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Eros and Necessity in the Ascent from the Cave

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This article addresses a question that provokes puzzled debate every time I teach the *Republic*, and to which I have never had a satisfactory answer. In Plato's famous allegory of the Cave in *Republic* vii, what *motivates* the freed prisoner's ascent from the cave to the light?[1] Plato seems to have a suitable answer elsewhere: in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* he presents the Form of Beauty as somehow making its reality and attraction felt to people who are otherwise, up to that point, spectators of Becoming. By contrast, in the Cave, we are told that the prisoner is *compelled* to turn around and ascend. So our puzzle can be divided into two. First, why does the Cave *not* invoke the inherent attractiveness of the Forms, and our erotic responsiveness to Beauty in particular, as we would expect from the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*?[2] What makes this especially puzzling is that in concluding his account of the Guardians' early education (402d-403c), Socrates emphasises that the young of the *kallipolis* will be surrounded by beauty, and that this will evoke in them a virtuous *eros* for the beautiful (on which see Lear 2006). Moreover, in book 6 his depiction of the philosopher as stargazer in the ship concludes with an affirmation that the real philosopher is driven by an *eros* that can only be satisfied by communion with

[1] On the whole, scholars seem to be less struck by this puzzle than students reading the *Republic* for the first time; but cf. Annas 1981, 259. Strauss 1964, 128 discusses 'the abstraction from *eros* which is characteristic of the *Republic*—an abstraction which is also effective in the simile of the Cave in so far as that simile presents the ascent from the cave to the light of the sun as entirely compulsory'. Although I share the sense that there is something odd about the marginalization of *eros* in the *Republic*, Straussian and Strauss-influenced readings have few points of contact with my own, and to engage fully with them would require a second article (cf., *inter alia*, Roochnik 2003 and Rosen 1965 and 2005).

[2] One might object that the cases are fundamentally different: neither the *Symposium* nor the *Phaedrus* presents *eros* as leading naturally to knowledge of any Forms other than Beauty, while only an ascent that induces knowledge of the Forms collectively, and of the Good in particular, will serve for the Guardians. Yet the Form of Beauty seems to be closely related to the Good, and Plato may even be tempted to identify the two (cf. *Hippias Major* 296e-297d, *Philebus* 64e-65a, *Symp*. 201c, 204d-e, and note the association of the Good with beauty in the Sun passage itself, *Republic* 507b, 508e-509a, cf. 517c1, 531c7). Moreover, knowledge of Beauty *should* lead naturally to knowledge of the Forms collectively: for all eternal objects of knowledge are interconnected, so that recollection naturally proceeds from one object to another (*Meno* 81c9-d3). Cf. *Phaedrus* 250c-e, and note what seems to be a reference to the *other* Forms as, at least hypothetically, objects of *eros*: 'It would awaken a terribly powerful love (δεινοὺς ἔρωτας) if an image of wisdom came through our sight as clearly as beauty does, and the same goes for the other objects of *eros* (τἆλλα ὅσα ἐραστά)' (250d3-6).

true being (490a8-b7, cf. 501d).[3] So why then is *eros* apparently absent later on from the ascent as outlined in the Cave? And, second, what alternative account of the motivation for ascent does Plato intend to convey through the language of compulsion? I will use 'ascent' to mean the whole upward trajectory depicted in the Cave allegory, from cognition of shadows to the Form of the Good,[4] but in particular for the all-important realignment from the cognition of visible realities to intelligible ones (represented by the move from the cave to the upper world), as well as kindred epistemic transitions discussed elsewhere—most obviously the advance from love of a beautiful body to the vision of Beauty described by Diotima in the *Symposium* (210a-212b). To what extent such epistemic ascents form a determinate kind for Plato is a question this article should help to answer.

Let us begin with a closer look at the text. What the Cave passage claims—repeatedly, emphatically, and very oddly—is that epistemic ascent is caused by compulsion (ἀνάγκη) and even force (βία):

> Consider, then, what being released from their bonds and cured of their ignorance would naturally be like, if something like this came to pass.[5] When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled (ἀναγκάχοιτο) to stand up, turn his head, walk and look up toward the light, he'd be pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he'd seen before…if we pointed to each of the things passing by, asked him what each of them is, and compelled (ἀναγκάζοι) him to answer, don't you think he'd be at a loss… And if someone compelled (ἀναγκάζοι) him to look at the light itself, wouldn't his eyes hurt, and wouldn't he turn around and flee towards the things he's able to see, believing that they're really clearer than the ones he's being shown?
>
> He would.

[3] This is clearly a reminiscence of the argument against the lovers of sights and sounds in book 5 (474b-480a), where the philosopher is depicted as insatiable in his pursuit of the truth. However, in that earlier passage the language of *eros* is used only for the erotic man, who is introduced as a parallel to the philosopher rather than the genus to which he belongs. Only in the back-references at 490b2 and 501d2 is it made explicit that the philosopher's desire for the truth counts as a kind of *eros*.

[4] I here assume that the levels of cognition depicted in the Cave correspond in essentials to the parts of the Divided Line, with the Sun in the Cave allegory representing the 'unhypothetical first principle', i.e., the Good as likened to the sun in book 6. Nothing in this article hangs on any of the puzzles raised by the discrepancies between these images.

[5] Translations from Plato are from Cooper ed. 1997, sometimes with revisions. At 515c5 Grube-Reeve, followed here, read and translate οἷα τις ἂν εἴη φύσει, εἰ τοιάδε συμβαίνοι ('what it would naturally be like, if something like this came to pass'), following Schleiermacher; but the OCT has, with manuscript support, οἷα τις ἂν εἴη, φύσει τοιάδε συμβαίνοι ('what it would be like, if such things by nature came to pass'). In fact the φύσει is somewhat enigmatic in either clause. But as Adam *ad* 515c18 notes: 'It should be remembered that the condition of the prisoners, shut out as they are from light and truth amid the darkness of the Cave, is "unnatural" [παρὰ φύσιν] in the Platonic sense of the word (see IV 443b *n*.). Their release is therefore a return to their nature, and therefore may be described as "natural". This, I think, is what Plato means to suggest by φύσει.'

> And if someone dragged (ἕλκοι) him away from there by force (βίᾳ), up the rough, steep path, and didn't let him go until he had dragged him out (ἐξελκύσειεν) into the sunlight, wouldn't he be pained and irritated at being dragged (ἑλκόμενον). (515c4-516a1)

This climactic wrench from the visible to the intelligible realm is the most profound of the intellectual transitions described in the allegory, and it receives the most emphatic invocation of compulsion. Once the upper world is reached, the language of force drops away, as does any reference to an agent leading the former prisoner: once we are fully in contact with intelligible realities, ascent is apparently a self-sustaining process. The language of compulsion returns later, however, applied to the ascent as a whole: 'It is our task as founders, then, to compel (ἀναγκάσαι) the best natures to reach the study we said before is the most important, namely to make the ascent and see the good, and when they have ascended and seen sufficiently, not to allow them to do as they are allowed to now' (519c8-d2). This final compulsion, by which the enlightened Guardians are forced to return to the cave (520a8, e2, 521b7, 539e4, 540b4), has been the subject of intense interpretive debate, but little note has been taken of the fact that it is only the second half of the story—compulsion has all along been equally prominent in the *upward* trajectory.[6] Later in book 7, as I will discuss shortly, compulsion is again prominent in Plato's account of the Guardians' curriculum. And in concluding the book 7 account of education as a whole, Plato again reaffirms that the Guardians' ascent is compelled: 'Then, at the age of fifty, those who've survived the tests and been successful both in practical matters and in the sciences must be led to the goal and compelled (ἀναγκαστέον) to lift up the radiant light of their souls to gaze at what itself provides light for everything' (540a4-8).

Now this emphasis on compulsion is surprising. It sits very awkwardly with Socrates' concurrent depiction of the ascent as involving a kind of *liberation*, with the cave as a prison that itself involves compulsion (ἠναγκασμένοι, 515b1). Moreover, we would have expected unforced ascent to be not only possible but the norm given what Plato says elsewhere in the *Republic*. As book 9 will

[6] For a helpful discussion of the problems and interpretive options regarding the 'return to the cave', see Brown 2000. I cannot here properly engage with this controversial topic. But if, as I will argue here, *anankê* comes in many forms, and the 'upward' compulsion is so presented as to allow for several possibilities, it seems a plausible hypothesis that the motivation of the return to the cave is likewise deliberately left open. *Anankê* may equally well refer to the compulsion of law, to the rational authority of a just demand, and to a resistance-overriding desire to promote justice or the good. Any or all of these forces might be in play in the motivations of the Guardian; and Plato seems not to have chosen among them. This eirenic suggestion amounts to accepting the positive proposals of Brown 2000, Irwin 1995, Kraut 1991 and 1992, and Cooper 1977; cf. also White 1986. It is perhaps significant (though I am not sure what to make of the fact) that the *Republic* itself opens with a display of mock force, with Socrates and Glaucon being compelled by Polemarchus and his companions to stay for the festival (327c-328b); cf. also the threat of force against Socrates at the close of the *Charmides* (176c-d).

explain, knowledge of the Forms is deeply appropriate to our human nature: it involves pleasure of an intensity that puts other pleasures in the shade, because the objects involved are the most real of any we enjoy. Knowledge of the Forms is quite literally the truest fulfilment we can experience (583b-586e). (Indeed, as *Phaedrus* 249a-c notes, communion with the Forms is constitutive of our humanity in the first place: it is only because of having seen the Forms prior to incarnation that we are human at all.) And compulsion is elsewhere in the *Republic* the kind of cause that makes a soul behave *contrary* to its nature. As such it is characteristic of the unjust, unnatural rule of the *lower* parts: 'But when one of the other parts gains control, it won't be able to secure its own pleasure and will compel (ἀναγκάζειν) the other parts to pursue an alien and untrue pleasure' (587a4-6), so that reason is 'dragged along (ἕλκασθαι) wherever either of the other two leads' (589a1-2). By contrast, when the human reason within us has control, it cares for, cultivates, tames and makes friends of the lower parts (586e-507a, 589a-b). Compulsion is what drags its object, awkwardly and painfully, riding roughshod over its own natural inclinations. And so we would *expect* the Cave to depict ascent to the upper world as a natural, harmonious, and deeply desired process, however arduous it might be.

How then are we to explain Plato's odd emphasis on compulsion in the ascent from the cave? One possible explanation comes with the subsequent discussion of the Guardians' curriculum, where compulsion is again a guiding thread. The studies that will bring about their educational ascent are repeatedly said to be *compulsory*, and they are themselves described as *compelling*. The two claims are connected. Arithmetic is to be the first compulsory subject (ἀναγκαῖον, 522e1, 525b2) precisely because (like the sight of the great and small mixed up together, 524c) it compels a reorientation of thought from the visible to the intelligible world: 'Then do you see that it's likely that this subject really is compulsory (ἀναγκαῖον) for us, since it apparently compels (προσαναγκάζον) the soul to use understanding itself on the truth itself?' (526a8-b3, cf. 523d3, 524c7). In a clear reference back to the Cave, Socrates says that calculation 'leads the soul forcibly (σφόδρα ἄγει) upward and compels (ἀναγκάζει) it to discuss the numbers themselves', rather than their perceptible instantiations (525d5-8). The same principle is applied to geometry as a candidate study: 'if geometry compels (ἀναγκάζει) the soul to study being, it's appropriate, but if to study becoming, it's inappropriate' (526e7-8, cf. ἀναγκάζει, 526e3). So perhaps Plato's talk of force in the Cave is just designed to prepare us for this equally emphatic motif later on. In that case we are presumably *meant* to be puzzled by the references to force in the Cave: all will become clear soon enough, when we learn that ascent in the kallipolis will be effected by compulsory study of compelling subjects.[7]

But this reading raises puzzles of its own. For one thing, Plato's sketch of the Guardians' curriculum concludes, paradoxically, with a *rejection* of compulsory

[7] Strikingly, the mis-education of the potential philosopher in contemporary society, and his apprenticeship as beast-pleaser, is also described in terms of compulsion (492d-493d, n.b. 492d1-2, 493d5-6).

education:

> …calculation, geometry and all the preliminary education required for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood, and not in the shape of compulsory (ἐπάναγκες) learning either.
>
> Why's that?
>
> Because no free person should learn anything like a slave. Forced (βίᾳ) bodily labour does no harm to the body, but nothing taught by force (βίαιον) stays in the soul.
>
> That's true.
>
> Then don't use force (βίᾳ) to train the children in these subjects; use play instead. That way you'll also see better what each of them is naturally fitted for. (536d4-537a2)

Here βία, together with the reference to slavery, is more narrowly suggestive of violence and unnatural, physical compulsion than ἀνάγκη; and there is more βία than ἀνάγκη in this passage, while the reverse is true in the Cave. Still, both terms occur in both discussions, suggesting that the difference in nuance is insignificant for Plato's purposes; and though the later passage has specific reference to earlier stages of the Guardians' education, the principle enunciated seems to be entirely general. The result is a paradox if not a downright contradiction. How can the ascent to the Forms be compelled, if nothing learned by compulsion will stick?

Now this rejection of compulsory learning must be intended as in the first instance a correction or clarification of the immediately preceding discussion of the curriculum. And it is possible to reconcile the two, if we think more about what it means to call a subject compulsory. Ἀνάγκη with its cognates can cover a broad range: we might best translate it as *necessity* rather than compulsion, since it includes what is unavoidable or required for some purpose. And this is natural language for statutory requirements: in the present context, the language of compulsion seems to be Plato's way of referring, *not* to the motivation of the Guardians, but just to the fact that they will be required to pursue the studies in question *in order to* become Guardians—a sort of hypothetical necessity, as Aristotle will call it (*Physics* ii 8-9, cf. *Phaedo* 99a-b).[8] Plato's point is simply that arithmetic (for instance) is not an elective subject: anyone who is to be a Guardian must study it. Socrates' later clarification then reassures us that this does *not* mean that anybody is going to be forced into anything—dropping out of the Guardian programme is evidently permitted.[9] Those who are by nature not fitted for such studies will thereby be revealed and weeded out all the more eas-

[8] Cf. perhaps *Rep*. 510b5 and 511a4: in the Divided Line, the soul pursuing *dianoia* is 'compelled' (ἀναγκάζεται) to use hypotheses.

[9] Objection: Plato says at 519c9 that the 'best natures' will be compelled to pursue these studies, not just 'whoever wants to become a Guardian'. But presumably the 'best natures' will not *want* to drop out: the curriculum will be among other things a vehicle for self-selection by the best, for whose natures the training is appropriate and fulfilling.

ily. The clarification also adds that the instruction itself will be non-coercive in style, having the air of play; and this is compatible with the claim that *the effect of the study itself* is to compel the understanding to ascend to the Forms.[10] A course can be compulsory without anybody being forced to take it; a subject can be compelling without the instruction being coercive. For it must ultimately be the study itself that forces cognition upwards: the only 'force' *directly* involved in and required for ascent is the force exerted by intellectual activities that redirect our attention to the intelligible realm. However, some *prior* compulsion may be required to bring us into a position in which such intellectual activities can exert their power: hence Plato's determination to make the most effective studies compulsory. And it is to this kind of prior compulsion that Plato seems to draw our attention with the language of force in the Cave.

This provides a quick, if somewhat superficial solution to our initial problem: the Cave emphasises force in the ascent to prepare the way for its role in the curriculum. But this 'curricular' reading (as I will call it) is unsatisfying on several counts. For one thing, though the Cave does adumbrate the curricular discussion to come, it is not *presented* as an image of the *kallipolis* and its educational system. On the contrary: Socrates says that the prisoners are 'similar to us', and that the image depicts 'our nature' (ὁμοίους ἡμῖν, 515a5, τῆν ἡμετέραν φύσιν, 514a1-2) in relation to education and the lack of it. This frames the allegory as making a perfectly general point about the difficulty of epistemic progress, given the limitations of human nature and human society.[11] The story to follow is evidently intended to reveal the effect of education as such on human nature, abstracted from any particular individuals, social situations, or educational practices.

So an interpretation of the ascent as 'compelled' in the localized sense

[10] There is still something a bit mysterious about this claim, despite the explanation offered at 523a-525a. Presumably mathematical instruction often fails to draw an unphilosophical nature upwards (even the ostensibly gifted Glaucon misunderstands the sense in which astronomy is supposed to redirect our attention 'up', 528e-530b). Likewise Socratic dialectic chronically fails to induce successful ascent in his interlocutors in the early dialogues; and *eros* surely leaves most lovers at the stage of loving bodies or souls (see below on the 'Socratic' and 'erotic' readings of ascent). So in what sense exactly are any of these disciplines *compelling* in their effect? Plato must mean to claim *not* that their effect is uniform and irresistible across the board, but only that when they *do* succeed in inducing ascent (which is contingent on the nature of the individual), they may be overcoming considerable internal resistance.

[11] I here adopt what Wilberding 2004, 119 describes as the 'more or less orthodox' reading of Socrates' remarks, namely, that the prisoners 'represent the ordinary man, i.e. the majority of men in the polis, whose mental state could be characterized as unreflective belief'. Wilberding makes a strong case for a very different reading, according to which the prisoners represent politicians and others who depend on catering to the opinions of the masses. I agree that a number of features of the image suggest this reading, but doubt that it is meant to exclude the alternative. As with the question of motivation, Plato hints at several determinations without limiting the scope of the image to any one of them. Only in this way can the Cave serve at once to explain the Divided Line, to depict ascent as we might aspire to it (i.e., in the specific context of an unreflective democracy), and to foreshadow the educational programme of the *kallipolis*.

explained above cannot be the whole story. Moreover, the compulsion is said to be exerted by some *agent*—a mysterious τις, 'someone', at 515c6, who releases the prisoner and compels him to turn around; this same agent exerts further compulsion at 515d5, d9 and 515e5-516a1. The forceful agent behaves like a fellow human, interrogating the freed prisoner and dragging him up the path to the light: this does not sound much like the impersonal operation of a curricular requirement. Moreover, Socrates connects this forceful agent with the figure of the returning philosopher. In discussing the unpleasant reception given by the prisoners to anyone returning from the light, he comments: 'Wouldn't it be said of him that he'd returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn't worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?' (517a2-6). So it is natural to think of the forceful agent as someone who has previously ascended to the upper world himself. And it is hard not to be reminded of the Socrates of the early dialogues, as well as *Republic* i itself.[12] It seems fair to see Socratic questioning as an attempt to liberate his interlocutors from the shackles of εἰκασία, and to get them to attend to intelligible rather than to superficial perceptible considerations (cf., e.g., *Hippias Major* 287b-291d, *Republic* 331b-c, cf. *Rep*. 476aff.).[13] As Adam (*ad loc*.) notes, there is also a resonance here with the *Theaetetus* digression, where the lawyer is depicted as dragged (ἑλκύσῃ, 175c1) upwards by the philosopher, from gossip about particulars to abstract questions about justice and other intelligible realities (175b-d).

I will refer to this as the 'Socratic' reading; but we need not take the forceful agent to be identified uniquely with Socrates, or even with philosophers as such. Presumably a mathematician or an eristic sophist could also, in their different ways, reorient us from the shadows of unreflective conventional wisdom. As on the 'curricular' reading, it must ultimately be the intellectual activity itself that forces our thought elsewhere; again, Plato's point would be that some *prior* compulsion is required to put us in a position where this can have its effect.

The Socratic reading gains strong support from Plato's emphasis on the *discomfort* induced by the forceful agent. Each mention of compulsion in the passage is accompanied by a reference to its unpleasant effects. The freed prisoner is initially 'pained and dazzled and unable to see' (515c8-d1); he is 'at a loss' (d6); 'his eyes hurt' (e1) and he flees the new objects he has been introduced to (e1-3);

[12] Cf., e.g., Bloom 1968, 406: 'In the account of the cave given here, a man is liberated from his bonds not by his own efforts but by a teacher who compels him to turn to the light. The actual mode of this turning is represented in the action of the *Republic*.'

[13] I take it that the cognition of shadows in the Cave corresponds to εἰκασία in the Line; but just what εἰκασία consists in is unclear and highly controversial (cf. Wilberding 2004). If we again take Plato's underdetermination as deliberate, εἰκασία will be *any* cognition that relates us to objects derivative of and cognitively inferior to everyday sensible particulars, and involves taking them as the only realities. The obvious candidates for such objects are the products of culture—art objects (shown in *Republic* x to share the ontological status of shadows), clichés, conventional wisdom, and the unreflective assumptions of one's society.

and when he is dragged up into the sunlight, he is 'pained and irritated' (515e5-516a3). We might well suspect that the references to compulsion in the Cave are intended primarily as an *explanation* of this discomfort: pain is the hallmark of force, understood as what moves an object without regard for its natural tendencies. And this is reminiscent of Socrates, given the strong discomfort regularly induced by his questioning (cf. *Meno* 80a-b). Socrates' interlocutors often *do* find his interrogations painful, and experience his dialectical practices as coercive (cf. Irwin 1986). Plato here acknowledges that this reaction is understandable, but urges that Socrates' victims recognise it as the standard side-effect of epistemic transitions, including transitions to a freer and better state.[14]

So the talk of force in the Cave seems intended to contribute to Plato's depiction and explanation of *resistance to philosophy*, an important recurrent theme of *Republic* v-vii. Together with passages like the image of ship and the stargazer in book 6 (487a-488a), the Cave explains why the philosopher is the object of unjustified (though understandable) scorn and hostility in ordinary societies. The overall point is of course to defuse the outrageousness of Socrates' shocking proposal that if any city is to attain justice and happiness, it must be ruled by philosophers (473c-474a).

This idea of resistance to philosophy brings out an important complication in Plato's view that communion with the Forms is natural to us. At the end of the Cave passage Plato turns to emphasise that education is a kind of redirection of intellectual attention, which involves a reorientation of the entire soul. And of the clever person bent on low ends, he says:

> if a nature of this sort had been hammered at from childhood and freed from its ties of kinship with becoming, like leaden weights which have been fastened to it by feasting, greed, and other such pleasures and which pull its vision downwards—if, being rid of those, it turned to look at true things, then I say that the same soul of the same person would see these most sharply, just as it now does the things it is presently turned towards. (519a7-b5)

The leaden weights of kinship with becoming, here said to be fastened on by physical pleasures, powerfully recall the chains of the Cave image. Given that the prisoners are 'like us', we must suppose that this bondage is the customary residue of miseducation into any ordinary society. We can achieve freedom from *eikasia* only with pain and difficulty, by shedding a kind of crust of irrational affective attachments and habits binding us to the body. Plato's claim that epistemic ascent requires liberation from the bodily is not a focus of books 5-7, but the passage I have quoted should suffice to remind us of the fuller treatment given in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates is emphatic that philosophical wisdom can only be attained to the extent we can disentangle ourselves from the body: 'every

[14] Cf. the *Phaedrus*: the sprouting of wings is a return to our better and enlightened state, but it is an itchy, painful business nonetheless (251b-252b).

pleasure and every pain provides, as it were, another nail to rivet the soul to the body and weld them together. It makes the soul corporeal, so that it believes that truth is what the body says it is' (*Phaedo* 83d4-7, cf. 64d-67b). Within the framework of the tripartite psychology established in *Republic* iv, the 'shackle' imagery must represent the domination of the soul by its irrational parts, and in particular appetite, which here replaces the body as the locus of our lowest desires and pleasures.[15] And this involvement of the lower soul and its desires helps to make sense both of our resistance to philosophy and the need for force in the ascent. Ascent means renouncing not only a comfortably unreflective cognitive state but a whole way of life bound up with it, one with distinctive pleasures, values, and attachments (cf. 553c-d, *Gorgias* 513c-d). But *exactly* how we are to integrate the tripartite psychology of books 4 and 8-9 with the epistemology of books 5-7, which makes no explicit mention of it, remains a central mystery of the *Republic*.

So the fact that enlightenment is 'natural' to us does not entail that we are born to it or find it easy to attain. And the fact that communion with the Forms fulfils the deepest needs of our nature does *not* conflict with the claim that to achieve it involves painful changes, which naturally evoke resistance. What has been welded on by everyday unreflectiveness must be hammered off by intellectual ascesis. Thus an important theme of the Cave passage is that *all* epistemic transitions are at least temporarily painful and confusing, whether they involve a shift to objects that are more knowable or less so (518a-b). Whatever 'compulsion' may *refer* to in the Cave, its *functional role* is as what overcomes our natural resistance to painful change.

However, like the curricular reading, the Socratic reading generates further puzzles in turn. For one thing, postulating a forceful agent as *the* cause of ascent introduces a regress problem: if one generation of Socratic teachers or philosopher-kings compels the next, how did the *first* generation ascend? If a teacher is a genuine requirement for ascent, the line of teachers must stretch back *ad infinitum*, a requirement likely to increase our doubts about the possibility of realising the *kallipolis*. And Plato elsewhere seems *not* to believe that a teacher is absolutely necessary for ascent.[16]

A further, underlying problem here is that the Cave allegory faces in two directions. As a figurative sketch of the process of enlightenment, it looks forward to the curricular discussion to come later in book 7. At the same time, it also looks back to the very abstract analysis of cognition in the Sun and Line, supplementing them with a diachronic depiction of progress from one epistemic level to

[15] A referee for *Ancient Philosophy* suggested (as I understand it) that this is sufficient to explain the absence of *eros* from the cave: our appetitive bonds make it impossible for Beauty to exert its attraction. But it is hard to see why an appetitive soul should be proof against *eros* (the opposite is suggested by the *Phaedrus* myth), and anyway force rather than *eros* continues to be invoked to lead the *unshackled* prisoner to light. So this can at most be a small part of the explanation.

[16] A problem noted by Szlezák 2005, 224, who cites *Seventh Letter* 341e3; cf. also *Republic* 499b-d.

another. In this backwards-looking role, as I noted above, the Cave is introduced as totally *general* in its application—as being about *us*—with the ascent introduced in correspondingly general terms. And if ascent is at all possible without the intervention of a Socrates-like figure, then (like the 'curricular' reading) the 'Socratic' reading of the ascent fails to make good on this claim to universality. The Cave ascent can be reduced *neither* to a depiction of Socratic dialectic *nor* to a sketch of education in the *kallipolis*.

A first step towards a solution is to understand the talk of compulsion in the ascent as *intentionally ambiguous* between the 'curricular' and the 'Socratic' readings. Neither reading alone will work for all possible cases: it is not true that ascent always requires intervention by a bullying wise man, nor that it requires the precisely defined curriculum of the *kallipolis*. The advantage of the language of *anankê* is that it allows for both possibilities. Thus it tacitly admits a certain pluralism into the apparently monolithic framework of the allegory: in practice, there may be very different paths to epistemic ascent.

It might be objected that these are two very different *kinds* of necessity, so much so that it is awkward if not impossible to see Plato as intending both at once. But it is important to note that ἀνάγκη is a highly flexible term,[17] which (so far as I can see) Plato never attempts to restrict, redefine, or use in a proprietary sense.[18] Rather, Plato uses ἀνάγκη and its cognates with much the same range of meanings and overtones as we use the concept of necessity or compulsion today. (Its most habitual usage in the dialogues seems to be simply for *what must be so*, as when ἀνάγκη is used as a formula of assent.[19]) Its senses in particular contexts are largely determined by those contexts, and what determinacy it has typically comes from an implicit or explicit contrast with some opposite. To take just a few

[17] Cf. Aristotle's accurately polymorphous account of ἀναγκαῖον in *Metaphysics* v 5.1015a20-b15: its senses include what is required for life; or required for some good or the removal of some evil; force and what is forced; and is what inexorable or could not be otherwise.

[18] Important Platonic uses of ἀνάγκη include *Symposium* 195c-197c (where Agathon seems to rewrite Hesiod so as to oppose *eros* to necessity), the somewhat mysterious *Republic* 493c-d and 616b-621b, *Timaeus* 47e-48b, 53d, *Laws* 818a-d, and *Epinomis* 982b-e. On necessity in the *Timaeus*, cf. Cornford 1937, Morrow 1950, Strange 1985, and Mason 2006. I cannot here discuss the complex and obviously relevant pre-Platonic history of the term ἀνάγκη, which is prominent in a number of Presocratic cosmogonies as well as in the poetic tradition. (Much of the relevant material is collected in Schreckenberg 1964.) I suspect that outside of the mythic-cosmological context of the Myth of Er (where Necessity perhaps recalls Parmenides' goddess, cf. Parmenides B8.30, B10.6, A37), Plato's use of the concept is informed less by its Presocratic significance than by the wide-ranging popular and literary usage. (In fact, given the powers ascribed to divine 'Ανάγκη by Presocratic authors, its reduction to a merely subordinate cause in the *Timaeus* must have been quite a shocking and paradoxical innovation.) On Homeric and other early usage of ἀνάγκη, cf. Parry 1986, 257: '*Anankê* in Homer means essentially "force", as applied by someone or something in the position of master over slave. Submission to such force is implicitly an unpleasant condition'; cf. also Williams 1993, ch. 4.

[19] Taking *Republic* i as an example, we find five instances of ἀνάγκη as an assent, alone or in a brief phrase (333d10, 335b12, 335c5, 349e15, 353e6); three similar uses for a point that is logically entailed (335c7, 350a10, 353e4); one for what is practically required for some result (351b8); and two for practical compulsion (347c1, c3).

instances, the necessary ἀναγκαῖον and its cognates may denote the unattractive as opposed to the naturally desirable (*Rep*. 347d1, 358c3, 360c7, 540b4), the imperative as opposed to the optional (369d11, 373a5, b3, e1),[20] the irreplaceable as opposed to the worthless (540d7-e1, 574c1-2), or the unavoidable as opposed to the preferable (493c4-5, 613a2). Necessity (Ἀνάγκη), beside being a cosmic force of inevitability and mother of the Fates (*Rep*. 616c-617d), is what overcomes reluctance (347b10-c3), contrasts with persuasion (519e4), and is logically required or entailed (*Timaeus* 28c3, 29b1); it is also the set of physical constraints that fix the scope and limits of intelligent design (*Timaeus* 48a1-4, 68e1-2). This last opposition, particularly prominent in the *Timaeus*, is certainly the most philosophically significant use Plato makes of Necessity, and we might expect it to fix the reference of the term, restricting it to the realm of irrational material forces. But the *Epinomis*, in arguing that the orderly motions of the heavenly bodies reveal them to be intelligent, insists on the contrary:

> The necessity of the soul that possesses intelligence is far the most powerful of all necessities. For it is a ruler, not a subject, and so ordains its decrees. When a soul reaches the best decision in accordance with the best intelligence, the result, which is truly to its mind, is perfectly unalterable.[21] (982b5-c3)

So necessity may be *internal*, a function of a thing's nature; or *external*, as what overcomes and 'drags' that nature. It may take the form of rational authority, passive resistance (as on the part of the Receptacle) or physical violence. If there is a common denominator—a core concept of 'necessity' lurking in Platonic usage—it is the one brought out by the *Epinomis* passage: necessity is simply what *determines* some outcome, whether by overcoming resistance or by presenting it.[22] *Nous* is the limiting case since its decrees face *no* internal resistance: thus its activities can either be counted as most necessary of all (as in the *Epinomis*) or *contrasted* with necessity understood as external resistance (as in the *Timaeus*).

So to see what 'necessity' means in the Cave allegory we need to ask what conceptual work it is used to do in that context. And here, unusually, its meaning is *not* fixed by contrast with any alternative kind of cause; the most telling conceptual connection in this context is rather Plato's emphasis on the discomfort of the freed prisoner. This suggests that we should understand necessity in the Cave in purely functional terms, as *whatever overcomes resistance*; and we should allow that this might take radically different forms within the *kallipolis* and out-

[20] The necessary desires are 'those we can't desist from and those whose satisfaction benefits us…for we are by nature compelled to satisfy them' (558d11-e3); these are opposed to desires 'that someone could get rid of if he practiced from youth on, those whose presence leads to no good or even to the opposite' (559a3-6, cf. 559b-d, 561a, 571b).

[21] The authenticity of the *Epinomis* is of course contested, and it may well be the work of Philip of Opus (cf. DL iii 37): my claim is only that its use of ἀνάγκη here helps to bring out the Platonic range of the term.

[22] Hence the relation of Necessity, understood as a cosmic goddess, to human fate, highlighted in the myth of Er in *Republic* x (616cff.).

side it.

This puts us in a position to turn to the other question with which I began: namely, why is there no reference in the Cave to the attractions of Beauty and the motivational power of *eros*? Given its purported universal applicability, the Cave *should* allow for erotic ascent: that is, for the case in which an individual's responsiveness to Beauty serves as trigger for reorientation to the intelligible realm. And if we understand the language of compulsion as functional and otherwise underdetermined, allowing for multiple modes of ascent, then the erotic ascent described in the *Symposium* may indeed be one of them. That is, perhaps erotic ascent is *not* here excluded after all. But to make sense of this possibility, we have to see how *eros* too could count as a kind of compulsion.

Now an earlier passage of the *Republic* seems almost deliberately planted to give assurance on this point. This comes in book 5, where *eros* provides a segue from the role of women in the *kallipolis* to a discussion of optimal Guardian-breeding practices:

> And since they have common dwellings and meals, rather than private ones, and live together and mix together both in physical training and in the rest of their upbringing, they will, I suppose, be driven by innate necessity (ὑπ'…ἀνάγκης…τῆς ἐμφύτου) to have sex with one another. Or don't you think we're talking about necessities (ἀναγκαῖα) here?
>
> Not geometrical but erotic necessities (ἐρωτικαῖς ἀνάγκαις), and they're probably sharper than the others in persuading and dragging (ἕλκειν) the majority of people. (458c8-d7)

The discussion then turns to strategies for regulation of this potentially disruptive drive, with the breeding festivals of the *kallipolis* presented as its eugenically-oriented version of marriage.

Eros here denotes sexual desire, depicted as an irrational and disruptive force; and there is certainly no suggestion in books 5-7 that anything like this could be causally involved in philosophical ascent. Still, the important point for our purposes is the emphatic affirmation here of 'erotic necessities': the explicit claim, presented as uncontroversial, that *eros* has or can have the quality of compulsion. Moreover, the other invocations of *eros* in the *Republic* tend to confirm this association of *eros* with force.[23] Cephalus approvingly quotes Sophocles as describing the loss of sexual desire as an escape from a mad master (329c2-4). Preparing for the argument against the sightlovers in book 5, Socrates argues that the person who really has a desire for something must be the one who, insatiably, desires it in every case, as the erotic man desires boys and the wine-lover wine. Most emphatic and memorable is the depiction of the tyrant as erotically obsessed in book 9. The soul of the tyrannical man is enslaved by *eros* as a tyrant

[23] The exception is the brief passage noted earlier (402d-3c), regarding the *eros* arising from the Guardians' early education in beauty.

within: 'When those clever enchanters and tyrant-makers have no hope of keeping hold of the young man in any other way, they contrive to plant in him a sort of *eros* (ἔρωτά τινα), like a great winged drone, to be the leader of those idle desires that spend whatever is at hand' (572e3-573a1, cf. 575c8). This *eros* maddens the soul and purges it of moderation, fulfilling its tyrannical nature: this is 'the reason that erotic love has long been called a tyrant' (573b6-7). What this internal tyranny seems to amount to is that the tyrannical man's sexual desires become insatiable, and drive him to obtain wealth from everywhere, even by force from his parents and through criminal acts. And this emphasis on the internal tyranny to which the tyrant is subject shapes the whole of Plato's account. The tyrant is always either master or slave, incapable of freedom or friendship; and, Socrates concludes, 'a tyrannical soul—I'm talking about the whole soul—will also be least likely to do what it wants and, forcibly dragged (ἑλκομένη βίᾳ) by the stings of a dronish gadfly, will be full of disorder and regret' (577d13-e2).

This coupling of *eros* and ἀνάγκη (and of both with tyranny) is not a Platonic innovation.[24] In fact, the book 5 reference to erotic necessities could be an allusion to Gorgias' *Helen*:

> And if *eros* is a human disease and a folly of the soul, it should not be blamed as a fault but deemed a misfortune. For she came (ἦλθε), as she came, by the snares of fortune, not by the plans of judgement, and by compulsions of *eros* (ἔρωτος ἀνάγκαις), not provisions of art.[25]

Euripides' Jason makes the converse point when he says that Medea deserves no credit for having saved his life: for *eros* compelled her (ἠνάγκασεν, *Medea* 530]. As in the book 5 talk of erotic necessities, so too with Euripides and Gorgias: *eros* represents a kind of internal compulsion—that is, a kind of desire so irresistibly intense as to make rational judgements, rival motivations, and social and moral barriers irrelevant.[26] *Eros* is what overcomes all these possible sources of resistance; *eros* is therefore a species of *anankê*.[27]

[24] On the breadth of pre-Platonic and contemporary *eros*, particularly in more or less political contexts, cf. Ludwig 2002, to which I am endebted for many helpful references.

[25] *Encomium of Helen* 18-19. My translation follows Diels' text and the translation of Dillon and Gergel 2003—especially in, somewhat reluctantly, taking Helen to be the subject of the perplexing ἦλθε ὡς ἦλθε.

[26] Accordingly, this *eros* is also recognised as causing extremes of discomfort and disorientation: see Sappho fr. 31.

[27] This claim may need further defense in light of an important Platonic passage that presents desire and compulsion as alternatives. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates compares the two as preparation for a surprising etymology of the divine name 'Hades', asking: 'Of the shackles that bind a living being and keep him in a place, which is stronger, force (ἀνάγκη) or desire (ἐπιθυμία)?' (403c1-3). Hermogenes responds that desire is far stronger; Socrates infers that Hades must therefore bind his prisoners with the strongest sort of desire (403c-404a). There is none stronger than the desire to associate with someone who will make you a better person; so Hades must be a sort of enchanting sophist. Here necessity is *opposed* to the sort of internal, psychological 'shackling' that desire (here ἐπιθυμία) can achieve. However, this contrast actually supports my more general point. Desire can function as the alternative to compulsion (here restricted to an *external* force) precisely because it *is* a kind of com-

The *Symposium* brings out the more particular point that *eros as a cause of epistemic ascent* could be understood as a kind of compulsion. In fact, Diotima's account of *eros* in the *Symposium* can help to explain *why eros* has this compelling character. According to Diotima, the lover desires beautiful things, 'that they become his own' (204d5-7); since good things are beautiful, *eros* looks to be indistinguishable from the universal desire to possess good things, i.e., the desire for happiness (201c, 202c-d). *Eros* is something of a shifting target in Diotima's speech, and it is unclear just how the various desires here associated with *eros*—desire for the beautiful, for the good, for immortality, for 'giving birth in beauty'—are related (cf. Sheffield 2006, chs. 3-4). In the end, what primarily distinguishes *eros* is its *function* of enabling us to give birth in beauty and thereby gain immortality (206b-208e). The desire fulfilled in this way leads some people to beget children, while others generate works of art, political institutions, ideas and theories, and, at the very highest level of 'initiation' and communion with the Form, 'true virtue' (212a).[28] *Eros* thus emerges as the desire for creative communion with some beautiful object and, through it, for immortality; and this account makes it easy to see why *eros* would have compulsive, tyrannical potential. To desire erotically is to seek immortality through creative union with something perceived as beautiful: and that is an inherently insatiable desire for what is by nature most powerfully attractive to us.[29]

To sum up: the fact that the Cave passage speaks of epistemic ascent as caused by compulsion does not exclude its motivation by erotic desire. For neither compulsion nor *eros* is quite what we might assume. Compulsion is not necessarily, or even standardly, a matter of external force or violence; and as Diotima explains, *eros* is not exactly (or at best) a desire for sex. *Eros* is an desire to eternally possess *some* good *qua* beautiful; and desires of this kind are, unsurprisingly, the most intense, insatiable, and therefore compelling—i.e., resistance-overriding—urges we can experience. The desire for wisdom can cer-

pulsion (in the broader sense of a force that overcomes resistance so as to determine some outcome). Desire too has its shackles—ones *more* reliable than any external force, just as erotic necessities are for most people more forceful than geometric ones. Again, the scope of ἀνάγκη is contextually determined, and what contrasts with necessity in one context may count as a species of it elsewhere. We might again compare the way in which necessity is opposed to reason in the *Timaeus*, while rational behaviour turns out to be maximally necessary in the *Epinomis*.

[28] Thus Platonic *eros* cannot be *defined* as a desire for some specifically sexual satisfaction. We can tell as much from the *Phaedrus*: if *eros meant* sexual desire, the first two speeches, in which the 'lover' and 'non-lover' are contrasted as competitors for sexual favours, would be incoherent. There is nothing peculiarly Platonic about this distinction between *eros* and sexual desire; and the *Symposium*'s expanded or generic sense of *eros* is not a Platonic innovation, despite Diotima's misleading suggestion that the standard sense is restricted (205b-d). As Ludwig 2002, 121 notes, there is evidence both of a long poetic tradition of nonsexual *eros* and of a sophistic and philosophical tendency to group multifarious desires under that name (cf. the evidence given in his ch. 3). Generic *eros* goes back to Hesiod and Homer; Ludwig also notes important uses of *eros* in non-sexual contexts in Thucydides and Euripides. On political *eros*, cf. also Wohl 2002.

[29] That the Beautiful is of all Forms the most vividly visible and therefore attractive to us is explicit at *Phaedrus* 250d-e.

tainly take this form: in *Republic* v, the philosopher is first introduced as 'the one who readily and willingly tries all kinds of learning, who turns gladly to learning and is insatiable for it', analogous to the erotic man who pursues all boys and the winelover who loves every vintage (475c6-7).[30] Thus we can add to the 'curricular' and the 'Socratic' reading an 'erotic' reading, delineating a third viable subspecies of the generic ascent depicted in the Cave. A good state school curriculum, private dialectic with a Socrates, and *eros* as described in the *Symposium*: an ascent to the realm of reason could be generated by any one of them. By using the undifferentiated language of compulsion, Plato allows each of these possibilities to flicker across the screen, and suggests that it does not matter which does the trick. Indeed, given our ingrown resistance to philosophy, *whatever* can bring about ascent will have to count as a species of compulsion. A passionate desire for the beautiful is the most obvious species of internal compulsion, while the requirements of an enlightened curriculum and a dialectical encounter with a Socrates are the most obvious external kinds. But there is no need to assume that these exhaust the alternatives, or that a prospective Guardian could be motivated by only one of them. If there is a more general moral here, it is that Plato's ambiguities and underdeterminations may be as carefully constructed and dialectically fruitful as any other aspect of the dialogues; in interpreting them we would do well to insist on 'both', like a demanding child (*Sophist* 249d1-4), and see where the interplay of possibilities leads.[31]

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[30] 'Desire' in this passage is the rather generic ἐπιθυμεῖν; and the denominator common to the erotic man, winelover, and philosopher is that each is φιλο-something. So it would be inexact to claim that book 5 depicts the philosopher as having *eros* for the objects of knowledge. But it is certainly suggestive that the discussion opens with a vivid and detailed description of the erotic man, as the paradigm case of the kind of intense, insatiable desire that the philosopher shares.

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