

# Plato's allegory of the cave narrative



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Plato's Allegory of the Cave Essay One of Plato's more famous writings, The Allegory of the Cave, Plato outlines the story of a man who breaks free of his constraints and comes to learn of new ideas and levels of thought that exist outside of the human level of thinking. However, after having learned so many new concepts, he returns to his fellow beings and attempts to reveal his findings but is rejected and threatened with death. This dialogue is an apparent reference to his teacher's theories in philosophy and his ultimate demise for his beliefs but is also a relation to the theory of the Divided Line. This essay will analyze major points in The Allegory of the Cave and see how it relates to the Theory of the Divided Line.

Also, this essay will attempt to critique the dialogue from the point of view of Aristotle, Plato's student, using his theories and beliefs. In the beginning, Plato states that there are a group of people sitting in a cave who face a wall and cannot turn around or move. Behind them is a fire and a curtain, behind which are people who pass by with gear and equipment they carry. This fire behind the people in the cave casts a shadow on the wall and, because the people in the cave cannot turn around, therefore the people believe that the shadows are ultimately real. Plato uses this setting and background to reflect human beings and their thought processes since they apparently see the shadows as real objects but do not realize that the only real objects exist where they cannot see.

The shadows on the wall are the imperfect and skewed reflections/representations of the Forms which are real. As the story goes on, there is one man among the group in the cave who is suddenly freed from his bonds and is compelled to look around. He sees the fire behind the

group, the curtain, and the objects passing by that cause the reflections. He therefore comes to the realization that what he has believed as real objects are actually imperfect representations of what actually exists. In this part of the dialogue, Plato is referring to the philosopher, more specifically, Socrates, and his questioning mind.

As a result of the philosopher's questioning mind, he realizes new definitions of reality. In relation to the Theory of the Divided Line, it represents a shift up from shadows and drawings to that of physical objects. However, because the man is still in the cave, it represents that he is still in the Visible World, or the Becoming World. An unusual set of events then occur to the man who is 'free' as he is forcibly dragged out of the cave, over the wall and past the fire, and is brought into the sunlight. Understandably, he is blinded by the sudden amount of light and must shield his eyes as he cannot see properly.

In this section, Plato emphasizes the theme of huge change that is not necessarily voluntary. In relation to the Theory of the Divided Line, it represents the major shift from that of the Visible World to that of the Intelligible World. In relation to the people still in the cave, the man has moved from things that the people can see to things that they cannot see. Originally, the man was reluctant to leave the cave and rather content on staying in the cave and in that sense of reality but it is the man's perpetually questioning mind that drives, or drags, him over the wall and into the sunlight. The sense of forcibly being dragged is emphasized by Plato to represent the strength of the questioning mind that brings about higher knowledge and understanding. Once the man is out in the sunlight, his eyes slowly adapt to his surroundings.

At first, he can only look at the objects and people through reflections in the water but slowly can look directly at the people themselves and the objects they carry with them. Plato uses this section of the dialogue to emphasize that he is now out of his realm of understanding and is in the Intelligible World where true reality, according to Plato, exists. Because the man can analyze and reason to move up to the Intelligible World, Plato shows this as a shift to the Realm of Mathematics. At the time, great value and importance was placed on the concepts of mathematics such as analytical and reasoning faculties of the mind and thus would have influenced Plato to place it on a higher level. Due to his level of understanding and the major shift from one World to the other, he is overwhelmed and takes time to slowly learn the new concepts. However, once the man is adapted enough, he can look directly at the beings and the objects that cause the shadows on the wall.

In the theory of the Divided Line, Plato exemplifies that the man is looking at what are known as the Forms. The Forms are the perfect objects that exist in the higher realm of understanding and are shadowed on the wall of the cave. Thus, he is stating that what the people in the cave see are simply imperfect and skewed representations of the true and perfect forms from which they originate. After having seen the people and objects around him, the man still cannot bear to look at the sun itself, which is ultimately the source of everything. However, he desires to learn more and can look up at the sky at night to see the "heavenly bodies" of the moon and the stars. In the Theory of the Divided Line, this represents a shift upwards to the Realm of Understanding and higher to the Realm of Science and is reflected in the man seeking to understand his surroundings once he has learned them.

The Realm of Science is reflected in his looking up to the stars above to learn more. Finally, the man is driven to look up at the sun itself to find answers. This ultimate shift is represented as the pinnacle of knowledge and understanding where he finally understands that the sun is the source of light, the influence that changes the seasons, and the energy source for everything around him. In the Theory of the Divided Line, the sun represents the perfect and ultimate form of Good and Justice and a shift to the highest point in the Intelligible World.

From here, the man now understands everything around him and what exactly is reality. He realizes that everything that he once believed to be true when he was in the cave was, though not false, completely inaccurate if perceived as reality. Having analyzed the key points in The Allegory of the Cave, one can see that every major change can be represented as a shift upwards in understanding and the Theory of the Divided Line starting from his original beliefs to his understanding of the ultimate form of reality, the form of Good, and the form of Justice. One key point that one is to realize is that everything that occurred to the man was an effect of his mind; the constant and perpetual questioning mind was the catalyst that made him look around in the cave, his dragging out into the light and his need to learn more about his surroundings. Plato would have strongly emphasized this point as the key point in the dialogue because it is one of the most important characteristics of a philosopher: the ability to question and constantly seek higher understanding. However, if one is to look at such a dialogue from the point of view of Aristotle, Plato's student and apprentice, one can see that there are many conflicting arguments presented by Aristotle.

One of the fundamental arguments to the Theory of the Divided Line presented by Aristotle would have been the basis of what exists and what reality is, which Aristotle so aptly describes as the "whatness" of objects. Although Aristotle would have agreed that there are higher Forms that exist, he would have contradicted the fact that Plato believes that they exist outside of the human realm. His explanation for such a belief would be that no Form could ever exist without something that makes it real. Thus, Matter must exist to make a Form. Aristotle would further his explanation that Matter cannot exist without a Form and that Form cannot exist without Matter.

Therefore, Aristotle would have argued that there would not be a place where the people in the cave cannot see because if there were no Matter, the Forms would not exist as there would be no "whatness" to make that Form real and embody its characteristics. From this new point of view, one can see that Aristotle presents a more materialistic view of reality that is more focused on what exists and how it makes up the Forms rather than how the Forms exist and what people see are simply imperfections of those Forms.