It would remain, then, as it seems, for us to discover that which partakes of both, of to be and not to be, and that could not be rightly designated either in its exclusive purity, so that, if it shall be discovered, we may justly pronounce it to be the opinable, thus assigning extremes to extremes and the intermediate to the intermediate. Is not that so?

It is.

This much premised, let him tell me, I will say, let him answer me, that good fellow who does not think there is a beautiful in itself or any idea of beauty in itself always remaining the same and unchanged, but who does believe in many beautiful things – the lover of spectacles, I mean, who cannot endure to hear anybody say that the beautiful is one and the just one, and so of other things – and this will be our question. My good fellow, is there any one of these many fair and honorable things that will not sometimes appear ugly and base? And of the just things, that will not seem unjust? And of the pious things, that will not seem impious?

No, it is inevitable, he said, that they would appear to be both beautiful in a way and ugly, and so with all the other things you asked about.

And again, do the many double things appear any the less halves than doubles?

None the less.

And likewise of the great and the small things, the light and the heavy things – will they admit these predicates any more than their opposites?

No, he said, each of them will always hold of, partake of, both.

Then is each of these multiples rather than it is not that which one affirms it to be?

They are like those jesters who palter with us in a double sense at banquets, he replied, and resemble the children’s riddle about the eunuch and his hitting of the bat – with what and as it sat on what they signify that he struck it. For these things too equivocate, and it is impossible to conceive firmly any one of them to be or not to be or both or neither.

Do you know what to do with them, then? said I. And can you find a better place to put them than that midway between existence or essence and the not to be? For we shall surely not discover a darker region than not-being that they should still more not be, nor a brighter than being that they should still more be.

Most true, he said.

We would seem to have found, then, that the many conventions of the many about the fair and honorable and other things are tumbled about in the mid-region between that which is not and that which is in the true and absolute sense.

We have so found it.

But we agreed in advance that if anything of that sort should be discovered, it must be denominated opinable, not knowable, the wanderer between being caught by the faculty that is betwixt and between.

We did.

We shall affirm, then, that those who view many beautiful things but do not see the beautiful itself and are unable to follow another’s guidance to it, and many just things, but not justice itself, and so in all cases – we shall say that such men have opinions about all things, but know nothing of the things they opine.

Of necessity.

And, on the other hand, what of those who contemplate the very things themselves in each case, ever remaining the same and unchanged – shall we not say that they know and do not merely opine?

That, too, necessarily follows.