

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

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 premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations 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 and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Plato. (1992). [The Allegory of the Cave]. In G. M. A. Grube & C. D. C. Reeve (Trans.), *Republic* (Revised ed., pp. 186–190). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett. (Original work from c.380 BCE.)

Plato. (1981). *Apology*. In G. M. A. Grube (Trans.), *Five Dialogues* (pp. 23–44). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett. (Original work written c.380 BCE.).

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 the chains of ignorance.

However, this comes with no small risk to the philosopher, as Socrates’ own life illustrates. For in 399BCE, 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 (philosophers and historians tend to agree that Plato here reproduces a fairly faithful report of Socrates actual defense during his trial).

Socrates attempts to prove his innocence by providing a passionate defense of philosophy (still in its infancy at that time) and its practice. In the end, though, this was not enough to convince his jury of 501 male fellow citizens: he died in prison, executed 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?
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?
4. The “Allegory of the Cave” is typically understood as an allegory about education, however, it also seems to offer perspectives about leadership—especially when combined with the *Apology*’s understanding of the vital role Socrates plays in Athenian society.

What do you think these stories 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 (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.