

## **The Allegory of The Cave' by Plato: Summary and Meaning**

**The 'Allegory Of The Cave'** is a theory put forward by Plato, concerning human perception. Plato claimed that knowledge gained through the senses is no more than opinion and that, in order to have real knowledge, we must gain it through philosophical reasoning .

### **“The Allegory of the Cave” by Plato**

In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato distinguishes between people who mistake sensory knowledge for the truth and people who really do see the truth. It goes like this:

#### **The Cave**

Imagine a cave, in which there are three prisoners. The prisoners are tied to some rocks, their arms and legs are bound and their head is tied so that they cannot look at anything but the stonewall in front of them.

These prisoners have been here since birth and have never seen outside of the cave.

Behind the prisoners is a fire, and between them is a raised walkway.

People outside the cave walk along this walkway carrying things on their head including; animals, plants, wood and stone.

#### **The Shadows**

So, imagine that you are one of the prisoners. You cannot look at anything behind or to the side of you – you must look at the wall in front of you.

When people walk along the walkway, you can see shadows of the objects they are carrying cast on to the wall.

If you had never seen the real objects ever before, you would believe that the shadows of objects were 'real'.

### **The Game**

Plato suggests that the prisoners would begin a 'game' of guessing which shadow would appear next.

If one of the prisoners were to correctly guess, the others would praise him as clever and say that he were a master of nature.

### **The Escape**

One of the prisoners then escapes from their bindings and leaves the cave.

He is shocked at the world he discovers outside the cave and does not believe it can be real.

As he becomes used to his new surroundings, he realizes that his former view of reality was wrong.

He begins to understand his new world, and sees that the Sun is the source of life and goes on an intellectual journey where he discovers beauty and meaning.

He sees that his former life, and the guessing game they played is useless.

## **The Return**

The prisoner returns to the cave, to inform the other prisoners of his findings.

They do not believe him and threaten to kill him if he tries to set them free.