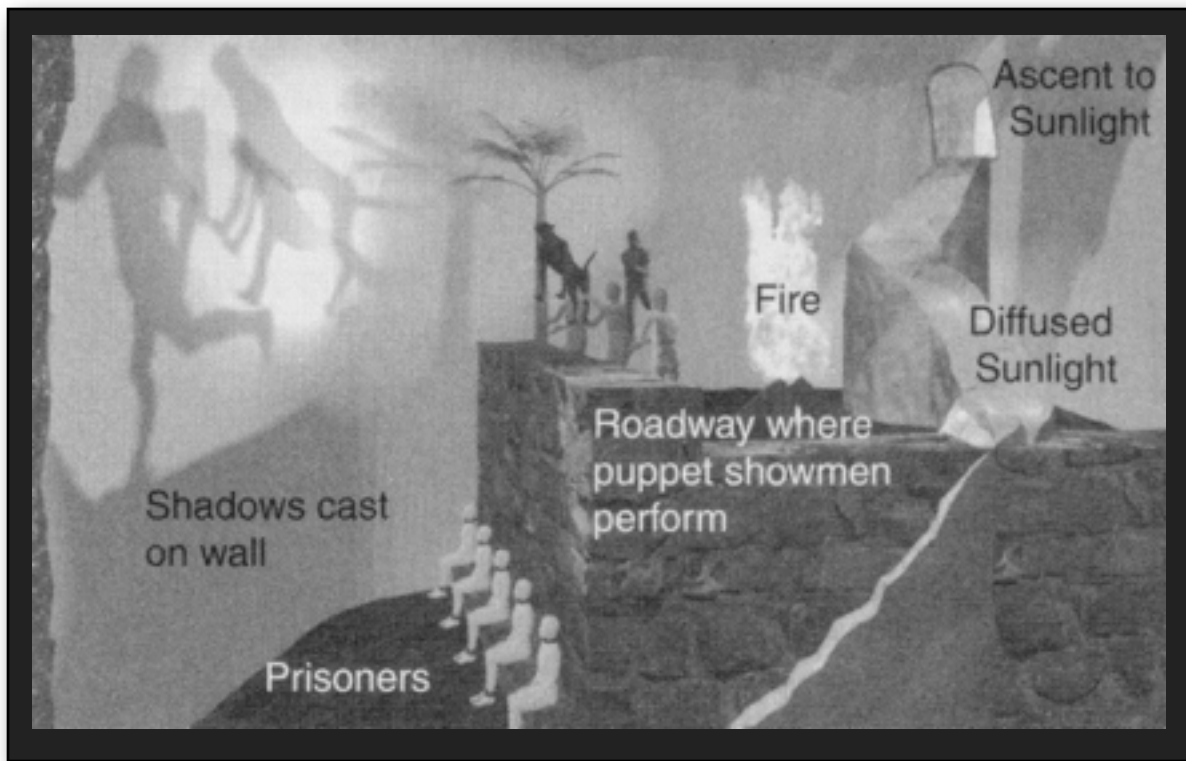


A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a large crowd of people, mostly men, looking upwards. The image is heavily stylized with a high-contrast, almost binary color scheme. The crowd is dense, filling the lower two-thirds of the frame. In the upper right, a bright, star-like light source emanates a strong beam of light across the top of the image. The overall effect is one of a collective gaze directed towards a powerful, unseen entity or event.

p l a t o ' s

a l l e g o r y o f

t h e c a v e



PLATO

Book VII of The Republic

The Allegory of the Cave

Here's a little story from Plato's most famous book, **The Republic**. Socrates is talking to a young follower of his named Glaucon, and is telling him this fable to illustrate what it's like to be a philosopher -- a lover of wisdom: Most people, including ourselves, live in a world of relative ignorance. We are even comfortable with that ignorance, because it is all we know. When we first start facing truth, the process may be frightening, and many people run back to their old lives. But if you continue to seek truth, you will eventually be able to handle it better. In fact, you want more! It's true that many people around you now may think you are weird or even a danger to society, but you don't care. Once you've tasted the truth, you won't ever want to go back to being ignorant.

Socrates is speaking with **Glaucon**.

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: -- Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you

look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned

towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, -- will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he 's forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer,

Better to be the poor servant of a poor master, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

AN ANALYSIS OF PLATO'S THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

1. What is the main message or theme of this myth or allegory?

2. Are the ideas expressed in this myth/allegory relevant and meaningful today? Why?

3. What are the symbols in the myth or allegory and what do they symbolize (represent)? What are the “modern day” equivalents?












symbols in The Cave	modern equivalents

4. Socrates is basically orating a story to Glaucon. Fill in the plot graph by writing “tweet” length interpretations of each plot component, for example:



They exist in an underground cave. Prisoners from birth. Their necks chained to face a stone wall. They gaze at shadows. They can't look back.

P L O T & N A R R A T I V E S T R U C T U R E

PLOT COMPONENT/ELEMENTS	TWEET
SETTING: is where the action takes place within a story (i.e, café, school). It is usually described to give the reader a strong image of where the characters are. Usually introduces the characters.	 
INCITING MOMENT: the event or force (i.e. initial conflict) that starts the action in a story. Without it, there would be NO story.	 
RISING ACTION: the action - conflicts, characters - leading up to the climax	 
CLIMAX: the high point of a story. The 'point of no return'. It is where the most suspenseful, 'waited for' action occurs. It is an emotional reaction by the reader to the events in a story.	 
FALLING ACTION: the action after the climax, leading to the resolution of the events within a story. Things start to get wrapped up in this stage of the story.	 
DENOUEMENT: the final unraveling of the plot, for example: the solution to a mystery or the explanation/outcome of a story.	

The following are “ongoing” narrative elements throughout a story or narrative and cannot be neatly fit into the plot structure, but are nonetheless essential and crucial for the telling of a story/narrative.

narrative elements	example
CHARACTERS: the people involved in the story.	
CHARACTERIZATION: the way the characters are described and developed through dialogue, language and description.	
CONFLICT: the relationship between the protagonist and antagonist. Usually there is friction and a problem to overcome within a story. There is not always one conflict in a story. The types of conflicts found in stories are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Person v. Person <input type="checkbox"/> Person v. Self <input type="checkbox"/> Person v. Society <input type="checkbox"/> Person v. Nature <input type="checkbox"/> Person v. Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Person v. Fate(???) 	
MOOD: the emotional sense that the reader feels from a story (sad, angry, dark, gloomy)	
POINT OF VIEW: stories are usually written in either 1 st ("I") or 3 rd (he/she/they) person point of view.	
GENRE: the type of story that is written, for example: horror, mystery/thriller, comedy, romance, action adventure	
LANGUAGE STYLES: language is a very important and integral part of any narrative. It determines audience, genre and is used to convey images of characters. The following are a few language styles that are common in narratives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Informal: language used commonly amongst friends and peers <input type="checkbox"/> Formal: language used with strangers or people we consider worthy of greater respect <input type="checkbox"/> Colloquial: everyday speech, for example: "Yeah, yeah. No problem with dat. I'll get right on it," he said in a fatigued, slacker voice <input type="checkbox"/> Slang: language used amongst friends or peer groups. Slang is often culturally, 'generationally' and geographically specific. It is often used to exclude and include certain people. <input type="checkbox"/> Jargon: 'professional' slang. Jargon is language used mainly in professional fields like medicine, law and computer programming. It is also used to exclude and include people. 	
THEME: the central idea – not topic – of a short story, novel or film. If a story is about a topic such as GOSSIP, the theme may be gossip has a destructive power.	