

# There and Back Again as a Free Person

## Philosophical Shades of Freedom on the Walls of Plato's Cave in the Thought of Heidegger and Arendt



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**ABSTRACT** The article refers to the issue of freedom from a philosophical perspective. First of all, it discusses Plato's metaphor of the cave in *Politeia*, in which the philosopher writes of freedom in its individual and collective forms. Then the article indicates how the metaphor was read by such contemporary philosophers as Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, who interpret Plato's metaphor from existential-phenomenological and political perspectives.

Heidegger stresses the freedom of a human being, who in the light of the subjective existential experience begins to live objectively in an authentic way. He frees himself up from the impersonal-I. A person, who experienced the truth as un-concealment, is not enslaved anymore to the impersonality of the crowd. He is able to face his own mortality and to take responsibility for his own fate. A special expression of freedom is shown in his care for others, even if it means risking one's life.

Hannah Arendt interprets Plato's metaphor from the perspective of political philosophy. Her assessment becomes some kind of memento. What if the prisoners of the cave simply do not want to leave their place? Does the philosopher have a right forcefully to pull them out of the cavern? What is better, the attitude of Socrates, who dialogues with people or the attitude of Plato, who simply lectures the mob? In this way Arendt refers to the concept of freedom, as it is sketched in Plato's cave. At the same time, she argues with Heidegger's interpretation of the Platonic metaphor.

**KEYWORDS** Arendt, Hannah; Heidegger, Martin; individualism; freedom; Plato's cave; political philosophy; Socrates; truth; un-concealment

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## INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the issue of freedom and discusses some of its aspects from a philosophical perspective. As a starting point for the discussion, it refers to Plato's metaphor of the cave in the seventh book of *Politeia*. This article, in the midst of many possible ways of interpreting the metaphor, concerns first of all the explanation suggested by Plato himself in the dialogue and in the broader context of his philosophy. Then, it transfers the interpretation of the text to the modern context and observes how it was read by such philosophers as Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. These perspectives point towards the existential and collective-political dimensions of freedom.

Moreover, Heidegger and Arendt ask in their interpretations of the metaphor of the cave important questions about the significance of the Platonic text in the modern world. A thesis can be stated that the above accounts refer to the universal story of humanity and underline its various threads in various contexts and from various perspectives. Heidegger and Arendt focus on its particular aspects, develop its motives and point to its possible applications.

The article does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis of the issue of freedom. Rather, it works as an introduction to the problem. It is a sketch, which draws a few shades of freedom from a philosophical perspective and relates them to the contemporary, complicated world with the hope that it can encourage a broader discussion about freedom. The ideas and arguments presented in this article are part of a broader future work exploring the philosophy of migration. The aim of this article is to indicate how the metaphor of Plato's cave can be read as a symbol of freedom not only in the ancient context, but also in the contemporary, complicated world.

## PLATO'S CAVE AND THE ISSUE OF FREEDOM

The philosopher, who for the first time refers to the issue of freedom (*eleutheria*) in a broad sense, is Plato (Stalley 1998, 145–58; Szczurba 2014, 101–19; Herrero de Jáuregui 2010, 213–7)<sup>1</sup>. The concept of freedom plays an important role in his moral and political philosophy, especially in such mature dialogues as *The Republic* (*Politeia*) or *The Laws*. Freedom in the Platonic sense can be rendered i.a. as the reign of the rational part of the soul in the human being. So understood, liberty signifies freedom from

1. Though the beginning of the discussion fades in the shades of ancient history and some aspects can already be traced in the preserved excerpts of pre-Socratic philosophers and the teaching of various Sophists.

wrong desires and for the responsible life (Berlin 2002, 166–218). Wrong desires need to be subjugated to the rationality of a person, or someone else should control them, if one's rational aspect of the soul has not developed in a sufficient way (*Politeia* 590e-1a; Mogens 2010; Miller Jr. 2018, 388–431; Bizoń 2017). Freedom from the slavery of the passions constitutes the core of *eleutheria* (Samaras 2002, 67–8), both in an existential-individual and communal-political sense (Szczërba 2014, 98–149; McNicholl 2003, 105–42). Freedom so understood, when transferred to the life of the community-*polis*, signifies a just existence in subordination to reason (*Politeia*), the practical outcome of which is submission to the law, determining the mature attitude of citizens (*Laws*) (Zygmuntowicz 2011, 47–50; Miller Jr. 2018, 388; Schofield 2006, 51–136).

These existential and political aspects can be found in Plato's metaphor of the cave, enclosed in the seventh book of *Politeia* (514a-52a). It is one of the most famous philosophical stories, which has received numerous interpretations from many perspectives in the areas of philosophy, science, literature and cinematography (Anderson 2014; Diduch and Harding 2019; Spychała 2019; Griffith 2003; Irwin 2002; Saramago and Costa 2003; Somoza 2002; Keates 2002; Lewis 1972; Reich 2017). In this article, I assume that Plato's metaphor anticipates the aspects of freedom which 25 centuries later were developed further by such philosophers as e.g. Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. In the context of these remarks, it is important to notice that Plato's text can be interpreted in the historical-critical way rooted in the broader context of the thought system of the philosopher. Yet, it is also possible to try to find in it the antecedents of contemporary positions and to read the text through the perspective of questions characteristic for present-day times. Such an attitude takes into consideration existential aspects to a greater extent than the traditional historical-critical position. In this article, while not ignoring the historical angle, I am stressing much more the contemporary reading of Plato's metaphor.

The metaphor of the cave, which Plato sketches in the seventh book of *Politeia*, after the analogy of the Sun (508b-509c) and divided line (509d-511e) seems—on a simple reading—to be referring to Plato's concept of ideas and the epistemological condition of human beings (Raven 1953; Dembiński 1999, 194–5). The Sun in the preceding metaphor helps one to understand what is the Good, and it leads the mind to perceive in the earthly world the truth, which is not transient and conditioned by temporal reality but is eternal and determines the entire realm. Ideas, i.e. the ideal objects, are comprehensible through mind, not senses; yet, they are at the basis of everything human beings perceive around themselves. Things are

somehow similar to ideas as their imperfect copies, and ideas are present in things as their perfect patterns and causes (Sweeney 1983; Dembiński 2016).

In a similar way, the analogy of the divided line stresses the fundamental division for Platonic thought between visible-gignetic and invisible-*noetic* reality. The first world, perceivable through senses, includes phenomena, the objects of nature—inanimate matter, plants, animals, and people, but also creations of people and their images, shadows and reflections. The *noetic* world consists of mathematical objects, but most of all it contains ideas, the most real and unchangeable beings, available to rational, and not sensible, knowledge.

The metaphor of the cave seems to be referring to the structure of reality indicated in the preceding analogies of the Sun and divided line. The Sun illuminates the sensible reality and extracts the beauty of the world from the darkness of the night. In a similar way the idea of the Good, occupying in Plato's thought the top place of all the ideas, "illuminates" and *de facto* determines the entire realm, both the noetic world, which is directly subjugated to the Good in the hierarchical order of beings, and the gignetic world, which constitutes an imperfect but necessary resemblance of ideas (Timaeus 37c-e; Dembiński 2016, 49–65). Physical objects i.e., reflections, shadows, reality outside of the cave, and finally the Sun are following the same pattern as the segments on the line proceeding from the sensuous world of illusions (*eikasia*, *aisthesis*), to the world of the truth, comprehensible through the rational faculty (*noesis*, *episteme*, *sophia*).

Such a reading of the metaphor of the cave leads to the conclusion that the cavern itself represents the shallow sensuous reality (*Politeia* VII, 531b-d). Those who accept it as the final reality are bound by their own senses. They remain in the world of transient shadows. The shackles preventing them from leaving the cave refer to the trap in which people remain caught in their sensuality. They are not able to free themselves from the realm of shadows, because they are not aware that they are trapped. They do not know that the realm they experience consists only of shadows of true reality, because they are deprived of the world outside.

Who are the people carrying the objects and the puppets behind the prisoners and creating the false reality for them? The natural answer in the historical-literary context of the dialogue is that these are sophists (Praus 1977; Świercz 2019; Nerczuk 2016)—teachers who appear in Athens in the fifth century B.C. in the time of Pericles' democracy. Sophists react against traditional philosophy, which seeks most of all the fundamental structure-*arche* of the entirety of reality. The first philosophers, so called philosophers of nature, attempt to reduce the total realm to the primary

substrate. This *arche*-principle they find in water, *apeiron*, air, fire, earth, *homoiomeria* or e.g. indivisible atoms (Gajda 2007, 65–73; Guthrie 1985, 26–45, 54–8, 76–8, 115–6). With reference to these *archai* they explain the nature of the cosmos, society and human beings. However, the vast number of philosophical concepts, which appear by the fifth century B.C., causes a kind of cognitive chaos and provokes questions about the direction philosophy has taken, if these philosophers are right and if the complex universe reflects the nature of the basic *archai*.

Sophists—simplifying the problem—reject the possibility of discovering the final *arche*-principle and focus their activity not so much on reconstruction of the nature and structure of reality but rather on the practical education of the citizens of Athens. They teach them virtue and political wisdom, so that they might become mature citizens of the democratic state-*polis* of Athens. Protagoras, Hippias or Prodikos teach people what is the place of a person in society and what should be the basis for the proper civil attitudes. Yet, among the sophists there are also those who teach the Greeks how to use the knowledge for their own profits. Hence, the most popular in their schools are such formal skills as dialectic, rhetoric and eristic. These activities become very popular especially among the younger citizens, who pursue their political career and comfortable life (Gajda-Krynica 1989, 50–87; Barney 2006, 77–97). Sophistry brings traditional philosophy to the “streets of Athens,” concentrates on a person and shows them which means to use to achieve success. At the same time, it stresses that there are no final, universal answers to the fundamental questions of humanity. And even if there are, human beings conditioned by their social or personal contexts are not able to reach them. What is right for one person or social group may be wrong for another. The state, law, ethical norms and language are not based on a divine structure of the world and its *arche*, but are conventional in their nature. That is why Greek states-*poleis* vary so much; that is also why what is good for one person may be harmful for another. A sickness for the patient and for the doctor may denote very different realities. There are always circumstances in the background. At the most, it is possible to say after Protagoras of Abdera that *anthropos metron*, “man is the measure of all things” (*Theaetetus* 152d, 169–72).

Yet such an attitude is unacceptable for philosophy. Plato indicates it e.g. in the dialogue *Sophist*, where he clearly differentiates between a philosopher and a sophist. The philosopher “in his reasoning always contemplates eternal being.” Conversely, the sophist willingly “escapes to the darkness ... it is so dark that it is difficult to recognize him” (*Sophist* 223d–224d, 267cd). The philosopher is a person who loves wisdom beyond anything else and

seeks it always (*Symposium*, 199c–212a). He approaches eternal being and contemplates it, even if it is only a short moment of *epiphany* (Szczerba 2004, 65–75). The philosopher lives in a temporal reality, but—in the light of philosophical-existential experience—with the awareness of that which is eternal and ultimate. He tries to transfer the knowledge of the causes and principles of the entire realm into everyday life and wants to share it with others because he cares for the truth. Wisdom which the philosopher seeks is cognitive in its nature as it approaches the ultimate, whether it is the cosmos, ideas or—as Plato’s Socrates maintains (Guthrie 1971, 232–378; Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar 2005)—the soul. While seeking wisdom the philosopher attempts to grasp the essence of humanity in the nature of Everything, to convert it into his temporal existence and to assist others to enter the path of philosophy. After all, “this capacity is in the soul of every human being” (*Politeia* 518c). In this sense, wisdom is practical and moral-virtuous in its character.

Sophistry, in Plato’s understanding, does not meet these requirements. Although the activity of the sophists seems at first attractive, it neglects that which is the most important. Sophistry does not try to reach to the core of things, but it concentrates on appearances and narrows down to rhetorical techniques of combating adversaries. In this sense the sophist is only a mediocre imitator of a philosopher, who gives himself to wisdom in the deepest sense of the word. The sophist rejects that which is “first in the order of being,” whether this is understood as principles or gods, and remains in the shallow reality which is perceivable by senses (Gajda 2007, 215–33). What is worse, it is not only he who remains in the “darkness of appearances,” but he also pulls others in too. The sophist, himself often well-educated in philosophy, voluntarily chooses the cave and rejects the opportunity to see the light outside (Laertius 1925, IX, 50–6; VIII, 8). He also leads others to the cave, binds them with his teaching and creates for them false appearances. In this way the sophists are harmful in a general, social sense, but they also bring harm to individual people who, entrapped in their teaching, limit themselves to the shallow level of life.

Philosophy functions very differently. The philosopher, however difficult and painful it is, leaves the cave of shadows to see the highest being and grasp the nature of reality (Szczerba 2014, 117, 39–42, 46; Orrù 1985). The climax of his way up is the moment when he experiences the ultimate realm. The moment of enlightenment changes his perception of reality, deconstructs the appearances, shows the source of the truth and in its light demonstrates the entire realm. This is the “fifth disclosure of an object,” which Plato or one of his disciples refers to in the seventh letter (342a–3e;

Wohl 1998; Maykowska 1987, VII–XXVIII). This is the encounter with the One, as few centuries later Plotinus will argue (Szczurba 2008, 2004). This moment of seeing the Good, encountering the One or being raptured by God is culminative in its nature. However, it does not end the path of the philosopher but rather enlightens the path in a proper way and helps the philosopher to understand it in the light of the Highest Being. From this perspective, the philosopher begins also to understand the sensible realm and with this perspective goes back to his own temporality<sup>2</sup>. He wants to share his vision with other people and pull them out of the cave of appearances. Yet, is it possible? Will those who have always been enclosed in the cave of shadows be able to comprehend the value of experiencing the Highest Being? Will they rather treat the vision of the philosopher as a fraud, and his strivings to free them up as a form of oppression? Was not this exactly what happened to Socrates, who—according to Plato—sacrificed his life to help people to discover the truth? (Ostwald 1989, 196–8; Filonik 2014, 2016).

In this way—with some simplification of the problem—we can present two main lines of interpretation of the metaphor of the cave from the seventh book of *Politeia* in its historical-literary context (Seňko 1983, 13). First of all, the social-political dimension, in which Plato refers to Athens at the turn of fifth and fourth century B.C. and criticizes the character of the Greek *polis*. He indicates that the democratic state remains in the dark cave of sophistical demagoguery. It does not want to follow the truth, but rejects the philosopher-sage, who shares the truth with others (*Apology*, 18e).

Secondly, to the social-political aspect of the metaphor can be added the individual existential perspective of a person seeking wisdom. With great effort a philosopher is able to free himself from the darkness of sensuous reality. Then he experiences the timeless truth, which allows him to perceive the *noetic* world (Hall 1980). The philosopher contemplates the ultimate being, which changes his perspective on everything. After having this experience, he “returns” and tries to share it with the others. The philosopher is free from the shackles of the sensuous life, in which shadows of temporal reality seemed to be final. Now he perceives the entire realm in the light of the experience he had. This perspective changes everything and it frees the philosopher from existential fear, and prepares him for the final rejection of temporal reality, that is, for death.

Is not this what philosophy is about in its existential sense? Is not philosophy—as Plato indicates in his *Apology* and *Phaedo*—the preparation

2. I am not reading the seventh book of *Politeia* through the perspective of the dialog *Sophist*.

for death? (Phaedo 64a; Grzybowski 2012; Gajda 1998; Austin 2009) Death itself appears as a border between the two worlds, temporal and eternal. In the *Apology* (29a–b), Plato refrains from giving a final answer about what comes after death. It is the great unknown, perhaps nothingness waiting for a person almost like an unending, calm sleep. Yet, perhaps death transfers a person to another place, where “all the dead are” (40e). In *Phaedo* (64a), Plato constructs a number of proofs for the immortality of the soul, indicating that death most of all frees the *psyche* from the shackles of the flesh and shadows of temporal sensibility (83b, e; Szczërba 2014, 127–44).

Philosophy leads people to comprehend the ultimate realm and, at least for a moment, “to stick out” their heads beyond their earthly reality. In this way philosophy frees its practitioners from the fear of death. If death is the big unknown, one should not fear it as if it were the most horrible fate (*Apology* 29a–b). If death leads to nothingness, it does not have to cause fear: it is just like a final, calm sleep without dreams. If death leads to a “prepared place,” “where (*ekei*) all the dead remain,” then it should be treated as the freedom for which the philosopher strives during his whole life (Szczërba 2014, 101–4, 20–1).

Leaving the cave of temporality allows the one striving for wisdom to perceive at least for a moment the ultimate realm and in its light to see themselves, the *noetic* world of ideas and the mundane reality. With this perspective the philosopher returns to the cave and, risking his life, shares his experience with the others. With this perspective the philosopher is prepared for the final freedom: he is ready for death and in his consciousness he is free (Gulley 1962, 1–47; Zygmuntowicz 2011, 281, 466, 587–8).

#### MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND HANNAH ARENDT ABOUT PLATO’S CAVE. EXISTENTIAL AND POLITICAL FREEDOM.

The metaphor of Plato’s cave has received numerous interpretations over the centuries. Its commentators have argued many times about the meaning enclosed in the text by the historical author. Others point to the significance of the text itself, independent of the author. Many have stressed various possibilities of understanding the metaphor by the reader at different times and numerous possible applications in changing settings. Hence, the various readings of the metaphor of the cave proposed by philosophers, scientists, politicians and artists.

Of the most important readings of the allegory of the cave in the twentieth century are those offered by such philosophers as Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt (Sosnowska 2015; Pöggeler 1989; Wrathall 2011; Rożdżeński 2014; Grzybowski 2016; Michalski 1978; Kwietniewska 2007; Serafin 2016).



Heidegger, in his interpretation of the platonic text, emphasizes the phenomenological-existential aspect of human freedom and points to the independence of an individual, their autonomy and authentic existence, which is the aim of every person's life. Hannah Arendt, debating with Plato and—to some extent—with the interpretation of Heidegger, stresses the political dimension of the allegory of Plato's cave. These two perspectives develop motifs sketched by Plato centuries earlier and indicate the actual significance of his text in the twentieth century.

*Martin Heidegger—leaving and returning to Plato's cave*

Martin Heidegger refers to the metaphor of Plato's cave most of all in two essays written in the beginning of 30's of the twentieth century, *On the Essence of Truth* (1930) and *Plato's Doctrine of Truth* (1930/31) (Heidegger 1998, 1976). In both of these texts the philosopher refers to the evolution of the concept of truth in history. He also indicates the essential importance of the existential experience of a human being, who gets out of their own cave of shadows and returns to it, discovering themselves in this process and aspects of truth in the shadows of the cavern.

Most of all Heidegger relates to the classical definition of truth as equivalence to the actual state of things with the content of judgment, *adequation* of things and intellect (Heidegger 1976, 158; 1988). He points out that such an understanding of truth reduces the problem to thinking and judging, and then to the properties of sentences. Yet, the German philosopher is convinced of a different, primal rendering of truth, which is *de facto* rooted in being and as such exceeds sentences, judgments or even thinking. Truth in its fundamental sense means, according to Heidegger, un-concealment (Gr. *a-letheia*), which in "Being of a being" reveals itself to a person and is experienced by them (Sheehan 2001).<sup>3</sup> Truth conceived in this way the philosopher describes i.a. as freedom (*Freiheit*) (Heidegger 1949, 319–51; Guignon 2011).

Such a rendering of truth Heidegger connects with the first, pre-Socratic currents of philosophy, but analyses it most of all in the context of the metaphor of Plato's cave. Here he examines the process of transforming the truth from its primal meaning of un-concealment into the classical understanding of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. He relates the problem of truth to human nature—*physis*—and examines how a person experiences it (Sosnowska 2015, 25). The evolution of the meaning of the

3. I am following the standard tendency to capitalize "Being" to mark the "ontological difference" between Being (Sein) and beings (entities). I am aware of the danger of the "onticization of Being," which Sheehan underlines in his paper *A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research*.

issue Heidegger attributes to Plato (Heidegger 1998, 155–83; 1976; Farber 1958; Wrathall 2004).

Martin Heidegger renders his analysis of the metaphor of the cave in four stages, which correspond to the subsequent phases of perceiving the truth by the human being (Serafin 2016, 42). The first stage denotes detention of a person in the cave of shadows (*Politeia* 514b–515c; Heidegger 1976, 194). The second refers to the freeing of a person and to the process of leaving the cave (*Politeia* 515 c–e; Heidegger 1976, 195). The third phase describes the being of a person outside of the cave, freedom in the light of the Sun (*Politeia* 515c–e, Heidegger 1976, 195n). The last, fourth stage, Heidegger ascribes to the return of an individual to the cave, from which they had been freed (*Politeia* 516e–517e, Heidegger 1976, 197).

In this scheme, the third stage seems to be the climax, both with reference to the understanding of the truth and to the process of setting free a person from concealment, the impersonal-I (*Das Man*). Still, Heidegger points out that even in the first stage of the process, the prisoners have some access to the truth understood as un-concealment. After all, they are not totally surrounded by darkness. They perceive things, which denote something. The shadows, however limited in their nature, are true and they exemplify some kind of being. The prisoners see the real—*alethes*—shadows, but they do not know that these are just appearances. Concealed from them is the fact that the shadow is not reality. Perhaps, this is the major weakness of the cognition of the prisoners that, when seeing shades, they think: human, animal or thing. Yet, their situation is not inhuman. *De facto*, being surrounded by what is hidden belongs to the ordinary experience of every person (Heidegger 1988, 26–27; Sosnowska 2015, 26).

The second phase, when the prisoner is freed from the shackles and pushed out to the exit of the cave, is characterized by pain, suffering and misunderstanding. Why is the world of the shadows wicked? Why does it need to be left out? Why is the light of the fire, which blinds and causes suffering, superior to the shadows of the cave? At this level of cognition, a person, if it is only possible, returns to the world of shadows. Yet, in the process of turning away from the concealment of shadows to the un-concealment of the light, Heidegger sees some kind of grades of truth, which reveals itself to a person. The fire symbolizes that which is more disclosed (*aletheia*) than shadows. At the same time the painful process of departing from the cave indicates that

“the truth” and “true” do not constitute things in themselves, which remain for everybody the same, common and equally important [*Gleich-gültiges*].

Not everybody has without reprisals the same right to every truth and not everybody has the same strength for that. Every truth has its own time. (Heidegger 1988, 32, my own translation)

The perception of truth appears differently to a person or people at various times and circumstances (*Theaetetus* 150a–1d; Szczerba 2014, 196, 210; Sosnowska 2015, 26).

The third stage, in which the prisoner is pulled out of the cave and forced to stay outside, indicates the fundamental change in the perspective of perception of a person. The freed prisoner adjusts in time to the new reality. He sees the Sun and, in its light, the true world, *alethestaton* (Heidegger 1976, 195–6), outside of the cave. Thanks to the sunlight he perceives not only the beauty of the outer world, the *un-concealment* of truth, but also begins to see the drama of the cave. Finally, he understands the tragedy of the prisoners, deception, in which they live not even being aware of it. Only now the freed prisoner sees shadows as shadows hiding the truth from people and playing the reality for them. The philosopher begins to understand the ontological difference between the being and the way the being appears. The journey of the philosopher has a vertical dimension: at the end he sees the Idea-Sun, which enables him to see things and shadows which things cast. In Heidegger's understanding, the idea is something different than the Being, it constitutes rather the condition of the possibility of the Being; the idea enables insight into Being of the being (Heidegger 1988, 52, Sosnowska 2015, 27). It is like the light, which enlightens a particular thing and "lets" the person to the Being, opens before him various levels of Being of the being. Ultimately, even the prisoners see shadows in the twilight thanks to the scarce firelight available to them. After leaving the cave, the philosopher sees more and more. It is not about the higher being, but rather different levels of Being of the being, which are disclosed before him. In this process of getting out of the darkness-concealment, which Plato calls the turning of the whole soul (*periagoge holes tes psyches*), a person somehow "returns to himself, as a being existing among beings," is set free to the truth as un-concealment of the Being and in its light begins to understand not only the nature of Being, but also his own essence (Heidegger 1988, 170; Heidegger 1976, 216–7; Kwietniewska 2007, 27). The essence of truth, according to Heidegger, lets us understand the essence of human being (Heidegger 1988, 75; Sosnowska 2015, 29).

The third stage of the metaphor of Plato's cave plays the climactic role in the journey of the philosopher. However, it does not end the journey. In the fourth stage, the philosopher returns to the cave. Why does he return?

Heidegger indicates that however free, the philosopher cannot live only in the light of the un-concealed truth; he is not a divine person. After the experience of truth in its fullest sense, he needs to return to the shadow-land, where the truth is concealed. He has to face other prisoners, and most of all he has to face his own mortality. In the light of the experience of the Sun-Idea the philosopher realizes his own finitude (Heidegger 1962, 282; 1957, 238). With this experience, the philosopher returns to the cave-mortality aware that a human cannot own the truth, but can experience and sense the truth. He can also point other people to the truth, which is happening (*Ereignis*), and the path of freedom, which he has already walked (Michalski 1978, 202). It is important that he understands the nature of the shadows-concealment, because he has seen the light and knows that the truth-un-concealment is also somehow present in the cave. Conscious of these two realities, the philosopher lives in the ontological difference of authentic and unauthentic existence (Heidegger 1962, 276; 1957, 232). He accepts his own finitude, but sees it in the light of the experience of the Idea. In this sense the metaphor of the cave becomes some kind of parable of *Dasein* (Serafin 2016, 42), i.e., in human understanding of his being “here-now,” existing aware of his existence, the philosopher experiences the “un-concealment of truth” and with this experience returns to himself (Dreyfus 1990, 40; Grzybowski 2019).

This way—simplifying the problem—human being-*Dasein* departs from the impersonal I (*Das Man*), from the mediocrity immersed in human mass, deprived of its own identity, sunk in the others. “*Das Man* is nobody,” enslaved by the impersonality of the crowd and totalitarianism of mass culture, rejecting his own individuality and authenticity. *Das Man* rejects the main aim of humanity, which is the authentic life. *Das Man* rejects his freedom and accepts living under “the discreet rule of others” (Heidegger 1962, 165–6, 297; 1957, 127–8, 253; Rossmann 2015). This impersonal being (the they-self) “resembles with its scrawny character a puppet with bending limbs” (Sloterdijk 1988, 155) and becomes almost a shadow in the cave, a prisoner compulsively looking to the wall. In contrast, the authentic I (the mine-self) is free, individual, spiritually mature, living in un-concealment of the truth, exposing itself and flourishing with the glow. The authentic I constitutes itself among other beings as “I” and shapes its own personality. It takes responsibility for its own fate but also takes care of others. The free human being faces his own finitude and mortality; he returns—as it is necessary—to his own cave of concealment, but in the light of the experienced truth, the un-concealment.

*Hannah Arendt—the freedom of the prisoner and the freedom of the philosopher*

Hannah Arendt approaches the metaphor of Plato's cave in a different way than Martin Heidegger (Sosnowska 2015, 35–7). On the one hand she agrees that Heidegger properly identifies Plato's transformation of the understanding of the concept of truth, so that its primal meaning of un-concealment evolved to the level of *adaequatio*. At the same time, she criticizes the German philosopher for ignoring in his interpretation of the metaphor its political dimension. Arendt stresses this aspect of the metaphor i.a. in her essay *What is authority?* (Arendt 2006, 284).

Most of all she points out that the fundamental reflection on political philosophy, combining contemplation (philosophy) and action (politics), was initiated by Plato and Aristotle and shaped the discipline for many centuries. The human, in Aristotle's view, is not only a thinking creature, but also a social, political being (*zoon politikon*) (Politics 1257a1; Arendt 2005, 35). In the community-*polis* an individual achieves the fullness of their humanity. Also, in the community an individual achieves their happiness, which has not only an individual but also a social dimension. Aristotle teaches that politics "is unique to man that he can live in a polis and that the organized polis is the highest form of human communal life and thus something specifically human, equally removed from the gods, who can exist in and of themselves in full freedom and independence, and animals, whose communal life, if they have such a thing, is a matter of necessity" (Arendt 2005, 116).

The political sphere means coexistence of different people, diversity of attitudes, views and opinions. The democracy of Athens in Pericles' times, in the fifth century B.C., may serve as a good example: all the citizens are equal, all enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, have equal access to offices and together decide on the shape of the state, including defining the borders of civil freedom (Garland 1992, 140–2). Contrary to the private sphere of a person, where necessity dominates in a form of labor, the public sphere is based on a freedom of the citizens and its outcome is activity of political, rational individuals (*zoon politikon, zoon logon echon*) (Court 2008, 23–31; Marulewska 2008, 29–44).

Freedom, which only seldom ... becomes the direct aim of political action, is actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all.... The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action (Arendt 2006, 145).

Plato's Socrates becomes, in Arendt's understanding, an example of a philosopher, who in his endeavors in the public forum strove to combine philosophy with political activity (Arendt 2005, 5–39; Zhavoronkov 2017, 304–7; Gąsiorowski 2012). With his questions and refuting of opinions (*doxai*) he stimulated the Athenians to critical thinking, helped them to reject falsehood and to conceive the truth. He debated with them and often discredited popular, but false understandings of such concepts as piety (*Euthyphro*), virtue (*Meno*) and justice (*Politeia*) (Marulewska 2008, 36–7). He was an integral part of the community, which required critique and from time to time “change of course.” He “was attached to this city by the god ... as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly” (*Apology* 18e).

The trial of Socrates became, according to Arendt, a climax in the process of shaping political philosophy. It signified the break between philosophical contemplation and activity in the public forum, between the truth of the philosopher and the opinion-*doxa* of the street of Athens (Karłowicz 2000, 31). The death of Socrates denoted a symbolic moment of division between philosophy and public activity, and the one who sanctioned the beginning of political philosophy was Socrates' student Plato (Arendt 2005, 6–7. 37–8).

On the one hand, Socrates with his public activity indicated that philosophy and politics can cooperate with each other. He did not oppose politics, but rather strengthened political activities by e.g., stressing the equality of those participating in a dialogue. On the other hand, Plato withdrew from politics after the execution of his master. He symbolically turned away from the forum to reflect on eternal matters of philosophy. Yet, later on he comes back, but now to impose his philosophical concepts on the community of the *polis*. From this moment on, Plato plays the role of the one who knows in the light of the philosophical experience and teaches the ignorant people (Sosnowska 2015, 46–48). According to Arendt, the metaphor of the cave describes in a paradigmatic way the process of the departing of the philosopher as a member of the *polis* and his return as the enlightened sage.

The beginning was made when, in The Republic's allegory of the cave, Plato described the sphere of human affairs ... in terms of darkness, confusion, and deception which those aspiring to true being must turn away from and abandon if they want to discover the clear sky of eternal ideas. (Arendt 2006, 17–8).

In her interpretation of the metaphor of the cave, Hannah Arendt puts particular stress on two aspects of the narrative, namely, the situation of

the chained prisoners and the return of the philosopher. The cave in her understanding is not just a philosophical metaphor, illustrating the state of the human mind—ignorance or delusion of sensuality. The cave serves Plato also as a political symbol, through which he judges the state of the Athenian *polis*. In his imaginary picture, he refers to Homer's *Odyssey*, where the shadows in Hades depict the lowest level of existence of the human soul (*Odyssey* XI, 500; *Politeia* 516e–d). For Plato, the shadows of the cave depict the state of Athens (Arendt 2005, 31).

The philosopher who leaves the cave is alienated. He is pulled out of a group of prisoners staring at the wall of the cave, on which shadows appear. The prisoners do not see each other, but they can exchange their opinions—*doxai* concerning the images. They exchange views, argue about possible interpretations, and this is what constitutes the essence of the communal life of the *polis*. On the other hand, the philosopher experiences the elusive enlightenment outside of the cave. It is not based on dialogue or argument, but on contemplation, expressed in the theoretical life (*bios theoretikos*). The alienated philosopher leaves the cavern, has the philosophical experience and alone returns to the place from which he departed. Yet, he does not participate in the political life of the cave anymore; his views have been changed by the *epiphany* he had.

*De facto* the philosopher returns to the cave like a ruler-authority, who knows and understands better. As such he discredits the partial cognition of the prisoners. The philosopher has experienced enlightenment and now is trying to impose his own point of view on his former companions; he wants to make them leave the cave. However, he is not able to persuade them to his own perspective. To do that, he would need to lower himself to the position of the prisoners. His perspective is transcendent to the reality of the inmates. In effect, the philosopher is not able to convince them of his perception, but can only enforce it on them. Therefore, he first discredits the views of the prisoners and subsequently tries to impose his point of view. This way, in the context of enlightenment and the liberation of an individual, coercion and violence sneak into philosophical discourse (Sosnowska 2015, 50–52).

In her reading of Plato's *Politeia*, Arendt argues that the cave-*polis* is just like the land of the dead in *Odyssey*. However, by taking such a perspective on the issue, Plato, she maintains, criticizes the political life of Athens in which the ancient Greeks believed. *Polis*, democracy and social activity are just shadows of things, appearances of reality in Plato's dialogue. The true life is beyond that, and so the traditional Greek perception on political reality needs a radical re-evaluation.

The reversal of the Homeric “position” is obvious; it is as though Plato were saying to him: Not the life of bodyless souls, but the life of the bodies takes place in an underworld; compared to the sky and the sun, the earth is like Hades; ... the true and real is not the world in which we move and live and which we have to part from in death, but the ideas ... grasped by the eyes of the mind. In a sense, Plato’s *periagoge* was a turning-about by which everything that was commonly believed in Greece in accordance with the Homeric religion came to stand on its head. It is as though the underworld of Hades had risen to the surface of the earth. (Arendt 2006, 36–7)

In this way, Plato’s metaphor of the cave from the seventh book of *Politeia* is rendered as more than an expression of the existential experience of a human being (Heidegger), who begins to understand what is the authentic existence of *Dasein* in contrast to impersonal-I, and in the light of which experience expresses his care for other people. Nor does the metaphor of the cave only illustrate the evolution of the understanding of the concept of truth in the history of humankind (Heidegger, Arendt), from the primal concept of truth as un-concealment situated in the being, into the concept of adequacy, which is expressed in a proper utterance. The cave, in the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt, becomes also a symbol of departure of philosophy (contemplation) and politics (action) and a symbol of imposing the philosophical vision on the social structure of the Greek polis. The philosopher, from this perspective, acts like a doctor, who knows which therapy to apply to the patient who is not fully aware of their condition, or a parent who authoritatively raises their child. “Nowhere else has Greek thinking so closely approached the concept of authority as in Plato’s *Republic*, wherein he confronted the reality of the polis with a utopian rule of reason in the person of the philosopher-king” (Arendt 2006, 106–7; Sosnowska 2015, 57; Voegelin 2000, 110; Cooper 1999, 133–41).

## CONCLUSION

The allegory of the cave has been interpreted many times and in many ways in the course of history. Frequently, commentators on Plato have sought not only the meaning encrypted in the text by the historical author. They have also pointed to the significance of the text as the objective outcome of the thought of the author but ultimately independent of the author. Finally, the interpreters of Plato’s allegory have pondered various possibilities of applying the text in changing circumstances and at various times depending on the sociocultural and/or temporal location of the reader. They have found in the Platonic story answers i.a. to the fundamental existential



questions of human beings and inspiration to reflect on challenges which a person faces in the course of life. Thus, various readings of the allegory have been suggested by philosophers, scholars of various branches, politicians, writers, artists and—recently—bloggers and vloggers.

This article does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis of the issue of freedom in the thought of Plato, Heidegger and Arendt. Rather, it draws a few shades of freedom from the philosophical perspective, important in the contemporary, complicated situation of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The choice of the discussed thinkers: Plato, Heidegger and Arendt is in some ways arbitrary. To this collection such names could be added as Berlin, Sartre, Jung, Kafka, Foucault, Gadamer, Maritain, Marcel, Rorty or Fukuyama. Yet, I hope that the perspective presented in this article accurately portrays particular—existential and socio-political—aspects of freedom, important for contemporary persons dealing with such important issues and their outcomes as the migration crisis, climate change or the industrial revolution 4.0. I also hope that this article will encourage a broader discussion about freedom.

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