

# Our Era's Shadows

## Edison Sanchez

Technology has undergone many changes in history and has helped shape the views and perceptions of the world today. This idea is closely related to Plato, who helped expose the idea that non-physical forms or ideas represent the highest form of reality, in contrast to thoughts and senses.

Technology today has become extremely influential in the decisions of our daily lives. It not only helps shape what we do as people, but it also has revolutionized the world. Technology has also become a chain in our lives, a concept that Plato once discussed in his notable work the “Allegory of the Cave,” which can be found in Book VII of the *Republic*. Before integrating both ideas of technology and Plato’s concept within the “Allegory of the Cave,” it is essential to understand what Plato’s viewpoint was. The “Allegory of the Cave” was to showcase that “we believe and think we see reality by watching the shadows on the wall” (Fragerotorio, 2016). It’s a story that depicts how individuals were chained inside a cave where the only reality they ever came across was mere shadows of items that passed through behind them, illuminated by a fire. Since those visuals were the only things that they ever came close to seeing, they took it as something real; they thought of it as the truth. We can closely relate this aspect of the story to the media, who play the role of the shadows— in other words, our puppeteers. The “Allegory of the Cave” essentially expresses the idea of learning and knowing through our senses of all things material.

When one individual managed to escape those chains, he became aware of the world of ideas, and it helped him to see his life as a part of the world of ideas. Plato explains his theory of forms “which explains that the world is made up of reflections of more perfect and ideal forms” (Percy, 2003). The theory explains that we must rely on our senses for everything we see in the material world, and everything we see in the material world is only a *reflection* of what something truly is. For example, take our exposure to the media. The relationship between the allegory and people with technology today is that, much like those individuals in the cave who believed everything they saw was the real thing, people nowadays believe anything the media has to tell them. Technology has resulted in the rapid rise of the media, and has introduced multiple ways to come across news stories. People have become so dependent on technology that it has become integrated into their lives; when we are provided information through the media, we aren’t precisely receiving the whole truth, but only sporadic parts. Even if we sense a falsehood, we still take what the media tells us as something true. The media becomes our shadows, and keeps us from encountering the truth.

In addition, the exposure and influence of the media has proven Plato’s observation regarding how we rely on our senses and exclude the true reality of

what things are. Our senses have driven us to a state where we don't accurately analyze any piece of news. Without being able to see the clear picture, we are driven to a false perception where the truth remains hidden.

A relatively good example would be the presidential election of 2016. When Donald Trump announced his run for president of the United States, he did it through remarks that many felt were true. Many believed everything they heard, including extremely negative comments regarding Mexicans and Muslims. When he described Mexicans, not only did he claim that they were "rapists" and "drug dealers," he made many Americans believe that Mexicans were truly a problem for this country, and that Muslims have some type of involvement in terrorism, causing people to support a ban of Muslims from the United States. When such points are made through the media and it's broadcasted all around the world, not only do people start discussing the idea, but they start believing that those points are legitimate. The media can lead to the circulation of false information.

Today, stereotypes chain us to a wall: information or remarks made regarding one's ethnicity or background distorts our view of those groups. People often state that White people are very rich, Asians are really smart, Mexicans are all illegals, Black people are dangerous, and Muslims are terrorists, but this isn't the case. Some of us work hard to show that we are different, but with false information shown to people, it gets hard. There are many focal points in the media that portray people as "shadows," and this portrayal isn't showing us the truth. The Trump campaign also saw the influence of media when countless fake stories and news items were spread about them. An example would be how the campaign believed "that a protester had been paid \$3,500 to go and protest at a Trump rally. And this fed into perceptions that the people who are against Trump were being paid by big interests" (Davies, 2016). The presidential election became our shadows because whether we were pro-Trump or pro-Clinton, we felt the need to believe negative information about the candidate we were opposing for the presidential seat, whether we thought the source was accurate or not.

Another example of believing the shadows produced by technology would be the Columbine Massacre. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were two teenagers who were driven to delusions that distanced them from seeing the real world. They were highly influenced by shooting games and it helped them develop a fantasy world that led them to bring the video game into our world. In April of 1999, they open fired and killed multiple people. Their exposure to violent video games led them to believe that their actions were justified, despite the fact that they were not. Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" still applies to our world today; the media, government, technology, and even religion have become the shadows in our modern society. The media, in general, is influencing just about everyone in modern day society, using celebrities, false advertising, and anything else they can think of just to make sure that we do as they want.

Plato describes the world as if there are a lot of unknown things out there. At the beginning of our lives, we are told multiple things whether they are true or not. Because of distorted news and facts presented in the media, we are at the point where we are even more hidden from the truth in these times than we were decades

ago. We have become the prisoners, and the media play the puppeteers in relation to the idea of the “Allegory of the Cave.” The media control every aspect of our lives, unless we stand up and break free and walk out of the cave and become aware of our surroundings. When we are able to think for ourselves and seek the true meaning behind everything without anyone guiding us to what we ought to think, then we will be finally released from those chains, and we will uncover the truth behind everything. If we continue to pursue endeavors or our lives as if everything appears to be the truth, we are going to be locked inside the cave for a long time. Much like Plato indicated, if we work together, we can set ourselves free and witness the true light. Plato once stated that the light can be blinding, but this is because the revelation of the truth has opened up the possibility to wonder whether what we depict as reality is true. We as people are the prisoners, amazed at our technology and knowledge without knowing the true meaning behind it all.

## References

- Davies, Dave (December 14, 2016). Fake News Expert on How False Stories Spread and Why People Believe Them. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2016/12/14/505547295/fake-news-expert-on-how-false-stories-spread-and-why-people-believe-them>.
- Korach, B. (2012). Violent video games promote violence. Retrieved from <http://education-curriculum-reform-government-schools.org/w/2012/12/violent-video-games-promote-violence/>
- Fragerotorio, Nicole (March 19, 2016). Plato’s Allegory of the Cave: The Eye-Opening Ancient Version of the ‘matrix.’ Retrieved from <http://truththeory.com/2016/03/19/platos-allegory-of-the-cave-the-eye-opening-ancient-version-of-the-matrix/>.
- Oswalt, Angela (June 4, 2010). Types of Media. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/types-of-media/>
- Pearcy, Mark (2003). The Allegory of the Cave by Plato: Summary, Analysis & Explanation - Video & Lesson Transcript. Retrieved from <http://study.com/academy/lesson/the-allegory-of-the-cave-by-plato-summary-analysis-explanation.html>.
- Plato (360 BCE). *The Republic*, translated by Benjamin Jowett. Retrieved from <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.8.vii.html>.

Nominating Faculty: Professor Laureen Park, Philosophy 2106, Department of Social Science, School of Arts and Sciences, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

Cite as: Sanchez, E. (2017). Our era’s shadows. *City Tech Writer*, 12, 6-8. Online at <https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/city-tech-writer-sampler/>