

Allegory of the cave and matrix comparison

In Book VII of The Republic, Plato tells a story entitled "The Allegory of the Cave." He begins the story by describing a dark underground cave where a group of people are sitting in one long row with their backs to the cave's entrance. Chained to their chairs from an early age, all the humans can see is the distant cave wall in front of them. Their view of reality is solely based upon this limited view of the cave which but is a poor copy of the real world.

In addition to the chained people, there are other people in the cave. Plato refers to them as the puppet-handlers and they are the ones holding those in the cave captive. (It is important to realize that the prisoners do not realize this--in fact, the prisoners do not even realize that they are being held captive since this existence is all they have ever known.) Walking behind the prisoners, the puppet-handlers hold up various objects found in the real world. Due to a fire that is burning the mouth of the cave, the prisoners are able to see the objects and each other only as distorted, flickering shadows on the cavern wall in front of them.

Unfortunately, the prisoners can not see the actual objects or the puppet-makers because they are unable to turn their heads. From childhood, "...their legs and necks have been in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only what is in front of them.... As Plato goes on to later explain, "The truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images."

The movie, "The Matrix," parallels Plato's Allegory of the Cave in a number of ways. Similar to the prisoners of the cave, the humans trapped in the matrix (the cave) only see what the machines (the modern day puppet-handlers) want them to see. They are tricked into believing that what they hear in the cave and see before them is the true reality that exists. Furthermore, they accept what their senses are telling them and they believe that what they are experiencing is all that really exists-nothing more.

Neo discovers that what he has been presented with his entire life is only reflections, or merely shadows of the truth. This theme is carried throughout the movie as we see many objects (as well as Neo himself) reflected in other objects.

The puppet-handlers, as Plato calls them, represent the influential, powerful members of society. In "The Matrix," the puppet-handlers are the machines spawned from a singular consciousness called AI (Artificial Intelligence.) Basically, the puppet-handlers in both cases use artificial surroundings as a way to control and manipulate the information that the prisoners receive.

And while the prisoners are being fooled and influenced by the false reality presented to them, so too are the puppet-handlers, to some extent, because they are also living inside

the artificial world they have created as well.

Note how towards the end of the "The Matrix," Agent Smith, a computer simulation, begins to express human emotions such as anger and hatred. Since he has to live in the false reality of the matrix, the agent has begun to adapt to his environment, the very prison-like surroundings he helped create for his captives. In fact, he is becoming more and more like the enslaved humans that he despises.