

Plato's Allegory of the Cave Script

Plato asks us to imagine a cave in which a number of unfortunate prisoners have been chained since birth, such that they are only able to see the back of the cave wall.

What they cannot see behind them is a raised walkway, along which people carry vessels and statues in various forms.

A wall along the length of the walkway conceals those who carry the vessels and statues, so that only the objects rise above it.

And, behind the walkway, toward the mouth of the cave, is a large fire. The light from the fire and the objects produce shadows on the back of the cave wall, which are the only things the prisoners have ever seen.

The poor prisoners have never known anything but their chained existence, the shadows on the wall, and the muddled voices of those who carry the objects that cast the shadows.

Now, imagine further, that a prisoner is freed from the cave and permitted to see the outside world for the first time.

The blinding light of the sun is initially unbearable to him. But, as his eyes adjust, he perceives the vessels and statues, realizing that they are more real than the shadows, which are only dark and murky projection of the objects that produce them.

The prisoner is then forced up a mountain and made to stare at the sun. The sun, of course, is entirely overpowering.

After gazing directly at it for a moment, he is temporarily unable to perceive even the objects that he previously recognized as being more real than the shadows. When looking at the sun, the only thing he can perceive is its brilliant light.

Being now free, the prisoner remembers his friends who are still chained in the cave. He returns to tell them about the outside world—the objects that make the shadows and the sun by which everything is visible.

But his friends cannot comprehend his story. They reject him, considering ascension to the outside world to be an act of folly, and would kill him if they were able, in order to prevent him from vexing them with his story.