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# An Invitation from Plato: A Philosophical Journey to Knowledge

## Summary

To trace paths to knowledge or to follow the journey searching for knowledge is to some extent equivalent to reading a philosophical book. Plato, who perceives this relation between journey and philosophy, writes his dialogues as if each of his works were a journey to knowledge. This paper inquires into the ascent and descent motif that is the symbolic motion of a philosophical journey and appears in Plato's *Politeia* repeatedly. By means of this motif, Plato depicts the journey of the soul in several different ways. This examination will show a possible way to read Plato's dialogue as a philosophical journey. This journey is undertaken by Plato or the figure Socrates, but at the same time it involves its readers in philosophical inquiries.

Keywords: Plato; philosophy; Republic (*Politeia*); journey of soul; dialogue

Das Lesen eines philosophischen Buches kann in einem gewissen Sinne mit einer Wegbeschreibung oder einer Reise zum Wissen gleichgesetzt werden. Platon, der sich dieses Verhältnisses zwischen Reise und Philosophie bewusst war, verfasste seine Dialoge, als ob sie Reisen zum Wissen wären. Diese Abhandlung behandelt das Begriffspaar Aufstieg und Abstieg, das als symbolische Bewegung der philosophischen Reise in Platons *Politeia* mehrmals verwendet wird. Mit diesem Motiv stellt Platon die Reise der Seele auf unterschiedliche Weisen dar. Meine Untersuchung zeigt eine Leseweise, mit der Platons Dialog als philosophische Reise verstanden werden kann, die zwar von Platon oder der Figur Sokrates unternommen wird, gleichzeitig jedoch den Leser in die philosophischen Fragestellungen miteinbezieht.

Keywords: Platon; Philosophie; Staat (*Politeia*); Seelenwanderung; Dialog

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## 1 Introduction

At the very end of Plato's *Politeia*, Socrates introduces the Story of Er, which is a report on how souls travel and what they do in the Afterlife. Among several unique elements in this story, the motifs of *anabasis* and *katabasis*, ascent and descent, have attracted scholars' special attention. These motifs, which are mostly used as a pair, appear repeatedly in the *Politeia*.<sup>1</sup> The most famous passage in which this paired motif appears is the Allegory of the Cave in Book 7. In this allegory, a person bound in a cave is depicted as going *up* to the outside, and, after a while, returning *down* to the cave. It is also well known that the dialogue begins with Socrates' word '*kateben*' (I went down), which is sometimes regarded as an allusion to the Allegory of the Cave.<sup>2</sup> If we compare the first sentence with the last sentence, we cannot doubt that Plato uses the ascent–descent motif intentionally.

The aim of this examination is to understand the framework of Plato's *Politeia*, which sustains the entire philosophical discussion expounded in the dialogue from the perspective of the ascent–descent motif. As the Story of Er shows distinctly, this motif can be seen as a sign indicating the journey of souls. Depicting the journey of souls on different levels, Plato tries to illuminate how we are able to set out our philosophical inquiries, which are likened to journeys.

In the following, I first give an overview of the concept of a journey in a philosophical sense. Then in the second section, I analyze three passages of the *Politeia* in which the ascent–descent motif plays the central role. They are, namely, the Story of Er, the Allegory of the Cave, and the opening scene. The third section compares these passages so that we can see how they are related to each other. Finally, in the fourth section, I propose a possible way to read the *Politeia* as an invitation from Plato, showing the close

1 The English translations taken from the *Politeia* are based on Bloom 1991. I have modified his translations on occasion. The citations from the original Greek text are based on Slings 2003.

2 Referring to Proclus' argument, Burnyeat under-

stands that "Socrates' going down to the Peiraeus and being detained there, somewhat reluctantly" corresponds to "an image of how [...] the philosophers would con–descend, somewhat reluctantly" Burnyeat 1998, 6.

connection between the first and the last sentence of the dialogue. The whole examination shall reveal a possible way to interpret the message Plato places in the last sentence of his second-longest dialogue.

## 2 Philosophical inquiry as a journey

Before we examine Plato's *Politeia*, an overview of the concept of 'journey' in general will help our understanding of the philosophical journey. It is not easy to define what is and is not counted as a journey. Besides, the existence of several terms in ancient Greek, implying a journey in the broad sense, makes this task more complicated.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, it is not the main aim of this section to judge which terms belong to the journey category. Let me first loosely define the concept.

Despite the variety of terms, if a certain word indicates a movement that contains the following two elements, we possibly understand it under the concept of a journey: leaving a place with which a person is familiar and acquiring something, whether material or intellectual, that could not be found as long as the person stays at the original location. Using these two conditions, we find that journeys in ancient Greek written material can be grouped into two categories: (1) a journey in the literal sense includes those taken by (quasi-) fictional figures, such as Odysseus, and those reported to be taken by historic figures, such as Plato; and (2) a journey in the metaphorical or intellectual sense does not have to include physical motion but occurs in someone's mind or intellect, sometimes in a conversation.

Journey (1) is characterized by a linear movement in general, even though it includes detours and other adventures. Simplified, such movements are described as 'going there and going back'. People taking this kind of journey, whether they are historical or fictional, depart from their homelands or the places with which they are familiar and, after a while, return to the places where they started their travels. This feature also implies that journey (1) has clear aims or destinations. People's journeys or movements are eventually the means to reach their destinations and fulfill their aims. Consider some examples. In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Odysseus leaves his homeland to beat the Trojan enemies. After accomplishing this goal, he tries to return to his homeland. His departure from his homeland has a clear, simple aim and destination. As another example, Plato leaves Athens to answer the request of Dion, who wants him to educate (or to do

3 The apparently most famous one is νόστος, which describes, for example, the process of Odysseus' return home from Troy to Ithaca (cf. *Od.* 1.5). In

Plato's texts, we can find for instance πορεία (cf. *Phaid.* 115a).

philosophy with) the young tyrant of Syracuse.<sup>4</sup> This goal is not attained in the way that Plato wishes, and he returns to Athens in despair. Nevertheless, his journey has a clear aim and destination.

In contrast, journey (2) does not necessarily include linear movement. Plato's philosophical journey can be pictured with the zigzag motion or the dialectic (*dialektische Aufhebung*).<sup>5</sup> This difference in the motion can originate from the clarity of the aims that are set in the journeys. The destinations of philosophical journeys are usually quite vague, especially in the case of Plato's so-called aporetic dialogues. Unlike journey (1), people who attempt to go on journey (2) are unsure of what they could retain by undertaking it. Their only aim is to escape the situation where they are trapped in dark and blurred knowledge. Note that this aim differs from that of attaining new knowledge. Those who endeavor to take the philosophical journey do not know at the beginning whether it will be able to bring them something new. This special character entails a tricky problem on its own.

This difficulty is introduced in Plato's *Meno* in the form of the paradox of philosophical inquiries referred to by Meno, who is familiar with the "eristic argument" (*Meno* 80d–e).<sup>6</sup> The point of the paradox is that we cannot search for a thing if we do not know what it is. Even if we were to find it, we cannot recognize it as the object of our search. Otherwise, if we are able to identify it as such, it necessarily means that we have already known what we are looking for. Hence, the method of philosophical inquiries leads to 'puzzlement' (*aporia*).

Comparing this paradox to our previous observation, we notice that the puzzlement that the paradox leads to characterizes the uniqueness of the philosophical journey. The question that Meno asks Socrates can be formulated as follows and is also directed to those who attempt to make a philosophical journey: how can we take a journey, although we do not have a clear, particular destination? This question does not serve as a spiteful means to refute the inclusion of the philosophical journey under the broader concept of a journey. Rather, its function is to caution; it warns that an intellectual inquiry – that is, the philosophical journey – is unlike a treasure hunt through which someone will discover something given externally.

Related to this point, it should also be noted that the end of a philosophical journey differs from that of journey (1). While journey (1) ends with the return to the traveler's

4 The whole story of Plato's travel to Syracuse is reported in his *Seventh Letter*.

5 The hypothetic method of inquiries (*Phaid.* 100b–102a) and the dialectic (*Rep.* 532b–535a) can be depicted with the zigzag motion.

6 Socrates himself does not view the paradox as a well-formulated argument. He develops the theory of

recollection as the solution or its opposing argument to the paradox after the particular passage. Regarding this paradox, Klein mentions the difference between 'searching' and 'learning' Klein 1965, 90–92. The English translation of *Meno* is based on Sedly and Long 2011.

hometown, namely the place found comfortable, journey (2) ends by reaching the place found uncomfortable, even if it is one's hometown. After the philosophical journey, it is almost impossible to return to the original position from which the journey started.

Despite some peculiarities of journey (2), as long as the movements contain the two previously mentioned elements, we can understand them under the concept of a journey.<sup>7</sup> If we observe the ascent–descent motif from the perspective of the concept of a journey sketched above, it appears not merely as a repeated motif but as the decisive element that builds the entire dialogue of the *Politeia* as a philosophical journey.

### 3 Three passages where the ascent–descent motif appears

This section concentrates on the examination of three passages of the *Politeia* where the ascent–descent motif appears: the Story of Er in Book 10, the Allegory of the Cave in Book 7, and the opening scene in Book 1. Let's start our inquiry into Plato's own text.

#### 3.1 The story of Er

Although it is placed at the end of the dialogue, it seems apt to examine first the Story (μῦθος) of Er because it describes the journey of souls more clearly than the two other passages. Briefly, this story has two purposes: to let people know the rewards and punishments that souls shall receive after their bodily deaths and to encourage people to live justly. Instead of telling it simply, Socrates introduces it as a story reported by Er, a “brave man” who died in war (614b3). In the following paragraphs, I focus on two elements of this story: the journey of the soul(s) and Er's role as a messenger.

First, consider the description of the journey of Er's soul. According to Er, his soul “made a journey (πορεύεσθαι) in the company of many” after it left his body (614b8–c1). Er's death itself is portrayed as a journey. Although such a depiction was not unknown at that time,<sup>8</sup> it is noteworthy that the journey of his soul is not expressed with any word relating to the image of a descent. It implies that Socrates intentionally changes the

7 Plato lets the character Socrates describe his inquiry by comparing it with “the second voyage” (ὁ δεύτερος πλῆθος) in the *Phaedo*. When Socrates heard that Anaxagoras explains intelligence (νοῦς) as “the cause of everything,” Socrates was pleased (*Phd.* 97b8–c6). However, after examining the argument of Anaxagoras, he is “swept away from his marvelous expectations” (*Phd.* 98b7) and decided to pursue his “second voyage” (*Phd.* 99c9–d1). For the

Greek text, I use Burnet 1900. The English translation is based on Sedly and Long 2011.

8 For example, Herodotus reports the reincarnation (*Seelenwanderung*) as follows: “The Egyptians were the first who maintained the following doctrine, too, that the human soul is immortal, and at the death of the body enters into some other living thing then coming to birth.” Godley 1920, Book 2.123.

place of the afterlife that Homer offered and Homer's followers had inherited.<sup>9</sup> Socrates does not depict the world of the dead as a place under the earth; it is no longer the *underworld*.<sup>10</sup> The journey of Er's soul ended when his soul "came back to his body" (621b6). However, the journey of the soul(s) portrayed in the story concerns not only Er but also others. Er reports how the souls of others make their journeys. Those who are judged to have lived justly go "up" (ἄνω) to the sky and enjoy rewards and happiness, while those who are judged to have lived unjustly go "under" (κάτω) the earth and receive punishments and torment (614c3–d1). After a thousand-year journey, they gather again. The just souls that rose to the sky "come down" (καταβαίνειν), while the unjust ones "go up" (ἀνέναι) (614d6–e1). The journey of souls in the afterlife is explicitly illustrated by the ascent–descent motif.

The other important point in the story is the role of messenger, which Er plays. The judges who render a decision for each soul inform Er that "he ha[s] to become a messenger to human beings (ἄγγελος ἀνθρώποις) of the things" in the afterlife, "and they [tell] him to listen and to look at everything in the place" (614d1–3). A few pages later, he is again called "the messenger from that place" (ὁ ἐκεῖθεν ἄγγελος) (619b2). Er is instructed to become the messenger, as well as the witness to the truth of the afterlife. To know the truth, humans are in need of a messenger who tells the truth to others and who "save[s]" (σώζειν) the story (621b8).<sup>11</sup> This point is decisive if we consider it together with the previous one. As already stated, Plato – or Socrates as the storyteller – seems intentionally to change the picture of the afterlife that has been inherited from Homer and his followers. To tell a new type of journey of the soul, Plato calls neither Odysseus nor Orpheus, who have both been accepted as messengers from the afterlife, but Er as a new messenger.<sup>12</sup>

In this way, Er's story pictorially represents the journey that all souls are fated to take after leaving their bodies. Souls in this story are depicted to some extent as having a close relation with the bodies in which they once dwelled because they are able to move physically, upwards and downwards, at least as far as Socrates – or the original narrator

9 Socrates names "tragedy and its leader, Homer" as those who are said to "know all arts and all things human ... and the divine things too" (598d8–e2).

10 Männlein-Robert emphasizes this point: Männlein-Robert 2014, 55; Männlein-Robert 2016. Some passages imply that the world of the dead is somewhere in or above the sky, which can be compared with the image of the Christian heaven. This world-view is also shared in the soul-chariot allegory of the *Phaedrus* (246a–254e). Additionally, the astronomical observations seem to reinforce the image of the world of the dead as placed somewhere in or above the sky.

11 Halliwell comments on the word 'save' as follows: "The presumable point is that most tales 'perish' as soon as they are told; Plato's sow a seed that can grow in us." Halliwell 1988, 193.

12 Männlein-Robert's view supports this point: "Anders als Odysseus gelangt er jedoch nicht absichtlich, sondern als zufällig ausgewählter Bote dorthin. Sein nüchterner Botebericht wird im Kontext der Politeia vom Philosophen Sokrates referiert und dezidiert als Gegenstück zur homerischen Lügenmärchengeschichte des mythischen Helden Odysseus beschrieben" (Männlein-Robert 2014, 56).

Er – describes them. This ‘saved’ story becomes known through the mouth of a brave warrior, a “randomly selected messenger”.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.2 Allegory of the cave

Let us move on to examine a passage found in Book 7: the Allegory of the Cave. It is undoubtedly one of the climaxes of the dialogue.<sup>14</sup> In the following paragraphs, we read the text step by step, paying attention to three points that are important for our inquiry: the bound state of prisoners, the compulsion of ascent, and the compulsion of descent.

Socrates begins the allegory with the description of bound people or “prisoners” (δεσμῶται) in the cave to “make an image of our nature in its education and want of education” (514a1–2). Their necks and legs are bound. Therefore, they are unable to flee from the cave and to “turn” (περιάγειν) their heads around (514b1–3). As a result, their heads are always directed toward the wall. A fire is burning behind them; between them and the fire lies a “path” (ὁδός) on which human beings carry all sorts of artifacts (514b3–7). Due to this environment, the prisoners always see only shadows on the wall and believe that these are real. Additionally, since voices and sounds, which originally come from things moving on the path between the fire and the prisoners, echo against the wall, they believe that these voices and sounds come from the shadows (515b7–9). This is “our nature” (ἡ ἡμετέρα φύσις) (514a1–2). It shows how much humans’ visual and auditory perceptions are deceived. Note that people are already “under the earth” (ἐν καταγείῳ) in the cave (514a3), although Socrates does not mention how they have descended to the cave. This means assumedly that humans are generally born with visual and auditory senses that are often hindrances to attaining a higher form of existence.

The second and the third points concern the hypothetical experiment of what happens to the prisoners when released from their yokes. This experiment begins with the scene depicting “someone” (τις) attempting to release a bound person.<sup>15</sup> After doing so, this someone “suddenly compels (ἀναγκάζοιτο) him to stand up (ἀνίστασθαι), to turn his neck around, to walk and look up (ἀναβλέπειν) toward the light” (515c6–8). The prisoner is forced to do all of the acts that he could never attempt in his bound state. The contrast between the prisoner’s situation and what “someone” compels the prisoner to do distinctly illustrates how demanding the first stage of the liberation is. However, the liberation process has just begun. Subsequently, someone “drags him away from the cave by force (βίᾳ) along the rough, steep, upwards way (ἀνάβασις)” (515e5). In this

13 Männlein-Robert 2014, 56.

14 If we follow Szlezák’s argument, the *Politeia* is constructed symmetrically, putting Books 5 to 7 at the center. See Szlezák 1984, 38; Szlezák and Rufner

2000, 920–922.

15 Here, both the person who attempts to release and the person who is released are written in the singular form. For example τις and αὐτῷ at 515d2.

sentence again, using words such as “by force”, “rough”, and “steep”, Socrates emphasizes the difficulty of getting away from the cave. This hardship reflects the requirement of “someone” who compels – but actually helps – the prisoners, because without this someone, the prisoners never dare to escape from the cave. As far as Socrates describes the situation, there is no chance for the prisoners to “stand up” and “turn [their] necks around” by themselves. As a result, nothing ‘outside’ of the cave exists for them. The presence of this someone, who remains anonymous,<sup>16</sup> corresponds to the existence of the world outside the cave. Thus, the passage regarding the prisoner’s liberation includes two significant messages; the liberation must be compelled by someone and its process is extremely difficult. As shown, the liberation process is characterized by an ascending motion, suggested by the words “stand up”, “look up”, and “upwards way”.

The latter part of the hypothetical experiment involves the return of the people who have been released and have gone outside the cave. After staying outside, “they are not willing to mind the business of human beings (τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων), but ... their souls are always eager to spend their time above (ἄνω)” (517c6–d1). If they go back down to the cave, they have to “contest about shadows of justice” with others who still and always will remain in the cave (517d6–9). The discomfort of returning to the cave is not limited to this aspect, however. If those released attempt to liberate other prisoners so that the latter group can also enjoy what the former has savored outside, the latter group resists the former’s efforts; the prisoners “would kill” those who attempt to release them (517a6). Therefore, the released group’s unwillingness to return to the cave originates not only from simple comfort but also from the danger of dying. Nevertheless, the people who have been outside the cave are neither allowed to “remain” (καταμένειν) there nor “be unwilling to go down again” (ἐθέλειν πάλιν καταβαίνειν) (519d4–5). Just as people were compelled to turn their necks around and to go up after they were liberated, now they are forced again to return to the cave. This passage, which seems to hint at Socrates’ death sentence, is also characterized by the compulsory turn from comfort to discomfort.<sup>17</sup> Contrasted to the former one, this turn is described with the descent motion (καταβαίνειν).

Thus, the Allegory of the Cave depicts the ascent–descent motif on two different levels. On one hand, it presents a concrete image of the cave and the prisoners who are

16 We may regard this ‘someone’ as Socrates himself. Männlein-Robert explains this ‘someone’ by comparison with Odysseus, arguing: “Wie Odysseus seine Geschichte, in der er als Οὐτις/ ‚Niemand‘ erforderlich aus der Höhle entkommt, selbst erzählt, so erzählt auch Sokrates sein Höhlengleichnis mit dem τις/ ‚Jemand‘ der aus der Höhle aufsteigen und

herausführen kann, selbst (auch der Armenier Er erzählt das eigene Ergebnis)” (Männlein-Robert 2013, 249).

17 Unlike the ascent, we do not know whether those who go back down to the cave will find comfort there again. Glaucon defines life in the cave as “worse” (χείρον) than that outside it (519d8–9).

bound under the earth, released, and then led above; this is the level of the image.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the ascent described here does not actually indicate physical movements. Socrates argues that it explains not simply the “twirling of a shell” (στροφή) but “the turning of a soul around (ψυχῆς περιαγωγή) from a day that is like night to the true day” (521c5–7). Since the allegory is defined as “the turning of a soul”, we can also understand the ascending motion in a metaphorical sense. Therefore, it indicates that the incidents described in the allegory actually happen interiorly to human beings, or more precisely, in their souls. Unlike the Story of Er, a soul is able to experience ascent and descent without dying.<sup>19</sup> However, the situation where the liberated are placed is tenser than that faced by Er, for in the worst case, death awaits those who are released. This death may also indicate something that should be understood figuratively, but in any case, the descent clearly involves painful discomfort, which is not mentioned in the Story of Er. Nonetheless, the compulsory moment of descent plays a significant role in the opening scene.

### 3.3 Opening scene

We can find a clear representation of the descent motif in the opening scene (327a1–328e7). In relation to the previous examinations, three points should be noted: the motif of descent in the first line, the compulsion by Polemarchus, and Cephalus’ request.

Let us start by reading the first line: “I went down to Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, son of Ariston” (κατέβην χθές εἰς Πειραιᾶ μετὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος; 327a1–2). To reiterate, the very first word of the dialogue is κατέβην (I went down). However, the place where Socrates heads to is neither the underworld nor the cave but the port city Piraeus. A. Bloom comments as “the center of Athenian commerce, it was the place to find all the diversity and disorder that come from foreign lands.”<sup>20</sup> Piraeus is the point where diverse cultures and viewpoints meet. The first sentence further includes two details that attract our attention. First, the whole story is introduced as an incident that occurred “yesterday”. The narrator Socrates always tells the story to his interlocutors, as well as the readers of the *Politeia*, in the time frame of “today”. Second, Socrates went down to Piraeus “with Glaucon”, which means that Socrates’ descent is not solitary. This

18 In the beginning of the allegory, Socrates says, “Next, then, ... *make an image* (ἀπεικασόν) of our nature in its education and want of education, likening it to a condition of the following kind” (514a1–2, emphasis added).

19 However, we can also find a point shared with the Story of Er, where death is depicted as a soul’s journey, equivalent to the departure from its body or its physical material. In the Allegory of the Cave, the

cave is pictured as a place where visual and auditory perceptions interrupt a person’s way upwards or paths to knowledge. Thus, the liberation from the cave can be compared with death as the departure from the body. This must be the reason why philosophy is called “practicing dying” in the *Phaedo* (67e5).

20 Bloom 1991, 440–441.

point seems different from the situation of the released who is portrayed as going back down alone among the prisoners in the cave.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the person accompanied by Socrates is Glaucon, “son of Ariston”, who is one of Plato’s brothers. Plato is also a “son of Ariston.”<sup>22</sup>

The second noteworthy point in the opening scene is the compulsion by Polemarchus. Polemarchus “ordered” (ἐκέλευσε) his slave boy to “order” (κελεῦσαι) Socrates and Glaucon to wait for him (327b3–4). As the author, Plato quotes the boy’s words again, “The boy said, ‘Polemarchus orders (κελεύει) you to wait’” (327b5).<sup>23</sup> Plato uses the word “order” three times in three lines to emphasize the compulsory character of Polemarchus’ words. This compulsion appears more powerful when Polemarchus forces Socrates to choose between two options: either Socrates and Glaucon “prove [themselves] stronger” than Polemarchus and his companions or “stay” with Polemarchus (327c9–11). Polemarchus also adds that Socrates will fail to “persuade” (πειῖσαι) him to let Socrates go because he has no desire to listen to Socrates’ opinion at all. Since Socrates and Glaucon actually have no choice other than staying with Polemarchus and his companions, Glaucon (not Socrates) decides to follow them to Polemarchus’ house.<sup>24</sup> Note that the descent to Piraeus is not against Socrates’ will because he himself went there for the purpose of observing the Thracian festival. However, this descent by “turning around” (μετεστράφη) (327b6) and “staying” in Piraeus is against his will.

We can find one more compulsory element in Cephalus’ words, which appear more moderate than those of his son Polemarchus. Cephalus complains that Socrates does not come down (θαμίζειν καταβαίνων) to him in Piraeus very often, which is what he “should” (χρῆν) actually do (328c6). Cephalus’ grievance against Socrates suggests that they normally live in different places. Cephalus resides somewhere ‘down there,’ while Socrates dwells somewhere ‘above.’ Although Piraeus is the crossing point of ‘down’ and ‘above,’ the fact that Socrates and Glaucon meet Polemarchus and Cephalus in the port city and that Cephalus requests that Socrates come down hint at the difficulty for those down there to go above. Cephalus repeats his request at the end of the same passage, “Come here regularly (φοίτα) to us as to friends and your very own kin” (ὡς παρὰ φίλους τε καὶ πάνυ οἰκείους) (328d5–7). Cephalus shows his will to become like Socrates’ “friends” and his “very own kin,” whom Socrates visits often.

The opening scene attracts the readers’ attention to the descending movement with its very first word, although we cannot find its corresponding movement (i.e., the ascent)

21 An example is “if such a man (ὁ τοιοῦτος) were to come down again” (516e3–4). On the other hand, it is possible that there are some people who are released and go outside the cave, because Socrates says “not to permit them (αὐτοῖς) what is now permitted” (519d2).

22 If we accept that the emphasis is placed on the “son of Ariston,” we may be able to consider Plato the actual companion of Socrates in this descent.

23 Szlezák 1985, 273–275.

24 Szlezák 1985, 272.

in Book I. The situation under which Socrates and Glaucon are placed, confronting Polemarchus who compels them to stay down there, reminds us of the circumstances surrounding those who are liberated and then return to the cave. However, unlike the prisoners who attempt to kill the liberated, the elderly man down in Piraeus expects to become like the ‘friends’ of Socrates. Although the same motif of descent is used in the allegory and in the opening scene, these two passages create opposite impressions.

#### 4 Comparison of the three passages

So far, we have read three passages from the *Politeia*, using the ascent–descent motif as a clue. First, let me summarize them from the perspective of the concept of a journey so that we can understand how the three separate passages are interrelated.

The Story of Er depicts how souls take their journeys, with ascending and descending motions. In other words, the ascent–descent motif connotes the journey(s) of the soul(s) in the *Politeia*. The narrative is told as a true story through the messenger Er. His soul’s journey enables him to convey a new and true perspective on the afterlife, which differs from the widely held view.<sup>25</sup> Er’s role as a messenger suggests that the journey, especially that of souls, brings people new *Weltanschauung*, which can be called ‘knowledge’ in the broad sense.

The ascent–descent motif that we sporadically find in the Story of Er appears in the Allegory of the Cave in a clearer way. If we compare the ascending and descending motions of the released with the description of the movements of souls in Er’s story, the process of liberation from the bound state in the cave can be interpreted as a sort of journey. Er, who is released from his body, journeys to the afterlife and after acquiring a new perspective, returns to deliver the message; that is, the new *Weltanschauung*, which will never be obtained as long as one’s soul is detained in one’s body.

Similarly, the opening scene can be regarded as illustrating part of the journey because the descent motif appears quite obviously there. While the journey beginning in the opening scene completely differs from the other two journeys, it is often said that Plato alludes to the Allegory of the Cave and the bitter fate awaiting the people released from the cave in the beginning of the dialogue.<sup>26</sup> The descent motif and the description of Socrates being compelled to stay can easily be associated with the same images appearing in the last half of the allegory. Indeed, the opening scene and the allegory share some points in terms of the descent motif. Socrates is not allowed to stay someplace

25 Regarding this point, Halliwell argues: “It is, in effect, a reinvented myth, and as such one contribution to Plato’s larger project of (re)appropriating

the medium of myth for his own philosophical purposes.” Halliwell 2007, 447.

26 For example Burnyeat 1998, 6.

“above” and is compelled to “stay” at the place where people live with others. What is contested in the house of Cephalus can be understood as shadows of justice because the interlocutors of Socrates cannot discover a firm definition of justice in the conversation made in Book 1 of the *Politeia*. Cephalus’ house, where Socrates and Glaucon have just arrived, seems to possess the same characteristics as the cave, where the prisoners compete for the best “knowledge” about shadows, and the surroundings of Er, whose soul has just returned to his body.

However, if we focus too much on the common points, we will lose sight of what the journey in the beginning of the whole dialogue actually is. First, we should not forget one crucial difference between the opening scene and the allegory. Specifically, the people in Cephalus’ house do not try to kill Socrates, while the bound people in the cave would “get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up” those who are released and try to liberate other prisoners (517a4–6).<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, Cephalus requests that Socrates come down and visit him and his company often (θαμιζεῖν and φοιτᾶν). What, then, does Cephalus’ readiness bring to the journey of Socrates and Glaucon?

To explore this point more precisely, a small excursion to other Platonic texts will be helpful. We can find an expression similar to Cephalus’ words in the *Laches*, one of Plato’s earlier aporetic dialogues. Lysimachus, who had not met Socrates until the day of the dialogue, says to Socrates, “You ought to have visited us often and thought [of] us as your kin” (181c1–2).<sup>28</sup> After they become acquainted, Lysimachus says that Socrates should visit him and his company, so they can keep their friendship (φιλία). Needless to say, Lysimachus’ words, “to visit us often” (φοιτᾶν) and “to think of us as your kin” (οἰκείους ἡγεῖσθαι), are equivalent to those of Cephalus.

In the beginning of the dialogue, he promises his interlocutors twice that he will “speak frankly” (παρρησιάζεσθαι) (178a4–5, 179c1–2). After becoming acquainted with Socrates, he asks Socrates to regard him as “one of your best-willing friends” (εὐνούστατον σοι) (181b8–c1). Lysimachus emphasizes his two essential traits: frankness (παρρησία) and goodwill (εὐνοία). Michel Foucault argues that in this text we can “see the series of precautions taken to set up the conditions, the zone of truth-telling.”<sup>29</sup> To put it another way, these attributes constitute the preconditions or requisites for those who try to acquire truth. In the *Gorgias* as well, frankness and goodwill are counted as two of the three qualities that Socrates demands of a person “who would sufficiently test (βασανί-

27 As Bloom mentions, the opening scene could be an allusion to Socrates’ trial. Bloom 1991, 310. However, as I point out later, even Thrasymachus does not try to kill Socrates.

28 For the Greek text of the *Laches*, I use Burnet 1903. The English translation of the *Laches* is based on Jowett 1931.

29 Foucault, Ewald, and Burchell 2011, 128–130.

ζειν) a soul” (487a1–3).<sup>30</sup> The settings of the *Laches* and the *Gorgias* prepare the space that enables “a permanent test of the soul, a *basanos* (test) of the soul”; in Foucault’s words.<sup>31</sup> Note that these characteristics only offer the space necessary for the emergence of truth. They do not guarantee that dialogues between people with these traits will necessarily produce or discover truth.

Returning to the *Politeia*, if we read the compulsion and the request of Polemarchus and Cephalus from the perspective not only of the Allegory of the Cave but also of “a *basanos* (test) of the soul”, we can find an ideal setting for philosophical inquiries in Cephalus’ house. Thus, Socrates and Glaucon’s descending journey, originally against Socrates’ will, begins to acquire a color different from the descent that those released from the cave would experience. While Socrates narrates the allegory conveying the bitter fate of the released, his own descent is heading in another direction that does not lead to that bitter fate. What then is Plato’s aim in depicting the discordance between what Socrates tells in the form of an allegory and the situation where Socrates is placed?

## 5 An invitation from Plato

As mentioned above, the descent motif represented with κατέβην can be associated with the journey of the soul, just as the Story of Er shows. But at the same time, when it appears with a compulsory element, the close connection between the opening scene and the Allegory of the Cave will be emphasized. It is not difficult to regard Socrates heading to Piraeus as parallel to the liberated prisoner returning to the cave. On the other hand, Cephalus’ eagerness to be in Socrates’ company seems to suggest that something different from the bitter fate that the liberated would suffer is awaiting the figure of Socrates in the *Politeia*. By preparing the house of Cephalus, Plato endeavors to write another scenario, which is different not only from the fate awaiting the liberated in the allegory, but also from the real misfortune that befell Socrates.<sup>32</sup> The following investigation shall explain why we can see that the descent of Socrates depicted in the opening scene hints at another fate for the prisoners liberated from the cave, paying attention to the concept of a journey that was the original starting point of our entire inquiry.

As previously stated, the character of Cephalus makes the opening scene distinct from the other two passages. His frankness and goodwill secure the space for the “*basanos* (test) of a soul”. Perhaps Thrasymachus, the main interlocutor in Book I, plays a role

30 The rest is *episteme* or knowledge. Socrates tells this to Callicles, who is one of the most hostile figures in Plato’s dialogues. For the Greek text of the *Gorgias*, I use Burnet 1903.

31 Foucault, Gros, and Burchell 2010, 366–367.

32 Socrates was sentenced to death for impiety against the gods of Athens and corruption of youth (*Apol.* 19b and 23c).

similar to that of those who “get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up” the prisoners. He is indeed aggressive toward Socrates: he “hunched up like a wild beast, he flung himself at us as if to tear us to pieces” (336b5–6). But thanks to the secured space prepared by Cephalus and the dialectical conversation with Socrates, Thrasymachus becomes gradually calm and finally shows his willingness to listen to Socrates.<sup>33</sup>

Although the house of Cephalus is portrayed as an appropriate space for the philosophical inquiry Socrates is undertaking, it should be stressed that it is merely the starting point of the philosophical journey. The house where Socrates’ interlocutors gather is not a *óδός* (path) on the journey. Now let’s focus on how Socrates uses the word *óδός* in the opening scene.

After Cephalus requests Socrates visit him in Piraeus more often, Socrates answers, “I am really delighted to discuss with the very old ..., one ought, in my opinion, to learn from them what sort of path (*τινὰ ὁδόν*) it is” (328d8–e2). Here, Socrates compares one’s life, or *way* of life, to *óδός*. The literal meaning of *óδός* is ‘path’ or ‘road’; but here Socrates uses this word in a very metaphorical sense. Its meaning is almost equivalent to ‘life’; to walk the path means growing old and living one’s life. In this sense, the old Cephalus represents one of the predecessors whose footsteps will be followed by the younger people. The path, as life, is not homogeneous for all people. Each person walks his/her own path, but there are several types of paths. The path of Cephalus is characterized by his piety, because in the middle of the discussion Cephalus leaves to “offer a sacrifice to the divine” (331d10). While this behavior seems to portray Cephalus as a devout old man, it can also be regarded as evidence of him being afraid of the afterlife, whose image has been brought to him by the stories he has heard since his childhood.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Cephalus is often seen as a figure representing those with conservative views of the afterlife.<sup>35</sup>

Socrates chooses another path on which Cephalus has not walked. On one hand, Socrates *cannot* follow the footsteps of Cephalus, because Cephalus leaves Socrates and other younger ones, *although* he was eager to talk with Socrates. Many prevailing stories concerning the afterlife hinder Cephalus from listening to the message delivered by Socrates and, as a result, from walking the path Socrates is to walk. On the other hand, Socrates *does not* choose the path Cephalus has chosen, because he has already chosen

33 Thrasymachus urges Socrates to continue talking about the regime at 450a–b.

34 This point is clearly shown in the following words of Cephalus: “The tales told about what is in Hades ... at which he laughed up to then, now make his soul twist and turn because he fears they might be true” (330d7–e2). As to this point, my understand-

ing relies largely on Lear’s following comment: “[Cephalus] can now recognize the Achilles tale as a story, but the tale has already done its psychic work. And by the time he tries in adulthood to think about what courage is, he is already looking out from Achilles’ perspective.” (Lear 2006, 30).

35 For example Blackburn 2006, 28.

another path, which leads upwards. Socrates stayed in Piraeus to show this upward path to his interlocutors.

Yet, an inconsistency appears here. If we assume that the ascent–descent motif described in the allegory is a model of the philosophical journey, the inquiry into justice is supposed to be described with an ascending motion. Thus, I now propose the following interpretation: Socrates needs to descend so that he may ascend with friends with whom he is capable of acquiring a new *Weltanschauung*. This interpretation is supported by the last sentence of the *Politeia*, where Socrates says, “We shall always keep to the upper path” (τῆς ἄνω ὁδοῦ ἀεὶ ἐξόμεθα) (621c4–5). We can associate this expression with the upward way in the cave, which leads to the entrance (or the exit) of the cave (515e6). The “upper path” indicates the path leading to the outside of the cave, the yoke of ignorance. I believe we are allowed to regard this upper path in the last sentence as corresponding to the descent in the first sentence.

The difference between the first and the last sentence is, however, not only the direction. The last sentence has the verb ἐξόμεθα (‘we shall keep’ or ‘we will have’), whereas Socrates uses κατέβην (‘I went down’) in the opening. The *numerus* and the *tempus* of the verbs make a sharp contrast. The change of *numerus* from first person singular to first person plural connotes that Socrates acquired his companions throughout the dialogue, with whom he is able to go above. Socrates’ use of the future form in the last sentence hints that a new philosophical journey is about to begin. But if this is so, who is included in the ‘we’ who shall keep the upper path?

There is no definite answer to this question because Plato does not write about it. However, if we recall that the *Politeia* begins with Socrates’ narration without referring to whom he tells his story about ‘yesterday,’ it seems reasonable to argue that “we” in the last sentence includes not only Socrates’ interlocutors and the attendees there,<sup>36</sup> but also the readers of the *Politeia* to whom Socrates tells his story from the viewpoint of ‘today.’ The one who prepares this setting is, needless to say, the author Plato. By making the dialogue open-ended, Plato invites us, the readers of his dialogue, to a further philosophical journey.

36 The dialogue attendees are not equal to the interlocutors of Socrates; that is, Glaucon, Adeimantus, Thrasymachus, Polemarchus, and Cephalus. In addition to these interlocutors, five people are named

(Nicheratus at 327c2 and Lysias, Euthydemus, Charmantides, and Cleitophon at 328b4–7), although there seems to be more people because Socrates says “and some others” (καὶ ἄλλοι τινές) at 327c2–3.

## 6 Concluding remarks

This paper examined how Plato depicts philosophical inquiries as journeys of souls, using the ascent–descent motif. The Story of Er describes the journey to the afterlife of Er’s soul as well as the journey of others’ souls with ascending and descending movements. In the Allegory of the Cave, the liberation of the prisoners in the cave is pictured with compulsory ascent and descent. The opening scene appears to be an allusion to the Allegory of the Cave at first sight, but our close examination revealed it has some peculiarities that make Socrates’ descent to Piraeus different from the compulsory descent of the liberated prisoners.

By means of the same motif, Plato on the one hand illustrates as philosophical journeys all philosophical inquiries that bring people new perspectives about the world, but on the other hand he tries to convey that we are also undertaking a philosophical journey by reading his dialogue. We should not forget that Plato wrote the *Politeia*. Because it was intended to be published, Plato wrote it with the awareness that it would have readers.<sup>37</sup> The role of a messenger was handed down from Er to Socrates and Socrates passed on the message to his interlocutors, especially Glaucon and Adeimantus within literature, but also to his young friend Plato in the real world. Now Plato tries to pass the message he received from Socrates to us, his readers. We open Plato’s books and read them, because we are “really delighted with the very old” philosophers and we think “one ought to learn from them what sort of path” they have made (328d8–e2). The *Politeia* shows us only one of numerous possible paths to knowledge. As the request of Cephalus triggered the discussion led by Socrates, for us, the readers, the *Politeia* functions as an invitation from Plato that brings us to the journey of our own souls. He provokes his readers to participate in the dialectic and write a continuation of his dialogue.

37 It is well known that after Plato’s death people found “a wax tablet with [the] first words of the *Politeia* written and rewritten in different arrangements”. Burnyeat 1998, 4. Diogenes Laertius reports

this anecdote as follows: “Euphorion and Panaetius relate that the beginning of the *Politeia* was found several times revised and rewritten.” Hicks 1938, III. 37. See also Adam 1963, 1.

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