

The difficult journey of education in plato's "allegory of the cave"

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In Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," Socrates discusses the difficult journey of education that an ignorant individual must go through in order to become enlightened. He employs symbolism of a dark cave full of shackled prisoners to depict the limited outlook of ignorant people. These prisoners face a wall with shadows cast from artifacts and make guesses on what each artifact is. Because they know of nothing else, they accept anything they see as the whole reality without using reason to contemplate its identity or whether there is more to it. When a person is liberated from the cave, or is educated, he or she realizes that his or her prepossessed beliefs were incorrect, and he or she must face the struggle of accepting the truth. Socrates opposes the idea of education being a simple act of "putting knowledge into souls that lacks it, like putting sight into blind eyes;" and instead sees education as an extensive process that is not instant or passive.

In fact, he believes that ignorant people do have "sight," but that their sight is turned in the wrong direction. He claims that they require assistance to redirect their perspective—sometimes even to the extent of using force. Although I disagree with Socrates' idea of using force to educate others, I support his view of education being more than the act of a teacher merely relaying information to a student and that it helps the individual grow as a person because education requires the individual to take time to accept his or her ignorance and create a new perspective for himself or herself.

According to Socrates, education opens the eyes of ignorant people and frees them from their unenlightened state. Education creates a way for an individual to contemplate his or her own knowledge, or what is already

known, and challenge them from a brand new perspective. Socrates explains that becoming educated is not accomplished through one person telling another person a fact. For example, teachers can write mathematical equations on the board for their students to memorize. The student does not automatically know what it is – they do not become instantly “educated” on the meaning of the equation by simply memorizing it. To become educated, the student must study it and utilize it in their problem solving. True education involves a lengthy process of an individual taking in information and using reason to form his or her own judgement upon it.

The purpose of education is not to hand over the truth, but to push an individual towards the truth. Socrates also implies that the ignorant person is not “blind,” for he or she already possesses his or her own set of beliefs and values– although they may not fit Socrates’ idea of being correct. He states that everyone is capable of learning and that “the instruments with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body,” illuminating his argument that education does not impact one part of a person, but the entire being. Education moves individuals in a fashion that transforms their soul completely, allowing them to think broader, or redirect their thoughts down paths never once explored. This allows them to observe their own thoughts as well as life and the people around them and question whether they are right.

The importance of education is pushed even further when educated individuals use their newly developed knowledge as a gateway to attaining

even more knowledge. Education nurtures one's mind and soul, allowing he or she to grow as a person and live a fuller life. In Socrates' metaphor, the prisoners believed that the extent of reality was " nothing other than the shadows" of the artifacts that they saw in the cave. When one of the prisoners was freed from the cave, he could acquire critical thinking from his exposure to the true reality outside of the cave and apply it to his past thoughts and life. He then realized that the entire truth was not just the shadow, but the artifact behind it as well. Through this, Socrates further emphasizes the fact that education allows one to grow as a person by using reasoning instead of senses to make judgements.

He suggests that as education enriches the soul in the direction of enlightenment, it also pushes the person to be more just. Education can pave the path towards justice by creating an increasing number of better individuals, better leaders, and a better society. Socrates ends the allegory by claiming that it is the job of the educated to revisit the prisoners who are restrained in the cave and " share their labors and honors;" he states that not doing so would be an " injustice" to the ignorant as they would not get to experience the life-changing transformation of the soul that comes with being educated. The prisoners' heads and bodies would remain in the same position it had always been—untouched and unturned by education, and the prisoners would never get to see the world from both perspectives. Without being able to turn their heads, they are unable see the whole truth like those who are educated can. This can create an imbalance in the society. By

educating others, society becomes more united as everyone would have the knowledge and experience of both the ignorant and educated.

From Socrates' perspective, it is fine for someone to “compel” another into education. He describes the freed prisoner's conversion as someone “dragg[ing] him away from [the cave]” and forcing him to “look at the light itself,” despite the light painfully blinding him. Socrates claims that over time, the prisoner, or the ignorant, would slowly process the truth and come to accept it. Although it is true that through such force the prisoner could reach enlightenment, I believe his method is still morally unacceptable. Socrates is correct when he states that passively receiving knowledge is wrong – but I believe there are better methods to educating someone besides using force. If someone is forced into education, he or she does not get the chance to go through the personal process of accepting the truth and developing his or her own way of thinking.

He or she learns not because they want to, but because they must. The ability to learn is innate in everyone, but I believe having the desire to learn is a fundamental part of education. The ignorant must be willing to push aside their false beliefs and try to see the truth. Having someone assist another is effective, but in order to become truly educated one has to be active in the process. A better method of education, from my perspective, would be to use persuasion. This way, one could help the ignorant come to the point of realizing that there is more to the truth, like being the person who breaks chains restraining the prisoner – but nothing more than that. Persuasion allows the ignorant to come to terms with reality under free will,

using no resistance. He or she has the chance to decide whether they believe an idea is right or wrong with no outside influences swaying his or her decisions. The person being educated can evolve their way of thinking without such things holding them back; he or she can learn to think for themselves.

Socrates and I share the same definition of education – it is not a transmission of information from a teacher to a student, but an affair that involves the student being active and processing the given information to create new ideas. We also both view education as a way to better individuals as it allows them to take current knowledge and enhance the mind, reflecting on themselves and altering their perspectives. Education takes a belief and redirects it, like a person turning their body in the other direction and giving them a new sight. Despite these agreements, I cannot support Socrates condoning the use of force in educating others. Having another intervene with the use of force inhibits those who are in the midst of being educated from experiencing the full effect of enlightenment. The better method to education is one that uses persuasion. It is acceptable for another to guide the ignorant towards enlightenment, but not to the extent of ignoring signs of resistance. Every person is born with the ability to learn, but to be educated there must be the desire for knowledge.