

Anyone who emerges without impurities from every single test—as a child, as a young man, and as an adult—should be made a ruler and guardian of our community, and should be honoured in life and in death, in the sense of being awarded the most privileged of funerals and tombs. Anyone who gets corrupted, however, should be excluded. So, Glaucon,<sup>414a</sup> I concluded, ‘I think that this is how we should select and appoint our rulers and guardians. These are just guidelines, though: I haven’t gone into details.’

‘I agree,’ he said. ‘It must be something like this.’

‘And we really and truly could hardly go wrong if we reserved the term “guardian” in its fullest sense for these people, who ensure that neither the desire nor the capacity for harming the community arises, whether from external enemies or from internal friends. As for the young men we’ve been calling guardians up to now, we should strictly call them auxiliaries and assistants of the guardians and their decision-making, don’t you think?’

‘Yes, I do,’ he said.

‘Now,’ I said, ‘can we devise one of those lies—the kind which crop up as the occasion demands, which we were talking about not long ago—so that with a single noble lie we can indoctrinate the rulers themselves, preferably, but at least the rest of the community?’

‘What sort of lie?’ he asked.

‘Nothing too outlandish,’ I replied, ‘just a tall story about something which happened all over the place in times past (at least, that’s what the poets claim and have persuaded us to believe), but which hasn’t happened in our lifetimes and I’m not sure it could, and people would need a great deal of convincing about it.’

‘You seem reluctant to tell us the story,’ he remarked.

‘And you’ll see that my reluctance was well founded,’ I said, ‘when I do tell you about it.’

‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘Just talk.’

‘What I’m saying is . . . I’m not sure where to find the gall or the words to tell the story . . . I’ll be trying above all to convince the rulers themselves and the military, and secondarily the rest of the community, that all the nurture and education we provided happened to them in a kind of dream-world; in actual fact, they were at that time being formed and nurtured deep inside the earth, and their weaponry and their equipment in general were also being made there. When they were finished products, the earth, their mother, sent them up above ground; and now in their policy-making they must regard the country they find themselves in as their mother and their nurse, they must defend her against invasion, and they should think of the rest of the inhabitants of the community as their earth-born brothers.’

‘I’m not surprised you were ashamed to tell us the lie before,’ he remarked.

<sup>415a</sup> ‘I had good reason,’ I said. ‘All the same, do please listen to the rest of the story as well. “Although all of you citizens are brothers,” we’ll continue the tale by telling them, “nevertheless, during the kneading phase, God included gold in the mixture when he was forming those of you who have what it takes to be rulers (which is why the rulers have the greatest privileges), silver when he was forming the auxiliaries, and iron and copper when he was forming the farmers and other workers. Now, despite the fact that in general your offspring will be similar in kind to yourselves, nevertheless, because you’re all related, sometimes a silver child might be born to a gold parent, a gold one to a silver parent, and so on: any of them might be produced by any of the others. Therefore, of all his instructions to the rulers, there is none that God stresses more than this: there is no aspect of their work as guardians which they shall be so good at or dedicated to as watching over the admixture of elements in the minds of the children of the community. If one of their own children is born with a nature tinged with copper or iron, they shall at all costs avoid feeling sorry for it: they shall assign it the status appropriate to its nature and banish it to the workers or the farmers. On the other hand, if a child born to a worker or a farmer has a nature tinged with gold or silver, they shall honour it and elevate it to the rank of either guardian or auxiliary, because of an oracle which states that the community will be destroyed when it has a copper or iron guardian.” Can you think of any tactics to make them believe this story?’

‘No, not for this particular lot, anyway,’ he said, ‘but I can for the immediately succeeding generations and all the generations to follow.’

‘I’ve got a pretty good idea of what you’re getting at,’ I said.

‘It would help them care even more for the community and for one another. But the future of all this will be decided by popular consensus, not by us.’

Within the community, the guardians and auxiliaries are to live an alert, military life (which resembles that of the Spartans), without owing property, which would corrupt them (by turning them into members of the lower class) and cause the downfall of the community. It is true that they will not be happy in the common, materialistic sense of the term, but arguably they will have the greatest happiness (see Chapter 12). In any case, the happiness of the whole is more important than that of any of its parts.