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Abstract

This paper investigates the theory and importance of the *Allegory of the Cave* and throws a light into Plato's political and philosophical theory, based on a selected number of references of renowned authors.



The Plato's Political Philosophy

Does the Allegory of the Cave throw any light on Plato's political theory?

Introduction

This paper explains the *Allegory of the Cave*, throws a light into Plato's political and philosophical theory. First develops arguments around the relation between the Allegory of the Cave and the *Divided Line Schema*. Afterwards I expand my argument in favour of some alternative links, between the Cave description and the characters of the Republic and the five types of state (one just right and four degenerated).

1. Plato's Theory

Plato was a Greek philosopher who lived in Athens between 428 and 348 BC. He born in an aristocratic and wealthy family and he was living a very privileged life when he met a man called Socrates, who became his teacher. When Socrates was accused of corrupting young men with new ideas and was sentenced to death, Plato decided to write about his friend's philosophy. This is why he later on became a professor and started his own Academy.

They both came from very different backgrounds. Plato was an aristocrat but Socrates' parents were middleclass, but his father, a stone carver named Sophroniscus, had some success at the time. Socrates may have inherited some good social connections from his father.

Socrates was a bad stone sculptor or didn't like that type of job. Simultaneously, he was famous for talking, particularly for teaching philosophy and for using questions to challenge students' assumptions about life.

Therefore, it is possible that Socrates was more down-to-earth than Plato. The first seems to have been someone who invested in a form of life that was simultaneously easier than sculpting and that allowed him to be surrounded by people of the upper-class.

Socrates spoke in a way that was appealing to the young generation (not necessarily to seniors) and that maybe lost the control along the way of *what he was saying* or *to whom he was talking to*. Socrates words (or deeds, because we don't really know the facts) brought him some enemies.

In the other hand, Plato grown-up to be a politician and his education included the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by Homer and other classics who talked about Gods and their influence over people (shadows of truth that covered reality) but also praised warriors and fighters as heroes. Plato was probably not successful as a politician (or/and as a warrior) and decided to blame the system, or simply felt he wasn't the right person for the job. He wasn't unbeaten as a lyricist either and frustration moved him away from poetry too.

According to this hypothesis, Plato was probably a theoretical, abstract and an idealistic person. For sure he idealised his teacher but he also truly believed in what he was being taught, in this original ideas about the truth and how the physical world was misleading, why humans were in constant struggle and didn't understand life but confused lies or simple opinions for facts.

Based on this assumption, I believe in the traditional version that claims that Aristotle, a Plato's student and later on a grate philosopher of his own, said that the *Allegory of the Cave* was a Plato's idea and not a Socrates' theory.

It looks like Plato's real life journey, actually. He felt like he was living a privileged but empty life overflowed with misconceptions and old rules of what people though he should do or how he ought to behave, but Plato wanted to fallow his own path. In his case, he tried to do well not as a politician but as a professor of the Academy (and he did).

Nevertheless, the main purpose of the *Republic* is to explain why a city (like Athens) must be governed by a philosopher. Thus, Plato wanted to rule, wanted to be a sovereign (and stay on top for a long time, for he pays tribute to Monarchy over Democracy, with a philosopher as king).

In the *Allegory*, the philosopher comes back from the truth (from the beautiful place he reached by getting out of the cave and watching the raising sun) to help the humankind, to broaden the good news about reality. In the *Republic*, it seems that the king must be altruistic and do the same thing.

Consequently, Plato never truly gave up on politics or on what his family wanted him to be; although in a twisted way, the only way he thought he could reach the top.

2. Allegory of the Cave and the Divided Line

Book seven, *The Republic*¹. The Cave (514a-519b).

The philosopher speaks about an underground cave² where some men are, since childhood, with their legs and necks tied down, in such a way that they may only look forward, as fire illuminates them from a distance, at their back. They are watching shadows of people and objects. There's a wall, built between prisoners and fire that runs long side an ascendant road, ending on an open entrance to daylight.

Prisoners don't face reality but they take it as such. Some were set free, forced to turn around and to face the situation in which they had been raised, pushed throughout the entire road until they actually could exit the cave, these would reach the superior world. Their eyes would hurt at the light of day. Their adaptation would be gradual – from shadows to reflections, from night to a morning sky – but necessarily gratifying. Once looking at the sun, the source of all life, perception would be complete.

Finally realising how they had lived, these men would feel piety for others still inside the cave and would despise gratifications they perhaps had received as rewards for a clear vision of the cave's shadows. And they wouldn't want to return. But if they nevertheless would come back, some adjustments should again be required, especially because their eyes could need to face darkness again. Against misunderstanding, they might've tried to clarify the minds of the still imprisoned by sharing *real* knowledge with them. But prisoners would laugh, insisting how the other's journey had destroyed their vision, and how they would kill anyone who would like them to make a similar expedition.

This allegory has both a political and a philosophical sense. It is central to Plato's theory, most likely why he himself explains it, to avoid misinterpretations, so that the idea stays clear in everybody's minds. The metaphor «must be applied to all explained previously» (517 a-b), because Book VII is a recapitulation of the divisions of knowledge in Book VI, reason why he compares the visible world to the cave, and the light of the fire to the strength of the sun.

The voyage throughout the ascendant road corresponds to the journey made by the soul from the visible world to the superior world, for (517b-c):

«(...) 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

¹ Cf. JOWETT, Benjamin (1901). *The Republic by Plato*. New York: The Colonial. URL: <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/plato-republic.txt>>

² According to Guthrie, Platon used to sophisticate pre-existent myths and allegories. Ideas related to prison probably come from a sort of orphic tradition, or possibly pitagoric. [GUTHRIE, W. K. C. (1990). *Historia de la Filosofia Griega*. (Vol. IV) Madrid: Editorial Gredos; p. 497]

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.»

Thus, the idea of Good is the cause of all just and beautiful, and must be understood and wisely used in both private and public life.

Thus, prisoners are all citizens³. Daylight represents enlightenment. The sun symbolises Good. Moving towards the superior world implies pain but it's possible⁴. To be more accurate, blindness is of two kinds: either from darkness into light or from light into darkness. Only a philosopher will distinguish them and will not laugh equally at both of them, for (518a-b):

«(...) is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees anyone whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other.»

Also according to this, education is like *looking again*, which is quite different from giving eyes to a blind. The faculty of sight has always been there (518d). The soul only requires to be turned round towards the light; because, if other virtues may be acquired through habits, intelligence has a *diviner life* and is everlasting, and as used may turn out to be good or evil, useful or not (518e).

The cave represents the dark and almost claustrophobic atmosphere of politics and law. The whole experience corresponds to the training of the philosopher-king in the ideal State, and the allegory tells us precisely that when the eyes of prisoners hurt as they ascend the road or when they return to darkness feeling a new, though different, pain. If idyllically the City requires a philosopher-king, there's still a difference between the politician turned into a philosopher and the philosopher turned into a politician. The first is *the one*, for he is in love with wisdom not with power (485b):

«Let us suppose that philosophical minds always love knowledge of a sort which shows them the eternal nature not varying from generation and corruption. (...) let us agree that they are lovers of all true being; there is no part whether greater or less, or more or less honourable, which they are willing to renounce; as we said before of the lover and the man of ambition. »

The irony is that the philosopher is supposed to love truthfulness: «(...) they will never intentionally receive into their minds falsehood, which is their detestation, and they will

³ With the allegory of the cave «(...) goes Plato's darkest and most pessimistic picture of the state of those *not* enlightened by philosophy. They are helpless and passive, manipulated by others. Worse, they are used to their state and *like* it, resisting efforts to free them from it. (...) Plato presses so far his antipathy to the passive and acquiescent state of the unreflective that the enlightened state is presented as being totally substandard. » [ANNAS, J. (1981). *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 253].

⁴ «The concept of hope is here used with especial reference to the expectation towards the beyond that's being experienced by the people initiated in the mysteries. The idea of the road from land to the other life is here transferred to the road of the soul from the visible world to the superior world. » [JAEGER, W. (1995). *Paidéia – A formação do Homem Grego*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, p. 885].

love the truth.» (485c). But they are willing to teach lies in the name of common good (noble lie, 459d) – *do means justify endings?* – for moral actions aren't necessarily good, unless they are useful (505a)⁵.

To acquire knowledge and goodness⁶, these illuminated men must cross three stages of conscience (rising, discernment and return – so that they may teach)⁷. They come back to the cave, even if it would be easier and more satisfying for them to stay apart, surrounded by beauty and truth, dedicating them to a contemplative life (519c-d).

They are unwilling to descend into political assemblies and courts of law; for they now hardly understand the ideas of those who have never in their lives understood the difference between shadow and substance. Besides, the day-by-day life outside the perfect city is hardly compatible with a sense of ideal. But the entire community must feel happiness, so philosophers must rule (519e-520a):

«(...) the intention of the legislator, who did not aim at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole State, and he held the citizens together by persuasion and necessity, making them benefactors of the State, and therefore benefactors of one another; to this end he created them, not to please themselves, but to be his instruments in binding up the State.»

Thus, philosophers are the best suited for the job (471c-502c), because for them politics is a burden (520d), a duty to reach happiness for all, not a way to achieve private honours and wealth. Besides, when the ideal City was described, the idea was not that citizens should do what they like, but that they should serve the State in favour of common good.

To save the State, education is crucial. The philosopher must use it to apart the guardians of the shadows of the visible world⁸. Previously, education had two branches: gymnastic (occupied with the body) and music (infused a natural harmony into mind and literature). But these weren't enough, for (522a):

⁵ According to Guthrie, already in Memnon, the *sophrosýné*, justice and value could be found among the activities of the soul that could be harmful if not guided by superior knowledge. [GUTHRIE, W. K. C. (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 483].

⁶ Plato seems more concerned with the shape of Good, than in defining exactly what it means. He says that the idea of Good is the highest of sciences (505a), which is knowledge, the sun (507e), the source of all, but apparently not much more in concrete. Seems more concerned in transmitting the idea that *once known* must be well used in favour of common good; that everything and everybody have a function to accomplish and that the ability to put it in action is a virtue advancing towards the infinite Good.

⁷ «The Letter VII reveals that the fire for knowledge only catches the soul that, by force of long years of fatigue, have become very similar to its object, in other words, to Good itself.» [JAEGGER, W. (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 889].

⁸ Because education was crucial, Plato did create an academy, to accomplish his duty as a philosopher that allegedly have seen the sun and already returned to the city to start teaching; to instruct the future rules (and some of his students were or rules or advisers of kings) or trying to interfere more directly in politics (Plato was too much of a theorist and he probably realised that, when supposedly refused invitations to help writing new constitutions outside Athens. Besides, he never interfered in his hometown, desolating many who saw potential in him. The only exception seems to have been Syracuse, where he made three times an effort, by instigation of Dion and others; failure was always complete. But he didn't go moved by reason, he went in name of love; though philosophers must be in love with life, he must of realised that love isn't math).

«Music, he said, as you will remember, was the counterpart of gymnastics, and trained the guardians by the influences of habit, by harmony making them harmonious, by rhythm rhythmical, but not giving them science; and the words, whether fabulous or possibly true, had kindred elements of rhythm and harmony in them. But in music there was nothing which tended to that good which you are now seeking.»

The science of numbers was the one required (522c), for «It appears to me to be a study of the kind which we are seeking, and which leads naturally to reflection, but never to have been rightly used; for the true use of it is simply to draw the soul toward being.» (523a).

Why maths? I would say to accomplish the best preparation for higher studies. If Plato's divisions of knowledge were based on pre-Socratic philosophy, contrasting the sensible with the intellectual, the permanent with the ephemeral, and the universal with the particular, he adds that numbers are separated from ideas, and that abstractions of sense are distinct from the abstractions of mind.

According to his theory of Forms, causes precede effects, and since the Good is the cause of all high-quality things, Good is not only an eternal and immutable form according to which first-class individuals become good, but rises ahead, in the hierarchy of forms. And a ruler very much must needs to know this. Therefore, he must learn the universal science of numbers, the one related to all other arts and sciences (unity and correlation between sciences).

Plato explains furthermore the education system (521c-541b) that includes lessons of sciences like arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, harmony, cubes and dimensions of depth (528b) and dialectic.

Plato's Divided Line includes two stages of understanding (opinion and knowledge/truth) and a road with four positions in total (imagination, rhetorical belief, mathematical understanding and dialectical reason).

Thus, stage one is the visible world of opinion (*doxa*) and includes two positions: first, imagination (rear of cave with projection of shadows⁹); second, rhetorical belief (turned to the fire at cave opening, the philosopher identifies figures projecting shadows).

Level two includes two more positions: mathematical understanding (the philosopher is confused and surprised by sunlight but still watches shadows) and dialectical reason (when he finally sees the sun and visible objects and finds the truth).

In other words, the superior stage has two subdivisions: first the thought (*dianoia*) deals with the originals of the natural world as images, turning the investigations on suppositions

⁹ «(...) Plato wants us to see everyday beliefs as no better than seeing shadows and reflections. But what are we to do about the state of 'belief'? In the Line this is the normal state of seeing trees and people. In the cave it is painful, requires effort, and induces bewilderment. There are two obvious ways to remove the problem. One is to inflate *eikasia* in the Line, claiming that Plato means it there to cover all ordinary beliefs. (...) The other response is to admit that *eikasia* in both Line and Cave means simply looking at shadows, and to urge that what needs expansion is the notion of *looking at shadows*». [ANNAS, J. (1981), *op. cit.*, p. 255].

and deductions (maths), and in the superior section advances through the intellect (*noesis*), proposing hypothesis to achieve a true principle.

There is a relation between *The Cave* and *The Line*¹⁰, and the *Divided Line* (509d-511e). This is an allegorical presentation of Plato's epistemology, it is divided into two unequal parts and subdivided into two others. *As a line* emphasises the continuity between the superior and the inferior levels, but *as divided* shows how they're different and separated.

Each lower sphere is the multiplication of the preceding, so may lead from unity to infinity. The dissimilarity between acquiring knowledge in the parts and the observation of the whole is similar to the difference between understanding and mind.

By contrast the visible realm (where essence is multiple) with the invisible realm (where the idea is unique) we find: «The old story, that there is many a beautiful and many a good, and so of other things which we describe and define; to them the term *many* is implied.

«And the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that on which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands, and is radiant with intelligence; but when turned toward the twilight of becoming and perishing, then she has opinion only, and goes blinking about, and is first of one opinion and then of another, and seems to have no intelligence.» (508d).

So, must find the *only truth*, self-existent and invisible (507d-e). And the ascendant road may lead the individual to daylight, if he uses his human intelligence and learns about mathematical sciences; may lead to the sun, the light by which all things are seen, the being by which they are created and sustained. The sun makes visibility possible but is at the same time visible, so Good is also intelligible.

The sun wants the birth and growth of living beings. The *Good* isn't in itself the *Being* but superior to it. This is the idea of *Good* (508e) as a *Divine Power* – life, idea, cause or reason – and thus the purpose of life, supreme object of desire and aspiration.

Therefore, the sun is the idea of Good and its light represents the truth. Objects of vision (colours) are the objects of knowledge (ideas); the person who sees is the cognitive man; the eyes are the *organs* of knowledge; the faculty of vision corresponds to the faculty of reason; the exercise of vision is the exercise of reason and the aptitude for seeing is to ability to know. And the Sun, the Line and the Curve, according to their specificities, show how the knowledge of the Good may have an impersonal nature¹¹

¹⁰ «(...) most would agree that the relation between the line and the cave demonstrates the relation between Plato's idealism and political idealism. The authors who take the sun as the central image of the longer way (...) claim instead that the significance of the cave is primarily pedagogical. It describes the *paideia* of the philosopher in society and perhaps also the *paideia* provided by the philosopher within society.» [PLANINC, Z. (1991). *Plato's Political Philosophy – Prudence in the Republic and the Laws*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press; p. 36].

¹¹ «The Line tells us that the disciplines that first lead to real knowledge are not concerned directly with moral aspects of the world, but are, surprisingly abstract and mathematical (...) The Sun and the Cave have stressed the extreme difference between any of our ordinary thinking about personal concerns and the thinking that can amount to knowledge.» [ANNAS, J. (1981), *op. cit.*, p 260].

3. Allegory of the Cave and some promising associations

In this chapter, some questions and promising associations are made: *what if there was a link between some characters of the Republic and the types of State*, presented in Book VIII? Could that link be analysed under a context like the Allegory of the Cave? Socrates says to Glaucon, at the end of Book IV:

«(...) a man may look down and see that virtue is one, but that the forms of vice are innumerable; there being four special ones which are deserving of note. (...) there appear to be as many specific forms of State as there are of souls.» (445c).

A reasoning very much interrupted by Polemarchus (Book V, opening); Adeimantus, Thrasymachus and Glaucon join him (449b-450b), driving the conversation to another direction. Why? Why this sudden appearance of Polemarchus and Thrasymachus, both silent since Book I? Socrates responds: «What a discussion you put in march over the State, like we started from beginning!» (450a). For Plato, this interference is remembered latter on, so should be important. When Socrates starts Book VIII, he says:

«I asked you what were the four forms of government of which you spoke, and then Polemarchus and Adeimantus put in their word; and you began again, and have found your way to the point at which we have now arrived. (...) Then, like a wrestler, put me again in the same position.» (544a-b).

This statement precedes the degenerated types of state. It comes after the description of the ideal city-state.

Plato traces the decline of the just state (Monarchy or Aristocracy) through four stages (Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny, by this order). As main characters¹², the *Republic* has Socrates, Glaucon, Adeimantus, Cephalus, Polemarchus and Thrasymachus. Says Socrates:

«There are five of the State, and five of the soul (...) The first, I said, is that which we have been describing, and which may be said to have two names, monarchy and aristocracy, according as rule is exercised by one distinguished man or by many. But I regard the two names as describing one form only; for whether the government is in the hands of one or many, if the governors have been trained in the manner which we have supposed, the fundamental laws of the State will be maintained.» (445c-e)¹³

This ideal state is foremost developed through in Books II-V. Who must rule and why, is explained on Book VI, in this case a philosopher-king, or at least a king-philosopher (473c-d), for he dedicates himself to the *being in itself* and he is in love with Knowledge (485b), has the right kind of character, despises all lies and aspires to absolute truth (486b-d).

¹² There are five more – like Lysias, Niceratus and Cleitophon – some silent, some almost.

¹³ Monarchy and Tyranny are, according to Socrates, the opposite extremes, for one is the very best and the other is the very worst. (576d).

This doesn't mean that, after returning to darkness, he may not be corrupted by society (492a). Thus, a perfect man is more likely to live in a perfect system, but neither of the actual types of state is just right for a philosopher (497b). So, he may become inutile in society. Socrates acknowledges that (487d). But immediately afterwards he accuses the citizens of denying the credits that philosophers deserve, not cherishing them, as they should, reason why Socrates explains the metaphor of the ship of the state.

In other words, the philosopher returns to the cave to accomplish his duty, in detriment of a tranquil life of contemplation, but most of other citizens repay this sacrifice by turning their backs at him. All this reminds us a lot about Socrates – his misfortunes, his life and death, at the very hands of those who did not understand his teaching methods in favour of a better-educated political class.

Then the philosopher continues his explanations, as if looking down – or already following the journey from daylight back to the cave.

Timocracy results from the fact that: «(...) everything which has a beginning has also an end, even a constitution such as yours will not last forever, but will in time be dissolved.» (546a). Because even the wisest have more children that they should, initiating a process that will lead to civil disorder. Generations will be worse and worse as time goes by, for «And so iron will be mingled with silver, and brass with gold, and hence there will arise dissimilarity and inequality and irregularity, which always and in all places are causes of hatred and war.» (546e-547a)

And all this because guardians: «(...) have been schooled not by gentle influences but by force, for they have neglected her who is the true muse, the companion of reason and philosophy, and have honoured gymnastics more than music.» (548b-c)

About the timocratical man, he is «(...) often the young son of a brave father, who dwells in an ill-governed city, of which he declines the honours and offices, and will not go to law, or exert himself in any way, but is ready to waive his rights in order that he may escape trouble. (...)» (549c)

A statement that continues (until 559e) references of his parents relations. This calls to mind the supposed relation between Socrates and his wife and children.

If the philosopher-king was a man like Socrates who was the timocratical man? Probably a man between good and evil, inferior as a person to an aristocrat, for intellectually less complex, a little aggressive and blind with wealth, already more in favour of war than peace, but still respectful of authority and some traditions (like common meals), dedicating himself to gym and war training, and conserving the division of tasks. So, there are two options: Glaucon and/or Adeimantus, the two favourite brothers of Plato, much eulogised in the *Republic*.

The curious about it, is that Adeimantus indicates his own brother (548d). But Socrates refutes him: «He should have more of self-assertion and be less cultivated and yet a friend

of culture; and he should be a good listener but no speaker.» (548e-549a), description he proceeds until 550b, getting closer and closer to the character of Adeimantus.

Besides, Glaucon apparently is more admired by the philosopher – like in 357a, when he says that Glaucon is fearless in everything. Adeimantus speaks much less than his brother, it's not always a good listener, but mainly seems more anguished when addressed to Socrates – perhaps the best example is in 367b-d. Glaucon is perhaps a fantasist, imagines the origins of Justice (story of Gigas ring), and agrees more easily with Socrates. And Adeimantus is the one who raises the voice at 449b-c. So, if all this reasoning makes any sense, I propose an intermediate proposal, a possible hierarchy between characters – if that's even allowed: Socrates-Glaucon-Adeimantus.

At this stage, I remember Oligarchy (550c-552e), in which «(...) instead of loving contention and glory, men become lovers of trade and money; they honour and look up to the rich man, and make a ruler of him, and dishonour the poor man.» (551a).

The oligarchic man (553a-555a) worked all his life, limiting himself to the satisfaction of his basic needs, so he is kind of avaricious. He hardly gave himself time to cultivate his mind, which makes him a bit ignorant of things (552e). Thus, he doesn't rush into a conversation in which he may show that lack of knowledge; besides, he prefers not to raise problems.

As if there is this big wall that gives him a sense of protection but also encloses him inside the cave, forcing him to see images he doesn't seem to care if are true or not, as long he and his wealth are spared of danger. As an old man, he just wants peace and quiet to profit the time he has left with the help of his large income. And with whom is this character nearer? Cephalus. He is old (328d-e), also rich (330d), and his story and attitudes towards of life recall a lot what's been said about the oligarchic man (330b-331b).

«And then democracy comes into being after the poor have conquered their opponents, slaughtering some and banishing some, while to the remainder they give an equal share of freedom and power.» (557a). Freedom rules as well as pluralism, so many believe Democracy to be the best of constitutions (557c).

But Socrates disagrees, for it doesn't cultivate excellence, degenerating even more than previously, because «(...) full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike.» (558c). It still valorises tolerance towards difference, but common public values can't be defended by the state exactly because of pluralism. Thus, there isn't a sense of *belonging to a whole* inside the city – precisely the opposite of what is so dear to Plato. The flames of fire are rising.

The democratic man brought up in a degenerated state, empty of science and noble habits, reacts accordingly (559d-e). He discards advises (560a). Education is badly given and bad companies help him drift apart from track. «They persuade men that moderation and orderly expenditure are vulgarity and meanness (...) insolence they term "breeding," and anarchy "liberty," and waste "magnificence," and impudence "courage."» (560c-e).

His soul is almost sightless. He may not differentiate useful pleasures from the not useful, for all are equal to him. He loves *égalité*. So, who among the characters of the *Republic* could correspond to the democratic man? Polemarchus says (331d) when Cephalus seems to leave the conversation, what seems a riddle of words: «Then, am I not – asked Polemarchus – your heir?» Besides, Socrates says, already in Book IX:

«And now remember the character which we attributed to the democratic man. He was supposed from his youth upward to have been trained under a miserly parent, who encouraged the saving appetites in him, but discountenanced the unnecessary, which aim only at amusement and ornament?» (572b-c)

A true son of Cephalus? Polemarchus is poorly educated. The conversation with Socrates in Book I clear that fact and he himself recognises it in 334b, for instance.

Tyranny and the tyrannical man are left. Democracy falls into anarchy when liberty – what they all value more – is drunk with intemperance. «The excess of liberty, whether in States or individuals, seems only to pass into excess of slavery.» (564a).

When anarchy allows concupiscence, not preventing the multiplication of disobedience to law, at the same time as those who govern are governed and vice versa. It becomes almost impossible to control the drunken, lustful and passionate that des everything for money (574a) and power.

They are not wordy of trust. They are selvage, arrogant, dreadful in words and deeds. Their style of life defends the law of the strongest against all those who step in his way (574d-575a). One of them will be the ruler of the city, which desperately claims for security. He will first pretend to be the saviour of the people (566b), but soon will show his true intentions (566e).

Citizens will regret their previous support. «By heaven, he said, then the parent will discover what a monster he has been fostering in his bosom; and, when he wants to drive him out, he will find that he is weak and his son strong.» (569a-b). But he who seemed to be the happiest among all, by being able to full everybody with his lamb face, will end terribly unhappy. He will become a slave of his own controlling and closed model of state (579b). His soul will not be able to fall deeper, for it's the unhappiest of all (580a).

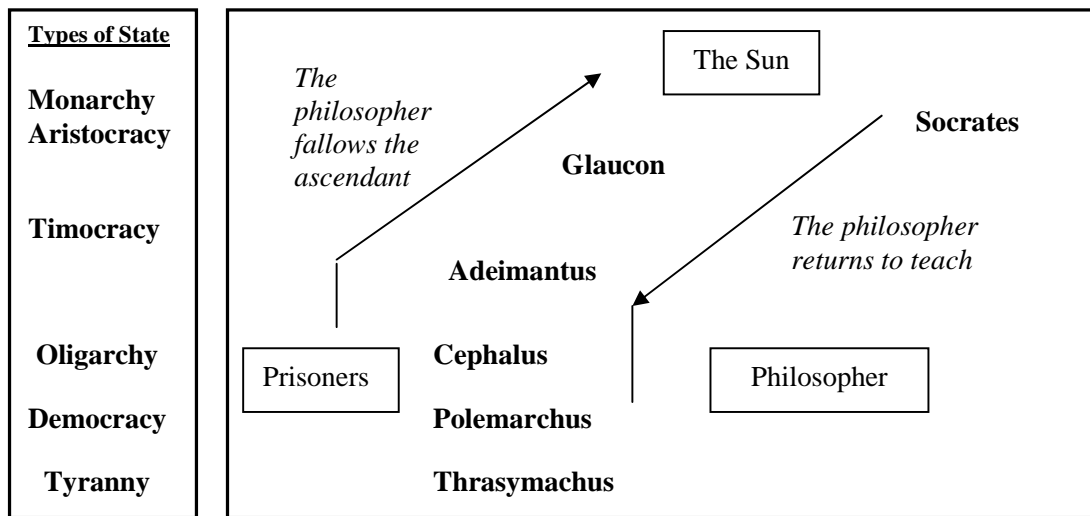
This description seems a description of Thrasymachus character. Very much remembers his fury (336b), his intemperance and shocking words and manners (336b-c). He brings anarchy, insolence and disrespect to a civilised chat, accusing the philosopher of falsity and bad faith. He insists in being paid for his services (337d) – differently, Socrates maintains frugality, serenity and insists on giving lectures for free (the ideal posture). He seems to represent an irrational and concupiscent element. And his beliefs are quite compatible with the description of the tyrant positions in the state:

«(...) my meaning will be most clearly seen if we turn to that highest form of injustice in which the criminal is the happiest of men, and the sufferers or those who refuse to do injustice are the most

miserable – that is to say tyranny, which by fraud and force takes away the property of others, not little by little but wholesale; (...) as I said at first, justice is the interest of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest.» (344a-c)

But Thrasymachus will end as defeated and unhappy as the tyrant of Socrates stories. Thus, the true philosopher – in love with wisdom and contemplation – wins the *image of philosopher* – in love with power (521b), an image that symbolises the best produced inside the cave but not good enough, or even *the worse possible*, for he is convinced of being whom he is not. The final result is something like presented in illustration 2.

Illustration 1: Allegory of the Cave/Characters of the Republic/Types of State.



Source: The author

Glaucon is a difficult character because it is not clear if he represents Aristocracy or Timocracy, but he seems to be a better man than Adeimantus (according to Socrates). Therefore, he is somewhere in between.

If I had to make a decision and attribute one type of state to each character then the correspondence would be: Monarchy (philosopher-king, Socrates or Plato), Aristocracy (Glaucon), Oligarchy (Cephalus), Democracy (Polemarchus) and Tyranny (Thrasymachus).

4. Theory and Practice

Plato tried to apply his theories, first as a tutor of Dion, brother-in-law of the tyrant Dionysius I of Syracuse (Sicily) and then returning to Athens where he founded *The Academy*, a school of thought.

Plato went to Syracuse several times. When Dionysius II ascended to the throne, Dion persuaded the tyrant to invite Plato to help him turn the young king into a philosopher-ruler of the sort described in the *Republic*. The plan failed, Plato escaped and returned and runaway again and the time in between was lost, in what the application of the *Republic* theories is concerned.

Plato's system was probably reasonable to him on paper but Syracuse's society and Dion or both kings named Dionysius were not prepared to live it.

The unsuccessful experience in Syracuse was not the only intervention of Plato in politics. The Academy was a good opportunity to educate future leaders. George Klosko (1986) confirms this idea:

«(...) the Academy was intended at least in part to offer practical training to would-be legislators and advisers of rulers. (...) According to (the not always reliable) Diogenes Laertius, the Arcadians and Thebans asked him to write laws for the city of Megalopolis which they founded. (...) Aristotle was of course tutor to Alexander of Macedon, while Dion was a close associate of Plato, and many members of the Academy accompanied Dion on his expedition to Syracuse (...) a clear pattern of political involvement emerges in connection with the Academy»¹⁴.

George Klosko (1986) agrees, when he writes that, though Plato is usually analysed as a philosopher, he was not removed from the political events of his time. He even says that: «(...) Plato had a much experience, direct or indirectly through his students (...)»¹⁵, thus he never abandoned the idea of being somewhat related to politics, even though he realised that he could not make it a full time profession. Again it was clear why:

«Even if Plato's plans did not always work out, his involvement (in politics) was extensive. The depth of his concern shows through the *Statesman* and *Laws*, and contributed to the movement of these works away from positions espoused in the *Republic*.»¹⁶

As explained before, Plato never truly gave up on politics but failed in turning theory into practice. He probably died frustrated a cause of that, but Plato managed to become larger than life and more famous than any of the Greek politicians of the classic period.

¹⁴ KLOSKO, G. (1986). *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*. New York: Muthuen; p. 188.

¹⁵ *Id. Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Id. Ibid.*

Conclusion

The Allegory of the Cave has both a political and a philosophical sense into it. It is central to Plato's theory. The voyage throughout the ascendant road corresponds to the journey made by the soul from the visible world to the superior world. This soul must then return as a philosopher to teach future rulers of an ideal city (or at least to help the *polis* not to degenerate even worse) to accomplish a main purpose (happiness of all the citizens of the state).

Eyes face adaptation in two situations: as they follow up the road and when they return back to the cave. It hurts to leave the world of shadows and face reality, more or less like when souls must leave the safe and gratifying world of contemplation, but education is fundamental and the philosopher is the best suited to rule an ideal city-state. The problem is that the philosopher, outside the proper environment, also may be corrupted.

Then, there is a relation between The Allegory of the Cave and the Divide Line schema. The Divided Line is an allegorical presentation of Plato's epistemology. The IDEA of Good, the Sun, (508e) is a *Divine Power*, simultaneously life, idea, cause and reason, as the purpose of life and the supreme source of desire and aspiration.

There seems to be a relation between the characters of the Republic and the types of state of Book VIII. There is a hierarchy among them as well as a correspondence between each type of state with a kind of person.

Which correspondences? Thrasymachus is last, closer to the tyrannical man, followed by Polemarchus nearer the democratic man. Next comes Cephalus, similar to the oligarchic man. Higher above two men: Adeimantus and Glaucon, one or both closer to the tymocratic man. Glaucon is a difficult character because it is not clear if he represents Aristocracy or Timocracy, but he seems to be a better man than Adeimantus (according to Socrates).

For Plato, Socrates is the brightest and closer to the sun. He's already returning from daylight to teach future rulers of a city State. *Republic* begins by saying: «I went down yesterday to the Piraeus (...)» (327a).

One last thing. Even if Plato gets in touch with us through the words of Socrates, it is possible to discover his own ideas and style. He also inspired many of his students (including Aristotle, who wrote about him, even if not always so nicely). Therefore Plato managed to accomplish his family's expectations for him and to reach the sun he so much searched for.

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