
Allegory Of The Cave Full Text

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Full Text*

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UNDERSTANDING PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE: THE FULL TEXT AND ITS TIMELESS MESSAGE

For over two millennia, Plato's **Allegory of the Cave** has captivated readers, philosophers, and seekers of truth. It remains one of the most powerful metaphors for human perception, ignorance, and the pursuit of knowledge. Many students and

enthusiasts search for the **Allegory of the Cave full text** to read it in its original form, hoping to grasp its profound implications. This article provides the complete allegory as presented in Plato's *Republic* (Book VII), followed by a clear interpretation and discussion of its modern relevance. Whether you are encountering this text for the first time or revisiting it, this guide will help you see beyond the shadows.

WHAT IS THE ALLEGORY OF THE

CAVE?

The Allegory of the Cave appears in Plato's dialogue *The Republic*, where Socrates describes a group of prisoners who have been chained inside a dark cave their entire lives. They can only see shadows cast on the wall by a fire behind them. The prisoners mistake these shadows for reality because they have never known anything else. The allegory then follows one prisoner's journey out of the cave into the sunlight, symbolizing the philosopher's ascent from ignorance to true knowledge. This story is not merely an ancient fable; it is a cornerstone of Western philosophy, addressing questions about reality, education, and the

social responsibility of those who have seen the truth.

THE FULL TEXT OF PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

Below is the complete passage from Plato's *Republic* (514a-520a), translated by Benjamin Jowett. This is the **Allegory of the Cave full text** as often studied in philosophy courses. Read it carefully to appreciate the imagery and the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon.

Socrates:

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlighte

ned:—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.

Glaucón: I
see.

Socrates:
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.

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

Socrates:
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?

Glaucón:
True, he
said; how
could they
see
anything

but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

Socrates:

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

Glauccon:

Yes, he said.

Socrates:

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not

suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Glauccon:

Very true.

Socrates:

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?

Glaucon:

No question, he replied.

Socrates:

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

Glaucon:

That is certain.

Socrates:

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
someone
saying to
him, that
what he
saw before
was an
illusion, but
that now,
when he is
approachin
g nearer to
being and
his eye is
turned
towards
more real
existence,
he has a
clearer
vision—wh
at 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?

Glaucon:
Far truer.

Socrates:
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 refuge 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?

Glaucon:
True, he said.

Socrates:
And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly

dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is 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.

Glaucon:
Not all in a

moment,
he said.

Socrates:

He will
require to
grow
accustome
d 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?

Glaucon:

Certainly.

Socrates:

Last of all
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
contemplat

e him as
he is.

Glaucón:
Certainly.

Socrates:
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
accustome
d to
behold?

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

Socrates:
And when
he
remember
ed 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?

Glaucón:
Certainly,

he would.

Socrates:

And if they were in the habit of conferring honors 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 honors and glories, or would he 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?

Glaucon:

Yes, he said, I think

that he
would
rather
suffer
anything
than
entertain
those false
notions
and live in
that
miserable
manner.

Socrates:

Imagine
once more,
such a 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?

Glaucon:

To be sure,

he said.

Socrates:

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
anyone
tried to
loose
another
and lead
him up to
the light,
let them
only catch
the
offender,
and they

would put
him to
death.

Glaucon:

No
question,
he said.

Socrates:

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
misappreh
end 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.

Glaucon: I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

Socrates: Moreover, I said, you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are

unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.