
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 unenlightened:—Behold! human beings

living in a
undergrou
nd 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.

Glaucon: 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.

Glaucon:
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?

Glaucon:
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?

Glaucón:

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?

Glaucón:

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?

Glaucón:

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 accustomed 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?

Glauccon:

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 contemplate 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
considerabl
e), 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.