

‘The unexamined life is not worth living’

Following this theory initiated by Plato we can investigate the Analogy of the Cave and the concepts and ideas put forth by Plato from this allegory.

Plato presents an interesting theory of knowledge through this allegory, explaining to us that the only way of finding true knowledge is through a long and grinding process of studying, researching and thinking. Plato believed knowledge is innate within us so this process is simply of us re-discovering our innate knowledge. By using the theory of the cave Plato explained that general people choose to ignore the unanswerable questions of life, and go through life ignorant of these questions. Unlike philosophers who search for the answers, and eventually find them, giving them true knowledge. Of course, being a philosopher himself, Plato is considered to be an elitist. When describing the analogy of the cave Plato declares that the philosophers, being the greater minds with deeper understandings of the world should all be kings. Another point made by this allegory is that knowledge can only be rediscovered if the individual searching accepts that there are two worlds. The empirical world, dependent on the senses, and the realm of forms, which is not a physical world that only true philosophers can enter after the grinding process of studying, researching and thinking.

To begin with, I will describe the basic story of the analogy of the cave and insert the different meanings and teachings I understand Plato to be putting forth at different intervals.

Plato teaches that the prisoners of the cave are like the people of our empirical world, which we consider to be reality. The prisoners are detained in such a way that all they can see is a cave wall. A fire is behind the prisoners, and shadows are cast on the walls by different forms of puppets. To the prisoners this is the real world. For them, this is reality as it is all they have ever been exposed to. In comparison to our world, the shadows are the objects we see, touch, smell, taste and listen to. The physical world to us is simply a shadowy world, a blurred image of the real world. Plato then goes on to explain that if a prisoner were set free, released from what was detaining him/her, and allowed to make his/her way out of the cave to the real world, this would be the comparison of the person who goes on the long study to discover true knowledge. After much adjustment, the prisoner would be able to look into the fire, and slowly would make their way out of the cave, adjusting to the different lights, noises etc. Now, the prisoner has the choice to refuse this new world they have been introduced to, backing away from

the fire and returning to sit in front of the wall they have grown to consider reality. However, if the prisoner were forced to face reality, they would realise that there is an entire world outside of the cave. Plato uses this analogy to explain to us that once we have been through the studying process, the adjustment, we will discover the real world, and have full knowledge, like philosophers. So instead of living in a world of opinion, we will live in a world of knowledge, instead of a world of what the senses perceive, we will live in a world of what reason understands, a world of reality.

In Plato's opinion this world of the 'Forms' is arranged in a hierarchy. The most important form is the form of the good, which is the ultimate principal, making the world of the 'Forms' to be a world we should all aspire to be in. However, one major flaw in Plato's argument is that it is based on opinion. Considering part of his argument bases this perfect world on being of knowledge and not opinion, and bearing in mind Plato considers himself, as a Philosopher, to be in this world, his argument is based on opinion. He has no fact of this realm of 'Forms' and therefore could be considered to be contradicting himself.

Nevertheless Plato's viewpoint is indeed worth at least acknowledging as a point of reference for the basis of our world.

Some philosophers believe that "Plato believes humans can't really know the whole truth". This is an interesting point of view, as Plato did indeed appear to be a highly elitist philosopher, believing philosopher kings should rule the realm of 'Forms', the world of reason. Undeniably Plato did make it clear that he felt Philosophers were of higher intellect and of more importance than ordinary people. However, it is also arguable that Plato did teach that knowledge is innate within us. If knowledge is innate then technically everybody has knowledge. So, if everyone goes through the process of rediscovering the innate knowledge within, everybody has the ability to become a philosopher. So in opposition to some philosophers I would argue that Plato did believe that humans could know the whole truth. If indeed the world of reason, the realm of 'Forms' does exist, and if it is possible for people to become part of this world, then the 'form' of truth will be accessible to all who go through process of rediscovering knowledge.

Plato described the world of reason to contain true goodness, the Form of good. An empirical example of goodness would be telling the truth, something that we believe not to be false. However, if we do believe that this world of reason is of goodness, then does that make the world we live

in bad? If the world we live in is bad, then the people who live in this world, cannot have access to the truth, the truth being an example of the form of good. Therefore, Plato could have been saying that those people who decide to ignore, or have not considered there being a different world other than the physical, can't really know the whole truth. This then brings us to the conclusion that it is true some people are and will remain to be without any knowledge of the whole truth, of goodness, and will be happy to accept the physical world as the only world. Yet there will still be those who enquire and question the physical world, and will search for the world of 'forms'. The world where the whole does exist. These people will become philosophers whilst going through the process of reacquiring the innate knowledge. But they are still people, and will gain true knowledge of the truth. Or so Plato's opinion tells us.

Plato's message was not that normal people cannot ever access the world of reason, the 'forms', just they have to rediscover their innate knowledge. Simplistically knowledge is there in front of us, and if we open our eyes to it we will be able to access it, if however we turn away and remain eyes closed to this knowledge, we will remain in a world of shadows and opinions.