



Whether Plato's allegory of the cave is relevant in the context of mass media and its depictions in the same?

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Abstract

The allegory of the cave is one of Plato's most famous concepts. He uses the allegory in order to explain in his theory of forms that postulates that despite being unaware of the realm of forms, humans can still think, speak, understand and form rational thoughts. Plato wrote the allegory in order to show the effects and consequences of education. It has also been interpreted in several other ways and has been connected to Plato's other writings, in particular, with the theory of forms which states that an ideal or pure form of something exists in abstraction, it cannot be experienced through the physical senses but is an abstract representation of flawed things found in the physical realm.

Keywords: Binary logit regression, Determinants, Income share, Niches, Woodlot

INTRODUCTION

The forms include concepts such as beauty, humans, roundness and so on. A similar idea can be found in Max Weber's concept of ideal types which are used as yardsticks to measure the similarity or difference, these ideal types are made up out of the characteristics and elements of particular phenomenon, it is not meant as a perfect thing, but is rather to stress certain elements common from case to case; Weber used this concept in the context of societal institutions. Weber's concept of ideal types was also used in psychology, particularly in the area of child psychology and development, the ideal type is understood as a perfect or pure concept

or thing through which the individual recognizes objects in the physical world (Wartenberg, 2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The allegory of the cave

In book seven of 'the republic' Plato writes about the allegory of the cave, presenting a particular condition before the other individuals involved in the debate. He puts forth an issue, from childhood a few prisoners are kept chained up in a cave, they are chained in such a way that they

are unable to move their bodies or their heads, the only thing they are able to see is the cave wall on which they can see shadows being cast from a fire placed behind them (Wood, 1987). They will be able to see the shadows of those passing by the cave and hear the noises echoing in the cave (Thevenin et al., 2012). The prisoners are kept this way for many years, until one day one of the prisoners is set free and ventures outside the cave. When the prisoner first arrives outside the cave they are very disoriented, they will be unable to see clearly since their eyes have been acclimatized to the darkness of the cave, they have also never seen how the world actually is having been used to the darkness of the cave and only having seen the shadows (Oliveira Moraes et al., 2021). The prisoner will eventually realise that what exists outside the cave is real and the shadows are not true depictions of objects or things and are illusions, he will become enlightened through his experiences outside the cave. After finding out the reality, the prisoner will go back to the cave to tell the other prisoners of what he has found and that whatever they have been seeing until now have been illusions, however, he will be met with distrust and suspicion because the other prisoners have known nothing other than their existence within the cave, and will probably react aggressively towards the freed prisoner and reject the freed prisoner (Fronterotta, 2010). Plato put forth this case based on the assumption that individuals are inclined towards whatever they are used to and will only see what they want to see regardless of the truth. Plato uses this allegory to depict how philosophers and intellectuals are treated by other people if they try and spread ideas which are contrary to popular belief, against the state or simply if it does not fall in line with the individual's belief regardless of the actuality of the situation or the truth (Featherstone, 2015). This concept is highly influenced by the death of Socrates, he was sentenced to death by the Athenian government for spreading ideas which could cause disruption in Athenian society and for corrupting the minds of the youth, and was made to consume hemlock. This incident played an important role in shaping Plato's view of the government and Athenian society, making him a staunch opponent of Athenian democracy. The allegory proposes that what an individual experiences to be reality in total is simply an illusion or a partial reality (Hug, 2011).

DISCUSSION

What can be derived from Plato's allegory is that perception makes individual reality, while there may be a modicum of reality as a shared experience, it does not result in a shared

perception of the reality presented. Plato's allegory of the cave exemplifies Socrates' belief that human knowledge is limited and individuals must know when they know nothing, the allegory depicts this idea of limited knowledge dictating an individual's reality (Thayer, 1977).

In current times, the media in particular exemplifies the allegory of the cave. It is often seen that the media reports affairs and issues in a somewhat biased manner, usually in order to benefit a particular side or match a particular perspective. In the present scenario, at least in most democratic nations, it may be easily assumed that information is freely available and whatever is presented in the media would be done so without bias and based on facts, this however seems to be a rather narrow perspective. However, unlike the allegory of the cave, despite whatever is presented to the individual, they are still not bound in one place and are able to choose which source they view their reality from. Despite having the choice to choose our perception the information presented through social media and mass media has a significant impact on an individual's world view. Some would consider the most obvious example of this to be China, where the national media is considered to be biased and all forms of media heavily controlled by the state, allowing only what is approved by the government to be shown on the news. With globalization and other forms of technology it is impossible to contain information and thus it is not completely impossible for information to leak out but the state machinery does have significant control over the same, resulting in the state having a major influence on the information presented to the people and their subsequent worldview. However, it would also be incorrect to believe that the condition in China is unique by virtue of the state's form of control and by virtue of it being a non-democratic nation.

Even democratic countries are known to have suppressed information and incidents through various means such as direct intimidation, arrest and harassment of journalists, limiting access to information, gag-laws, anti-defamation legislation, bribery, blocking and filtering content, electronic surveillance, pressurizing the dismissal of certain journalists, controlling access to inputs, discriminatory access to government subsidies and schemes, financial pressure, purchasing of independent media houses by government proxies or by political party members, spreading misinformation and so on. An example of which could be the rampant use of section 66A of the IT act, 2008 in India to charge netizens and activists with violation of the same, until it was amended on

grounds of violation of freedom of speech after the Shreya Singhal V. Union of India case. A study conducted on Facebook users found that users who tend to rely on their feeds for information develop a skewed sense of perception because they are exposed to information limited to their pre-existing perceptions or ideologies, most supporting their existing beliefs. Additionally, people with strong ideologies or political views attempt to reduce exposure to conflicting or contradictory information as a method to reduce cognitive dissonance. This often occurs due to social media algorithms which collect user data and use the same to show content which the user has previously shown interest in. Thus, people are exposed only to certain similar content, limiting the information they receive.

An apt example of this is shown in Orwell's 1984, in which the state controls all forms of media and information, the history of the nation itself is rewritten over and over in order to have an effective control over the people. The state constantly monitors its citizens in order to control their thoughts, ideologies and opinions. This is exemplified through the concept of doublethink, a method of indoctrination through which the subject is taught to accept contrary beliefs at the same time, a method used by the ruling party of Oceania. An example of this would be the sudden change of Oceania enemy from Eurasia to Eastasia, another would be the amount of rations being "increased" from the previous month although the amount itself had been reduced. The citizens themselves are taught to accept whatever they are exposed to. The character Emmanuel Goldstein exemplifies the concept of the freed prisoner in '1984', his attempts to reveal anything against the party and big brother simply led to him being rejected and hated by society. A more recent example of the allegory being depicted in media would be the 1999 movie "the matrix", in which all individuals exist within a shared stimulated reality known as the matrix. The movie includes similar archetypes as depicted in the allegory and in 1984. However, there are some inherent contradictions in Plato's conception of reality and enlightenment and his other writings in the republic.

Plato believed in a state controlled education system, and that without education individuals would make no progress. Education acted as a positive measure for the operation of justice, education also allows for an individual to become a virtuous person. he was influenced by the Spartan system of education which was state controlled and involved military training. The Athenian education system on the other hand

was privately sponsored and only the rich could afford it. Plato rejected this as well, he believed in a state controlled education system which would provide education to all citizens regardless of class and must be started at an early age and include music moral education and gymnastics, primarily focusing on their physical education. Other subjects prescribed were mathematics, science and history. Higher education would begin at the age of twenty after an examination to determine those eligible, at the age of thirty, those who passed received five more years of education. However, education continued till the age of fifty, each level having different subjects.

Those who completed education till the age of fifty years would be able to become philosopher kings who would act as rulers and guardians of the state. The ultimate aim of Plato's education system, and all other social institutions, was the perpetuation of the state, that is, the main purpose was to ensure the continued existence of the state. The main issues in book two of the republic are on education and censorship, particularly revolving around whether greater censorship in the education system will lead to more just state or society. While censorship in this case is discussed in the sense of imparting a moral education to the citizens in order to ensure a moral and just state.

While censorship is meant primarily for literature and fiction, in particular about the works on Homer and Hesiod, despite censorship of certain fiction Plato is not unwilling to include fictitious literature. "And literature may be either true or false? Yes. And the young should be trained in both kinds, and we begin with the false? I do not understand your meaning, he said. You know, I said, that we begin by telling children stories which, though not wholly destitute of truth, are in the main fictitious; and these stories are told them when they are not of an age to learn gymnastics. Very true". The censorship of the curriculum would be left up to a censorship of writers who would decide what is moral and just.

This seems to be contradictory to his earlier criticism of the Athenian democracy, which put his teacher Socrates to death for corrupting the minds of the youth and also against his statement of censoring art and literature, which indicates that societal norms on morality continue to hold sway over what is acceptable in society to Plato.

While there is a need for certain moral standards to be upheld, there may be a difficulty in differentiating those which are arbitrary and holdback progress and those which are necessary, even though the moral standard is

continuously changing from time to time and it is ultimately impossible to stop it.

While Plato writes in the context of having an effectively functioning state and thus requiring some degree of censorship for the same purpose, it appears contradictory in the sense that enlightenment is gained through education and experiencing reality and Plato advocates censorship of material which is considered by him to be immoral or have a detrimental impact in the education of the people and subsequently impact the functioning of the state.

Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist and philosopher, theorized a similar condition in his media theory. He gives the term 'simulacra' which refers to a symbol, sign or object which loses its relation to reality, *i.e.*, when the representation of something comes to replace the real thing being represented. When this occurs in multiple cases, the difference between simulation and reality becomes indistinct and the individual experiences what he terms as 'hyperreality'.

Therefore, as in the allegory of the cave in which the prisoners are only able to see the shadows which become their only reality, according to Baudrillard, due to the rising significance of mass media consumerism people end up stuck in hyperreality, in which 'truth' simply ends up being the majority or media consensus, thus human end up experiencing a simulation of reality rather than reality itself.

This is a considerably worrying prospect, indicating in there being a significant need for not only more honest journalism but also a greater need for a general scepticism amongst the masses when it comes to believing news and information.

One must consider the source of information, both sides of the argument, who benefits from your belief or disbelief in the same, the way in which the information is presented and a plethora of other factors.

CONCLUSION

For instance, if we take the issue of information in school textbooks being either removed, reworded or misrepresented it becomes quite apparent that the previous narrative will shift; this may result in important parts of history being whitewashed and losing its significance. This can have very real social and political consequences, particularly in the detriment to the well-being of marginalized groups. A degree of scepticism is required when taking in any information, blind belief will never show the whole truth, leading to the same perception as the people chained in the cave, a half understanding steeped in shadows with no clear understanding of reality.

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