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PLATO'S *PERIAGŌGĒ*: CHANGING DIRECTION AS A CENTRAL ASPECT OF EDUCATION

Abstract

Plato's concept of *periagōgē*, as presented in the Analogy of the Cave, serves as a fundamental component of his philosophy of education, illustrating the process of "changing direction" or "redirecting" one's mind's eye from ignorance to the Form of the Good. Plato's understanding of culture or education, *paideia*, accentuates the shift from passive observation to active participation in the pursuit of ultimate knowledge and ethical excellence. This educational change of direction, from passive to active, unfolds as our entire soul turns toward the Form of the Good. Maintaining the soul's proper direction and alignment involves cultivating the lower parts of the soul through the emulation of good habits, good behavior, and proper feelings, while concurrently strengthening the higher reasoning powers through mathematical sciences, culminating in dialectics. Such an educational redirecting of the soul aims at the Form of the Good as its teleologic, practical, and paradigmatic axis around which we are revolving as we go about our daily endeavors. Those who were able to grasp the Form of the Good, not only undergo inevitable personal change but also bear the responsibility of guiding others toward such a transformation, as their teachers and mentors, just like Socrates did. Consequently, *periagōgē* in the right direction, or aspiration toward the right ideals, promotes personal betterment but also extends its effects towards society, where such enlightened individuals help others to stay on the right path.

Keywords: *periagōgē*; turn around; redirecting; orientation; *paideia*; education; culture; Form of the Good; soul

PLATONS *PERIAGŌGĒ*: RICHTUNGSWECHSEL ALS ZENTRALER ASPEKT DER BILDUNG

Zusammenfassung

Platons Konzept der *periagōgē*, wie es im Höhlengleichnis dargestellt wird, dient als grundlegender Bestandteil seiner Bildungsphilosophie und veranschaulicht den Prozess des "Richtungswechsels" oder der "Umleitung" des geistigen Auges von der Unwissenheit auf die Form des Guten. Platons Verständnis von Kultur oder Bildung, *paideia*, betont die Änderung von passiver Beobachtung zu aktivem Engagement in der Suche nach dem ultimativem Wissen und der ethischen Exzellenz. Diese bildungsbezogene Richtungsänderung, von passiv zu aktiv, entfaltet sich während unsere gesamte Seele sich zu der Form des Guten zuwendet. Die Aufrechterhaltung der richtigen Ausrichtung der Seele erfordert die Pflege der niederen Teile der Seele durch die Nachahmung guter Gewohnheiten, guten Verhaltens und angemessener Gefühle, während gleichzeitig die höheren, vernünftigen Kräfte durch mathematische Wissenschaften gestärkt werden, die in der Dialektik gipfeln. Eine solche edukative Umdrehung der Seele zielt auf die Form des Guten als ihrer teleologischen, praktischen und paradigmatischen Achse ab, in Bezug zu der wir uns drehen, während wir unseren täglichen Bestrebungen nachgehen. Diejenigen, die die Form des Guten erfassen konnten, durchlaufen nicht nur zwangsläufig eine persönliche Veränderung, sondern tragen auch die Verantwortung, andere zu einer solchen Transformation zu führen, als ihre Lehrer und Mentoren, ganz so wie es Sokrates tat. Folglich fördert die *periagōgē* in die richtige Richtung und das Streben nach den richtigen Idealen liegt nicht nur in der persönlichen Verbesserung, sondern erstreckt sich auch auf die Gesellschaft, wo solche erleuchteten Individuen anderen helfen, auf dem richtigen Weg zu bleiben.

Schlüsselwörter: *Periagōgē*; Umdrehung; Umlenkung; Ausrichtung; *Paideia*; Bildung; Kultur; Form des Guten; Seele

Introduction

In Plato's holistic worldview, *paideia* (culture and education¹) plays a central role as a process of comprehensive cultivation of the ideal human being

¹ While the term "culture" in English most closely approximates the original meaning of the Greek term *paideia*, but does not cover it completely, just as any other word from the range of translation options would not. In the context of this article, I will interchangeably use the terms "culture" and "education" when delving into Plato's concept of *paideia*, selecting the most fitting term based on the specific context at hand. For an extensive historical and philosophical exploration of the meaning of the ancient Greek term *paideia* and in particular Plato's use of it, as well as insights into possibilities for

in a moral, aesthetic, political, and rational sense. In the *Republic*, he gives an extensive analysis of what the paideutic practices of ancient Greece are and what they should be. For Plato, this process of cultivating an excellent human character means setting it in the right direction to reach, envision, and understand the highest principles of reality, and especially the Form of the Good as its pinnacle and a source. This is very vividly suggested in the Analogy with the Cave in *Book VII* of the *Republic*, which stands out as both famous and particularly relevant to the philosophy of education, while the concept of *periagōgē*, as a transformative turning around or changing direction, takes on a central role in it (*Rep.* 514a-521d). This analogy serves as a powerful symbol, representing the soul's transformative journey from ignorance to the most comprehensive understanding of reality possible. By means of the new insights made possible through correctly directed inquiry into reality and harmonious usage of the abilities intrinsically connected to one's own moral feeling, the individual who undergoes this "turning about" is prepared and obligated not only to reintegrate into human society but to assume a leading role in governing and helping to educate others. In this respect, the concept of *periagōgē* plays a central and transformative role in Plato's philosophy of education.

1. *Paideia* and *Periagōgē* in the Cave Analogy

Plato's Analogy of the Cave (514a-521c) is a profound allegorical narrative that delves into the human condition and our relentless quest for wisdom. At the very beginning of the analogy, Plato states that the image employed in the analogy represents the state of humans like us with respect to how educated or uneducated we are: "compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this" (*Rep.* 514a). Prisoners in the cave represent ordinary individuals with a superficial understanding of the world, individuals who are trapped in this world of appearances and sense perception, while our habitat in the cave symbolizes the limitations of the realm of sensory perception. At this stage of imprisonment, they have no knowledge of anything beyond the shadows on the cave's wall they see in front of them, and are totally unaware of the external world. They are just like us (515c) in everyday life, when we are occupied with superficial events and things, not really questioning their content and meaningfulness. Even

its translation, please refer to Jaeger's seminal work on *paideia*, in three volumes (1943). (Jaeger 1943, Author's note Vol I-III, Volume I: xvi, 3-5, 113, 475 n.1).

today, if we just take an example of social networks, we seldom question their content and we allow it to capture our attention for hours, during which time we are passively fed with unquestioned beliefs and values through posts of other members, but are also attacked by advertisements embedded in these networks. We walk around unaware of our true surroundings and true values, looking at that screen in our hands. But even without social networks, generally, people tend to forget to stop for a minute and question those values and ideas that are planted in us. Somehow, we forget to really look at the people surrounding us, to ask about the world and reality we live in, or in other words, we take things for granted and forget to rethink things properly.

However, in the Analogy of the Cave (514a-521c) we read that one day, one of the prisoners is freed and forced to turn around (*periagōgē*), facing the cave entrance and the blinding light outside. Initially, the released prisoner is dazzled and experiences discomfort due to the sudden exposure to the light. So, they may resist and prefer to return to the familiar darkness of the cave. But, if they are encouraged to continue their ascent, if they are guided around, step by step towards the source of the light, they will gradually become accustomed to the brightness of the outside world. Eventually, they will be able to gaze directly at the Sun and comprehend its supreme role in the realm of visible reality. Along with their newfound understanding, they may feel a mix of compassion for those still in the cave and joy at their own liberation. But, if these enlightened individuals were to return to the cave and try to cultivate their fellow prisoners, they would encounter challenges. The darkness of the cave would initially impair their vision, and the others might ridicule them. In some cases, those still in darkness might even harm or kill the one who tried to free them.

In addition to its symbolism, this analogy provides us with a definition of culture or education (*paideia*). In 518c-d, Plato concludes that *paideia* is an art (*techne*) of “turning around” or “conversion” of the individual soul to face in the right direction (*periagōgē*, *metastrafesetai*, *strefein*), towards “the light”. At first glance, this definition makes it clear that the moment of *periagōgē* plays a central role in the art of education and cultivation. In trying to understand what Plato exactly meant by it, it is useful to consider the etymology of the term. *Periagōgē* is derived from the Greek verb *periagō*. The prefix *peri-* is a preposition meaning “around,” “about,” or “in a circle,”

while the verb *agō* means “to lead” or “to guide”² So, *periagōgē* translates to “to lead around,” “turn about,” “cause to revolve,” or “to guide in a circular manner.” In Plato’s dialogues, this concept does convey the idea of “turning around” or “leading around” and is used to describe the process of “changing direction” or “redirecting” one’s mind’s eye or consciousness towards deeper comprehension and philosophical thinking. *Periagōgē*, besides “turning around,” “reorientation,” and “redirection” is often translated as “conversion” (grounded in Plato’s use of terms *metastrafesetai*, *strefein* as synonyms to *periagōgē*) or “revolution”³ (as a radical change) and primarily relates to the idea of transformation and the soul’s journey and redirecting towards “the light,” as Plato’s definition above tells us, or what he would consider the Form of the Good. The translations *revolvere* and *revolution*, in addition, capture nicely the the relationship between *periagōgē* and the Form of the Good as the metaphorical axis around which bodies progress in their circular motion, symbolizing us as those who are turning our minds away from the darkness of self-deception and and towards The Good in the hope of completing our course and gaining true knowledge of reality. Last but not least, this revolving about our axis indicates our own radical, complete, or comprehensive inner transformation, as Plato’s Cave shows us.

Even though the act of *periagōgē* seems to entail a highly arduous and primarily intellectual process, as elaborately detailed in the *Republic*’s educational program of the philosopher-guardians, through its directedness towards “the Good it is also closely connected with a moral betterment.”

² Henry George Liddell. Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. with the assistance of. Roderick McKenzie. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1940: *περιάγω*

http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D*p%3Aentry+group%3D93%3Aentry%3Dperia%2Fgw

³ It is interesting to note that the word “revolution” goes back to the Latin *revolvere* “to revolve, roll back”, as stated in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. It is noteworthy that when *revolution* first appeared in English in the fourteenth century, it referred to the movement of a celestial body in orbit; that sense was extended to “a progressive motion of a body around an axis,” “completion of a course,” and other senses suggesting regularity of motion or a predictable return to an original position. At virtually the same time, the word developed a sharply different meaning, namely, “a sudden radical, or complete change,” apparently from the idea of reversal of direction implicit in the Latin verb. (“Revolution.” Merriam-Webster.com *Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revolution>. Accessed 11 Nov. 2023.)

By designating the ultimate goal of our knowledge and understanding it as “The Good,” Plato makes it evident that the search for knowledge is inherently connected to principles of moral deliberation and ethical conduct. The idea that *periagōgē* can encompass both intellectual and moral dimensions gains support from a recurring theme in Plato’s other dialogues, not uncontroversial in itself⁴, that no one does evil knowingly (see for example, *Meno* 77e-78a, *Protagoras* 352c, *Gorgias* 468b.). Another aspect underlies the concept of *periagōgē* which can be felt in Plato’s *Phaedo*, where the notion of the soul’s immortality is connected to the idea of transcending the constraints of the material world (77d-84b, 106c-d, 114b-115a), which can be understood as a form of spiritual transformation through philosophy. In essence, *periagōgē* encapsulates the idea of a profound and transformative turning point, conversion in one’s life, or changing direction of one’s life, often associated with a shift from ignorance to knowledge, materialism to spirituality, or vice to virtue.

From the Analogy of the Cave, it is clear that *periagōgē* signifies the pivotal moment when individuals undergo a radical shift in perspective, akin to the discomfort of turning away from comfortable previously held illusions (*Rep.* 515c-d). It symbolizes the instance when one breaks free from the shackles of ignorance, represented by the chains in the cave, and embarks on a journey toward the enlightening rays of knowledge. However, this transformative process is no simple endeavor and we can imagine that the pain it causes resembles the intellectual discomfort experienced when confronted with new and challenging ideas. Moreover, it involves a profound change in one’s values, desires, and beliefs, ultimately leading to a redirection of one’s life toward higher truths (both in a cognitive and spiritual sense) and ethical excellence. *Periagōgē* represents, then, as a sort of *pars pro toto* the core concept of a journey of overall self-improvement and philosophical enlightenment, wherein individuals aim to align their lives with the highest moral, intellectual, and spiritual standards.

⁴ A notable figure in opposition to this idea is Friedrich Nietzsche. For example, in his *On the Genealogy of Morality* from 1887, Nietzsche contends that morality, in itself, may serve as a mode of deception, and he challenges the notion that individuals consistently act in alignment with their understanding of what constitutes good or evil (Nietzsche 2017).

2. The Historical Influence of the Concept of *Periagōgē*

To enrich our comprehension of Plato's concept of *periagōgē*, it is crucial to examine its role across history and its significance in shaping the Western culture we recognize today. This exploration can enhance our understanding of the central importance of *periagōgē* in cultural and educational practices. To begin with, *periagōgē* occupied a central role in Neoplatonic philosophy. Its founding figure, Plotinus emphasized the idea of a spiritual journey or ascent that involved a profound "turning around" of the soul from the material world towards the divine or One, which is most directly explored in *Ennead VI, 9, On the Good or the One*. In early Christian thought, the concept of *periagōgē* was particularly present in the context of conversion and repentance. It was seen as a turning away from sin and worldly pursuits toward God and salvation, as can be seen in Augustine of Hippo, a Christian theologian, who discusses the concept of *periagōgē* in his *Confessions*, particularly in Book VII, where he reflects on his own conversion and turning away from a life of sin toward God. The idea of *periagōgē* continued to be explored in later philosophical and religious traditions, where it usually represented a fundamental shift in one's thinking, values, or beliefs, leading to a redirection of one's life. For example, in Kant's philosophy, a central theme is moral transformation, where individuals transition from being guided by external influences or inclinations to acting in accordance with rational, autonomous moral principles. Although he does not employ the specific term *periagōgē*, his ideas on moral conversion and the transformative power of reason are relevant to discussions of personal transformation in moral philosophy. Kant's significant discussion on this topic can be found in the second chapter titled "Transition from the Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysics of Morals", in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Kant 1785).

In contemporary pedagogy and educational philosophy, scholars often draw on these and other philosophical and psychological perspectives to develop theories and practices that promote personal transformation, moral development, cognitive growth, and philosophical engagement within the educational process. While the term *periagōgē* itself may not be widely used, the underlying concepts of transformation and development remain central to discussions of education and pedagogy. In this respect, we can see that John Dewey emphasized the role of education in personal growth and

moral development. In his work, *Democracy and Education* and in his other writings, Dewey argued that education should foster reflective thinking and ethical development, leading to personal transformation and social progress (Hildebrand 2018).

Furthermore, in this line of thought, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget's work on cognitive development and the role of active reasoning in learning has had a significant impact on educational philosophy (Case 1973, 20). Even though he is labeled as a constructivist, it can be said that his stages of cognitive development theory, which highlight how individuals undergo cognitive shifts and intellectual growth as they interact with their environment and engage in educational experiences (20-25), are directly inspired by Kant and, at least indirectly by Plato.⁵ Based on the work of Piaget, but also of Dewey, American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, in his theory of moral development, explores how individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning and ethical development (Kohlberg 1978, 670-672). It is interesting how Kohlberg postulates that in the final stage, individuals adhere to universal ethical principles and values, such as justice, equality, and human rights, even when these principles conflict with established laws or societal norms (Kohlberg 1978, 671). This shows how morality is guided by a sense of ethical duty. His theory is often applied in the field of education to understand and promote moral growth in students (Kohlberg 1978, 672-673).

The historical usage of this concept reflects its importance in philosophical and ethical discussions across different periods and traditions. This has an immense historical and philosophical significance for the Western world as we know it today, and we can easily say that Plato's philosophical thoughts on education align with modern pedagogical ideas related to personal transformation, moral development, and cognitive growth. These connections highlight the enduring relevance of the ideas *periagōgē* brings within the history of philosophical thinking and in shaping contemporary pedagogical approaches, indicating the relevance of the topics that this concept brings with it and its centrality for cultural developments.

⁵ It suffices to acknowledge that the influence of Plato on Kant remains a matter of controversy, although a detailed exploration of this point belongs to a different discussion. For the purposes of the present discussion, the perspective maintained here is that Plato did have a substantial influence on Kant's philosophy in general.

3. Active and Passive Education

Returning to the *Republic's* Analogy of the Cave, we could say that Plato's original take on it can be found in 518d when Socrates says that education or culture (*paideia*) is "an art of the speediest and most effective shifting (*periagōgē*) or conversion (*metastrafesetai*) of the soul". With this notion, he strongly opposes the attitude that *paideia* is "an art of producing vision" in the soul, "like planting sight in blind eyes." Instead, he operates on the assumption that the eye already "possesses vision"; but is "not rightly directed it and does not look where it should." *Paideia*, accordingly, is "an art of bringing this about" or *redirection* of vision. With this statement, Plato delves into the question of what education is and what education is not. Both of those claims, namely, (*paideia* is the art of *producing* vision in the soul; *paideia* is the art of *redirecting* the vision which is already present in the soul) have implications of their own.

Plato's perspective challenges the notion that education is primarily about "producing vision" within the soul, refuting the idea that teachers can simply infuse true knowledge into a mind lacking it, and approach that would be akin to inserting vision into blind eyes (518c). Such an image of a teacher, who is pouring knowledge into a student's brain, was later promulgated through the concept of *tabula rasa*. This concept of the empty slate was popularized by the ancient Roman philosopher and statesman Seneca. However, the most influential development of the *tabula rasa* concept in the Western philosophical tradition is often attributed to John Locke, especially in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In Locke's account, the student is empty and passively waiting for information and data, with no innate knowledge, beliefs, and ideas. It seems that even today this is how the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student is understood or is happening in Western schooling systems. On the other hand, this view was also harshly criticized by many. Among them, most notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau opposed the concept of *tabula rasa* with his conception of children as active learners, which was specifically developed in his work *Emile, or On Education* (Rousseau 1762).

More recently, such a view of static education was criticized by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. He calls such an inert method the "banking concept of education," where the teacher deposits knowledge into passive students, who merely receive, memorize, and repeat the information (Freire 2018, 71-73). According to Freire, this approach restricts students'

creativity and transformation, making them passive collectors of knowledge (Freire 2018, 73, 80-81). As opposed to this approach, Freire argues that true education should involve active inquiry, praxis, and the constant pursuit of knowledge through interaction with the world and others (Freire 2018, 75-76). On this assumption, Freire's critical pedagogy involves a dialogical approach where educators and students engage in a mutual process of learning and transformation (Freire 2018, 79-81). Similarly, in Plato's Analogy of the Cave, the turning about, redirection, or "conversion" of the entirety of a person's faculties, from the physical to the mental, promotes a more active (or procreative) and independent implementation of educational processes that must result in a deeper and more comprehensive transformation of the human individual. In this active practice of gaining education, students need to be motivated or need to assume their role as actively engaged learners.

4. Turning the Soul

After highlighting in his definition of *paideia* how our reasoning abilities do *not* work, Plato proceeds to explain what they are like by referencing a broader psychology of human beings, pointing out that "this indwelling power in the soul and the instrument whereby each of us apprehends is that of an eye that could not be converted to the light from the darkness except by turning (*strefein*) the whole body" (518c). This "power in the soul" that turns with "the whole body" has to be understood in the context of Plato's portrayal of the human soul in *Book IV* of the *Republic*. There we find a depiction of the soul's three distinct faculties, each of which involves both body and soul, as well as their relationship. The first, our appetitive (*eipthymētikon*) faculty, designates the lustforsensory pleasures and satisfaction of need. The second, the spirited (*thymoeidos*) or volitional ability, pertains to our will, which directs us toward higher aspirations and ambitions, for example, the desire for honour and fame. Lastly, the reasoning faculty (*to logistikon*) encompasses our capacities for deliberation, thought, reflection, knowledge, and understanding. This "power within the soul," this "instrument," comprised of analytic or "left-brain" processes of definition, calculation, and argumentation, and synthetic or intuitive ("right-brain") grasp of the whole constitutes our mental "eye" whose excellence is achieved through wisdom or true philosophy... In the other two faculties are found the rest of the body's and soul's excellences (*aretē*), for example, prudence,

and courage, when they are exercised properly. These two require alignment or change of direction accordingly, which they achieve in tandem with the reasoning faculty. But Reeve is right when he remarks that “much of Platonic education has to be directed... at the reorientation of the soul’s appetitive and spirited elements” (Reeve 2010, p. 224). For the conversion of the reasoning capacity and the achievement of the excellence of the whole person cannot be achieved without the “turning about” of these two elements.

A way to cultivate proper direction and alignment was depicted earlier in the *Republic*, in Books II and III, where Plato presents elementary education. What was concluded there is that our feelings and motivations can be correctly guided by setting the right examples in the educational curriculum. Specifically, primary education is depicted as helping to cultivate the lower parts of the soul. This is achieved by emulation of the correct educational content and role models and, habituation of the appetitive and volitional parts of the soul to work properly with the reasoning part (cf. 394e-395d). Higher education, which is discussed following the Analogy of the Cave in Books VII and VIII is concerned more with strengthening our reasoning powers, as suggested by the teaching subjects he depicts, starting with mathematical sciences: arithmetic, plane and solid geometry, astronomy, and harmony (525b-531c), and culminating with dialectic (531d-534e). Margot Fleischer analyzes the practices that Plato suggests as part of his elementary and higher education in terms of a twofold transformation, which she explains in more detail in her article *Die Zweifache Periagōgē in Platons Höhlengleichnis* (Fleischer 1970). According to Fleischer, the first transformation involves liberation from sensory constraints, enabling individuals to orient their lives based on sensory observations and experiences (Fleischer, 1970, 491), while the second phase goes deeper, emphasizing the need to break free from unquestioned assumptions and traditional beliefs through critical thinking and dialectical understanding (Fleischer, 1970, 495, 497).
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As part of the second stage of this transformation, Plato conceives mathematical sciences as “the study that would draw the soul away from the world of becoming to the world of being” (*Rep.* 521d.) Adams’ observation in this regard is well-founded when he highlights the idealistic nature of Plato’s deliberations concerning the curriculum and the subjects of the pedagogical system (Adams, 2009, 167). In this context, ideal principles and intelligibility serve as the governing factors, requiring both fortification of one’s resolve and focused alignment toward rationally determined moral principles

for the purpose of maintaining a wise and just manner of life toward true knowledge and goodness (Adams, 2009, 167). , I we recall that Plato in 518e identifies rational power within us as being of a “divine quality,” this might justifiably be identified as the organ that can help us in achieving the ascent to the highest principle – the idea of the Good - which governs the world of true being and knowledge but which is itself “beyond” (*epekeina tes ousias*). Plato’s “idealism” is thus grounded in our innate rational power, which connects us with intelligible reality and the true nature and essence of all things (508d, 509a-b, 514d, 515d, 516a).

It appears that a natural predisposition of the faculties which constitute the human personality, resulting from our participation in both the physical and intelligible (noetic) reality, is essential for this initial transformation. Given that within us a power exists that enables reasoning and learning, perhaps we can postulate that an enigmatic scenario of a sudden release from the bonds which inhibit our free development as suggested in the narrative of the Analogy of the Cave at 515c is possible. Then in this scenario, the suggestion that this might occur “in the course of nature“ could refer to an inherent quality or inclination of our power of reasoning toward the good or “goodness itself”. In this case, it would not be so surprising that “one”, who admittedly proved talented, “was freed from his fetters and compelled to stand up suddenly and turn his head around and walk and to lift up his eyes to the light.”

Since humans partake in a dual, physical and mental, nature, it is in accordance with their nature to be capable of sometimes suddenly breaking free from the constraints of physical reality and intentionally turning towards the essence of things with their intellectual capacity, sometimes on their own, sometimes with the help of others. Even though Plato’s Cave does not specifically say how the prisoner came to be freed or whether the prisoner freed himself, the way Plato presents human nature and psychology certainly could suggest that from time to time an independent “breaking free” is possible. However, we have to bear in mind that the Cave Analogy more clearly suggests the help of some other, one that underwent and made the full circle of going up and out of the cave and coming back and down to it.

5. The Importance of a Guide

Initially, this process of liberating and turning around is painful for the person undertaking it, while the world around them becomes unclear and

unrecognizable to them. At first, they are at a loss and puzzled (*aporein*, 515d). This condition reminds us of the state to which Socrates led his interlocutors in his conversations with them, as we recall from Plato's aporetic dialogues. There, Socrates' *elenchos* or method of refutation lead them to an impasse, *aporia*, from which they didn't know how to be released. The importance of this predicament is that it exposes the recognition of the limitations and inconsistencies of their previously held beliefs. To find oneself in this condition enables the individual to recognize the gaps and the contradictions in their beliefs and understanding on their own, which prompts them to question further and deeper, and hopefully, motivates them to continue up this path. Ideally, *aporia* produces a form of intellectual humility that would allow them to shift their focus from dogmatic certainty to open inquiry, that is, a more reflective exploration of their beliefs and the nature of reality.

Finally, the inconclusiveness of the state of *aporia* reflects both the ongoing and elusive nature of the process of approximation to the ultimate knowledge of the Good, and the need to remain continually focussed on that process. In this connection, Fleischer posits that meaningful dialogue and the thorough examination of thoughts are pivotal components in the journey towards the stage of *aporia* and liberation and, ultimately guiding liberated individuals to engage in profound contemplation of Forms (1970, 495). So, to continue the journey, a state of confusion is vital, where two realities are confronted – one true and new, but painful and veiled, and the other familiar and comfortable. However, through gradual acclimation, accomplished through the adoption of correct habits (mentioned above in connection to elementary education in Books II and III of the *Republic*), it becomes possible to develop an understanding of intelligible reality.

After the sudden moment of liberation, the role of the guide (a teacher, instructor, or mentor) who speaks the "truth" becomes significant. Guides encourage the newly freed individual to "see better now" because they are "closer to reality" and turned toward the objects that are "more real things" (*Rep.* 515d). These guides reveal these objects in their reality and compel the liberated individual to answer questions, define, and attempt to understand what they see. Guides tirelessly strive to engage the freed individual in a dialogue, which appears as one of the most significant aspects of education. A true mentor must themselves be possessed of true knowledge of things and insight into reality, comprehending the entire picture at the same time as the mental journey which both presupposes and leads to it. As such they are

aware that the liberated individual now sees better than in the previous situation. They clearly understand the direction in which the liberated individual should be turning. It is the real, true reality toward which they need to be oriented if they would like to gain a proper understanding of anything. For such guides and role models, we can assume that they have undergone this experience themselves and that they are the ones who have returned to the cave after attaining knowledge of the Good.

In Plato's philosophical framework, in which Socrates serves as the principal inspiration and model for self-reflective and contemplative living, this inaugural teacher might well be Socrates. While this remains speculative, we can reasonably conclude that even if not the very first, Socrates was undoubtedly one of those prisoners who liberated themselves and embarked on the journey toward the cave's exit, where they were able to grasp the notion of the Good beyond the shadows and ignorance within the cave. For instance, in the *Apology*, Socrates emerges as the wisest precisely because he humbly admits his lack of knowledge (*Apol.* 21b-23b), thus marking the commencement of his own ascent. Additionally, when he descends back into the cave, his guidance of others "up the ascent" and "into the light of the sun" (*Rep.* 515e) aligns with the method of *elenchos* that Plato clearly delineates in his early dialogues. Despite the reluctance of the liberated individual, and their attempts to turn back to the familiar and painless, the mentor is relentless. He subjects the liberated individual to "unpleasantness" and "obscurity," even dragging them "by force" up the steep incline and not letting them go until they have been pulled out into the sunlight, regardless of their anger and suffering (515e - 516a). The mentor's tirelessness here recalls Socrates' persistence, as presented in the analogy of Socrates with the gadfly (*Apol.* 30e), who does not cease from his questioning and probing of individuals, compelling them to confront the difficulties of the path they embark upon by re-evaluating their ingrained beliefs, revealing contradictions among them, and rejecting those based on unjustified assumptions or unquestioned prejudice.

Furthermore, Socrates, through his elenctic method, encourages and helps the freed individuals to give birth to knowledge that lies within and around them. He does not relent in his further investigations and demands definitions of concepts crucial to our life choices like the ones which are investigated in Plato's early dialogues, including courage, piety, friendship, moderation, beauty and more. Through this method, he requires from the students that they determine and locate objects within their limits while

attempting to discern their essence in this manner. In connection to this, remembering Plato's *Euthyphro* 6d-e where Socrates is seeking a *paradeigma* for which Reeve rightly claims is "a standard or norm" which "enables its possessor to judge particular cases correctly." and "because it is so to speak reality's own norm... is both justificatory and explanatory" (Reeve, 2010, 212). In this respect, as Reeve points out, only those who really understand what something is can provide a correct definition and an account of the thing in question. (2010, 212). Those paradigms in turn help clarify concepts and things in everyday life, enabling our right conduct and understanding. This is crucial in keeping us properly directed while gaining our experiences and understanding of the world, in other words, in keeping us on the right path throughout life's journey.

6. The Role of the Form of the Good

Plato was a harsh critic of his contemporary society, including the authorities and content that were generally considered to be of indubitable cultural and educational value at that time. His dialogues challenge unexamined beliefs supported by tradition, convention, egoism, hedonism, or relativism on one side, but simultaneously offer a glimpse into a world guided by Forms, universal principles, and ideals, such as the Good, Beauty, Truth, and Justice. In such a picture of reality, the Form of the Good is the highest and most fundamental, illuminating all other Forms and aspects of reality. It serves as a metaphysical, epistemological, and cosmological principle governing the entire reality, encompassing both the intelligible and the sensible realms. Plato, in *Rep.* 516b-c, articulates that the Form of the Good "presides over all things in the visible region and is, in some sense, the cause of all these things that they had seen." Plato's renowned Analogy of the Sun vividly portrays the exalted and multifaceted role of the Good. In this analogy, he compares the sun, the source of light, illumination, and visibility in the physical world, with the Form of the Good, which is the source of truth, knowledge, and moral virtue in the world of Forms (508e-509a). Here, this concept serves as the transcendent (*epekeina tēs ousias*, 509b) archetype and source or cause of enlightenment, understanding, and, essentially the whole of reality. But what the analogy actually means has been a topic of debate from ancient to contemporary times. For Nettleship, the Form of the Good is a condition or a logical prerequisite of, but not to be identified with, the conception of knowledge and truth, objective reality or essence,

and systematic order or the cosmos (Nettleship 1968, 140). Patzig, for his part, postulated that Plato understood his Forms in terms of perfection, as perfect standards or exemplars. According to this standpoint, the Form of the Good represents “what is common to all Forms and simultaneously provides access to the knowledge of Platonic Forms” (Patzig, 1988, 117). The Good would accordingly be “the Form of perfection” and “appear only in the light of questions about perfect examples of possible predicates” (Patzig, 1988, 117). In this manner, Forms represent standards with regard to which things measure their existence, according to how close to or further away they are from the perfection of the Forms. The Forms exist as absolute or perfect models or examples (of Justice, Beauty, or the other virtues, for example) toward which they aim as their physical instantiations and which they seek to approximate by their resemblance of them. This does seem in accordance with Plato’s thinking about the Forms, as can be seen from Plato’s allusion to the role of the Form of the Good a *paradeigma* for all other entities to look up to at in *Rep.* 484c-d, 500e, 592b.

Instead of telling us directly *what* the Form of the Good is, however, Plato gives us a method of grasping it on our own, in other words, he shows us what education and the cultivation of a human who would achieve a vision of the Good would entail. This which is in correspondence with thinking that a person should be actively and independently engaged in their own learning. Within the context of the Cave Analogy, the educator’s intent is to guide our innate power of reasoning (our inherent ability to actively learn or acquire knowledge by our reason) toward such a source and cause – or as he states it, to turn it in the right direction, which for Plato means specifically towards the Good (517 c-d; 518c, 518e, 519d, 521c). We can see thereby how the Form of the Good becomes the purpose or aim (*telos*) of human existence. M.-É. Zovko emphasizes that the source of existence is thus equated with the concept of goodness, and that this connection carries significant implications for the issues of knowledge and the purpose of education (Zovko 2017, 7). For Plato, namely, knowledge goes beyond an understanding of the nature and behavior of things, to include recognition of their intrinsic value and purpose, in other words, “what they are ‘good for’” (Zovko 2017, 7). Nettleship similarly points out that ancient Greek moral philosophy deals with the concept of goodness in terms of the purpose that each thing fulfils in becoming what it is meant to be (its *telos*) (Nettleship 1968, 137). Thus, a human being has a specific task to carry out, and the morality of our action is revealed by the quality of the action,

in other words, by whether we carry it out well, or excellently in accordance with our proper nature. As opposed to today's understanding, according to which the good of a thing is seen as a purpose extrinsically connected to it, as if the good were to be added to it from outside the thing itself, in Plato's view, a thing is good insofar as it is able to realize the good or excellence as its proper task (Nettleship 1968, 137). In this respect, for Plato, if we would like to gain ultimate cognitive and moral understanding of ourselves and the reality around us, we have to turn towards a somehow inherently recognizable universal principle and standard, a paradigm within us (518d-e) This aligns well with his view of turning the entire soul, together with its "divine qualities" to its divine source, i.e. the Form of the Good, as detailed in the Analogy of the Cave, as well as with the idea of a kinship between the eye and the Sun, on the one hand, and the Form of the Good from the Sun Analogy (508b-c).

The focal point of the Cave Analogy lies in our alignment with the paradigmatic ideal that serves as the guiding force or a compass for our journey of formation and cultivation. The pursuit of the Good emerges thereby as a fundamental educational aim, achieved through the continuous practice of redirecting our focus toward it by proper alignment or directedness of the primary faculties of the soul. As articulated by M.-É. Zovko, Plato's "education is formation of the soul for the attainment of the good, both in a technical and a moral sense" (2017, 7). Significantly, in the formation of the human soul, M.-É. Zovko discerns the paradox of human nature, as constituted by the requirement for intentional effort and application in order to accomplish the soul's natural development (Zovko, 2008, 315). The concept of human excellence (*aretē*) itself encapsulates this paradox, embodying both the inherent nature of humans as a "preexisting form" and the moral obligation to strive towards the realization of that excellence as an ideal (Zovko, 2008, 315). This entails a holistically conceived endeavor to realize our humanity through our knowledge, convictions, words, deeds, habits, behavior, manners, and lifestyle. Plato's educational system is accordingly shaped by the intentional unity of the faculties of the soul, and their inherent aim of working together harmoniously towards their natural purpose and hierarchy (Zovko 2008, 315) such that the pursuit of knowledge becomes pursuit of the Good. In this regard, *paideia* appears as the metaphysical and epistemological approximation of the first principle of the whole of reality, leads individuals to a deeper understanding of universal ideals like truth, beauty, and justice, integral to human purpose and well-being.

Another aspect of the Form of the Good, which proceeds from its teleological and paradigmatic implications, involves a Plato's designation of it as "useful and beneficial" (*Rep.* 505a, 519a). This perspective carries a profound practical significance, particularly with regard to the relationship between purpose, and well-being. By emphasizing its utility and benevolence, Plato promotes the pivotal role of the idea or ideal of the Good in providing practical guidance, empowering individuals to make choices which are conducive to producing their proper excellence and enabling them to lead just and meaningful lives. Thus, our mental orientation towards the good shapes our actions and decisions in accordance with the highest ethical and intellectual standards as noted at 517c: "anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this." From this vantage point, the Form of the Good serves as our moral compass, guiding and keeping us constantly properly directed toward principles in accordance with our proper nature. Conversely, when we lose sight of these ideals we are imperiled and in danger of losing our way, as depicted by Plato in his description of capable individuals who have strayed from the correct path at 519a.

This point further underscores the insight and the conviction that knowledge is not merely a means to an end but inherently purposeful in a moral sense, at the same time highlights the paradigmatic role of the Form of the Good as our prime example with which to compare ourselves and to which we should approximate our conduct.

Finally, Plato emphasizes that with these powers and abilities there comes responsibility. Once an individual gains insight into the Good, they also gain insight into their moral duty to return to the cave and share their enlightenment with those still confined to the shadows. This endeavor once more epitomizes the moment of *periagōgē*, the profound conversion of the cave dweller from the role of a passive observer to that of an active participant in the quest for truth, who desires to help others in the same quest. A similar line of thought, in keeping with the concepts of responsibility and duty suggested here, and echoing Plato's emphasis on the connection of goodness and justice, can be recognized in Kant's "categorical imperative" which affirms the moral duty to align our actions with universal principles (Kant, 1785). In Plato's perspective, our duty is to purposefully harness the powers of the soul through the attainment of understanding and wisdom, with the ideals of goodness, justice, and the virtues serving as the paradigmatic cornerstone and point of orientation. Moreover, this implies that the goal of this spiritual, intellectual, and moral transformation extends beyond

mere personal achievement and directs us to concern for personal and social well-being of others, contributing thus to the greater good of society, expressed in our continuous effort to steer and align ourselves with supreme principles and ideals, but also to show and teach the same skills and insights to others.

Conclusion

Plato's holistic approach to education, encapsulated mainly in the Analogy of the Cave and the concept of *periagōgē*, offers a profound philosophical framework that underscores the significance of *periagōgē* as essential for intellectual growth and moral development. Education, according to Plato, is not merely about "producing vision," but involves a transformative turning of the entire soul in the right direction. It explains how our pursuit of knowledge can lead to a profound personal conversion, reshaping our perception of reality. Keeping the Form of the Good in mind as a paradigm allows us to see the world clearly, make ethically informed choices, and lead purposeful and virtuous lives. Although the journey is complex and uncertain, its transformative power is invaluable for the best formation of our whole personality and has a tremendous impact on our way of life and well-being. It is through *periagōgē* that we transcend mere existence, we better our lives, and embark on a lifelong journey toward true wisdom and enlightenment. The ultimate aim of this intellectual and moral transformation extends beyond personal achievement to the betterment of others in our social context, fostering a continuous effort to align with supreme principles and ideals while imparting these skills to others. Plato's philosophy of education thus emphasizes the interconnectedness of knowledge, virtue, personal growth, and societal well-being, with the Form of the Good in its paradigmatic role in this pursuit of truth and ethical excellence. In this manner, Plato's insights embody the essence of *periagōgē* and its central role in human enlightenment.

So, this leads to the conclusion that education should not be a mere passive acquisition of information and knowledge, but a foundational element in the comprehensive development of individuals and the well-being of society. Not only does education empower individuals, it also contributes to the welfare and advancement of the community as a whole, making it a cornerstone of human civilization and culture. We might say that education, as a vehicle for personal growth but also for social integration, cohesion,

cultural preservation, and the advancement of human civilization, symbolizes a profound journey of humanity, a sort of manifestation of human existence itself. If that is the case, it might be advisable to reflect more deeply on the direction education is taking today.

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