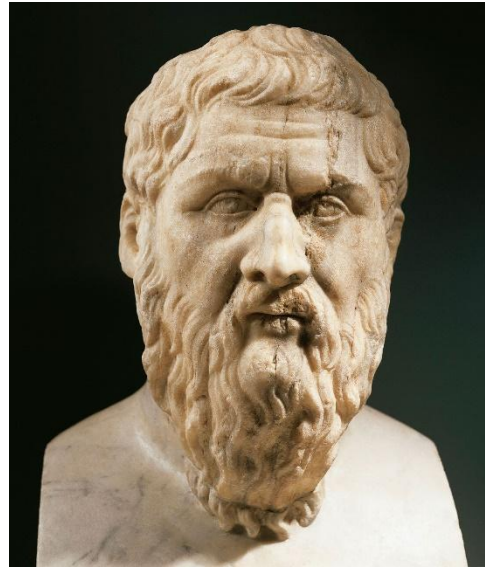




## A story influenced by the philosopher Plato



A remarkable journey awaited in the buzzing classroom, where inquisitive minds sought knowledge. The students embarked on an exciting journey known as "Classroom Time Travel" driven by their fascination with history. A mysterious entrance blended into the walls, ready to transport them back in time.

The Greek Philosopher Plato is visiting to engage in discussions with the students and answer philosophical questions that explore various concepts and ideas within the realm of philosophy. Four students, the Philosopher and the teacher participate in the discussion. The students are in pairs and have different philosophical works and dialogues by Plato in front of them.

**Teacher:** Please sit in pairs. We are delighted to have the great philosopher Plato with us today. Our guest is widely known as the philosopher that features Socrates as the main character in his philosophical investigation, where he explores a multitude of concepts and ideas.

One of Plato's most famous works is "The Republic" in which he explores the complex concept of justice and presents the idea of a utopian society ruled by philosopher-kings.



You are invited to talk with him and find answers to your questions. Feel free to ask anything you would like as the discussion is open.

**Philosopher:** Good morning class. I am delighted to be here with you and thank Mr. Jason for the invitation. I am confident that we will engage in a very creative dialogue.

**The hand of a student, who was usually the most fearless in the class, shot up in the audience.**

**Christine:** It's a pleasure to have you here with us today! Can you share a bit about yourself?

**Plato:** Certainly. As you already know, I am Plato, recognized as one of the world's most famous and extensively studied ancient Greek philosophers. I was born in Athens in 428 or 427 BC; the exact year remains a mystery!

**Lewis:** And who was your primary influence?

**Plato:** I was a student of Socrates and went on to teach Aristotle. Although I was primarily influenced by Socrates and conveyed and expanded on his ideas and techniques, I was also influenced by Heraclitus, Parmenides, and the Pythagoreans. Nevertheless, Socrates' philosophical exploration served as the foundation of my philosophy. Thus, I consider Socrates to be my primary influence.

**Mary:** We've heard about your Academy. Can you tell us more about it?

**Plato:** Certainly. In 387 BC, I founded the Academy in Athens, often referred to as the world's first university. There, I trained other great and equally influential philosophers, such as Aristotle, who studied there for two decades. Throughout my life, I travelled and lived in Cyrene, Italy, Sicily, and Egypt, before eventually returning to Athens and founding the Academy.





Source: School of Athens” by Raphael 1509-1511, Raymond Yee, Wordpress.org

**Teacher:** Plato is renowned for his theories on Metaphysics. Would you like to learn a bit more about this?

**Christine:** Yes! I was wondering if you think that your philosophy influenced other philosophers?

**Plato:** Certainly. My philosophy influenced a wide range of other philosophers, across various branches, including Metaphysics. The core of my metaphysics can be found in my famous “Theory of Forms.”

**Lewis:** Could you tell us more about this Theory? What is it about?

**Plato:** That is an interesting question. According to this theory, there is a higher reality that goes beyond our changing world sensed through experience. This higher reality is made up of Forms, which are eternal, unchanging entities that can be understood through the intellect rather than the senses. Thus, our everyday reality stems from these Forms. The things that I consider “real” are not the things that are permanent and unchanging, but what can be comprehended and grasped through knowledge and understanding..

**Mary:** Which of your works do you consider the most significant?

**Plato:** Let me reflect on that for a moment. As a philosopher, providing a precise answer is not simple. If I had to choose one, I'd go with "The Republic," where ethics, political philosophy, moral psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics are intricately integrated into an interconnected and systematic philosophy.

**Myria:** How would you describe your writings?

**Plato:** Most of my writings take the form of dialogues, often featuring Socrates as the main speaker. In “The Republic”, I argue in defence of a just life and its integral link to a fulfilling existence. One of the dialogues depicted in “The Republic” is the well-known “Allegory of the Cave.”



Source: Plato's Allegory of the Cave, by 4edges, Source: Wikipedia.Org

**Christine:** Could you tell us about the ‘Allegory of the Cave’.



**Plato:** Of course, the 'Allegory of the Cave' is a tale that revolves around education and philosophical learning. It serves a dual purpose. It symbolizes my view on reality and essence, and it teaches the importance of philosophy in revealing the true nature of things.

**Seeing the students' confusion, the Philosopher simplifies his explanation.**

**Plato:** To explain it briefly, the allegory begins with some prisoners being tied up in a cave and facing a wall. Their necks are tied too, which makes it impossible for them to turn their heads. All they can see is a wall with a lot of shadows, which are created by the reflection of different objects.

**Lewis:** What is the significance of these objects?

**Plato:** These objects are being carried around by others in front of a fire, but the prisoners are not aware of this. They have spent their whole lives in the cave, facing the wall, so that's all they know. To them, the shadows are real because that's their entire experience. They learn to predict the shadows' movements and think they understand the truth around them. Then, one of the prisoners is set free and immediately realises that what they have been seeing their whole lives, are actually shadows of real objects. The prisoner then realises that their entire reality was just a shadow of the actual reality outside of the cave.

**Mary:** What happens then to the prisoner?

**Plato:** The prisoner ventures out the cave to explore the real world. At first, the prisoner is blinded by the sun, having lived in darkness their whole life but then sees that the sun illuminates everything, like reason illuminates the true nature of things. After discovering the true world, the prisoner goes back to the cave to share her insights with the other prisoners. However, having experienced the real world, the prisoner struggles to perceive the shadow world as before. The other prisoners mock her, perceiving her as a fool. They feel threatened by her questioning the shadow world. They are content in their ignorance and resist the idea of being liberated.



**Myria:** Is there a deeper meaning in this allegory?

**Plato:** This allegory, my dear students, is rich in symbolism and metaphor, which illustrates my perceptive of reality. The freeing of the prisoner represents the work that philosophy and reason do. The allegory of the cave, in essence, demonstrates that without the practice of philosophy, we remain in the dark. The mockery of the other prisoners towards the freed prisoners suggests that our philosophical journey may lead us to viewpoints that challenge societal norms. Overall, my Allegory of the Cave encompasses my Theory of Forms and could serve as an excellent introduction to Metaphysics for you, young minds. Through the Theory of Forms, you will question the physical world we know and see it from a different point of view.

**Christine:** What is the definition behind the topic of 'Being'?

**Plato:** Well, according to the theory of 'Being' and existence, nothing simply exists; 'to be, means to be something.' This will help us develop our reasoning skills, encouraging us to see things differently and accept that there are more diverse ways of interpreting the world beyond our accustomed views. This illustrative nature of the Allegory of the cave can place you, young learners, in the role of the 'freed prisoner' who leaves the dark cave and goes on to explore the real world.

**Lewis:** Could you tell us how you began writing of Imprisonment?

**Plato:** Well, I began by having Socrates ask Glaucon to imagine a cave where people have been imprisoned from childhood, but not from birth. These prisoners are chained so that their legs and necks are fixed, forcing them to gaze at the wall in front of them and not to look around at the cave, each other, or even themselves. Behind the prisoners is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners is elevated walkway with a low wall. People walk along this walkway, carrying objects or puppets. They walk behind the wall, so their bodies do not cast shadows for the prisoners to see, but the objects they carry do. The prisoners cannot see what is happening behind them, they can only perceive the shadows cast upon the cave wall in front of them. The sounds of the people's voices echo off the walls, and the prisoners believe these sounds come from the shadows.



**Mary:** What does Socrates say about this entire scenario regarding the prisoners?

**Plato:** Socrates suggests that, for the prisoners, the shadows represent reality because they have never seen anything else; they do not realise that what they see are shadows of objects in front of a fire, let alone that these objects are derived from real things existing outside the cave, which they have never seen.

The fire or artificial light source, and the puppets, used to make shadows, are manipulated by artists. Plato, however, suggests that the fire also symbolizes the political doctrine being taught within a society. The artists use light and shadows to teach the dominant doctrines of a particular time and place. Furthermore, few humans will ever escape the cave. This is not an easy task, and only a true philosopher, with decades of preparation, would be able to leave the cave, and ascend the steep incline. Most humans will continue to reside at the bottom of the cave, with only a select few serving as the primary artists responsible for projecting shadows using artificial light.

**Myria:** How is a prisoner then freed?

**Plato:** Well, let's imagine that one prisoner is set free. This prisoner would look around and see the fire, but the bright light would hurt their eyes, making it hard to see the real objects causing the shadows. If they were told that what they're seeing by the fire is the true reality, not just the shadows on the wall, they probably wouldn't believe it. Due to the pain, the freed prisoner would turn away and run back to what they were accustomed to (ie., the shadows of the carried objects). In simpler terms, the bright light would hurt their eyes, and they would escape by looking at the things they knew, believing those were clearer than what was being shown to them.

**Christine:** What happens next?

**Plato:** Well, the story continues with the prisoner being forcibly dragged out of the cave, and finally seeing the light of the sun and the reality outside the cave. Initially, the prisoner will feel discomfort and experience eye pain due to the intense sunlight. However, with time, they will gradually adapt to this new reality.



**Lewis:** But why did the freed prisoner decide to go back into the cave?

**Plato:** The freed prisoner thought that the world outside the cave was better than the one they had known inside and attempted to share this with the other prisoners; However, when the freed prisoner returned to the cave, their eyes had adapted to the sunlight, and they couldn't see well in the darkness, much like when they first saw the sun. The other prisoners interpreted this as the journey outside harming the returning prisoner. Consequently, if given the chance, the other prisoners would resist anyone trying to pull them out of the cave.

**Teacher:** The story of the cave is actually very similar to our own reality. I'm sure we all have existential questions. I have to say that I am proud of all of you for your interest and your contribution to this discussion. Thank you for your precious time and help Mr. Plato. It has been a pleasure having you here with us today.

**Plato:** The pleasure was entirely mine Mr. Jason. I enjoyed this conversation with your students. I must say, you have a class full of promising young philosophers.!

**The students said goodbye to Plato as he walked through the supernatural gateway.**