

Explain Plato's Analogy of the Cave

In Plato's analogy the cave, we see him try to show his beliefs about the forms through a story. Plato was wise and realised the importance of explaining often difficult ideas in a simpler way, he choose to use analogy to this.

In the story the first analogy that Plato makes uses the prisoners. They represent the everyday person. Plato believes that many people don't know the real truth and are happy to accept what they see around them without questioning it. As a result to this acceptance, our souls are trapped within our bodies.

The actual cave the prisoners are in shows that they are trapped away from real life. The cave symbolises the physical world in which we live in. It is an illusory world of the senses, which we make the mistake of believing, is everything.

The shadows which are projected onto the walls of the cave are only images, yet the prisoners, because they have never known any different, take these images and assume them to be reality. Plato is saying that this is what people without philosophy are doing. He believes that everything we can experience using our senses are only a projection of a perfect object which exists in another realm. In the story this realm is the outside world. Once the prisoner is set free and goes out into the outside world he can suddenly see that the world he knew before was incorrect. Plato is saying that just as the things inside the cave where incorrect, so are those in the physical world. He believed the outside world represents another realm, the 'real world'.

The 'real world', contains a perfect ... of everything. These.... He called the 'Forms'. Everything that we see in this world is just an imperfect shadow of these forms. As a result this means that nothing is we know is real. However these Forms are invisible to us.

In the story we can see that the escaped prisoner realises that the sun is what everything ultimately owes its existence to. The sun is representing a Form of all the other Forms. This is the form of existence and perfection, Plato calls this the Form of Good.

The journey of the escaped prisoners represents the journey undergone to gain knowledge. In the story it is descried as being step and rough. This is showing Plato believes the only way to gain knowledge is through intellectual pursuit, but realises the struggle in doing this. He

believes the only way of gaining understanding is through thinking and reflecting. He believes we have to ignore the senses as these only lead us away from the truth.

The final comparison made in the story is through using the return of the escaped prisoner. Upon his return, we see the other prisoners feel threatened when their ideas about the world are questioned. The escaped prisoner knew that he would be mocked when he returned, but chose to anyway, it is every philosopher's purpose to share the truth with others. The prisoner's response represents the ignorance of most people. Most are not prepared to question what they know as it destroys the secure world that they live in. Plato shows that people are prepared to kill so that they can keep their security at the end of the analogy; in the same way he believes that this is why Socrates was killed-he offered an alternative.