

what suits you will be fair, and I shall agree to it. If you do not come, you will find nothing that affects Dion either personally or otherwise arranging itself to your liking.' These were his words; the rest would be long to repeat and not to the point. Letters also kept coming from Archytas and the Tarentines to sing the praises of Dionysius' devotion to philosophy and to inform me that, if I did not come now, it would mean a complete breach of the friendly relations that I had been instrumental in creating between them and Dionysius; and those relations were not lacking in political importance.⁴⁰

[*The possibility of making Dionysius a convert could not be disregarded.*]

Now when I was thus urgently sent for,—when my friends in Sicily and Italy were pulling me, while those at Athens were, you might say, by their entreaties actually shoving me out of Athens,—once more came the same message, that I ought not to betray either Dion or my friends and companions in Tarentum. Besides, I knew anyway without being told that no one need be surprised if a young man on hearing a really great enterprise suggested, quick to grasp the idea, had yielded to the spell of the ideal life. It seemed accordingly my duty to make the experiment so as to arrive at a definite conclusion one way or the other; for I must not be guilty of betraying that very ideal and of exposing my beliefs to the reproach they would deserve if there were any truth in the reports I had received.

[*I accordingly did go a second time to Syracuse.*]

So I did set out under cover of these arguments, full of fears, as you might expect, and foreboding no very good result. At any rate in going I found that here at least it was really a case of the third to the Saviour,⁴¹ for I was fortunately brought safe home again. For this I have to thank Dionysius next to God, because, when many wished to put me out of the way, he interfered and gave some place to conscience in his dealings with me.

[*I tested Dionysius' devotion to Philosophy by proposing to him a difficult course of training.*]

When I had arrived, I thought I ought first to put it to the proof whether Dionysius was really all on fire with philosophy or whether the frequent reports that had come to Athens to that effect amounted to nothing. Now there is an experimental method for determining the truth in such cases that, far from being vulgar, is truly appropriate to despots, especially those stuffed with second-hand opinions; which I perceived, as soon as I arrived, was very much the case with Dionysius. One must point out to such men that the whole plan is possible and explain what preliminary steps and how much hard work it will require; for the hearer, if he is genuinely devoted to philosophy and is a man of God with a natural affinity and fitness for the work, sees in the course marked out a path of enchantment, which he must at once strain every nerve to follow, or die in the attempt. Thereupon he braces himself and his guide

to the task and does not relax his efforts until he either crowns them with final accomplishment or acquires the faculty of tracing his own way no longer accompanied by the pathfinder. When this conviction has taken possession of him, such a man passes his life in whatever occupations he may engage in, but through it all never ceases to practise philosophy and such habits of daily life as will be most effective in making him an intelligent and retentive student, able to reason soberly by himself. Other practices than these he shuns to the end.

[*This method makes it unnecessary for the one who uses it to proceed further if the pupil is not really a convert to Philosophy.*]

As for those, however, who are not genuine converts to philosophy, but have only a superficial tinge of doctrine,—like the coat of tan that people get in the sun,—as soon as they see how many subjects there are to study, how much hard work they involve, and how indispensable it is for the project to adopt a well-ordered scheme of living, they decide that the plan is difficult if not impossible for them; and so they really do not prove capable of practising philosophy. Some of them too persuade themselves that they are well enough informed already on the whole subject and have no need of further application. This test then proves to be the surest and safest in dealing with those who are self-indulgent and incapable of continued hard work, since they throw the blame not on their guide but on their

own inability to follow out in detail the course of training subsidiary to the project.

[A. DIGRESSION ATTACKING THOSE WHO HAVE EXPLAINED PLATO'S DOCTRINES. *I did not, however, give him a complete exposition of my doctrines, though he has since written something on the subject.*]

The instruction that I gave to Dionysius was accordingly given with this object in view. I certainly did not set forth to him all my doctrines, nor did Dionysius ask me to, for he pretended to know many of the most important points already and to be adequately grounded in them by means of the second-hand interpretations he had got from the others.

[*No one who really understood the subject would ever publish a book on it, for words are inadequate to convey instruction in this matter.*]

I hear too that he has since written on the subjects in which I instructed him at that time, as if he were composing a handbook of his own which differed entirely from the instruction he received. Of this I know nothing. I do know, however, that some others have written on these same subjects, but who they are they know not themselves.⁴² One statement at any rate I can make in regard to all who have written or who may write with a claim to knowledge of the subjects to which I devote myself,—no matter how they pretend to have acquired it, whether from my instruction or from others or by their own discovery. Such writers can in my opinion have no real acquaintance

with the subject. I certainly have composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future; for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining.

[I do not think I should do any good by writing on this subject.]

Besides, this at any rate I know, that if there were to be a treatise or a lecture on this subject, I could do it best. I am also sure for that matter that I should be very sorry to see such a treatise poorly written. If I thought it possible to deal adequately with the subject in a treatise or a lecture for the general public, what finer achievement would there have been in my life than to write a work of great benefit to mankind and to bring the nature of things to light for all men? I do not, however, think the attempt to tell mankind of these matters a good thing, except in the case of some few who are capable of discovering the truth for themselves with a little guidance. In the case of the rest to do so would excite in some an unjustified contempt in a thoroughly offensive fashion; in others certain lofty and vain hopes, as if they had acquired some awesome lore.

[B. PROOF THAT THE REALITY OF THINGS CANNOT BE EXPRESSED IN WORDS.]

It has occurred to me to speak on the subject at greater length, for possibly the matter I am discussing would be clearer if I were to do so. There is a true doctrine, which I have often stated before, that stands in the way of the man who would dare to write even the least thing on such matters, and which it seems I am now called upon to repeat.⁴³

For everything that exists there are three classes of objects through which knowledge about it must come; the knowledge itself is a fourth; and we must put as a fifth entity the actual object of knowledge which is the true reality.⁴⁴ We have then; first, a name; second, a description; third, an image; and fourth, a knowledge of the object. Take⁴⁵ a particular case if you want to understand the meaning of what I have just said, then apply the theory to every object in the same way. There is something for instance called a circle, the name of which is the very word I just now uttered. In the second place there is a description of it which is composed of nouns and verbal expressions. For example the description of that which is named round and circumference and circle, would run as follows: the thing which has everywhere equal distances between its extremities and its centre. In the third place there is the class of object which is drawn and erased and turned on the lathe and destroyed—processes which do not affect the real circle to which

these other circles are all related, because it is different from them. In the fourth place there are knowledge and understanding and correct opinion concerning them; all of which we must set down as one thing more, that is found not in sounds nor in shapes of bodies, but in minds; whereby it evidently differs in its nature from the real circle and from the aforementioned three. Of all these four understanding approaches nearest in affinity and likeness to the fifth entity, while the others are more remote from it.

The same doctrine holds good in regard to shapes and surfaces, both straight and curved; in regard to the good and the beautiful and the just; in regard to all bodies artificial and natural; in regard to fire and water and the like; and in regard to every animal; and in regard to every quality of character; and in respect to all states active and passive. For if in the case of any of these a man does not somehow or other get hold of the first four, he will never gain a complete understanding of the fifth. Furthermore these four—[names, descriptions, bodily forms, concepts]—do as much to illustrate the particular quality of any object as they do to illustrate its essential reality because of the inadequacy of language. Hence no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, especially not into a form that is unalterable,—which must be the case with what is expressed in written symbols.

[C. FURTHER EXPLANATION OF THE NATURE OF REALITY.]

Again, however, the meaning of what has just been said must be explained. Every circle that is drawn or turned on a lathe in actual operations, abounds in the opposite of the fifth entity, for it everywhere touches the straight,⁴⁶ while the real circle, I maintain, contains in itself neither much nor little of the opposite character. Names, I maintain, are in no case stable. Nothing prevents the things that are now called round from being called straight and the straight round; and those who have transposed the names and use them in the opposite way will find them no less stable than they are now. The same thing for that matter is true of a description, since it consists of nouns and of verbal expressions, so that in a description there is nowhere any sure ground that is sure enough. One might, however, speak for ever about the inaccurate character of each of the four! The important thing is that, as I said a little earlier, there are two things, the essential reality and the particular quality; and when the mind is in quest of knowledge not of the particular but of the essential, each of the four confronts the mind with the unsought (particular), whether in verbal or in bodily form. Each of the four makes the reality that is expressed in words or illustrated in objects liable to easy refutation by the evidence of the senses. The result of this is to make practically every man a prey to complete perplexity and uncertainty.

Now in cases where as a result of bad training we

are not even accustomed to look for the real essence of anything but are satisfied to accept what confronts us in the phenomenal presentations, we are not rendered d ridiculous by each other,—the examined by the examiners, who have the ability to handle the four with dexterity and to subject them to examination. In those cases, however, where we demand answers and proofs in regard to the fifth entity, anyone who pleases among those who have skill in confutation gains the victory and makes most of the audience think that the man who was first to speak or write or answer has no acquaintance with the matters of which he attempts to write or speak.⁴⁷ Sometimes they are unaware that it is not the mind of the writer or speaker that fails in the test, but rather the character of the four,—since that is naturally e defective. Consideration of all of the four in turn,—moving up and down from one to another,—barely begets knowledge of a naturally flawless object in a naturally flawless man. If a man is naturally defective,—and this is the natural state of most people's minds with regard to intelligence and to what are called 344 morals,—while the objects he inspects are tainted with imperfection, not even Lynceus⁴⁸ could make such a one see.

To sum it all up in one word, natural intelligence and a good memory are equally powerless to aid the man who has not an inborn affinity with the subject. Without such endowments there is of course not the slightest possibility. Hence all who have no natural aptitude for and affinity with justice and all the other noble ideals,

though in the study of other matters they may be both intelligent and retentive,—all those too who have affinity but are stupid and unretentive,—such will never any of them attain to an understanding of the most complete truth in regard to moral concepts. The study b of virtue and vice⁴⁹ must be accompanied by an inquiry into what is false and true of existence in general and must be carried on by constant practice throughout a long period, as I said in the beginning. Hardly after practising detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense-perceptions, after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy, at last in a flash understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light.

For this reason no serious man will ever think of c writing⁵⁰ about serious realities for the general public so as to make them a prey to envy and perplexity. In a word, it is an inevitable conclusion from this that when anyone sees anywhere the written work of anyone, whether that of a lawgiver in his laws or whatever it may be in some other form, the subject treated cannot have been his most serious concern,—that is, if he is himself a serious man. His most serious interests have their abode somewhere in the noblest region of the field of his activity. If, however, he really was seriously concerned with these matters and put them in writing, 'then surely' not the gods, but mortals 'have utterly d blasted his wits'.⁵¹