

Plato and the Allegory of the Cave

1. **What** is the allegory of the cave?
2. **How** does the allegory of the cave work?
3. **Why** is the allegory of the cave important?

1. **What** is the allegory of the cave?

Arguably, the allegory of the cave is the most famous passage in the Republic, which is itself widely regarded as the most famous dialogue of Plato (c. 428-347 BCE). As an allegory, Plato's cave is similar to an analogy but slightly different. Write a definition for "allegory".

Allegory

For some people, the cave is synonymous with Plato, and philosophy students are often taught that it is a neat encapsulation of Platonic thought. It involves a group of prisoners who are trapped in a cave, and follows one prisoner as he escapes. Make a note outlining the allegory of the cave.

Allegory of the Cave

2. **How** does the allegory of the cave work?

Just as Animal Farm reveals something about Russian history, the allegory of the cave reveals something about society, nature, and human knowledge of reality. In the first half of the allegory, Socrates portrays a group of prisoners that is beholden to a shadow puppet show, and claims that all human beings are like these prisoners in some way; in the second half of the allegory, he describes one prisoner's escape. Explain how the various elements of the allegory of the cave work.

How the Allegory of the Cave Works

All human beings are trapped by their societies and their natures.

Beyond the cave, the Sun (which represents the Form of the Good) illuminates reality just as, within the cave, the fire illuminates the imitation of reality.

Human beings who escape the cave find the prospect of returning to it unattractive and the prisoners pitiable.

3. **Why** is the allegory of the cave important?

The allegory of the cave is important for a number of reasons; however, in *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Julia Annas points towards three of particular significance, including its pessimism, power, and problematic nature. Make a note about why the allegory of the cave is important.

Why the Allegory of the Cave is Important

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3