

The *Allegory of the Cave* can be found in Book VII of Plato's best-known work, *The Republic*, a *lengthy* dialogue on the nature of justice. Often regarded as a utopian *blueprint*, *The Republic* is dedicated to a discussion of the education of a Philosopher-King, who would be able to rule in justice the greek Polis.



The cave setting. A *dim* cave inhabited by PRISONERS: they are held IMMOBILE and chained in *fetters* since childhood; they are compelled to look *straightforwardly* ahead, facing a WALL; no freedom of turning right or left, just the chance of *gazing* at the wall. Behind them a raised WALKWAY: other people walk *to and fro* along this, carrying things on their heads (puppets, objects). Behind the walkway there is a huge FIRE, *shedding* LIGHT towards the wall at the bottom of the cave. This fire projects the puppets' and objects' large SHADOWS on the wall, creating a chain of PICTURES, which can be observed by the prisoners. The cave is open: behind the fire a *path* is leading to the ascent outside, where bright SUN and daylight shine.

Actions taking place in the cave.

(a)-**SLAVERY**: prisoners watch the shadows cast by the men walking in the walkway, NOT KNOWING these are shadows: they just BELIEVE these objects/pictures are real things moving on the wall. They would *praise* as clever whoever would become an expert about shadows as someone who has fully understood the nature of the world; all human nature would depend on the shadows on the wall; they don't *conceive* any sun or exit.

(b)-**EXIT**: BUT if a prisoner would *suddenly* stand up: if someone were to show him the puppets and objects carried on the walkway, he would not recognize them for what they are: only the pictures on the wall would be believed to be real objects of the world. The prisoner would not be able to look at the fire: he would be STRUCK BLIND by its light and try to TURN BACK TO THE WALL, his unique well known *realm*. If the prisoner got upwards and reached the outside, he would be distressed by the daylight and more unable to see it than the fire itself, not believing what would going on there. Yet, after some time he would acclimate to this new situation and be able to see more and more new things around him, until he even could look upon the SUN. He would understand the sun as the SOURCE of the real light outside the cave and as the real truth.

(c)-**RETURN**: now, what about a possible return into the cave? He wouldn't be believed at all by the prisoners still sitting at the wall. He would have lost any faith into the shadowy pictures displayed on the wall. He would understand that the fire was not the primary light, but simply the source of illusion. He is not anymore accustomed to darkness, shadows, puppets and the wall. He would be accused having corrupted his eyes when he went up, and he would be told it wouldn't be worth trying to get outside again. He would be a danger for mankind, and should be isolated. He could even be killed by the prisoners, when trying to explain the truth to them.

Myth explanation: a) there are invisible truths, lying under the apparent surface of things, which only the most enlightened can *grasp*. b) **education is not a process of putting knowledge into empty minds**, but of making people realize that which they already know. c) **Truth** can be achieved only by *personal effort and commitment*; the most part of human common sense remains blind to truth and prefers to remain *entangled* in the *everyday life routines and prejudices*. d) the 4 levels of knowledge in Plato's thought: **Doxa (Eikasia and Pistis) and Epistème (Diànoia and Nòesis)**: the allegory shows that the advance of man through these 4 levels of consciousness can be undertaken by those who dare to step out into the pure light of knowledge.

*Plato (427-347 B.C) Born in Athens, Greece, to an aristocratic family very much involved in political government. When Socrates was publicly executed in 399 B.C., Plato finally distanced himself from a career in Athenian politics, instead becoming one of the greatest philosophers of Western civilization. Plato's *The Republic* is an enduring work, discussing justice, the importance of education, and the qualities needed for rulers to succeed. Plato felt governors must be philosophers so they may govern wisely and effectively. He founded the Academy, an educational institution dedicated to pursuing philosophic truth. Many of Plato's essays and writings survive to this day and he is considered to be the founder of Western Philosophy.