

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy as Leadership

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

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 position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Plato. (2004). [The allegory of the cave]. In C. D. Reeve (Trans.), *Republic* (pp. 208–212). Hackett. (Original work from ca. 380 B.C.E.)

Comment

The “Allegory of the Cave” is possibly Plato’s most famous writing. With this story, 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 their chains of ignorance.

However, this comes with no small risk to the philosopher, as Socrates’ own real life illustrates. For in 399 B.C.E., Socrates was brought to trial before an Athenian popular court for impiety and corruption of the youth. In the end, Socrates lost that trial and died in prison, being executed by drinking hemlock as required by law.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. In Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”, what is the situation of those living in the cave? What happens to the person who leaves the cave and upon their return? Are they welcomed back?
2. Why should those freed from the cave return to its depths? Will those outside the cave actually want to return?
3. This story is typically understood as an allegory about education. However, it also seems to offer some perspectives about leadership and its responsibilities.

Understood that way, what do you think this story may say about leadership and the role of a leader in society?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

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 about these issues at our next class meeting.