

Thursday, 4 June 2026 // filosofia 15 at Rozz-Tox // *Waking Life* (2001 Linklater, dir.) & “The Allegories of the Line and the Cave” (375BCE Plato)¹

Agenda:

- pre-screening discussion (about 6:30pm, informal)
- film starts 7:00pm // 10 - 15 minute break // post-screening discussion of Plato reading selection and film from 9:00pm to 10:00pm

Pre-screening discussion (6:30pm)

- general remarks about our filosofia series:
 - we screen a film and we pair it with a famous philosophical text that examines themes related to that film; this year the schedule is quarterly:
 - 5 March 2026: *Memento & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Descartes)
 - 4 June 2026: *Waking Life* & “Allegory of the Cave” (Plato)
 - 10 September 2026: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind & Discourses* (Epictetus)
 - 10 December 2026: *Silent Running* & “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?” (Routley)
 - more filosofia plans on instagram (@rozztox_qc & @casuallyineffacious), on the Rozz-Tox website: www.rozztox.com, and my website: dekecainasgould.com
- More details on the four main branches of philosophy:
 - metaphysics: the theory of reality
 - notable sub-fields: ontology (the study of what exists), philosophy of mind (theory of the nature of consciousness), free will, God, personal identity
 - epistemology: the theory of knowledge
 - notable sub-fields: analysis of ‘knowledge’ (challenges to the “Justified True Belief” model), debates over the a priori vs. a posteriori justification (whether there is justification independent of experience)
 - axiology: the theory of value
 - notable sub-fields: normative ethics (theory of right/wrong), aesthetics (theory of good/bad art), social and political philosophy
 - logic: the theory of right reasoning
 - notable sub-fields: classical logic (modern formal theory of entailment), non-classical logics (formal theories that reject assumptions in classical logic, such as the principle of explosion (*ex falso quodlibet*) in paraconsistent logics)

¹ Plato. (375BCE/1997) “Allegories of the Line and the Cave.” excerpt from *The Republic* in *Plato: Complete Works*. Cooper, ed. Grube & Reeve, trans. Hackett.

- tonight's topic: metaphysics and epistemology
 - What is real? And how can we know? What is education?

Post-Screening Discussion (9:00pm)

- Connection between Plato and the film:
 - The rotoscoping technique is an interesting, deliberate artistic choice on Linklater's part. It suggests that the film is akin to drawings/shadows, inviting us to consider that what we are seeing is a lesser grade of reality to help us ascend.
 - I'm not claiming that this is Linklater's intention, only that it welcomes the comparison to Plato's allegories of the line and the cave.
 - It is often observed that the experience of any film is one of staring at a wall with two-dimensional images projected that represent three-dimensional objects in time, which is very similar to the situation Socrates describes in the cave.
 - "The Dreamer" is clearly searching for insight from many different sources, mostly receiving others' views until he ascends into the sky.
 - similar to the prisoner in the cave who leaves into the light
 - most important connection: the Dreamer is seeking an understanding of the nature of reality (metaphysics), and Plato's prisoner also ascends to seek a higher understanding of the nature of reality.
 - Why not Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy* for the supplemental reading instead? Two reasons:
 - first, I already used Descartes for the last filmesofia (paired with *Memento*)
 - second, I wanted to focus on the question of *reality* (metaphysics) first, and the question of knowledge (epistemology) second, whereas Descartes is focused on the epistemological question primarily
- Background & Key Concepts:
 - Plato was the most famous follower of Socrates, and he later went on to found the first institution of higher education in the West.
 - Plato was not the only follower of Socrates who wrote about him: see Xenophon (details below).
 - Incidentally, Aristotle, Plato's most famous student, attacked Plato's theory of reality in the book *The Metaphysics*, which is the namesake of the entire discipline. Aristotle went on to have tremendous influence over Western thought in virtually all areas.
 - some of those key arguments appear in Plato's own book *Parmenides*.

- Socrates wrote nothing, and it appears that he was proud of this fact.
 - After Socrates's execution for corrupting the youth, it appears that Plato fled Athens to live among the followers of Pythagoras near Syracuse, Sicily.
 - The followers of Pythagoras were members of a cult-like organization called the μαθηματικοί ("mathematikoi", the origin of our term "mathematician") that worshipped a higher, non-physical reality generated by "The One", and revealed to us through music and mathematical study of nature.
 - in their view, the physical world is but a shadow or inferior set of copies of the pure, unchanging, eternal, non-physical entities behind the scenes, which are revealed to the understanding by the study of mathematics
 - When Plato returned, he created his own franchise of this Pythagorean tradition in his home town, purchasing a plot of land in the sacred olive grove called Ἀκαδημία ("Academia", the origin of our term "academy").
 - nearly all of his works (27 out of 29 dialogues) feature Socrates as a main character, and seems to be an act of rebellion against Athens to keep Socrates present despite his execution (for more, see Kraut 2026)
- Plato's theory of reality: the "Forms"
 - Plato thought that the objects of the physical world are always "becoming", and imperfect, and they inherit their features from their relationship to the realm of ideas or "Forms"
 - Forms are non-physical entities that are perceived by the understanding, and are eternal and unchanging
 - the number two is always even, always half of four, etc.
 - physical objects are perceived by the senses, but are unstable
- Allegories of the Sun & Line (p1130)
 - The Sun and The Good: an argument by analogy
 1. The sun is responsible for all light and hence all visual perception and sustenance of all continued existence of entities in the realm of becoming (life).
 2. The Good is responsible for all value and hence all intelligible perception and the sustenance of all entities in the realm of Being.
 3. The sun has a higher degree of reality/perfection than all entities in the realm of becoming.
 4. Thus, the Good has a higher degree of reality/perfection than all entities in the realm of Being.

- a. there's a tighter relationship between the function of understanding and ideals (normativity) and the world than is often presupposed by most philosophers
- The Line and Hierarchies of Becoming, Being, Opinion, and Knowledge
 - consider a line such as (see Annas 1981, p247):

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} | & - & - & | & - & - & - & - & - & - & | & - & - & - & - & - & - & - & - & | \\ B & D & & C & & & & & E & & & & & & & & & & A \end{array}$$
 - BD is the set of shadows & images, DC is the set of all physical entities, CE is the set of mathematical entities, and EA is the set of Forms
 - correspondingly, the realm of BC produces in us mere opinion, whereas the realm of CA produces in us knowledge
 - as BD is to DC as CE is to EA, the job of the philosopher is to learn how it all fits together
 - philosophy is about understanding the relationship between all things
 - Plato also was a great synthesizer of the views of his predecessors: BC corresponds to the plural realm of “becoming” that Heraclitus wrote about, CE to the objects of study for the Pythagoreans, while EA corresponds to the realm of Being and the Parmenidean “One” (see Roochnik 2004).
- Allegory of the Cave:
 - Prisoners are trapped viewing mere images, and mistaking this for reality because it's all they've known.
 - one prisoner is freed, and dragged out of the cave
 - this experience is painful and difficult, but once he adjusts, the prisoner prefers to see objects as they really are
 - Socrates and Glaucon agree that it is the prisoner's duty to go back and free as many other prisoners in the cave as possible, even if they hate him and try to kill him for it.
 - An argument concerning the true nature of education:
 1. In the cave, the liberator assumes that the prisoner has the capacity to see, and it is his job to help steer the prisoner toward the true light and help show him the nature of the cave.
 2. In education, the teacher assumes the student's capacity to understand, and it is his job to help steer the student toward the truth and help show him the nature of reality.
 3. In the cave, the liberator does not assume that he can put the power of sight into the dimmed eyes of the captive, cave-bound prisoner.
 4. Therefore, the teacher doesn't assume that he can put knowledge into the student, but instead should guide the student, assuming the student's ability to know. (p1135)

- It's worth noting that Plato goes on in the rest of the selection (Book VII) to argue that people should not be exposed to philosophy too young, and only a select group should be permitted to study philosophy (cf. 39m in *Waking Life*)
 - children tear into everything "like puppies", but if they grow up this way they become "lawless" (p1154)
 - likewise, it takes real discipline, skill, memory, and talent to be a true philosopher (whether man or woman! a very unusually egalitarian view at the time, p1155)
- Some additional background: Plato's Recollection Epistemology
 - There is another feature of Plato's theory of knowledge that isn't in our reading selection explicitly, but it is important for understanding his view of knowledge: Plato insisted that all of our knowledge is already in our souls from before this earthly life!
 - He defended a theory according to which the soul exists in other forms before you were born: a theory of reincarnation.
 - compare to the scene with Ethan Hawke (approximately 20m into *Waking Life*) when they discuss knowledge and "collective memory"
 - Plato insisted that this makes the best sense of our knowledge of immaterial forms, and how we can understand perfect concepts such as equality or the concept of a circle.
 - See *Meno* and *Phaedo* for his arguments for this.
 - Finally, Plato's famous proposed analysis of the concept of knowledge from the *Meno* held sway in Western philosophy for over two thousand years: subject S knows that proposition p if and only if (a) S believes that p, (b) S's belief that p is true, and (c) S's belief that p is justified. (The "JTB" analysis of knowledge.)
 - This analysis was considered the correct theory of knowledge until Gettier decisively refuted it in his famous, two-page 1963 article.
 - Curiously, Plato also appears to have rejected this analysis in his own later dialogue *Theaetetus*.
 - specifically, he struggled to make sense of the concept of "an account", or what we would call "justification"
 - it's not being able to vocalize a thought (p229), nor knowing the elements (p230), nor knowing the difference (p233) ...
 - the dialogues asks: what else could justification be?
- Back to *Waking Life*:
 - claim: Linklater is urging us (the audience in the theater) to pursue a higher reality

○ argument:

1. The Dreamer receives indications that the nature of his experience is not what it seems on the surface.
2. If 1, then he has reasons to believe that the nature of reality that he perceives is caused by something more real than what he sees with his senses.
3. We (the audience) receive indications that the nature of our experience is not what it seems on the surface.
4. If 3, then we have reasons to believe that the nature of reality that we perceive is caused by something more real than what we see with our senses.
5. The Dreamer's revelation is important, and he has reason to reach as many people as he can with this knowledge concerning the nature of reality.
6. So, our realization is important, and we have reason to reach as many people as possible as well.

Recommended Further Reading/References:

1. Annas, Julia. (1981) "Understanding the Good: Sun, Line, and Cave." *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford UP. 242-271.
2. Aristotle. (350BCE/1985) "Book I." *Metaphysics*. in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume II*. Princeton UP. 1552-1569.
3. Gettier. (1963) "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis*. 23.6: 121-123.
4. Kraut. (2026) "Plato." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Zalta & Nodelman, eds. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/>
5. Plato. (385BCE/1997) "Meno." *Plato: Complete Works*. Cooper, ed. Hackett. 870-897.
6. Plato. (370BCE/1997) "Phaedo." *Plato: Complete Works*. Cooper, ed. Hackett. 49-100.
7. Plato. (360BCE/1997) "Theaetetus." *Plato: Complete Works*. Cooper, ed. Hackett. 157-234.
8. Plato. (360BCE/1997) "Parmenides." *Plato: Complete Works*. Cooper, ed. Hackett. 359-397.
9. Roochnik. (2004) *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell.
10. Xenophon. (371BCE/1990) *Xenophon: Conversations of Socrates*. Waterfield, trans. Penguin Classics.