

1984 by george orwell and allegory of the cave by plato: a comparative study

[Literature](#)



Comparative Text Analysis

The two stories, "1984" by George Orwell and Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and "Meno's Slave" are different in settings and thematic concerns but converge on the issue of the conduct of the characters and their focus on reality. Orwell tells the story of Winston Smith who lives in London, Oceania. Orwell notes that Oceania is under control of the 'Big Brother' that consists of the elite that monitors the events in the country using listening devices and cameras. Winston Smith works at the Ministry of Truth and is involved in altering the history of Oceania and public records to brainwash the citizens. While at work, he falls in love with Julia, a coworker and they move in together before he is arrested and tortured. In Oceania, the ruling party prohibits free speech, thought, and sex.

On the other hand, Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" is a description of the lives of prisoners that once lived in a cave. The prisoners were chained to a wall and could see shadows of different things projected on a wall. Interestingly, the slaves give names to the things they see without considering their reality. The Allegory of the Cave features the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon, his student. In the "Meno's Slave" Plato writes about the conversation between Socrates and a slave in Meno's house. The slave comes out as ignorant but one who can comprehend geometry. A close reading of the three stories reveals similarities and differences among the characters. Based on the similarities and differences of the characters in the three stories, and their discovery of reality, one can see that their behavior confirms Orwell's and Plato's position on critical thinking.

Similarities

The characters in the three stories portray naivety given their acceptance of the status quo. For instance, in Orwell's book, the citizens of Oceania are naive in that they believe that they are being monitored by their government. Interestingly, the supporters of the Party do not question the possibility of the government's power to even monitor their thoughts. The Oceania government, through the Big Brother, had mastered the approach of intimidating people. For instance, the government had put big billboards in the streets with the messages "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (Orwell 4). Police in Oceania carried out patrols to confuse people that they were being monitored. Given their naivety, the characters in Orwell's 1984 could not rebel against the government that had curtailed their freedoms.

The naivety of the people of Oceania is revealed in the early life of Julia, Winston's secret lover. Julia had accepted to join the ministry of love. She had agreed to follow the policy that prohibited the people from engaging in sexual affairs. Julia belonged to the anti-sex league at the time she met Winston (Orwell 12). Thus, she was brainwashed to stay away from men and lead a chaste life. Similarly, before he rebelled, Winston was naïve in that he agreed to the policies of the party that prohibited sexual encounters. Orwell describes Winston as a person that "disliked all women and especially the young" one (12). By disliking women without any reason apart from wanting to adhere to the policies set by the ministry of love, Winston shows that he was naive.

O'Brien also portrays naivety by pretending to be rebellious as a way of tricking Winston. Instead of joining the movement to overthrow the Party, <https://assignbuster.com/1984-by-george-orwell-and-allegory-of-the-cave-by-plato-a-comparative-study/>

O'Brien accepted to be naïve and tortured Winston as a way of making him denounce his love for Julia. Earlier, Winston writes a diary to O'Brien, but the latter does not want to interpret the contexts since he is too naïve to comprehend (Orwell 103). The naivety of O'Brien is seen in his action of torturing Winston while believing that his action will scare other dissidents. The expectation is that O'Brien should have tortured his victim in front of the screens that relayed information to the citizens of Oceania for them to be scared and continue obeying the oppressive laws of the Party. Interestingly, O'Brien's actions pay off when he influences Winston to love the party without questioning its ideologies. O'Brien is also naïve since he believes in the existence of the Big Brother even if he has not seen him.

Similarly, Meno's slave is naïve in that he imagines that he is smart, but he is not as Socrates finds out after the interview. The slave imagines that he can speak fluently and that is a measure of his abilities to solve problems. He compares the mathematical knowledge to the knowledge to speak (Plato 17). By imagining to do something that he has not done before, the slave shows naivety.

The prisoners described in Plato's "Allegory of Cave" are also naïve. The slaves only assume what they see even without looking keenly into it. For instance, since they see images of flames projected on the wall, they only imagine the possibility of other things passing near the fire and whose images could be projected on the wall (Plato 6). They fail to discuss the shadows they see but only give names to the images. Without discussing or

learning from anyone, the slaves show naivety by naming what they have not seen.

At the beginning of Orwell's book, Winston is seen as ignorant. He fails to question the government's move to spy on the people of Oceania. Winston seems to feel comfortable in spying on the people and advancing propaganda on behalf of the Party that rules Oceania. He commits to working for the Party without knowing that one day he could become the victim of its cruelty. By engaging in altering historical accounts of events in Oceania, Winston seems to be ignorant of the harm he causes to himself and his people (Orwell 9). The outcomes of the ignorance catch up with Winston when he is arrested and tortured and the information is concealed from the public.

Julia is also ignorant since she reveals her secrets to Winston even before she knows him completely. For instance, she reveals to Winston that she obtained chocolate from the black market. Julia's actions are against the laws of Oceania and could land her in jail but she reveals that to Winston as an indication of ignorance of the outcomes of her actions. Also, Julia reveals to Winston that she has been having affairs with other men. Winston declares his love for Julia even after she confesses to have slept with other men (Orwell 158). He tells her that his love for her equals the men she has had in the past. Although the two declare their love for each other, they are ignorant of the possibility that they could be spying on each other. Winston is also ignorant by telling O'Brien that he was convinced by Julia to join the rebellion against the Party.

The slaves in Plato's allegory of the cave are ignorant in that they fail to question why they are held captive. They do not demand justice and that shows that they are ignorant of their rights and freedom. By failing to imagine that they can be free, the slaves portray their poor judgment that reveals their ignorance (Plato 4). They do not even question the nature of the things whose shadow they see being projected on the wall but assume that there exists freedom of movement outside the cave.

Also, Meno's slave is ignorant in that he tries to solve a mathematical problem using his oral skills. Socrates indicates that the slave could have remained "confident in his ignorance" (Plato 16). By assuming that he knew when he did not understand, the slave did not attempt to learn. However, the slave later confirmed that he was knowledgeable since he tried to solve a problem using his past experience.

Differences

The characters in Orwell's book are conscious of their situation and understand that they are being oppressed by the Party. Some of the characters are willing to secretly disobey the Party as an indication that they are rebellious. For instance, various officials in the Ministry of Love are engaging in extramarital affairs even when the Party prohibits them from engaging in such affairs. Julia reveals the secret rebellion to Winston when she tries to convince him to love her. She claims that she knows people by looking at their eyes and she can tell that Winston is not a diehard supporter of the Party (152). Julia's confession that some people in Oceania are secret rebels shows that the characters are conscious of their situation and are waiting for the right time to overthrow the government. The <https://assignbuster.com/1984-by-george-orwell-and-allegory-of-the-cave-by-plato-a-comparative-study/>

rebellious supporters of the Oceania government are secretive and do not show their rebellion to the authorities. For instance, O'Brien keeps the secret about Winston's rebellion for a long time until the latter is arrested and apprehended.

On the other hand, Meno's slave is unconscious of his situation. He believes that he is knowledgeable and sticks to his belief. He does not show any signs of rebellion and always obeys the decrees of his master. The slaves described in Plato's allegory of the cave are also unconscious of their situation and obey what they are told by their master without questioning his orders.

Characters' Truer Understanding

Winston and Julia are supporters of the Party as seen at the beginning of Orwell's book. However, they understand their situation when they begin questioning their beliefs. Winston questions why the Party mistreats the people. He sees the Party as a cult that was hiding iniquities that it committed against the people (Orwell 158). Similarly, Julia questions the role of government in her private life and thereby she begins to exercise her sexual rights secretly. The two discover the true understanding of their situation by seeking to know what is right for them and the Party.

O'Brien can discover a true understanding by questioning what he gains from torturing people that rebel against the Party. He is yet to discover himself and his separation from the state. O'Brien feels as if he is the government and that clouds his imagination such that he cannot seek to understand of reality. Also, O'Brien can discover reality by questioning the

efficiency of the Big Brother in spying on the people. The Big Brother does not apprehend any person for rebelling against the government. Therefore, he might not exist in reality. O'Brien should demand the audit of the efficiency of the Big Brother to know whether he is real or fiction.

Meno's slave can discover reality if he tries doing what he believes in and what he is capable of doing. Socrates reveals that the slave did not understand mathematics as he claimed (Plato 16). Thus, the slave can discover the true reality by trying to practise his skills.

The slaves in Plato's allegory can discover reality by getting out of the cave. The slaves should try to rebel against their master and get out of the cave and investigate whether what they saw in shadows represented real objects. When one slave is set free, he discovers that what they were seeing were shadows of flames and not real objects (Plato 3). The slaves can also discover reality if they question the possibility of seeing objects while in a cave. They should try to see real objects and not their representation for them to differentiate reality from illusions.

Based on what the characters should do to discover reality, one can see that Plato's and Orwell's idea of reality is based on questioning one's beliefs and objects surrounding him. For instance, Winston begins to believe that Big Brother does not exist when he questions his beliefs regarding the actions of the Big Brother. In the past, Winston believes that he is being watched (Orwell 11). However, as he engages with Julia, he is not caught by the Big Brother. O'Brien can discover reality about the existence of the Big Brother if he demands to see his actions. The failure by O'Brien to abandon

sycophancy and pursue truth blinds him. Orwell's idea is that critical thinking is based on questioning beliefs as a way of establishing reality.

Plato's allegory and the story of Meno's slave reveal that his position is that one can discover reality if they see, touch and do what they claim is real. By presenting the slaves that see reality as illusions, Plato seems to suggest that reality can only be discovered if people get out of their comfort zones and look for reality in the conduct of the objects that they claim are real. Socrates questions the slave as a way of establishing whether he can think beyond his assumptions (Plato 16). Plato's idea of critical thinking is that one can only discover reality if they think beyond their imagination and use examples and interact with real objects for them to discover reality.

Opinion

Critical thinking can reveal reality when one questions their beliefs. Thinking critically requires that the thinker tries to answer his assumptions and convictions (Paulson 21). By questioning one's beliefs, it becomes possible to differentiate between reality and illusion since it leads to a critical investigation of the beliefs and objects. Therefore, critical thinking that examines the outcomes of beliefs and actions can lead to the discovery of reality. The critical thinking of this nature should be based on one's experience and interaction with physical objects.

Conclusion

George Orwell's 1984 and Plato's allegory of the cave and Meno's slave revolve around naïve characters that believe in what they are told without questioning. However, some characters in Orwell's book such as Julia are

conscious and rebellious in that they defy authorities. Based on the tree stories, it is apparent that Orwell sees critical thinking as a way of questioning beliefs while Plato stresses the need to differentiate reality from illusion as a way of discovering reality. In essence, critical thinking helps in discovering reality by questioning the beliefs that one possesses about an object, person or situation.