, which disappears with νόησις; in διάνοια, we wander through (διά) thought and λόγοι without the compass of the idea of the good, without which no true knowledge and understanding are possible.
- 8 It is quite easy to relate each of the three kinds of bed to one of the four segments of the line: the bed itself, unique and work of a god relates to the segment associated with νόησις; the beds manufactured by bed-manufacturers relate to the segment associated with πίστις, and they are part of the σκεύη (514c1) raised above the wall and projecting shadows on the wall of the cave; the images of beds painted by a painter relate to the segment associated with εἰκασία. The problem most scholars see there is that, if such a parallel were intended by Plato, one sort of beds is missing, the one to be associated with the segment associated with διάνοια. But if Socrates doesn't list it, it is there all along in plain view for us to find by ourselves: it is the word "κλίνη"!
- 9 A justification of my choice of this reading can be found in Appendix 4.1, pp. 178-182 of my *Plato (the Philosopher): User's Guide* at https://plato-dialogues.org/pdf/Plato_user_s_guide.pdf.
- 10 To be exact, the names given by the chained prisoners may not be "based *only* on visual resemblances": Socrates' next line deals with sounds and their association with shadows by the prisoners. So, differentiating voices and other sounds (of animals, for instance) may participate in the distinction of εἶδη leading to choices of names. And by generalization, data from all the other senses (touch, smell and taste) may participate in these distinctions for the chained prisoners, who, even chained, can make use of all their senses.
- 11 By « technical », I mean the meaning it's supposed to have in the so-called "Theory of Forms" attributed to Plato by scholars, whatever that may be, roughly speaking, what would constitute the everlasting "reality" as opposed to the world of becoming, of which its constituents only "partake".
- 12 To preserve this feature in a translation into English, one might replace "table" by "tripod" and "bed" by "seat".
- 13 Specializing ιδέα rather than εἶδος was easier for him since ιδέα was more recent and less frequent: in the Greek texts available at Perseus, there are 313 occurrences of ιδέα overall, none in Homer, 1 in Pindar, 55 in authors prior to or contemporary with Plato, 97 in Plato's dialogues and 136 in the works of Aristotle available at Perseus, which are far from including all his works, while there are 1044 occurrences of εἶδος overall, 42 in Homer, 6 in Hesiod, 121 in authors prior to or contemporary with Plato, 413 in Plato's dialogues and 659 in the works of Aristotle available at Perseus. One indication that the specialization works this way is that Plato uses the expression ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ιδέα, never τὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ εἶδος.
- 14 We know nowadays that human eyes react only to a subset of "light" frequencies and the human ears only to a subset of "sound" frequencies.
- 15 This is the process Socrates pictures in the *Theaetetus* with the image of the aviary (*Tht.* 197c1-200d4), which fails only because Socrates assumes (deliberately in my opinion to put Theaetetus, and the reader, to the test) birds to stand for items of knowledge (ἐπιστήμας, 197e3), but would have worked perfectly well had he assumed they stand for *words*, which don't imply perfect unchanging knowledge of what they designate from the start on, but only their

association with evolving “subjective” εἶδη that may be ill carved at first.

- 16 The Stranger from Elea uses this resemblance between wolf and dog at *Sph.* 231a6 when trying to characterize the sophist as a practitioner of the art of διακριτική and reluctantly ascribing him a method resembling like a wolf a dog that of Socrates.
- 17 This explains why Socrates, in the quoted section of the *Phaedrus*, speaks of εἶδη for division and of ἰδέα for synthesis in a manner consistent with the distinction in meaning I suggest Plato makes between these two words.
- 18 This is what Socrates means when he says in his opening remarks to Calliclēs in the *Gorgias*: “if something of what human beings feel (πάθος), different for the ones, different for the others, was not the same, but one of us felt (ἔπασχεν πάθος) something peculiar to himself different from the others, it would not be easy [for him] to make plain to others his own feeling (πάθημα)” (*Grg.* 481c5-d1).
- 19 This “demonstration” is grounded in the fact anticipated by the Stranger from Elea that nobody, whether a son of the earth or a friend of εἶδη, no matter what meaning one gives to the words “movement” (κίνησις) and “rest” (στασις) and whether one considers them to be φύσεις, γένη (words favored by sons of the earth), εἶδη, ἰδέαι (words favored by friends of εἶδη), οὐσίαι or some other name still, will accept as true the sentence “movement is the same as rest”, but only the sentence “movement is other than rest”. And if he uses these words interchangeably there, it is not because they are synonyms for him but because the name one gives to what they refer to in this discussion is irrelevant to the demonstration.
- 20 For ease of comparison, I use the same notations as Smith.
- 21 Regarding the replacement of νόησις by ἐπιστήμη at 533e8 as the name of one of the four παθήματα, the reuse of νόησις at 534a2 to designate διάνοια and what is now called ἐπιστήμη taken together and the introduction of δόξα at 534a2 to designate πίστις and εἰκασία taken together, it’s a trick of Plato to make sure that we are not prisoners of words but can grasp the ἰδέαι behind the words: in the Divided Line, he has introduced notions, especially the four παθήματα, which were new but he had to use existing words to talk about them. This is the reason why he keeps the four names for the end and gives them all at once, inviting us to adapt their usual meaning in the light of what has been said earlier and in relation to one another. But when he returns to the divided line, he deliberately changes some names to make sure that we follow and are not prisoners of words. And he does this with the name of the πάθημα corresponding to the stage where we can see τὰ αὐτά behind the words!
- 22 Another trick of Plato with words: he changes the word meaning “reflection”, but the use of ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι in both cases makes perfectly clear that he is talking about the exact same thing.