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Seeing Through Images: The Bottom of Plato's Divided Line

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PLATO'S SOCRATES, IN THE *Republic*, mentions four conditions in the soul (παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ) on the divided line, one of which involves images (εἰκόνας). He names this state 'εἰκασία'. (To avoid unnecessary controversy, I will not translate the word.) I wish to defend a view of εἰκασία that has been championed, though never with great effect, at various times, most notably in the early twentieth century by J. L. Stocks¹ and A. S. Ferguson,² and later by Jacob Klein.³ Although the view itself is not novel, I hope to present an updated and compelling defense of the account. On this reading, εἰκασία is the state in which one can view an image as an image—typically, it involves the attempt to learn about some object through consideration of an image of that object. This state, notably, does not usually involve any confusion of image and original.

Against this reading, another reading, which I will call the “standard reading,” has emerged, and has been consistently defended—James Adam defends it in his 1902 commentary,⁴ and James Wilberding⁵ has recently joined his voice to this

¹J. L. Stocks, “The Divided Line of Plato *Rep.* VI,” *Classical Quarterly* 5 (1911): 73–88.

²A. S. Ferguson, “Plato's Simile of Light. Part I,” *Classical Quarterly* 15 (1921): 131–52, “Plato's Simile of Light. Part II,” *Classical Quarterly* 16 (1922): 15–28, “Plato's Simile of Light Again,” *Classical Quarterly* 28 (1934): 190–210.

³Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (1965) (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 112–15. Klein's discussion also provided inspiration for the title of my essay. He writes that, when experiencing εἰκασία, “we see ‘through’ an image, as it were, its trustworthy original” (115). Other proponents of this view include Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1941), 192–208, especially at 202–05; Neil Cooper, “The Importance of DIANOIA in Plato's Theory of Forms,” *Classical Quarterly* (New Series) 16 (1966): 65–69; and David Roochnik, “Images as Images: Commentary on Smith,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1999): 205–09.

⁴James Adam, *The Republic of Plato, Edited with Critical Notes, Commentary, and Appendices*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., with an introduction by D. A. Rees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 72 and 158–59.

⁵James Wilberding, “Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004): 117–39. To name all who support some version of this “standard” reading would be difficult, but the list should include at least Francis MacDonald Cornford (*The Republic of Plato, Translated with Introduction and Notes* [London-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1980], 222); R. C. Cross

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tradition, calling εἰκασία the “inability to distinguish between appearance and original.”⁶ This standard reading offers an enticingly orderly correspondence between the levels on the divided line and the stages depicted in the cave allegory. The prisoners at the “bottom” of the cave confuse images for reality; and likewise, on this reading, those at the bottom of the divided line mistake images for originals.

This standard reading, however, is unsatisfactory. The initial description of εἰκασία makes the suggestion that Socrates believes that anyone consistently mistakes images for originals strikingly implausible. Furthermore, other portions of the *Republic*, especially the parallel later described between εἰκασία and διάνοια, the third highest state on the line, support the claim that εἰκασία can—at least sometimes—involve the successful study of an object through its image. After outlining my view of εἰκασία and explaining these arguments against the “standard” view, I will return to the cave, and attempt a pairing of the line and the cave that accords with my account of εἰκασία.

The literature on the central books of the *Republic* is teeming, and I am here offering only a small reading of a small passage. Within that passage, in fact, I will ignore a number of fascinating controversies. I will avoid discussion of whether the error that supposedly characterizes εἰκασία is the failure to distinguish be-

and A. D. Woozley (*Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* [London-New York: Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, 1964], 208–28); Gail Fine (“Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V–VII,” in *Epistemology*, ed. Stephen Everson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 85–115, at 100–02); D. W. Hamlyn (“Eikasia in Plato's *Republic*,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 8 [1958]: 14–23); William Francis Ross Hardie (*A Study in Plato*: Thoemmes Press, 1993], 59–62); Vassilis Karasmanis (“Plato's *Republic*: The Line and the Cave,” *Apeiron* 21 [1988]: 147–71); Miguel A. Lizano-Ordovás (“Eikasia' Und 'Pistis' in Platons Höhlengleichnis,” *Zeitschrift Für Philosophische Forschung* 49 [1995]: 378–97); H. J. Paton (“Plato's Theory of ΕΙΚΑΣΙΑ,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* [New Series] 22 [1922]: 69–104, especially at 76); Sir David Ross (*Plato's Theory of Ideas* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951], 78); Nicholas D. Smith (“Plato's Divided Line,” *Ancient Philosophy* 16 [1996]: 25–46, at 28, and “How the Prisoners in Plato's Cave are ‘Like Us’,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 13 [1999]: 187–204, at 202); and Corinne Praus Sze (“ΕΙΚΑΣΙΑ and ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Plato's Cave Allegory,” *Classical Quarterly* [New Series] 27 [1977]: 127–138). A hard case for my classification is Julia Annas (*An Introduction to Plato's Republic* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981]): she entertains a position quite close to the standard view, for example at 255, where she asserts that the prisoners “must be” at the level of εἰκασία if the line and cave correspond, and at 256, where she writes that the prisoners’ state “looks like” that of one experiencing εἰκασία. However, she does not appear to treat the mistaking of images for originals as essential to εἰκασία, and she goes on to call the correspondence of the line and the cave into question, for reasons related to my reasons for preferring the “non-standard” view of the correspondence (see 247–56). For further discussions of the divided line, see Yvon Lafrance, *Pour Interpréter Platon. La Ligne En République VI, 509d–511e, Bilan Analytique Des Études, 1804–1984*, Collection d'Études Anciennes, Collection Noésis (Montréal: Éditions Bellarmin, 1986).

⁶Wilberding, “Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave,” 129. Note that Wilberding's use of the term ‘inability’ suggests that εἰκασία could be seen as a faculty rather than a state (or, more specifically, the absence of a certain faculty; in a perhaps overly literal sense, a “difficulty”). As Nicholas Smith has pointed out to me, however, Socrates explicitly refers to things like knowledge and opinion as faculties (δυνάμεις) in Book V, and calls the items on the line conditions (παθήματα) in the soul, rather than faculties. Despite disagreements in the secondary literature, I shall try to remain consistent in treating εἰκασία as a πάθημα, that is, as something that one experiences rather than exercises. With respect to the questions of whether these conditions are propositional and whether they are intentional, I remain neutral, as my account should accord with various answers. For further discussion of the character of the powers and conditions found in the *Republic*, see Nicholas Smith, “Plato on Knowledge as a Power,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 145–68; and Jan Szaif, “*Doxa* and *Epistēmē* as Modes of Acquaintance in *Republic* V,” *Les Etudes Platoniciennes*, vol. 4 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007), 253–72.

tween images and originals or the total ignorance of that distinction. I will also offer no extended discussion of the objects that correspond to the mental states described on the upper portion of the line. It is true that my view does illuminate the consideration of those objects: in particular, my account appears to lend support to the claim that the objects that correspond to *διάνοια* are in fact the same kind of objects that correspond to *πίστις*, though seen more clearly.⁷ I shall offer a brief account of that support toward the end of my discussion. My modest goal, however, is to show that whatever object *εἰκασία* has, the experience of this state does not entail the confusion of image and original. It is sometimes possible to see originals through images, and this vision should be called *εἰκασία*.

I. RELATIVE CLARITY: AN ACCOUNT OF *εἰκασία*

Socrates begins his description of the line with a brief account of images, the objects on the lowest level of the line:

It is like a line divided into two unequal sections. Then divide each section—namely, that of the visible and that of the intelligible—in the same ratio as that of the line. In terms now of relative clarity and opacity, one subsection of the visible consists of images. And by images I mean, first, shadows, then reflections in water and in all close-packed, smooth, and shiny materials, and everything of that sort. (509d6–510a3)⁸

Socrates then names the condition of the soul that corresponds to images ‘*εἰκασία*’ (511e1–2).⁹ I often perceive reflections and shadows, and when I do so, I am experiencing *εἰκασία*. When I experience this state, I usually recognize that what I see is an image of some other object—I examine or consider the shadow in order to discover something about the object casting the shadow.

Richard Foley, in a recent discussion of the divided line, provides a concise statement of some key features of images, the objects that correspond to *εἰκασία*: “There are two criteria that place an object into this category: (1) it is an image, (2) the object of which it is an image is physical.”¹⁰ The very notion of an image involves reference to some other object, the original or model. An image, when recognized as an image, at once calls the original to mind while appearing distinct from that original—an image, as Theaetetus says in Plato’s *Sophist*, is “something that is made similar to a true thing and is another thing that is like it” (240a7–8). If *εἰκασία* is the state that involves images, the experience of that state should in-

⁷For a recent, and quite convincing defense of this claim, see Smith, “Plato’s Divided Line.”

⁸I shall make use of the Greek text in S. R. Slings, ed., *Platonis Respublica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and the translation in G. M. A. Grube, trans., revised by C. D. C. Reeve, *Republic*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 971–1223, noting any changes.

⁹My intention is to remain agnostic with respect to the question of how the objects and the conditions are related. Whether the relation is causal or intentional, *εἰκασία* is the condition in my soul when I confront images. For recent accounts of some questions regarding the epistemology of the *Republic*, see Smith, “Plato on Knowledge as a Power,” and Szaif, “*Doxa* and *Epistēmē* as Modes of Acquaintance in *Republic V*.”

¹⁰“Plato’s Undividable Line: Contradiction and Method in *Republic VI*” [“Plato’s Undividable Line”], *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 1–24, at 20. It is worth noting that Foley does not offer any direct discussion of the nature of *εἰκασία*, though some comments he makes suggest that he is sympathetic to the standard reading.

volve not only dealing with images, but also the possibility of recognizing them as such. Indeed, when Foley goes on to argue that the account of the line itself can be seen as an image, his argument depends on showing that a reader can view the account in Book VI as an image of a physical line: “As a linguistic description of a divided line, the passage is a poor copy of a physical line.”¹¹ If Foley is right to claim that examining the line takes one through the various states described (and I find his argument quite persuasive), then it seems right to claim that *εἰκασία* involves recognizing images as images. After all, as Foley notes, the account of the line quite clearly contains instructions for drawing the line—in other words, attending to the description of the line (the image) ought to involve recognition that the description is an image of something else, the physical line. Of course, the line also functions as an object related to other states. In particular, it is an excellent example of an object associated with *διάνοια*, inasmuch as it aids in understanding relations among intelligible objects.¹² Although the line is not exclusively an object associated with *εἰκασία*, it can serve as such an object. When the account of the line is viewed as an object corresponding to *εἰκασία*, that view ought to involve the recognition that it is an account of the physical line—the recognition, that is, that the line is an image. To view an image as an image, then, is possible at the level of *εἰκασία*.

Notice that no confusion of image and original need occur. I do not want to eat a photograph of an ice-cream cone. If I do mistake an image for its original, that error does not result from the fact that I am experiencing *εἰκασία*. The philosopher-kings of Book VIII miscalculate the periods of fertility not because their knowledge fails them, but because they must mix “rational calculation” (*λογισμός*) with sense-perception (546b). The philosopher who calculates correctly is in the same condition in her soul as the one who miscalculates; the error comes from sense-perception. Similarly, I suggest that the error that sometimes accompanies *εἰκασία* need not be a result of that state, any more than the philosophers’ eventual error results from their knowledge.¹³

At the same time, however, *εἰκασία* involves less clarity than *πίστις*, the state which corresponds to the originals of these sensible images. When I examine a reflection of an object, the conclusions that I draw will be less secure than those I might arrive at by studying the object itself. Indeed, I may make serious mistakes if I only look at images and do not consider originals—someone no more than six feet tall might cast a twenty-foot shadow; and Mao Tse-Tung appears both kind and wise in many portraits. The fact, then, that *εἰκασία* does not necessarily involve the error of mistaking an image for its original entails neither that *εἰκασία* is error-free, nor that it is superior to *πίστις*. Nevertheless, I can experience a state that enables me to view one thing as an image of another. This state does not necessarily result in accurate information, but, as I hope to show, *εἰκασία* need not involve the error of mistaking images for originals.

¹¹Foley, “Plato’s Undividable Line,” 20.

¹²As Foley discusses; *ibid.*, 22–23.

¹³For more on the philosophers’ error see Smith, “Plato on Knowledge as a Power,” 160 and n29.

2. FITTING THE LINE TO THE CAVE:
THE STANDARD VIEW

The standard reading insists that εἰκασία must necessarily involve precisely the error of mistaking images for originals.¹⁴ The most forceful argument for the standard reading appeals to the cave allegory:¹⁵ since the cave allegory must be fitted to the line image (517a–b), the prisoners represent εἰκασία. Further, since the prisoners mistake images for reality, such error is characteristic of εἰκασία.

Socrates famously describes the prisoners who (A) see only shadows: when one of them is freed (B), he is shown the artifacts whose shadows he had watched. Eventually (C), the freed prisoner sees reflections of objects above ground, then (D) the objects themselves, including the sun (514a–517b). This progression appears to match the progression from (A') εἰκασία to (B') πίστις, and then from there through (C') διάνοια to (D') νόησις. Indeed, Socrates says that the cave image “must be fitted together” (προσαπτεόν) (517b1) with the earlier discussion. “The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, [and] the upward journey [to the] upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm” (517b1–5). There seems to be a convenient one-to-one matching between the line and the stages the prisoner experiences.

On this reading, just as the prisoner benefits by leaving the shadows behind, one would benefit in leaving behind the condition in the soul called εἰκασία, since it seems to be involved exclusively with illusion. I hope to show, however, that this reading makes the very mistake it fears: the standard interpretation forgets that the cave is an image (εἰκών; 517a8), and confuses the image with the original. Before suggesting an alternate matching of line to cave, I will discuss some serious difficulties for the claim that error is essential to εἰκασία.

3. NOT SCARED BY SHADOWS

The word itself and the examples of the experience of this condition suggest a more positive view of εἰκασία. As has often been noted, the word seems related to a verb meaning “liken,” “compare,” or “conjecture” (‘εἰκάζειν’), and also to one word for images (‘εἰκόνας’).¹⁶ These relations might, then, imply that the word connotes conjecture about objects by means of images. Such etymological appeals, however, appear on both sides of this disagreement, and so do not seem particularly significant. Wilberding, for example, argues that since εἰκασία corresponds to the lowest stage in the cave story, the sense must be of the sort of conjecture about images that ignores originals altogether.¹⁷

¹⁴On some accounts, the error is being ignorant of the distinction of image and original. That error, though, seems to invite the error of mistaking one for the other, insofar as someone unaware that some things are images should be inclined to view images as objects in their own right, and so I will focus on the latter reading.

¹⁵This argument has been made many times. For a clear, recent version, see Karasmanis, “Plato’s *Republic*: the Line and the Cave,” 149–51 and 159–62.

¹⁶See, for example, John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato* (London-New York: MacMillan, St. Martin’s Press, 1960), 159n; Stocks, “The Divided Line of Plato *Rep.* VI,” 77; and Wilberding, “Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave,” 130.

¹⁷Wilberding, “Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave,” 130. It may be worth noting that Xenophon does use ‘εἰκασία’ in a way that must mean “imitation” or “representation” (*Memorabilia*, 3.10.1). This

Socrates' examples of the objects related to εἰκασία, though, speak against the standard reading: "shadows [and] reflections in water and in all close-packed, smooth, and shiny materials" (510a1–2). It is widely acknowledged that it is absurd to think that (outside of the cave story) anyone usually makes conjectures about shadows and reflections while ignoring the originals. An excellent statement of this fact comes from Nickolas Pappas (a supporter of a version of the standard view): "I use a mirror to shave my flesh-and-blood face, not the reflected one."¹⁸ It seems absurd to claim both that εἰκασία is a state related to actual shadows and that εἰκασία necessarily involves the confusion of images and originals. I do not typically mistake shadows for three-dimensional objects, and it certainly does not seem necessary that I make that mistake every time I consider a shadow. To avoid this apparent absurdity, one must deny either that εἰκασία deals with actual shadows or that εἰκασία must involve mistaking images for originals. In other words, either εἰκασία does not always involve confusing images and originals or words like 'shadows' must be read metaphorically. The second option is necessary for the standard view; suggestions for the meaning of 'shadows' have included sense data,¹⁹ the images of poets,²⁰ the whims of "the many,"²¹ the teachings of sophists,²² and "vulgar conceptions of justice."²³

That last suggestion might gain support from Socrates' mention, after the cave allegory, of people contending "about the shadows of justice or the statues of which they are the shadows" (517d8–9). As with other arguments, however, this reading of εἰκασία seems supported primarily by the supposed parallel with the cave. The argument seems to assume that the two images match perfectly, and then reasons that since a) the prisoners experience εἰκασία and b) they contend about shadows of justice, εἰκασία is contention about shadows of justice. Nicholas Smith diagnoses other readers' trouble as the failure "to see that the shadows the prisoners contest about are explicitly identified as 'the shadows of justice'."²⁴ What Smith has failed to see, however, is that Socrates is not here describing the prisoners' contests, but rather the "evils of human life" (τὰ ἀνθρώπεια . . . κακὰ) (517d5).

usage seems to favor the reading I prefer, though this mention is by no means sufficient to discredit the standard view. Wilberding, in fact, acknowledges the Xenophon passage, but dismisses it, since it cannot accord with the correlation of εἰκασία and the prisoners in the cave (Wilberding, "Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave," 130 and 136).

¹⁸Nickolas Pappas, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Republic* (New York: Routledge, 2003; 2nd ed., 2005), 147. For acknowledgement of this issue, see, for example, Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 250–55; Cross and Woosley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*, 227–28; Ferguson, "Plato's Simile of Light. Part I," 144; Hamlyn, "Eikasia in Plato's *Republic*," 18; Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 114; James Anastasio Notopoulos, "The Meaning of Εἰκασία in the Divided Line of Plato's *Republic*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 44 (1933): 193–203; Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 203–04; and Stocks, "The Divided Line of Plato *Rep.* VI," 78.

¹⁹Hamlyn, "Eikasia in Plato's *Republic*," and possibly Cornford, *The Republic of Plato*, and Henry Jackson, "On Plato's *Republic* VI 509d Sq.," *The Journal of Philology* 10 (1882): 132–50.

²⁰Sze, "ΕΙΚΑΣΙΑ and ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Plato's Cave Allegory," and R. G. Tanner, "ΔΙΑΝΟΙΑ and Plato's Cave," *Classical Quarterly* (New Series) 20 (1970): 81–91.

²¹Wilberding, "Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave."

²²Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 157–58; also Hamlyn, "Eikasia in Plato's *Republic*."

²³Smith, "How the Prisoners in Plato's Cave are 'Like Us'"; Cornford, *The Republic of Plato*, offers a related account at 222.

²⁴Smith, "How the Prisoners in Plato's Cave are 'Like Us,'" 202.

The prisoners are like us (515a5), but they are not us; they compete in identifying shadows not of justice, but of “people and other animals” (514c1–515a1). As the objects considered by the prisoners differ from the objects considered by us, these passages on their own do not support the claim that we are in the same condition as the prisoners.

Giving up the claim that the prisoners themselves dispute about shadows of justice, one might still claim that, since they experience *εἰκασία*, and since they mistake images for originals, when we experience *εἰκασία* we mistake shadows of justice with justice itself. I agree that many of us regularly mistake shadows of justice for the thing itself, but this error is not a result of our experiencing *εἰκασία*. The argument for that latter claim seems to rest only on the assertion that the prisoners represent *εἰκασία*; and that is exactly the assertion that I wish to persuade you to reject. But more on the cave shortly.

Although these suggestions for seeing *εἰκασία* as some metaphorical mistaking of shadows for originals are fascinating and often illuminating, it seems more reasonable simply to take Socrates at his word here and see *εἰκασία* as including the viewing of things like shadows and reflections. After all, the presence of metaphors is rarely disguised in the *Republic*, and it would be surprising for Socrates to mask anything in metaphor during the relatively technical discussion of the divided line. The discussion of painting and poetry in Book X does suggest a further extension of *εἰκασία*: it is indeed the viewing of not only shadows and reflections, but also of other things like shadows and reflections. As Socrates explains, the painter belongs to the same “class of makers” (*δημιουργῶν*) as the person who makes all things with a mirror (596e5–6): both makers produce appearances (*φαινόμενα*). Although objects such as paintings seem to be manufactured things, and so could be the objects of *πίστις*, the fact that I can look at a painting in two ways helps show that paintings can be the objects of *εἰκασία*. On the one hand, I can view the painting as an object in its own right, as canvas, oil, and pigment; I can, however, also view it as a painting of some object—I can inspect a painting of a bed in order to gain some grasp of beds (rather than canvas or pigment). Indeed, Socrates speaks of artists reproducing manufactured things (596d–e). When I see the painting as an object in its own right, the painting is the object of *πίστις*. In the other case the painting—the same object, note—is seen as an image: it is an object associated with *εἰκασία*.²⁵ Thus, this state, *εἰκασία*, usually involves sensible images of things, and usually involves treating those images as images. Fighting over shadows of justice, therefore, need not take place at the level of *εἰκασία*, since the error involved in that fight is not typical of *εἰκασία*.

If fighting over things like the shadows of justice does not involve *εἰκασία*, however, then what state is involved in that fight? The state involved ought to be *πίστις*. I trust or believe in my ordinary views of justice in the same way that I believe in three-dimensional objects. I do not view either as anything like an image or reflection of a form, but instead as objects in their own right. Many commentators—even

²⁵And if I try to curl up and go to sleep on a painting of a bed, that is not a result of my experiencing *εἰκασία*, but rather of some failure of judgment. Compare the account of the philosophers' error in *Republic* VIII: their error does not result from their knowledge, but from their need to combine reasoning and sense perception. See Smith, “Plato on Knowledge as a Power,” 160 and n29.

proponents of the standard view of εἰκασία, in fact—agree that πίστις is typical of people not educated in philosophy.²⁶ A significant difficulty arises, however, for the claim that ordinary beliefs about justice are at the level of πίστις: this view might appear to treat πίστις as inferior to εἰκασία, even though Socrates clearly places πίστις above εἰκασία in terms of clarity (509d, 510e).

My understanding of εἰκασία does not, however, privilege εἰκασία over πίστις.²⁷ Conjectures related to ordinary beliefs about justice are less clear than those beliefs themselves, just as conjectures related to shadows and reflections yield insights about three-dimensional objects that are less clear than beliefs directly associated with those objects. Further, the fundamental error involved in πίστις, the error of mistaking worldly objects and ordinary beliefs for things themselves, is also present in εἰκασία. I am arguing not that εἰκασία is free of all error; I am arguing only that εἰκασία does not always involve the error of mistaking images for originals.

Note also that the fight is over “the shadows of justice or the statues of which they are shadows” (τοῦ δικαίου σκιῶν ἢ ἀγαλμάτων ὧν αἱ σκιαί) (517d8–9). The fighting might be over statues or shadows: the mental state here must be one that could deal with both of these types of (metaphorically) visible things—both sensible images and sensible originals—and that could not deal with the intelligible original. Πίστις seems just such a state. The fact that the craftsman of Book X—unlike the user or the imitator—has the right belief (πίστιν ὀρθήν) about his products’ virtue, beauty, and correctness (601d–602a) again suggests that the mental state involved in forming ordinary beliefs or opinions about things like justice is πίστις.

Εἰκασία need not, therefore, involve the mistaking of images for originals. The fight over the shadows and statues of justice takes place at the level of πίστις, and not εἰκασία. The metaphorical reading of εἰκασία as a state dealing with shadows of justice should be rejected. Once that reading is rejected, εἰκασία can be viewed as dealing with shadows without granting that one experiencing that state must mistake shadows for real things. The prisoners, then, who mistake shadows for reality, do not represent εἰκασία. This claim might appear to group me with those whom Wilberding views as “not too concerned about preserving parallelism” between the line and the cave.²⁸ The end of my discussion will present an account of the relation of the line and the cave that I hope will, if nothing else, demonstrate the sincerity of my concern.

4. CLEARER THAN OPINION, DARKER THAN KNOWLEDGE

Before returning to the cave, consider one last piece of evidence: other parts of the *Republic* reaffirm the reading of εἰκασία as usually involving a seeing through images. Διάνοια, which Socrates calls “clearer than opinion, darker than knowledge” (533d5–6), is the mental state exemplified by mathematical reasoning, and is inferior only to understanding or intellect (νόησις). Socrates explains the

²⁶See for example Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 158–59; Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 255; Cross and Woosley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*, 227–28; Paton, “Plato's Theory of ΕΙΚΑΣΙΑ,” 100; and Roochnik, “Images as Images: Commentary on Smith,” 206.

²⁷Compare Klein, who does seem to suggest that εἰκασία is in some sense superior to πίστις in *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 115.

²⁸Wilberding, “Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave,” 129n33.

ratios governing the line in Book VII “as intellect [νόησις] is to opinion [δόξα], so knowledge [ἐπιστήμη] is to belief [πίστις] and διάνοια to εἰκασία” (534a4–5). That these two states should stand so related suggests that εἰκασία may not be wholly disreputable—although διάνοια is not the best state possible for a human, it helps turn the soul toward being (533d). Perhaps, similarly, εἰκασία sometimes points one beyond images and toward originals. Additionally, the initial description of the activity characteristic of διάνοια contains a suggestive connection to images: the soul investigates in part by “using as images [ὡς εἰκόσιν χρωμένῃ] the things that were imitated before” (510b4–5). Both states involve the relation of image to original.²⁹ If διάνοια does not confuse the former for the latter, why must εἰκασία?

It does seem possible to experience εἰκασία and mistake an image for an original—I do sometimes waver at someone’s reflection, having failed to notice the mirror. Perhaps in that sense διάνοια is clearly superior to εἰκασία, since the former seems immune to such errors. Nevertheless, their partial similarity suggests that εἰκασία need not always involve mistaking images for originals.

Defenders of the standard reading should here counter that διάνοια does involve just such confusion. Socrates says in Book VII that crafts on the level of διάνοια, like geometry, “dream [ὄνειρώττουσι] about what is [but] are unable to command a waking view of it” (533b7–c1). In Book V, Socrates defines ‘dreaming’ (ὄνειρώττειν) as “to think that a likeness [ὄμιον] is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like [ὅ ἔουκεν]” (476c6–7). These passages suggest that διάνοια indeed involves the mistake supposedly typical of εἰκασία, the mistaking of an image for an original. If διάνοια involves such error, then the similarity of that state and εἰκασία should confirm the flawed nature of the latter condition.

The oddity of this claim, that διάνοια involves dreaming, has troubled readers since as early as 1876, when August Krohn thought it problematic that, in Book V, dreaming is limited to opinion, while Book VII suggests that knowledge also involves dreams.³⁰ Perhaps this apparent parallel is best dismissed. After all, as Adam writes, concerning this passage, “there are dreams and dreams.”³¹ More problematic for those who would condemn διάνοια on account of this mention of dreaming is the fact that the dreamers in Book V, the lovers of sights and sounds, believe “in beautiful things, but [not] in the beautiful itself” (476c2–3). The dreaming geometers dream “about what is” (533c1)—unlike the lovers of sights and sounds, these geometers seem aware of the thing itself.

Finally, Socrates’ original description of the practitioners of διάνοια removes all suspicion that one experiencing this state mistakes likenesses for what they are like:

[A]lthough they use visible figures and make claims about them, their thought isn't directed to them but to those other things that they are like [οὐ περὶ τούτων διανοοῦμενοι, ἀλλ' ἐκείνων περὶ οἷς ταῦτα ἔουκε]. They make their claims for the sake of the square itself and the diagonal itself, not the diagonal they draw. (510d5–e1)

²⁹For a helpful discussion of the fact that the line describes a class of knowable images, see Smith, “Plato’s Divided Line,” 30–40.

³⁰August A. Krohn, *Der Platonische Staat* (Halle: R. Mühlmann, 1876), 179–81.

³¹Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 140.

Διάνοια does not involve anything like the mistaking of images for originals, nor does it involve ignorance of the existence of the relevant original things. Εἰκασία is similar to this state, in that both are explained by their relation to images. As they are similar in this way, and if διάνοια does not involve mistaking (intelligible) images for (intelligible) originals, then the same might plausibly be said of εἰκασία.

It is sometimes claimed, however, that the treatment of imitation in *Republic* X confirms that εἰκασία involves error, since Socrates calls it a waste of time to care for things like images, since they are three removes from the truth (598a–599b). This reasoning appears inadequate. When Socrates mentions people fooled into thinking that images are actually the things they depict, he restricts this error to “children and foolish people” (598c1–4). Most people do not make this mistake, and so this extension of εἰκασία does not entail that this state is essentially flawed. The mistake comes in treating the images more seriously than is appropriate, not in the mere attention to images.

5. DOWN INTO THE CAVE AGAIN

Before offering my account of the cave, I quote Paul Shorey: “all the details of the [cave] imagery cannot be pressed and . . . we need not ask too curiously to what in Plato’s serious thought every touch that fills out the picture corresponds.”³² To take one example, the freed prisoner studies the sun itself, but humans cannot look at the sun without going blind, a fact of which Plato was aware.³³ What does this tell us about the form of the good? This discussion is not the forum for attempting an answer to that question, but it is worth recalling the difficulty of pressing the details of Plato’s images.

Although this difficulty exists, I do believe that, at least to a certain degree, it is possible to obey Socrates when he says that the line and the cave “must be fitted together” (προσαπτεόν) (517b1). Julia Annas concludes that “the imagery, memorable though it is, has no consistent overall interpretation.”³⁴ Annas claims that if the prisoners represent εἰκασία, then that state has a much broader range in the cave image (where it characterizes most of our lives) than in the line image, where it involves an activity (looking at shadows and reflections) that we spend only “a fraction of our time doing.”³⁵ In other words, if the prisoners do represent εἰκασία, and that state involves looking at shadows and reflections, it is rather odd to say that the prisoners are “like us,” since few of us spend our time in that way. That difficulty might suggest that the two images cannot finally be fitted together properly. On the other hand, if the prisoners do not in fact represent εἰκασία, then perhaps a fit would be possible. Finding the right fit is difficult, and the line and the cave do not seem to fit as neatly as we might like. I do, however, believe that some parallels can be established, as I hope now to show.

I submit, then, that one can make sense of the injunction to attach the cave to the line without agreeing that εἰκασία always involves mistaking images for

³²Paul Shorey, *Plato: The Republic*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press-W. Heinemann Ltd., 1935), xxx–xxxii.

³³See *Phaedo*, 99d–99e.

³⁴Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 256. See Robinson as well, who offers a sustained defense of the claim that the line and cave are not parallel (*Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*, 192–202).

³⁵Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 255.

originals. The prisoners, we are told, are “like us” (515a5). In what state, then, does that place us? Numerous commentators, including many proponents of the standard view of *εἰκασία*, agree with Adam, who notes that *πίστις* is the “normal attitude” of the uneducated.³⁶ As Cross and Woosley put it, “Plato describes the initial state of the prisoners as being the normal condition of man, which . . . is certainly *pistis* rather than *eikasia*.”³⁷ Most people, on Plato’s Socrates’ view, trust or believe (*πιστεύειν*) that the everyday objects and beliefs that they encounter are what is most real. These objects are the objects of *πίστις*, like the animals, plants, and manufactured things that Socrates mentions at 510a.

But the prisoners in the cave do not experience *πίστις*; they are fooled into thinking that shadows, not three-dimensional objects, are what is real. And are not they like us? They are like us, but they are not us. Their mistake is an image of our mistake. They mistake shadows for real things; we mistake everyday objects for what is real. When we turn from those everyday objects toward what is truly real, we begin to experience *διάνοια*. When the prisoners turn away from the cave, when they turn toward the shadows and reflections outside of the cave, they begin to experience *εἰκασία*. The initial state of the prisoners must, therefore, be beneath *εἰκασία*, just as our initial state is beneath *διάνοια*.³⁸ The first stage in the prisoner’s liberation is an image of the first stirrings of knowledge in a human. The prisoner is made to look at the statues whose shadows he had seen, but he cannot bear it, and wishes to turn back to the shadows: “he’d be pained and dazzled and unable to see [*ἀδυνατοῖ καθορᾶν*] the things whose shadows he had seen before” (515c8–d1). Here, the prisoner is perplexed, *ἀπορεῖν* (515d6), and he is an image of human perplexity. The first time one is confronted by a sensation that calls the mind to two opposites at once (like the finger that is both larger and smaller than other fingers), one becomes perplexed, one reaches *ἀπορία* (523e–524a).

Next, the prisoner is brought outside, and for the first time—a key moment, which few commentators mention³⁹—he actually is able to see something besides the shadows in the cave. Granted, he had been “compelled to look” (*ἀναγκάζοι . . . βλέπειν*) at things in the cave, such as the fire (515d8), but in the cave he is never able to see (*καθορᾶν*) anything but shadows. Indeed, Socrates’ question about the freed prisoner at 515e1–4 confirms that although other objects have been presented to the prisoner, he is actually able to see only shadows:

And if someone compelled him to look at the light itself, wouldn’t his eyes hurt, and wouldn’t he turn around and flee towards the things he’s able to see, believing that they’re really clearer than the ones he’s being shown?⁴⁰

³⁶Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 158–59. Other readers who agree include Annas (*An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 255), Paton (“Plato’s Theory of ΕΙΚΑΣΙΑ,” 100), Roochnik (“Images as Images: Commentary on Smith,” 206). See also Smith (“Plato’s Divided Line,” 41), who comes close to this view.

³⁷Cross and Woosley, *Plato’s Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*, 227–28.

³⁸For a very similar account, see Cooper, “The Importance of DIANOIA in Plato’s Theory of Forms,” 68.

³⁹Indeed, Foley mistakenly claims that the freed prisoner studies the statues in the cave before ascending into the world outside of the cave in “Plato’s Undividable Line,” 11.

⁴⁰Οὐκοῦν κἂν εἰ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς ἀναγκάζοι αὐτὸν βλέπειν, ἀλγεῖν τε ἂν τὰ ὄμματα καὶ φεύγειν ἀποστρεφόμενος πρὸς ἐκεῖνα ἃ δύναται καθορᾶν, καὶ νομίζειν ταῦτα τῷ ὄντι σαφέστερα τῶν δευκνημένων.

The prisoner is not able to see anything but the shadows on the wall until he is brought out of the cave.

Outside of the cave, the prisoner sees first shadows and reflections (516a5–7), and he does so in order that he might consider the originals of these images, which are too bright for him to see directly; the prisoner has begun to experience εἰκασία. Similarly, the student of mathematics is turned away from the world of becoming and toward the world of being; she begins to experience διάνοια (523a–526c).

Finally, the freed prisoner looks upon objects themselves (516a8–b7). He reaches πίστις. Eventually, “he would be able to see [δύναται ἄν κατιδέειν] the sun, not images of it in water or some alien place, but the sun itself [αὐτὸν καθ’ αὐτόν], in its own place, and be able to study [θεάσθαι] it” (516b4–6). This corresponds to the eventual achievement, by the philosopher, of νόησις. The philosopher reasons “without making use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on from forms to forms, and ending in forms” (511c1–2).

The cave represents the move from the visible world to the intelligible, and it does so by exhibiting the prisoner’s move into the visible world. Within the cave, only one stage occurs that represents a state on the divided line, a stage that represents human πίστις. The prisoner is turned toward the artifacts and the fire, and he lifts his eyes, but he is never described as actually able to see anything except the shadows on the wall until he leaves the cave. In the cave, then, Socrates illustrates first πίστις and then the perplexity or ἀπορία that precedes διάνοια. Nothing in the image corresponds to εἰκασία, and so the state of the prisoners does not demonstrate that εἰκασία essentially involves mistaking images for originals. In fact, by again suggesting a parallel between the freed prisoner’s εἰκασία and the student’s διάνοια, the cave allegory confirms the valuable and useful character of the former.

6. CONCLUSION

The relation between εἰκασία and διάνοια also suggests further ramifications of my account of the former. In particular, since the two states do resemble each other, the nature of εἰκασία ought to provide insight into the nature of διάνοια. It has been frequently remarked that much of the significance of the discussion of εἰκασία comes from its usefulness in illuminating the upper part of the line.⁴¹ That being the case, the fact that εἰκασία usually involves seeing through images should provide useful illumination of the objects described on that upper portion. There are a number of good reasons for holding that the objects at the second highest level are the same sort of objects found at the level to which πίστις corresponds, now only conceived of as images of forms, not as things in themselves.⁴² To those reasons I would add that, since the experience of εἰκασία often involves seeing originals through images, the viewing of images as images, the objects that correspond to διάνοια ought to be those same originals, now viewed as images. Socrates describes the procedure of those experiencing διάνοια at 510e:

⁴¹See, for example, Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 248–49; and Ross, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 68.

⁴²See Smith, “Plato’s Divided Line,” 34–42.

These things that they make and draw, of which shadows and reflections in water are images, they now in turn use as images, in seeking those others themselves that one cannot see except by means of thought.⁴³

The objects that correspond to εἰκασία are images, which are usually viewed as images. Διάνοια involves viewing the originals as images—those originals should then be considered the objects that correspond to διάνοια. Εἰκασία is the condition in the soul that often involves using images as images, and the images are the objects that correspond to that condition. Διάνοια is the condition in the soul that involves using originals as images. Those originals might plausibly be seen as the objects that correspond to that condition. In other words, it does indeed appear that the objects that correspond to πίστις—when seen as images of forms—are also the objects which correspond to διάνοια.

In the same way that διάνοια does not involve the mistaking of its objects for reality, εἰκασία should not necessarily involve mistaking images for originals. Εἰκασία is best seen as a state that usually involves seeing originals through images, an excellent capacity—unclear, yes, but excellent nonetheless. Socrates, in *Republic* VI, describes himself as “greedily making images” or “greedy for images” (γλίσχωρως εἰκάζω) (488a2). Although the condition in the soul that is defined by its correspondence to images is less clear and less reliable than others, it is to Socrates' credit that he is eager to experience that state. The image that he goes on to present in Book VI, of the city as a ship, helps his friends understand some real issues that confront philosophers and politicians. Understanding, rather than any image, is the goal of the philosopher, but images can help her reach that goal. Likewise, εἰκασία is not the best condition for my soul, but neither should it be viewed with scorn. Experiencing εἰκασία often—though perhaps not always—allows one to see through an image to its original. This state is useful not only in studying the phenomenal world, but also in illustrating the initial move toward understanding.⁴⁴

⁴³αὐτὰ μὲν ταῦτα ἃ πλάττουσιν τε καὶ γράφουσιν, ὧν καὶ σκιαὶ καὶ ἐν ὕδασι εἰκόνες εἰσίν, τούτοις μὲν ὡς εἰκόσιν αὐτὸν χρώμενοι, ζητούντες δὲ αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα ἰδεῖν ἃ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως ἴδοι τις ἢ τῇ διανοίᾳ.

⁴⁴This paper began as a small part of my dissertation, and I thank Thomas Tuozzo both for his dedication to that project and for his willingness to keep talking about Plato with me. I would also like to thank those who discussed an early version of this paper with me at the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy meeting at Fordham University in the fall of 2005. Finally, I am grateful for comments on later drafts from Brad Inwood, my anonymous reviewers, and especially Nicholas Smith. I take responsibility, of course, for the account and all of its shortcomings.