

Plato and allegory of the cave final paper



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Plato and Allegory of the Cave Final Paper By Haviland Fleming Haviland Fleming Professor Brad Bannon Political and Soc. Philosophy-01 14

November 2018 Plato's story The Allegory of the Cave is an influential and pivotal philosophic text that created such a lasting affect that it is still taught in classrooms to this day. One of the primary reasons for this to be so monumental is that Plato addresses a wide variety of philosophical topics in this one work like Metaphysics, ethics, epistemology and many more.

The story of teaching of The Allegory of the Cave has been looked at, debated, and taught around the world for well over 2, 000 years at this point and because of that the interpretation can vary depending on the reader. As we argue and debate what Plato was truly seeking to accomplish with his allegory and subsequent analysis, we should think about the argument he was trying to make from his perspective and whether or not he was successful. The correlation between the story of the cave and Plato's analysis is quite interesting for any astute learner of philosophy.

The world community as a whole knows quite a lot of The Allegory of the Cave due to it being taught in most learning institutions in the western world although a fair amount of individuals do not know that the story originally comes from a larger text known as The Republic. In the larger story of The Republic Plato contemplates attempting to communicate what he would argue would be the utmost ideal government. As he works through the story of the republic he is trying to provide evidence for all of his positions and his thoughts on government. His end goal with The Allegory of the Cave is arguably to convince the reader that politicians should not want to rule and lead for the sake of power, but they should rather be against the idea to rule

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in the first place. In Plato's argument a ruler should instead lead his people out of compassion for those who are unenlightened, this is a reference to people who are similar to those in chains and facing the wall in the story of Plato's cave. Plato asks the question of why should the rulers be enlightened and not others so in his idealistic view the country should be ruled by a philosopher king, due to them being the ones who are qualified and enlightened enough to make these monumental decisions for the greater good of their people. Plato argues that if a ruler should command then they should have a love for wisdom and yearn for understanding as well as truth in order to rule fairly and intelligently to the people. There is no difference between a ruler who philosophizes and a philosopher becomes a ruler and in an ideal world all the kings are philosophers according to Plato. The Allegory of the Cave and the following argumentation is supposed to support the border argument that some people are truly enlightened and see things ten thousand times better than the inhabitants of the den, and that those people who see so much better are the ones that should be ruling the country although those people should also have the desire not to rule.

Since Philosophers were arguably the most enlightened people of all and since Plato wants them to take on the role of rulers and to rule with compassion, Plato specifically targets them with The Allegory of the Cave. In the actual writing, Socrates addresses Glaucon who is a student of his that he presumably is trying to lead to a state of enlightenment such as the men in the story. Socrates is acting exactly like one of the people in the allegory who has gone up to the light and is now returning to help the other people reach true understanding. Although Plato is not writing to people like

Glaucon. I would argue that he is writing to people much more similar to himself and to Socrates. He is saying to fellow philosophers that they should be like Socrates and be the people that return to the darkness to help those still bound and don't know that they are enslaved. The argument that Plato brings forward to the people he is addressing is that they should do more than just enjoy the joy of their understanding but to go back to the darkness in order to help others become enlightened no matter the cost. Plato says that philosophers who are enlightened will most likely remember their old friends in the cave and felicitate themselves on the change, and pity them. While Plato is saying that this is what they will likely do, he is also saying that they should want to do this as well. Plato thought that in order to convince his audience of the point he has made he would have to present his inherently logical allegory first, this in hope would make the reader agree with him. To be fair one of the principle strengths in The Allegory of the Cave is Plato's language and logic for most people would agree with the story although can disagree with its application to society. Plato layers his arguments one on top of the other to create an almost unshakable case that is quite hard to argue against. He does this by thinking of all possible angles and objections as he builds his story. For instance, the prisoners have always been in the cave, they have always been shackled and they have never been able to look around. In this hypothetical situation it is hard to argue the start of his argument because how would someone know they were in the dark if there was no conceivable way they could have seen the light. At times it seems obvious that Glaucon just has to agree with Socrates. While this is an allegory, all of Plato's assumptions and examples seem very plausible and intuitive as far as the allegory is concerned; Plato has considered all of the

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angles and the possible objections making his argumentation that much stronger.

He then makes a significant transition from this hypothetical example by claiming that it applies to the real world and to society. Plato makes the transition when he writes this entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument. Plato is involving a little bit of trickery here by convincing the readers with the allegory and then leaping into his real agenda with how we should view the world and the state using the allegory as the foundation for it. In a way this could be one of the first uses of the bait-and-switch scam although I am not sure it was the first. He baits us by using a plausible hypothetical allegory and switches by diving into his philosophical agenda without giving logical reasons for the transition even when his allegory was logical. In order to assert that the allegory relates directly to real life, Plato should have given us some concrete evidence for that transformation. Philosophical arguments are usually built upon a priori logic, reasoning, and empirical fact. An argument is made by presenting specific reasoning for believing in that said value or X (his assertion of the state). If I was to look at this from a formulate/mathematical perspective then assume A. if A then B. B equates to R, where R is real life, If B, then X. The issue with the argumentation is that how he does not give us reasons or empirical, a priori, to believe that B equates to R. In order to find this argument convincing, we should require Plato to provide additional reasons C and D to show that the move B equates to R is justified. So while The Allegory of the Cave might give evidence for what he is talking about, it

is by no means a solid argument that an entire metaphysical and epistemological view on which the world should be based.

There are additional ways in which the real-life application of the allegory of the cave can be disputed although Plato does not take the time to tell us how some of the specific items in the allegory translate to real life. In the allegory, the prisoners were restrained in such a way that it is difficult to deduce the truth of their circumstances if it was related to the real world. Plato says that most people live in such a way, but he does not say exactly how they are restricted. Apparently, the people in the allegory must be able to seek the light in some way because one man who made it out is able to do so. Plato does not answer several obvious questions like: why are others not able to do the same thing? Who was the first person to reach true enlightenment? Is achieving enlightenment a one-time event and do they have an encompassing knowledge of the world around them when they reach that enlightenment? Also the allegory seems patently unrelated to issues of the state or government. The Allegory of the Cave discusses enlightenment and the search for knowledge, by Plato's own admission yet he wants to take the allegory and make specific applications in regards to government and politics. While this makes sense as far as philosophers and enlightenment are concerned, it does not seem to harbor directly on the issues that he wish it would .

The Allegory of the Cave is an important text that still has the potential to stimulate critical thinking about our nation, the world, and the nature of reality even in the year 2018. However, it is far from a conclusive argument for the world of forms. Plato has a very specific rhetorical purpose and target

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audience, and he uses a somewhat devious rhetorical strategy to attempt to sway them to his viewpoint. Despite a convincing analogy, the leap from the analogy to real life applications is clouded in mystery as it can and has been debated throughout the ages.

When it comes to the in class discussion of Political and Soc. Philosophy we talked about this subject during the duration of a class period. The start of the class was consisted of people talking about the current events of the day and then we went into the implications of what went on in the allegory, we went over the men holding the prisoners there, the cave itself and the enlightenment aspect. Our first real discussion was asking if the prisoners looking at the shadows on the wall were actually prisoners. If a person is held although it is not against their will are they really a prisoner, some argued in favor and some against for this point. The other part of this question had to do with perspective because a person could only see that there were prisoners if those who were watching were enlightened so would a regular individual of the cave see a prisoner. The second point was talking about the people that were holding the prisoners there to look at shadows. Were they evil or are they even human, this point was talked about for a very short amount of time. The class then went on to the topic on enlightenment, which had many different points of view. Professor Bannon reminded the class that there are usually many forms of individualistic truth or the way an individual perceives a situation and he represented that by drawing a six sided die on the whiteboard that gave the representation that a person could say they see a 4 while another could say they see a 1 and both would be correct. When we talked about the enlightenment came into the debate there were

many questions although someone asked if the enlightenment could be concealed within another cave that had another enlightenment around it. We talked about how if a person found himself or herself within enlightenment could see things much more clearly than if they were back in the cave. Once an individual sees the truth then they cannot ever go back to just looking at the shadows on the walls. We talked a little about what happens if a person enters enlightenment although they truly are in the dark and those chained to the wall are really the enlightened ones. We elaborated on what does it mean to be enlightened and the implications of that. We had the fun little exercise of trying to describe light to a person who has only seen darkness their whole life along with talking to a color blind person what color is. We went over how the man in the allegory goes from being within the dark and now being in the light.

The class eventually talks about the encounter of the enlightened one with those in the back of the cave. How would a person tell them about light, the sun, colors, fragrances, grass, hills, dirt etc? Would they believe him or push him away. We talked about how if people hear something they really believe to be true is false then they can dig their heels in and say with vigor that they are right instead of accepting the new truth. The process of telling someone everything they ever thought is wrong is a challenging thing to do and can kick a person out of groups, organizations and other things just for telling the truth. A part that the class focused in on was The duty to tell or the obligation to tell others about the enlightenment if a person themselves has found the enlightenment. Should the person who learned of the enlightenment leave into the world or go back to the darkness and tell his

friends about what he has seen. The person probably knows there is a good chance they will be rejected but should he still go. Many of the class argued in favor of this because a person has a conscious obligation to go and help free the friend even when they don't know per say that they are a prisoner. Should those who are better off help their friends or look after themselves when it comes to knowledge? The class talked about the differences between should we and we have to concepts, which didn't really come to any conclusion. We eventually said that if someone is enlightened and out of the cave that they have a moral obligation to go back into the cave to save their friends even if those friends hate him for it. There was some disagreement on this topic. As a class we tried to talk about real world application of this although it did not go to far due to time constraints on the class. We talked about North Korea being a somewhat good example of the cave having the normal population being those looking at the wall. If they don't know any better then what their government tells them then are they really prisoners Was an argument that was thrown around? When the people see America as the major evil of the world are they in a cave or enlightened? The class had many questions about this topic although at this point many students were packing up which signaled the arrival of 12: 15 meaning the class was ending.