

I experience,  
therefore i am: a case  
for an evolutionary  
view of self from plato  
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Plato's allegory of the cave tells the story of a group of men bound together in chains from birth, locked away from the world in a deep, dark cave. They are forced to stare at the wall of the cave and are unable to look around at each other and their surroundings. One day, one prisoner is mysteriously freed from his shackles and leaves the cave to explore the new and enchanting world of humanity. After he exits the cave, his eyes struggle to adjust to the sunlight. But, after they adjust, he discovers that there are other people in the world - free people, no less. Amazed, he returns to the cave and tells his fellow prisoners of his experience. Unsurprisingly, they do not take his information - which is ultimately a challenge of their worldview - very well. They brutally murder the man, thereby refuting his worldview and confirming that humans are shaped by their environment and are unwilling to listen to and accept new ideas and opportunities. Although the assertions about human nature made in the allegory of the cave are wholeheartedly correct, Plato's theory of the self - which says that all parts of the soul have desires, but desire in appetitive and spirited parts is not a matter of belief about what is good and what is bad - is wholly foolish and incorrect. Instead, one should prescribe to an amalgamation of the evolutionary and dualist view of self, which says that the self develops in the brain as a result of past experience and genetic inheritance in order to differentiate self from other. It hinges on " the ability by the brain to coordinate new sensory information in light of the organism's internal states and in the context of its personal history and genetic inheritance".

There are a vast array of fictional pieces that ponder the self, but none are as well-done and innovative as Ridley Scott's landmark 1982 film Blade

Runner. It portrays a dystopian Earth in which a genius inventor named Edmond Tyrell has created mechanical humans called replicants. While once an exciting and innovative product, virulent hate for the new beings has begun to spread throughout Earth and its surrounding colonies. As a result, the eponymous blade runners (all of whom are hitmen) are dispatched to hunt down and destroy the newly rebellious replicant population. The replicants have no genetic experience – only artificial and implanted experience from their creator and his henchmen. Unlike humans, their lives are artificial, short in length (many of the replicants in the film have lifespans totaling only four years), and meaningless in their existence. Reflecting on and ultimately accepting his short yet fascinating life in one of cinema's great soliloquies, the film's replicant antagonist Roy Batty remarks: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die". Without context, this dialogue can be interpreted as a man reflecting on the many experiences of life and looming expiration (Batty is at the tail end of his life cycle). With context, though, this dialogue takes on an entirely different meaning. Prior to Batty uttering these famous lines, he saved his rival Rick Deckard from an untimely death. With this in mind, Batty's speech can be interpreted as a confirmation of the existence of self and an accusation (the accusatory phrase "you people" cues the viewer into his tone) that replicants are more human than flesh and blood humans themselves. In other words, Batty advances the notion that the soul cannot be programmed; instead, the soul is obtained through experience and by living life to its fullest, no matter the length.

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Arrival, directed by Denis Villeneuve, written by Eric Heisserer, and adapted from Ted Chiang's short story "Stories of Your Life," illuminates how subjective time really is. Its main character, Dr. Louise Banks, is sent on a mission to decipher the language of the non-dangerous aliens dubbed Heptapods. Initially, she labors to understand the aliens exceptionally complex language but ultimately discovers that their language conveys feeling, not sound. After fully immersing herself in the foreign language of the Heptapods, her perception of time changes. Her adaption to the new language, while rooted in evolution (humans are hard-wired to adapt to new situations relatively quickly), primarily stems from her learned behavior (the language). In the short story, she describes her experience with the new language: "With this language, I can see how my mind is operating. I don't pretend to see my own neurons firing; such claims belong to John Lilly and his LSD experiments of the sixties. What I can do is perceive the gestalts; I see the mental structures forming, interacting. I see myself thinking, and I see the equations that describe my thinking, and I see myself comprehending the equations, and I see how the equations describe their being comprehended." It is admittedly strange to compare the experience of learning a new language to taking LSD, but the comparison is apt in this case. To Louise, learning Heptapod is like taking the mind-altering drug LSD in that it significantly changes brain chemistry; it alters how she thinks, how she perceives time, and how she lives her life. Really, it alters her view of self.

People should live life to fullest knowing full well that their time on Earth is finite and could be over before tomorrow. The title "Stories of Your Life" is

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vital to understanding the self and human existence: life should be made up of many stories - not just a single one - and humans should strive to live their lives to the fullest. Each individual is different, everyone - no matter skin color, age, sexual orientation, etc. - shares the common experience of being human. At our core, we are all human beings worthy of dignity, respect, and if we put a little effort into it, a decent life.