

Ethics of Leadership

Philosophy as Leadership

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave" (PDF on webpage).
- Plato, *Apology* (PDF on webpage).

Background

The "Allegory of the Cave" is possibly the most famous part of Plato's *Republic*. In it, Socrates describes the human condition as alienation from truth and reality. In response, philosophers, as lovers of truth, must leave their ivory towers of contemplation and descend in order to liberate their fellows from the chains of ignorance. However, this comes with no small risk to the philosopher, as Socrates' own life illustrates. For in 399BC, Socrates was brought to trial before an Athenian popular court for impiety and corruption of the youth. Plato's *Apology* presents Socrates' defense against these charges. In attempting to prove his innocence, Socrates provides a passionate defense of philosophy (still in its infancy at that time) and its practice. In the end, this was not enough to convince his jury of 501 male fellow citizens: he died in prison by drinking hemlock as required by law.

Questions

1. Describe Plato's "Allegory of the Cave". What happens to those who return to the cave? Are they welcomed back? Why should those freed from the cave return to its depths? Will those outside the cave want to return? How is this story related to leadership and the role of a leader?
2. In response to his accusers in the *Apology*, Socrates characterizes (on pages 26–29) his activity of philosophy by beginning with a story about a visit to the Oracle at Delphi by his friend Chaerephon. What does Chaerephon ask the Oracle and what is the Oracle's response? How does Socrates respond to the Oracle's claim? What does he learn from doing this? Why does this make Socrates unpopular?
3. Socrates claims (on pages 33–36 & 41) he will never cease to practice philosophy, even under pain of death. What reasons does he give for this? How does the importance Socrates attaches to philosophy and the method he uses to practice it exemplify the role of conflict for a transformational leader as suggested by James MacGregor Burns?
4. Was Socrates a leader?