

## Discussion questions for Plato's Allegory of the Cave

### Group 1

1. Describe how the people in the cave are situated in Plato's parable. Why can't they move their legs or necks to take a look around? What is the only thing they are capable of seeing? What is their only source of light?
2. What are the stages of the liberated prisoner's experience outside the cave?
3. What do these prisoners trapped in the cavern believe is real?
4. How do the prisoners react when they first see sunlight? Why?
5. What does Plato's allegory of the cave tell us about how we recognize things?

### Group 2

6. What does Plato's cave tell us about what we see with our eyes?
7. What is truth according to Plato in this allegory?
8. What other ideas could have been influenced by Plato's cave?
9. Describe an experience you have had in which something that looked true turned out to be false or looked false turned out to be true.
10. How is it possible that people can believe in illusion and accept it as reality?

### Group 3

11. What sometimes happens to people when the illusion is shattered and reality is revealed?
12. Describe other "caves" in modern life in which people might be "imprisoned" or feel "imprisoned".
13. If a prisoner is released from the cave and compelled to look toward the light, what will he experience? Why?
14. If the liberated prisoner goes back to the cave and tries to explain to his former fellow prisoners, what kind of reaction will he get? Why?
15. To what extent do you find Socrates point about human tendency to confuse "shadows" with "reality" relevant today?

### Group 4

16. What could be the elements that prevent people from seeing the truth, or regarding "shadow" as the "truth"?
17. What are some things the allegory suggests about the process of enlightenment or education?
18. What do the imagery of "shackles" and the "cave" suggest about the perspective of the cave dwellers or prisoners?
19. In society today or in your own life, what sorts of things shackle the mind?
20. Compare the perspective of the freed prisoner with the cave prisoners?

### Group 5

21. According to the allegory, how do cave prisoners get free? What does this suggest about intellectual freedom?
22. The allegory presupposes that there is a distinction between appearances and reality. Do you agree? Why or why not?
23. Plato is very skeptical about the "visible realm." For him, knowledge is always of the "intelligible realm." Describe what distinction Plato means to draw when he talks of these two realms. Why do you think he is skeptical of the visible realm? Do you think this skepticism is merited?
24. What is the aim of education, according to Plato? How does this compare to how we think about education today? Do we have anything to learn from Plato? Why?
25. Plato thinks that philosophers should be rulers. Why do you think he thinks this? And what are Plato's worries if someone other than a philosopher rules? Are these worries merited? What does this tell us about contemporary politics?