

Background: Plato's Cave

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 07 Feb 1997

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m.driussi — 07 Feb 1997, 19:52

Reply: Item #2740464 from WHORL at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET02#

Plato's Allegory of the Cave (beginning of Book VII in the REPUBLIC) imagines humankind as living in an underground cave which has a wide entrance open to the light. Deep within are human beings facing the back wall, chained at neck and leg so they cannot move. They have never seen sunlight or the sun.

Outside the cave there is a fire burning continuously, casting firelight into the cave. Between the fire and the cave is a raised path and a wall, together forming a puppet theater.

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cave path fire
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Along this path stroll mysterious non-human beings (we might call them outsiders or puppetmasters) who carry all sorts of objects so that they project over the pathwall. Firelight upon these objects casts a shadow upon the back wall of the cave, and these shadows-of-real-things are the only things which the prisoners (humanity) can see. To them, this is reality.

So one prisoner is unchained and turned around to see the world of firelight (the cave, the path, the fire), then the prisoner is dragged out to see the world of sunlight that lies beyond the world of firelight, and the prisoner sees the sun itself, at which point the prisoner becomes the heroic philosopher. End of allegory, more or less.

=Interpretation of the Allegory [insert hedgewords to suit taste]=

To the pre-Christian Socratic philosophers, the four worlds (cave, puppet stage, fire, sunlight) represent our world (cave), the world of Absolute Truth (sunlight), and the intermediate stages. Socrates is the heroic philosopher.

The Christian reading sees Jesus Christ as the heroic philosopher, showing the way for all prisoners to escape the cave.

The Kabbalah reading immediately recognizes the four worlds and sees stages of God at points along the way. So firelight is a lesser manifestation of God the sunlight. Old Testament prophets would be examples of heroic philosophers.

The Gnostic reading, when stripped of reflexive anti-Judaism, is similar to the Kabbalistic

reading except there is a tendency to demonize lesser manifestations of God. So fire is seen as the Pretender to the throne of Sunlight. And the sun doesn't know, doesn't give a damn about the prisoners. Each gnostic has the potential to find his/her own path to becoming a unique and untranslatable heroic philosopher.

Now then, what does all this have to do with THE BOOK OF THE LONG SUN, you might ask?

=mantis=

Questions or problems to whorl-owner at lists.best.com