

For tonight's response, I basically want you to use your writing to think more deeply about the material. Below are some "starter" questions for the online conversation, but feel free to answer another question from last night's responses.

As usual, please respond to the 2 people ahead of you on the response chain.

Matt: In his quote, "*But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort,*" what does the idea of good refer to? Why does it appear last of all?

Linda: What does Plato mean when he says "[good] is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life, must have his eye fixed"?

Saehee: Who or what do the chains represent in comparison to modern society?

Allie: If the truth is essentially what we are exposed to first, how do we find real truth? If everyone's perception of truth depends on his/her upbringing, is there such a truth?

Ian: Is the person who has come back into the cave after being in the light now at an advantage, or a disadvantage? He now has incredible knowledge that the others have no way of gaining, but if he is trapped again, is that knowledge useful? Is ignorance bliss? Finally, are there any situations where this has happened to a philosopher or scientist in history?

Carolyn: Have you ever felt like your perception of reality was drastically altered from your previous assumptions by a new experience? If so, did you tell anyone (and what did they think)? If not, do you think such a change is possible?

Plato #2

Response to Ian's Question: The person who returns to the cave after seeing the sun may be either at an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on the interests and the personality of that individual. In the case of the individual described in the Allegory of the Cave, he is both advantaged and disadvantaged. He enjoys the knowledge he received; yet that knowledge isolates him from those whom he spent most of his life with. Depending on whether he prioritizes that knowledge or his companionship, the person could either be advantaged in terms of intellectual awareness or disadvantaged in terms of interpersonal relations. Similarly, the effects of his return to the cave with a glimpse of the Truth in his mind depend on the person's preference. If the person would like to continue to pursue intellectual questions without the need for discussion, the knowledge could be useful. If the person feels isolated and needs those who understand his experience, the knowledge could be highly detrimental. Most people would likely fall into the latter category—it is difficult to function as the only enlightened individual in a crowd of sheep. In that case, ignorance is likely preferable. Humans need companionship and social interaction for as much as the sake of employment as for sanity. I personally envy those who are trapped within their own worlds, although those worlds may not reflect the harsh but sometimes beautiful truths of what I perceive to be reality. A good instance that I think would illustrate this occurrence is not that of a philosopher or a scientist, but of a character in a novel. The Underground Man in *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoevsky comes to terms with what he thinks is reality and suffers from ennui and loneliness. However, at the same time, he also revels in what he believes in his intellectual superiority and gets a degree of pleasure from the notion that he may be the only enlightened one.

Response to Saehee: I agree that ignorance seems preferable. The point you have made about radically new knowledge having been rejected by dominant structures throughout history is very interesting—it is definitely true. It makes me wonder why some of these radical ideas are accepted and some are not. Why was the discovery of the sun's position as the center of the solar system—which Carolyn mentioned—accepted?

Response to Carolyn: The chains definitely do represent people being stuck in one place—I think of them as representing a combination of personal experience and culture. I know I like to say that reactions are highly dependent on the individual, but that also is the case for whether people know of their enchainment or not. In a situation like that of the cave, whether one knows one is enchained or not does not make a significant difference. Those who do know have to simply accept it.

Plato #2

Ian: Is the person who has come back into the cave after being in the light now at an advantage, or a disadvantage? He now has incredible knowledge that the others have no way of gaining, but if he is trapped again, is that knowledge useful? Is ignorance bliss? Finally, are there any situations where this has happened to a philosopher or scientist in history?

Plato's imagery seems to majorly disagree with the "ignorance is bliss" sentiment. He depicts ignorance as an underground cave lit somewhat artificially in which men are chained to the ground and unable to move. In contrast, the world of knowledge is bright, sunny, and life changing. Many other philosophers might have reversed this imagery; ignorance is a free, heavenly place where the art of *not* knowing shields us from the world's pain and knowledge is a dark, boundless cave where we are hunted down by our own findings and thoughts.

Using Plato's imagery, I think the person who has come back from the light returns with an advantage over his peers. Although he will no longer be content in the confines of the cave, he knows what is out there and is stirred with newfound motivation. In a sense, the phrase "there is no turning back" applies perfectly to this situation, as knowledge cannot be erased.

Saehee: Who or what do the chains represent in comparison to modern society?

I think the chains seem to represent a somewhat complacent attitude many individuals adopt to avoid disappointment or failure. We often refrain from exploring other options because we are scared of what we may find, and as a consequence we remain in our little space, unmotivated. The same way breaking chains is a conscious decision, remaining in the shackles is as well. With the exception of some people who simply are not aware of the world's possibilities, I believe people fake content-ness to justify their laziness and close-mindedness. Staying chained up is an active choice- it is safer, more stable, and far less exposing than breaking loose. Some people wallow in their idleness their entire lives fully aware of what they could have accomplished but in complete denial. Perhaps my thoughts do not agree totally with Plato's, but in my opinion, people are just as responsible for being in chains as are their circumstances. Therefore, it does not take a dissatisfied mind to break loose of its shackles... It takes an honest one.

Response to Plato (#2)

Saehee: Who or what do the chains represent in comparison to modern society?

I really like Alex's analogy of the chains restraining people from freeing themselves from old ideas. In response to his question of how a person might determine if they have escaped from a cave, I think that the experience would be quite clear. To use imagery from Plato's *Allegory*, one could say that the transition out of the cave would be blinding. Once one could get past the blinding light and figure out what in the world was happening, the situation would make sense.

I think that the chains represent people being stuck in place. I'm not sure whether or not it is safe to assume that the people of Plato's cave are aware of the existence of their chains. If they've never moved, how do they know that movement is even possible? In this sense, the chains would represent someone's lack of awareness of their reality. (I think it ties into the phrase "The more you know, the more you realize you don't know," which would be reversed in the case of the cave.) If a person is completely unaware of their greater surroundings, then, most likely, they will continue to live in a consistent and monotonous fashion.

Ian: Is the person who has come back into the cave after being in the light now at an advantage, or a disadvantage? He now has incredible knowledge that the others have no way of gaining, but if he is trapped again, is that knowledge useful? Is ignorance bliss? Finally, are there any situations where this has happened to a philosopher or scientist in history?

To some degree -- I agree with Saehee in that the person returning to the cave is at a disadvantage. After seeing and experiencing a new and seemingly truer reality, going back into the cave would be extremely difficult. This new and immense amount of knowledge would have no positive effect on whoever had previously escaped because they would be trapped in the cave. Therefore in Plato's cave, ignorance might be bliss.

However, if another person was able to escape to "reality" and return to the cave, the two could converse and share their experiences. In this case, they would still be miserable stuck in the cave, but they would be able to share their thoughts and find comfort in one another.

To answer the last part of Ian's question: I think that this has happened *many* times over the course of history. Any time that anybody discovers or hypothesizes anything radical, the rest of society often takes a lot of time to adjust. The people who find something extraordinary (famous examples such as evidence of evolution or the Earth rotating about the Sun) have always faced harsh criticism and calls of insanity.

Plato #2

In response to Ian's question, I think that the person who returns to the cave after being exposed to the light is at a disadvantage. In this circumstance, ignorance is bliss. Before his enlightenment, he is fine living in the cave because it is all he has known. He has had nothing to compare his life to and does not yearn or search for the truth because he does not question his reality. But once he is introduced to an entirely new world, how can he possibly go back? He can't just forget about the new world that he has seen. If he returns to the cave, it will be torturous to try and conform back and accept what he now sees as shadows as realities. He can try to convince the others that there is a brighter world outside, but in order to believe him they must experience it for themselves. He does not have any evidence of the world outside the only one that they have known so it is hard for them to accept the "truth." His knowledge is potentially useful, but as shown through history, people have always rejected new and seemingly absurd ideas because of their ignorance.

In response to Alex:

Can he actually live as a “normal person” if he is living in a world based on a false reality? What does “normal” mean in this context? Wouldn’t “normal” in the cave be believing that the shadows were the truth?

In response to Alex:

Do you think that the chains can also be interpreted a representation of society? Maybe it is a combination of someone’s own stubborn views and societies pressures to conform. Since all of those in the cave are not only chained but also chained together, it seems like there is one force that is holding all of them back from realizing the “truth”. In reply to the question about reentering a cave unknowingly, I don’t think that it matters whether or not one discovers the “true” truth. People change their perspectives all the time and test new theories even though they might not be right or accurate. I think it is the curiosity and the try and fail method that is important in this situation. In the story, even if the man isn’t actually outside seeing true sunlight, he now knows that there is a possibility of a different world.

Alex: Response

Saehee: Who or what do the chains represent in comparison to modern society?

I think that the chains can be compared to our own stubborn ideas. The chains prevent the people from seeing things from another point of view. When a person manages to escape and tries to explain this new world to the people in chains they refuse to believe what they are being told because they cannot change their opinions because they are chained to their old ideas. In our own society, when a person believes their right they believe that they are the one that managed to escape from the chains. But a person with an opposing view believes that they are the one who managed to escape. This goes back to the issue of perspective. How does a person know that they have escaped from the cave? How does the person know that they have not reentered a cave? Does it matter?

Carolyn: Carolyn: Have you ever felt like your perception of reality was drastically altered from your previous assumptions by a new experience? If so, did you tell anyone (and what did they think)? If not, do you think such a change is possible?

I have never felt that my perception of reality was completely different. I think that my perception of different things, especially things in my childhood, are more easily changed, yet it is for simpler, less important things. Looking back and learning more about things change my idea of things. For example, Blue, the main character of the childhood TV show Blues Clues, is actually a girl, but I thought she was a boy. Again, this is a small, unimportant issue. There have been other light bulb moments, learning that it is impossible for atoms to touch each other in ILS, but none have completely changed my perception of reality. There has been no epiphany comparable to that described in the Allegory of the Cave. But I do think that change is possible. Maybe not on such a large scale, but looking back on history there have been several events/changes in history that have changed people lives. Social revolutions that require people to change because of a law are the things that most readily come to mind. Wide spread diseases can change things over a short period of time, yet things never radically change in a short amount of time. Massive change that effects many people is typically gradual, taking place over several generations.

Allegory of the Cave

In response to Ian's questions, "Is the person who has come back into the cave after being in the light now at an advantage, or a disadvantage? He now has incredible knowledge that the others have no way of gaining, but if he is trapped again, is that knowledge useful? Is ignorance bliss? Finally, are there any situations where this has happened to a philosopher or scientist in history?" I think that the person who has come back into the cave after seeing the world is at an advantage because he now can live like a normal person, however, he will be very confused because he will not know what is the real world. As for if he is trapped again, not only would that be an awful situation but he may have been better off had he not seen the real world. Ignorance would be bliss because now he would be craving this other world that he saw, knowing that there is something else out there for him. I think this knowledge would not be useful while he is sent back to the cave because nobody would believe his story and they would think he was crazy, and his knowledge of something other than shadows would now be useless.

Caleb's questions, "As the person left the cave, I find it hard to believe that anyone would be so quick to understand the fallacy that was their life in the cave. If everything you've ever known was suddenly turned upside down, wouldn't it be more likely that they would simply return to the cave?" are interesting and I agree with his idea of returning to cave because the idea of this dream like world with light and things other than black shapes would seem way too unfamiliar and scary. I also think the man who escapes would explore this new world due to his curiosity and want to discover what this new world actually is. I also agree that the person would not be so quick to believe that this new world is in fact the real world and that the world he had once lived in was a forgery. If I was put into a completely new and strange world I had no idea existed I would be very scared to try to go out and explore and accept that this is real and what I had lived my life previously in was not real. I would only want to return to my home and be safe and ignorant to what weird things could have been had I stayed in this weird new world.

plato response

Elizabeth: Assuming that this theory is correct, what is the purpose of the initial hiding of the truth? **Is it so that only those worthy or capable get the privilege of seeing the truth?**

It would seem that, if a group of men is holding the puppets, there must be a group of free men who keep their fellow men in chains. It's interesting that Socrates barely mentions these guys. It's possible that they're just puppeteers, but are they also the captors? Maybe they're the privileged classes of society, intent on distracting the masses from the fact that they're being kept in the dark, literally and metaphorically. But that would mean that the puppeteers were already enlightened. I think there's probably a lot of ways to interpret the puppeteers, but I see them as the ones who've put together the whole cave setup and are distracting the prisoners with trivial matters.

I think part 2 of this question is really important. Why is one man freed from the chains (of intellectual bondage, to make the metaphor translate)? Is it pure chance, or does the man somehow free himself? Plato doesn't touch on this too much, but he does argue that the allegory proves that "the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being..." He's specifically saying that it doesn't really matter who the teacher is, it's the lesson that matters and every student has the capacity for real understanding. So what I'm inferring from that is that there's no smarter class of people—under the right circumstances, anyone can see the light/understand philosophy. But now I am really confused/interested in knowing why man #1 escaped from his shackles. This is really interesting to me right now because of the current election and some of the discussions between parties about

dependence/independence from the gov't especially regarding education. So in my mind, being freed from chains = early childhood education, but there are so many other things it could represent and I'm sure a lot of people would disagree with that analysis.

Sissy: In this story, we can all agree that the real world is better than the fabricated world in the cave. **But what if the real world was worse than the fabricated world?** In that case, would it be better to introduce others to the real world, or to leave them in ignorance?

Ignorance is supposedly bliss. The men in the cave don't seem unhappy with their situation, partly because they can't imagine any other reality. Based on Plato's description of one man's ascent into the aboveground world, I think it's safe to assume that this could have been a challenge for that guy. You go aboveground, suddenly there's a blinding light and you can't see anything, plus there's wind and smells and sometimes it rains. Uncomfortable! The real world seems better to us, but that's because we haven't spent all of our lives in a cave. It's assumed that this man would be happy to be free, but I'd imagine it would be a very traumatic experience to realize you'd been fooled your whole life. In some ways you might want to return to the darkness and safety of the cave. So this question seems relevant to the allegory. I'm not sure I can actually answer it any more than that—I don't know that it's right to force people out of a comfortable ignorance, as long as they're not hurting themselves or anyone else with that ignorance, and force them to "learn" and experience something they may not want to experience at all.

Plato Response

I found the last part of Ian's question particularly interesting: "Finally, are there any situations where this has happened to a philosopher or scientist in history?" I'm sure that scientists and philosophers have conducted studies or experiments where the results were disappointing, and the new "truth" seemed much less exciting than what was originally hypothesized. However, I can't think of any experiment (even if disappointing) that did not result in the advancement of knowledge and improvement to society in some form. On a smaller scale, I do think that the idea "ignorance is bliss" can be valid. There's not much harm in saying something like "I like your drawing" when in fact you hate it. On a larger level, however, the idea that ignorance is bliss will only lead to problems. Even if the truth seems worse than what was previously thought of as true, a deeper knowledge of the world around us will lead to more innovative ideas and ways to improve society.

Another reason I was fascinated by this question is that it also made me think "Are there any situations where this allegory had happened to someone in society?" Coincidentally, in Linguistics today we watched a video on a girl who came to be known as Genie--she was kept in a small room, physically restrained, in almost complete isolation until she was rescued at age 13. The case of Genie reminds me that even though Plato's Allegory of the Cave is a hypothetical situation, if it were replicated in reality, our perceptions of the ideas presented may change. When thinking about Plato's allegory from the point of view of a philosopher, it's easy to discuss whether or not it's better to be left ignorant, or whether or not the man who left the cave was better off than the others. In the context of a situation such as Genie's, however, how could I possibly say that I agree with the idea that ignorance is bliss?

This also answers a bit of the questions that Matthew brought up. I'm going to be very blunt: honestly, it would SUCK to see the world then go back to having to live in the cave. But would this ever be the situation in real life? Would someone ever find out a new "truth," and then be forced to forget about it and never see it again? What sort of "truth" would be a one-time deal, like the man seeing the world outside of the cave? In response to your other questions, I like to define truth as not what one perceives as true, but what is *actually* true. Of course, we have no definite way of knowing the actual truth, but we do have theories that are largely accepted as true. I agree with the idea "I know one thing--I know nothing."

In response to Brittany, Darwin was a really excellent example of a "truth" that may have seemed crazy and unbelievable. Although the idea of evolution seemed to be an insult to religion and a more detrimental to society than the previous idea of creation, it is evolution that has brought us to the level of knowledge of biology that we are at right now. I don't think that the truth can ever be harmful to the world in a larger sense, although I think it can be harmful to individuals, like those who supported the theory of creation.

9/6 Brittany

In response to Ian's second question, I think Plato's point that he who has seen the light will be perceived as crazy to those remaining in the cave is meant to illustrate multiple ideas. I agree that it shows the ostracizing of "thinking men", or those who express unorthodox ideas. I think that these ideas specifically are ones whose truth would upset or threaten the humans' conception of the world and themselves, or in other words human identity. A perfect example of this is Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution by natural selection. His theories that all the species ever on earth had come into being through a gradual evolutionary process, rather than spontaneous creation by a higher power (God), and that man had descended from apes rather than being a completely separate, unique creature were absolutely shocking. Fearing backlash from both his wife and society for subverting the perceived power of God and His creation humans, Darwin postponed publishing his tome for nearly two decades. However, after the uproar had chiefly minimized and the theory of evolution was bolstered by new scientific discoveries in fossil records, comparative anatomy, and DNA, the theory revolutionized biology. I feel that Darwin, and other people who know more than the rest, do have an obligation to share their knowledge with others regardless of social repercussions. If they truly hold the truth (although I realize that "truth" in itself is rather vague and controversial), the knowledge can only ultimately help humanity, although it may be a lengthy process for the idea to be accepted.

Looking at the cave-dwellers from a different perspective, we can interpret their repudiation of the world-seeing individual and his newfound knowledge as innocence or denial. Because they have never known, experienced, or considered reality they simply cannot envision it. After living a sheltered life, they have no conception of anything else. (I find this situation striking as customary features are reversed: instead of a caring figure sheltering a naïve child from the harsh realities of life, a rather nebulous, mysterious group of people is sheltering humans from the shocking but valuable reality. This brings up another question—are the "puppeteers" well-intentioned? Or antagonistic perhaps?) Another possibility is the people's denial about reality. Learning a previously thoroughly-established "truth" is false is a frightening, destabilizing phenomenon. Although the people have never experienced "reality", they likely considering the "what if", bewildered at the prospect of their world-conception's being undermined.

In response to Sara's first question, the "they" referred to here is the chained, unknowing people literally and metaphorically in the dark. Plato implies here that despite the jarring, glaring aspects of reality, nothing is worse than believing in a false truth and living stuck, unable to fathom much less reach reality.

Plato Response

After reading all of the "starter questions" Ian's question really intrigued me. "Is the person who has come back into the cave after being in the light now at an advantage, or a disadvantage?" Although I don't necessarily think of this as a "pro-con" type of situation, I did ask myself, "What is the purpose of realizing a greater truth if you are going to 're-chain' yourself in the cave to try to change the minds of others?" It is assumed that experiencing this new reality is better than the world of shadows before,

sensually, but aside from personal indulgence, what is the purpose of returning to the cave afterward? Sure, the philosopher's selfless answer would be to free the minds of others and save humanity, yet even the philosophers know that trying to do so is nearly impossible due to the difficulty of breaking people's perspectives on truth. Thus, there is no purpose of his knowledge of the "true" reality if he returns to the cave. What is the use? I put the word "true" in quotes because "truth" is more or less a subjective concept. Truth is determined by what people *believe* is true, because they are willing to stick to their own beliefs to the death. Therefore, does the escaped man's truth mean anything to the other prisoners?

I heard a speaker at a retreat this past weekend, and he said something interesting; something along the lines of, "Ignorance is bliss' should never be the case. People should always strive for more knowledge." I do not believe that this is always true, for there are many situations where ignorance or an absence of knowledge leaves the subject in a better situation than the actual knowledge does, for example, an inconvenient yet pointless truth. At the same time, however, I do not believe that Plato's Allegory is one of these instances. For Plato's Cave, it is implied the reality is better than what is known before. There is an added dimensionality to everything, utilizing and indulging all senses. A rational person, making an informed decision, would always choose escape from the cave over staying. Therefore, in this case, ignorance is not bliss. Bliss is, in fact, bliss.

Responding to Caleb, this explanation about truths is exactly why one can't change another's perspective of truth. He or she must experience it on her own. Finding truth is a very inward and independent journey. That is why, to me, it makes no sense to return to the cave, in any situation. Surely, the escapee would pity the remaining prisoners in the cave, yet there is nothing that can be done to save them. Their chains can only be broken by their own desires to break them and see what lies beyond.

Plato Response

I am responding to Matt's question: In his quote, "*But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort,*" what does the idea of good refer to? Why does it appear last of all? This final paragraph seems to say some things about good that fall within my understanding of what "good" could be, but also seems to have some aspects which do not correspond with my understanding of good. The part that most agrees with my conventional wisdom of good, is when Plato describes good, as being the creator of all good things. At first this seemed to say that Plato was suggesting that the concept of good is a creator of some sort, but more likely he is just saying that good things come from good people, good ideas, etc. This part seems to be very in line with my conception of good. It is the next part that is a little odd. Plato describes good as "the immediate source of reason and truth". I have always thought of good, at least moral good as not having to be logical or reasonable. For example, Thomas Malthus (I've been studying for a chemistry test) said that in order for the human population to not outgrow the resources on Earth, some significant portion of the population must die. While this is logically true, and I logically know that it would be disastrous if not enough people died, I don't consider this to be morally good. It seems like goodness is less about morals and more about some sort of grand understanding of the universe. But there is the possibility that I am reading too much into his word choice. I believe that Plato feels that in order to achieve an understanding of goodness, one must be a philosopher like him and study goodness for all of his or her life. This is why good might come last.

Response to Sara: I think that you gave a really great analysis of whether or not the person who has seen the light is at a disadvantage or not. The if a person has some sort of information that only they know, but can do nothing with it, it would be more like torture than freedom. One part of your answer that was particularly interesting was the idea that the people in the cave might try to deny the existence of the light, not out of pure ignorance, but because they don't want to believe in what is being denied to them. It is really original and cool that you say that human beings may be complicit in their own blindness. That they not only believe that ignorance is bliss, but are

willing to fight for their ignorance.

Response to Elizabeth: I absolutely agree that morals vary from place to place, and that depending on who one asks, one will get wildly different ideas. The part of your response that was really food for thought, was the idea that the only thing we can agree on is that we all basically exist. This makes a lot of sense when one thinks about how many different answers one will get if a bunch of philosophers are asked what the meaning of life is, or is there something greater. This idea suggests that the people in the cave, suffer from not only ignorance, but also a lack of agreement on life in general, that all of humanity suffers from.

Plato

Response to Ian's Question: Is the person who has come back into the cave after being in the light now at an advantage, or a disadvantage? He now has incredible knowledge that the others have no way of gaining, but if he is trapped again, is that knowledge useful? Is ignorance bliss? Finally, are there any situations where this has happened to a philosopher or scientist in history?

I think the person who returns to the cave after being in the light is at a disadvantage, as his new knowledge does nothing but convince everyone around him he is crazy and that the world outside is a terrible place. He cannot recognize shadows clearly anymore, and that is the only skill people in the cave need. However, this is only because he has to return to the cave, where the new knowledge does not do him any good. Within the cave, being able to recognize shadows is the useful skill he who has left no longer has. Outside of the cave, his new knowledge would do him plenty, but he is trapped among the ignorant. But if he somehow manages to convince the others of the world outside and teach them what he knows, his knowledge will no longer be useless, as he will be able to share it and use it to enlighten others. Unfortunately, although to whoever left the cave and is forced back into ignorance ignorance is torture, it is bliss to the people who never left the cave. If they are told of the world outside and convinced it is real, they will begin to suffer, wishing they could see that world for themselves. Thus, they might try to deny the existence of the world of light to protect themselves from the misery they will feel at not being able to see it for themselves.

Similar situations have happened throughout history. Whenever a ground-breaking discovery is made, everyone else rejects the idea. Amazing artists, philosophers, and scientists, like whoever leaves Plato's Cave and sees the world outside, have all experienced rejection by those who do not see the world the same way. For example, when Galileo published his ideas that the universe was heliocentric, he was shunned and forced to recant because no one wanted to believe that they were ignorant and that there was so much they did not know. However, in the real world, unlike in Plato's Cave, the others eventually change their minds and believe the new knowledge, even though that usually happens after the death of the person who made the discovery.

Response to Caleb: I agree that seeing a different world where people are simple and happy could open minds to new worlds. However, just because people see these situations and know that they exist, I do not think it actually changes their mindset and how they act. Just like in Plato's Cave, those who never got to leave the cave can hear about the world outside from whoever leaves, they will never truly believe in it.

Response to Dylan: I agree with the idea that everything should be open to discussion. People who refuse to listen to new ideas are not going to learn anything and also be seen as extremely foolish. Even if they choose not to believe what they are told, they should listen and allow others their opinions, especially as no one knows what "truth" is; the only "truth" people know is what they believe.

plato's cave response to responses

Responding to Allie's question:

I think that this question could be equally applicable to the question of morality, and what it means to ethical or good. Each individual's perception of what is good is determined by what he/she was taught growing up, and the environment he/she was first exposed to. For morals in general there are certain rules of conduct that tend to be fairly universal, such as killing innocent people=bad. In regards to truth, it's more difficult to find a common ground from which everyone then can differ in opinion. I suppose that common ground might be that we all exist, in one form or another. Then from there people can decide whether reality is that everything that we can see and touch and prove scientifically, or if all of existence is really a computer generated game for children. Who knows?

Response to Dylan's discussion:

I think that the view that the world is divided into real, provable things, and opinions, doesn't allow for the fact that everything that you consider absolutely factual and true might all be fake. Sure, we've proven to our satisfaction that the earth orbits around the sun. But what if in fact time as we know it is actually history in reverse, and the rotation of earth is acting as a rewind button on time, so we are only performing pre-determined actions in reverse, but we can't see that because backwards time is all we know? Or what if solar flares are actually bits of the sun returning from a fourth dimension, propelled through in such a way to create an ultra-exothermic reaction? Or all of existence is the dream of a 12yr old genius on the planet Skerfl? I don't believe that either of these things are true. But that's the thing: we just don't know. I don't think it's possible to maintain that there are proven things (aka true things), and opinions about things(aka debatable ideas about truth) because no matter how proven something is, there's always something else to disprove it.

In response to Caleb:

I agree that the most difficult part about accepting a new truth would be letting go of what you've always known to be true. Also on a more self-centered level, you'd feel like a bit foolish for having previously only been aware of one form of reality, and still have a sentimental inclination to want to revert back to your previous view of things. This doesn't seem to be an issue in Plato's telling of the person going into the light and seeing the real world. It takes some adjusting, but the person accepts what he now sees as reality, and eventually sees the sun/goodness and is happy with this. You can never really know how you would respond to having your world turned upside down like that until it actually happens.

Plato Numbah 2 - Caleb

In response to Carolyn's question: I have felt that an experience has drastically changed my view of reality. During the summer going into 8th grade at Redwood Day, I went on a school trip to Costa Rica. A group of ten of us travelled for almost 24 hours to get to a small town called Boruca in the middle of the Costa Rican rainforest, on a Reservation for the natives. It was a truly mind-opening experience for me; it made me rethink everything I knew about happiness, materialism, and really American culture as a whole. These people were incredibly poor (in the American view of things), but had what

they needed to survive. And they were happy. They were more content with life than almost anyone I had ever met in the States. They were close with nature, close with each other, deeply religious, and grateful for all the little things. Of course, they all thought that we had it better, but there was definitely something I envied about the simplicity of their existences. I came back a totally different person. Did I tell anyone? Yes, it wasn't really similar to the Allegory of the Cave in that way. Do I think that type of change is possible? I'm not sure. To have your literal perception of the world turn out to be a lie would be a much harder thing to share. If someone came up and told me that every way I interpreted the physical world around me was wrong, I would most definitely think they were crazy. The hardest part to overcome, I think, would be the fact that it's all I've ever known. I've only ever seen the world the way I have. That seems redundant, but it's true. I would bet that no two people experience the world in the same way. We'd never know, because we can't extend our minds past the experiences we've had, but I'm sure that no two people experience **anything** in the exact same way. This is also something I've thought a lot about as a twin. I get the question all the time, "what's it like being a twin?" I don't have a good answer to that question. I've never **not** been a twin; it's all I've ever known. How can I compare the two sides if I've only ever experienced one? In addition, my twin and I are incredibly different, but over the years I've come to know how she thinks. I can have an experience, and also imagine how she would interpret the situation as well. It's an interesting combination, it makes me wonder how everyone **else** sees the world!

Plato #2 Discussion

Allie's Question: If the truth is essentially what we are exposed to first, how do we find real truth? If everyone's perception of truth depends on his/her upbringing, is there such a truth?

While this may be a very binary way of looking at things, I think that information comes in 2 types. One is factual information, which is scientifically provable, although that does not mean it is necessarily easy to prove or disprove. The other is non-provable information, essentially opinion.

The line between these two types I feel is extremely fluid, and is never set. What people thought hundreds of years ago was impossible to know is now relatively common knowledge, for example in medieval times people had no hope of understanding sickness and what caused it besides rudimentary attempts at describing imbalances in the body. Now we cannot only describe the cause of many sicknesses, but exactly how viruses and bacteria work function and even how to stop many of them. Similarly, something universally understood to be truth may one day be shown to be completely false. In many matters we can prove truth, or at least show it to be truth to an extremely high level of certainty. On the other hand, such as in the matters of religion, there is no "right" answer, and as far as I am concerned if something cannot be proven then the hope for an absolute truth about it is a lost cause. Thus the idea of a "perception of truth", in my opinion, is invalid as something can either be proven or cannot and is thus open to interpretation.

In response to Allie's discussion:

While I agree to the idea that the chains represent the idea of one truth, I have come to interpret the significance behind it differently. I do feel that many people in the world are not open minded to new ideas and "truths", it is not always valid to say that everything is open to discussion, certain things are more open for discussion than others. For example, to state a relatively old disproven argument, people used to think that the earth was the center of the universe, and were extremely closed minded to the idea that the sun was in fact the center of our solar system, and beyond was not even the center of the universe or even in a significant location. Observations contrary to the earth centered view of the world were plenty and verifiable, while only long standing notions verified the earth centered view of the world. On the other hand, certain notions that have long been believed to be true may very well be true and have large amounts of observation to back them up, and challenging these ideas is just as foolish as refusing to let go of a long held but incorrect idea. People should be willing to give up long lost false notions, although the largest factor in believing something to be true is fact and observation, not solely based on opinion.

Response to Saehee's Question

Saehee's question: Who or what do the chains represent in comparison to modern society?

I think the chains in Plato's cave metaphor represent the idea that there is only one truth. In the modern world, this widespread belief inhibits us to see other truths or perceptions of truth. Essentially, our perception of truth is unable to be altered because the accepted truth in this modern world is absolute. However, we do not really know of another truth: the truth only the prisoners would know. Since these two perceptions of the truth are distant from one another and have no access to each other's perception or idea of the truth, we cannot see the truth any other way besides the way we first saw it. In Plato's Allegory of the Cave, when the prisoners enter the sunlight and exit the dark cave, their eyes adjust and eventually they are convinced they have seen a new reality or truth. However, I believe that, in the analogy of the cave, the prisoners will always see truth as shadows and the "free" people will always see reality in the objects themselves. I think the reason that the prisoner who escaped claims he has found a new reality outside the cave is that the idea that reality is in the light and the objects themselves is more accepted within the population because the population is more abundant than in the cave. Therefore, the prisoner's eyes may adjust to the light physically, but his perception of truth does not fully 'adjust' to this new world and perception of truth at its core. When the prisoner sees an object in the world outside the cave, his mind will first wander to the shadow of that object he saw on the wall of the cave. This first thought is where one's perception of reality truly exists. This prisoner will associate all objects with his first perception of truth: the reflections. Therefore, his view of truth will never fully change. The same idea applies to the 'free' people coming into the cave and out of the light. When they are chained down and see shadows on the wall of a cave, they will associate those shadows with the object itself: the texture, the color, the weight. They will know that in reality, or their perception of reality, the object they see reflected on the wall is merely a simplified version of the object itself: a solid color, a simple shape, no texture. In this case, the chains are holding them back from seeing reality with the perception of the original prisoners. Moreover, the chains represent their own view of reality in the world outside the cave.