

Explain how Plato uses the myth of the cave to illustrate his ideas about the human condition and the nature of reality?

Could reality be the greatest special effect of all time? Since the 6th century B.C.E a growth in human knowledge and understanding had occurred and people began to question the world rd they lived in, these people were called philosophers. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximines, Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Socrates were all highly regarded intellectuals but one man's thoughts on the world stood out. Plato is probably the best known of al the ancient Greek philosophers. His philosophy contributed to the evolution of many ideas about God and films such as The Matrix. One of the most famous books about of philosophy is Plato's *The Republic*. In this work Plato discusses the nature justice, the ideal society, and who should rule it. Plato described his view on reality using similes. He felt we must escape from the mistake of believing that our perceptions of reality were the truth.

Plato's *Allegory of the cave* is possibly the most famous passage of all his writings. Plato expresses something of the beliefs of learning, and the about the relationship between world of appearances and the world of reality. The allegory begins with a description of prisoners in a cave, who are only able to look straight ahead of themselves because they are chained. They have a fire behind them, and a wall in front, and the cave has a long tunnel entrance so that no natural daylight in the cave, only the firelight. The prisoners have been there in the cave since childhood so this is the only thing they will know of. Behind them people are putting on a type of puppet show but they can only see the shadows. They can only see poorly formed shadows of artificial objects pretending to move which they perceive of reality. In the cave, one of the prisoners is set free. He is able to stand up and turn around. At first the movement is painful and the light from the sun blinds him. He then realises that his form of reality was not as it seems. He then retreat back to the fire but is forced outside. The more his eyes adjust to the light the more he understands about the truth. The former prisoner feels sorry for the other that are still in the cave so he goes back to the cave. When he sees the shadows again he realises that how false the actually were. But the people still chained laugh at him as he has spoiled his ability to see the puppet show. The passage ends with the prisoners in the chains saying that they will kill anyone who tries to set them free.

The myth compares the situation of Plato's prisoners with the situation of all human beings. "*I want you to go on picture the enlightenment or ignorance of our human conditions as follows*". What human's think of as real is an illusion in the same as the prisoners in the cave thought that the shadow on the cave was real. Plato believes the empirical world makes humans, prisoners as they are trapped by their ignorance and lack of understanding of the way things really are. Plato epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with human knowledge and tries to find out the limits of human understanding. In the allegory of the cave it shows how the prisoners believed the whole truth as this was what they can prove with empirical knowledge (five senses) this could be proved the same for humans. Many of us believe that our world can be the only one as we have never seen anything else other than it, but wouldn't that make us the same as the people still trapped inside of the cave. The shadows of the puppets are the things in our world that we believe to be real. The fire represents the corruption that false knowledge "empirical" forces on the human mind.

The only real truth shown in this passage is the sun, which represents truth in its purest most honest form.

Plato believed in two worlds. The first was the empirical world that people could derive through their five senses. According to Plato this world is false as the empirical world is constantly changing and at constant state of flux. He believed that the empirical world keeps human beings in their ignorance. This can be referred back to the cave as the prisoners are trapped at the lowest form of reality not knowing or questioning if there could be more than what is around them. Plato is also able to show how empirical knowledge can be misleading at times flat out wrong. In his epistemology he also refers to as particular in the empirical world are dim, unreliable, shadowy reflections of something superior. Our shadowy reflections would be the puppets to the prisoners. This shows how our reality can easily be compared to the reality of the cave, as at this very moment a higher power could be simply manipulating our senses into believing that what we are doing at this very moment is real.

Plato believed that there was a higher world than the empirical that was the metaphysical world. The metaphysical world was perfect and true but was only attainable by people using their reason for example philosophers. It was not accessible by the five senses. Plato believed that it was the opposite of the empirical world that was changeless, eternal and true. This is also called the world of forms. When the prisoner is released at first he finds it hard. This demonstrates how human beings have to work for enlightenment and that you will not achieve it easily. It also shows that how at first humans would rather stay in ignorance than challenge their own preconceptions as the freed man retreats back into the cave. After the man is forced back out into the real world he is blinded by the sun, which represents the truth. This section is ambiguous, as the man may have retreated due to fear as well. By doing this Plato shows that enlightenment is a gradual process. After he has attained a genuine understanding of reality he is able to achieve the pure truth. Unfortunately for a human being there is no one there who is able to force us to look deeper we have to achieve it by ourselves. The way in which the chapter ends is an obvious reference about the human nature. He described how the remaining prisoners would go as far as killing, to remain in their own form of reality. By doing this Plato describing how the majority of people are content with their dim reflections of reality and are not willing to open their minds to the possibility something better.

To conclude the allegory of the cave is able to represent Plato's ideas on the nature of reality in a way that is easier to understand as the reader is able to relate to the example given. He uses similes and metaphors to portray his ideas of ignorance to enlightenment and empirical to metaphysical.