

Nate's "Allegory of the Oasis" Graphic

Post by "Cassius" of December 20, 2018 at 11:32 AM

Here is the original discussion which took place in 2017 about this graphic. Names have been changed except for Cassius and Nate himself:

Cassius Amicus July 18 at 6:25pm

One of the memorable aspects of Plato's philosophy is his "allegory of the cave," which illustrates his fundamental view that you have no knowledge of reality unless you're part of the Academic Elite. The cave picture neatly conveys the kind of "path to true knowledge" that abstract theories offer, and Epicurus' reaction to that approach was the origin of critiques such as the "Epicurean Critique of Mathematics" recently discussed in another post.

If we are going to explain clearly the Epicurean response to Plato's cave, we ought to be able to illustrate the Epicurean view with some similarly-compelling analogy, and not just by saying "Plato was wrong."

It would be a good creative challenge to sketch out Epicurean illustrations of the correct alternative(s) to Plato's Cave. I grabbed a screen shot of a very basic diagram of the cave, as well as a graphic of atoms to bodies, just to have a basic graphic for this post, but I don't want to suggest that a simple atoms-to-universe progression is the right approach. The Cave analogy addresses multiple issues, not only the nature of knowledge but other aspects of man's place in the universe, and so an Epicurean diagram might address these or other issues separately, or together

We have some very creative people here, and much of the job of Epicurean advancement is to confront errors like that of Plato with a substitute orientation of our own. Can anyone come up with suggestions (in the form of sketches or diagrams would be nice) to help get us thinking about how to present these arguments graphically?

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Poster1 Why not use the metaphor from Lucretius about sculpting and building one's self as a fortress of self sufficiency, wisdom and pleasure? A sort of tower that we can see the world from a vantage point of philosophy.

Also the act of building is active, pragmatic, involved moral reform and habituation and not just aligning our views w nature, whereas Plato is merely theoretical. We can then ask things like: what is the architecture of this fortress? And compare it with people who live at the whims of fortune (storms, by sea, building on sand, and other allegories) while we have the stability of

philosophizing with our feet on the ground, on terra firma, on good foundation.

Poster1 Also, I think the rudiments of architectural analogy can be found in some explanations of the canon regarding building the foundation of a construction. So perhaps it may be a matter of putting the entire analogy together and giving it coherence.

Poster2 Nice. Have him (show his brain and nervous system too) navigating a path (or tracking down prey) in the woods by a starlit cosmos and add tags "senses, anticipations, feelings".

smile emoticon:)

Cassius Amicus Yes I think an architectural analogy might work. And that brings to mind DeWitt's comment in his book that it is important to distinguish "the stones of the wall" from the "tools of precision."

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Poster3 I just heard Plato's cave also used in favor of philosophical idealism, along with some other things. Honestly it baffles me that anyone can take it seriously. The idea "we create our reality" is very appealing to people I guess, no matter how absurd.

Cassius Amicus I see we don't have any takers in designing an Epicurean graphic so far, but what Michael has just observed is also I think a key component of such a graphic. We definitely don't create our own reality, nor does anyone else create it for us. And yet as Haris has been remarking in the nearby thread, we (or at least our faculties of sense, including pain and pleasure) do play a large role in our perceiving that reality. So we need a graphic that emphasizes BOTH the role of "outside reality" plus the role of our faculties plus our own evaluative role, while discarding the gods and the "geometers-only" assertions.

Poster4 I'm not sure that we can make a single picture of this... because the world and the stuff in it, is much too complicated. Unlike plato Epicurus wasn't hiding from the fact that knowledge is hard.

Maybe we could make it a short comic strip... Well, someone could. I can't draw.

"How to know things? Go out of the cave and find a thing. Look at it [sight]. Poke it with your hand [touch]. Pick it up and smell it [scent]. Put it back down and see what it does... While you wait, talk with others about this new thing you found. Invite them to look at it with you. Write down what you think about it."

Side note: an outline of the Philosophy could be a map of a village.

Poster3 I don't know enough of Platonism to do this, but it would be good if some refutations toward Platonist arguments were made here.

Cassius Amicus Focusing a graphic on epistemology would probably make sense. Perhaps even as simple as portraying the Platonists as the ones who put / keep the ordinary people in chains

in the first place!

Poster4 "Break your chains and leave the cave."

Poster5 Not sure that is how I would interpret Plato's Cave.... Academic Elite??? Where the heck did that come from?

Poster4 Academic elite = philosophers of the Academy.

Poster5 That answer just made things worse for me. Plato was not writing his philosophy for any small, specific audience. He was simply philosophizing! The cave allegory is his way of explaining much of his thought. Detractors of Plato often misrepresent his ideas and philosophy. Recently, after decades of study, I have dumped Aristotle and am revisiting Plato in earnest. So far, I am having no trouble in still studying Epicurus as I believe we have to look at any Philosopher in light of modern discoveries and what effect these would have on them.

Poster2 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory_of_the_Cave

Cassius Amicus As this article discusses, it might not be reliable that "let no one ignorant of geometry enter" was placed over the door to the academy. But as even this defensive article says, "If the late character of our sources may incite us to doubt the autheti...See More

Plato FAQ: "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter"

Did plato write : "Only the dead have seen the end of war"?

plato-dialogues.org

Cassius Amicus This could go in this thread, or the one discussing geometry/math, but here is a good graphic on a basic point which Epicurus disputed (the number of shapes of the fundamental elements): http://www.storyofmathematics.com/greek_plato.html

Contrast this to Epicurus - Letter to Herodotus (Bailey): "Besides this the indivisible and solid bodies, out of which too the compounds are created and into which they are dissolved, have an incomprehensible number of varieties in shape: for it is not possible that such great varieties of things should arise from the same atomic shapes, if they are limited in number. And so in each shape the atoms are quite infinite in number, but their differences of shape are not quite infinite, but only incomprehensible in number."

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Poster2 Does Plato say that these shapes are composed with each other in order to explain more complex shapes? That is ... complex shapes by composition of these "basic" 12 shapes.

The standard model of physics has twelve elementary particles of matter (fermions) which are composed, and those are composed again to what we call chemical atoms. The composers are the 4 bosons types which bind the fermions together (binding is the same as orbiting... caused by both attractive and repulsive "forces"... emissions/absorptions of bosons... 4 forces).

Nathan Bartman We'll have the Allegory of the Stars.

Plato begins by suggesting that we are all prisoners, having been forcefully chained to an area reminiscent of a dungeon, and that our ascent out of the dungeon is reminiscent of our development as an intellectual being. This is a fair analogy for any philosophy to exploit, and even Epicurean philosophy could appropriate 'The Cave' and re-label it's components: the 'Cave' as religion, and the 'imprisonment' as anxiety. The 'chains' are fear, and the 'shapes' of the shadows are dogmatic belief. By 'sensing' the cold, hard touch of our chains, we 'feel' that it is painful. We then 'anticipate' a need to be warm, soft, and unchained; we 'anticipate' the open sky and the bright sun, unburdened from the stale cave of mysticism. We can suppose that the remaining prisoners are 'followers,' still chained with dogma, still staring at mysticism. This would mean that the final stage of the allegory, the rescuing of the other prisoners is like trying to convince devout, religious dogmatists that a larger world exists outside of the confines of their own mysticism.

Turning the 'Cave' on its head can be profitable, but, like I said, I take issue with Plato's suggestion that we are prisoners, that we are chained, or that 'someone' put us there (it sounds very Stoic). Dreary imagery like 'prisoners' and 'chains' doesn't seem quite right for an Epicurean Allegory.

So, Behold! The Allegory of the Stars!

In the Epicurean allegory, sensory faculties are represented by a telescope, and sensory organs are represented by the mirrors of the telescope. The starlight that enters our telescopes is completely real, even though it depicts objects as they were millions of years before our existence. Even though there is a difference between the image of the star as we see, versus the actual body of the star itself, millions of light-years away, the photons we collect through the telescope are not 'shadows of a real thing,' and are not pieces of a 'false reality.' What is real is neither 'the Form of the star,' or 'our Idea of the star,' but, rather, the real-world atoms that both comprise the photons which we are currently receiving, as well as the protons and neutrons that are contained within the radius of the object, millions of light-years away. The images of the stars through our telescope are not merely 'imperfect forms' of the stars, but are, in fact, the atoms of the star, itself

If the telescope is perception, and the mirrors of the telescopes are sensory organs, and the starlight is thin layers of atoms, then our 'feelings' are the calibration of the telescope we don't want a blinding telescope that damages our lenses (unlike the Cyrenaics)! We also don't want a telescope that is so dark the moon appears dim (unlike the Stoics!). We neither want over-exposure nor under-exposure: the 'goldilocks zone' of pleasure is our aim. We don't want to look directly into the core of the sun, nor do we want to stare a cold, dark, empty space. Too

much pleasure leads to pain, and too much pain... also leads to more pain. If we are rightfully struck with awe, intellectually-engaged, we 'anticipate' there to be more beauty if we point our telescope in a different direction; perhaps we'll see more beautiful, colorful, pleasurable clouds of gas and dust.

Finally, let us suppose (to finish my counter-analogy of Plato's allegory) that the 'prisoners' in 'chains' from the 'Cave' allegory have now been morphed into 'people who are simply unwilling to look into the telescope' because of dogma. A good, real-world example of this is the trail of Galileo; his accusers were so perturbed by his disturbance that they refused to look through his telescope. The only 'prisoners' in the Epicurean Allegory are people who are too obsessed with their fear of the telescope to be willing to look through it. And, sometimes, even when they do, they mistake the image of the mirror for the mirror itself, and either accuse the manufacturer of deception, or else, wage a war against the idea that mirrors reflect light.

I'm interested in generating a diagram to illustrate this Allegory of the Stars, but I'd like some input first. Is this a reasonable allegory?

Cassius Amicus Great start - yes let's get comments! One fine point is that I would not omit reference to active prison guards - not all (or most?) of the chains and bars and restraints are self or naturally imposed.

Poster6 Nathan Bartman, It sounds great to me.

You might want to fix a few inaccuracies:

Galileo's telescope was made with lenses, not mirrors.

"The images of the stars through our telescope ... are, in fact, the atoms of the star, itself" is physically wrong. The photons emitted by the star create the image which we perceive. Neither the images nor the photons are the atoms of the star. (In Epicurean terms, we may call the photons the "atoms" of the light without contradicting modern physics.)

Poster7 Often Eastern and Western idealist philosophies love the idea of reality being not "real" or an illusion. This is always an interesting, but an entirely unprovable assertion. When someone like Plato makes the claim that this reality is but shadows upon the wall it is based on ungrounded opinion. To say that this reality is a hologram or matrix simulation is to say that you KNOW there is some higher base or parent reality...otherwise it is fanciful opinion. If this is Plato's Cave and everything is an illusion then we must accept the illusion as reality because there is no other known reality to base it on.

Parmenides was supposed to have said that the "opinions of mortals have no warranty" and ultimately that is true. The world is full of relative mortal opinions (including Plato) Epicurus says to trust your faculties. I'm more inclined to trust Epicurus simply because he's handing me my authority back...my natural ability to judge what is good and bad based on what I feel.

Poster3 Plato made many arguments for it, but I'm not very familiar with them. I don't think the idea holds up even for a moment though. Hindu philosophers also argue for this. I encountered one who claimed consciousness is all we have knowledge of, since it's...See More

Poster7 You can literally stand on the edge of a vortex that will suck you in to relativistic idealistic speculation. I don't know how people do it...it makes me dizzy.??

Poster3 I could never even take the "brain in the vat", matrix, or "is it all just a dream" stuff seriously. Sure, yes, thought experiments, whatever. Why worry if it's just a mere theoretical possibility (assuming that's even the case) without any real evidence?

Poster7 Exactly. Thought experiments are fine, but let's not all dive off a cliff because we believe "reality isn't real." That's the true danger of idealism.

Poster3 Besides Epicurus had some very good arguments against this skeptical blather. Like it's inconsistent, lazy and completely undermines the very concepts they use to begin with.

Poster3 Yes, "reality isn't real" would be a perfect example. There is a complete self-contradiction.

Poster3 Honestly that annoyed me about the Matrix film itself. The whole "If reality is just things you can sense, that's only the electrical signals". Well what else would it be exactly? They never say.

Poster3 To me the Matrix (if such existed) is an example of a reality that isn't the entirety of things. Which just means we don't know it all automatically. Much like now.

Poster5 I politely and respectfully disagree. I am actually leaning the other way. Throwing complex words like "reality" around loosely as if we know what it is invites assumption upon assumption. And we all know that to "ass-u-me" just makes asses out of y...See More

Poster2 You will trust your senses. No matter what you say. You will open your eyes today, and not keep them closed.

The information they provide will help you navigate life and people and find food. You will not plug up your ears, for long, especially as you ..

Cassius Amicus Going back to Nathan I do think a telescope or some similar figure is a major component as a way of highlighting the role of the senses. Even in disagreeing Tommy helps us focus on the main issue being whether we have the courage and the nerve to trus...See More

Poster5 Thank you Cassius. I understand the automatic or natural conclusion that our senses are the only thing given us by Nature to discern "reality". However, I believe jumping to that seemingly obvious conclusion is near-sighted. I am not sure of the termin...See More

Cassius Amicus "consider the equally natural ability of our consciousness or mind to discern patterns, forms, ideas, absolutes, etc.?" Since those things do not exist outside our minds, one

possible term for that would be "imagination"! wink emoticon;-)

Cassius Amicus With the usual caveat of nonendorsement of much of the rest of her viewpoint, I do believe in terms of illustration that the opening "astronaut" analogy in the "Address to West Point" usefully conveys in figurative form many of the same issues we are talking about in responding to Plato on this point. If you have not read it (only a few paragraphs long) it is worth reading:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=pUQNrl79WrkC&pg=PT10...>

Image may contain: text

Cassius Amicus And speaking of astronaut analogies and prisons with "gates" and "bars" there is no analogy that comes to us with greater authority than this one. The picture almost draws itself:

When human life, all too conspicuous,
Lay foully groveling on earth, weighed down
By grim Religion looming from the skies,
Horribly threatening mortal men, a man,
A Greek, first raised his mortal eyes
Bravely against this menace. No report
Of gods, no lightning-flash, no thunder-peal
Made this man cower, but drove him all the more
With passionate manliness of mind and will
To be the first to spring the tight-barred gates
Of Nature's hold asunder. So his force,
His vital force of mind, a conqueror
Beyond the flaming ramparts of the world
Explored the vast immensities of space
With wit and wisdom, and came back to us
Triumphant, bringing news of what can be
And what cannot, limits and boundaries,

The borderline, the bench mark, set forever.

Religion, so, is trampled underfoot,

And by his victory we reach the stars.

Cassius Amicus And not one but two more obvious pictures from the same source:

1 The pit or canyon or ditch:

Not only reason, but our very life,

Unless we have the courage and the nerve

To trust the senses, to avoid those sheer

Downfalls into the pits and tarns of nonsense.

All that verbose harangue against the senses

Is utter absolute nothing.

2. The architecturally flawed building:

If a building

Were planned by someone with a crooked ruler

Or an inaccurate square, or spirit-level

A little out of true, the edifice,

In consequence, would be a frightful mess,

Warped, wobbly, wish-wash, weak and wavering,

Waiting a welter of complete collapse -

So let your rule of reason never be

Distorted by the fallacies of sense

Lest all your logic prove a road to ruin.

Poster7 The realm of idealism is real. The realm of imagination and dreams are real too. They exist in THIS universe.

My dreams are real because they belong to my mind and my mind is a real and physical thing belonging to this dimension. Other than these ideas of holograms and Platonic Caves being nice thought experiments, what value are they without evidence? Should I just take Plato's word and trust his theory? Why him?

All we have are our senses and analogies to this universe. Everything that we imagine has its genesis in this world and in this dimension. If someone wants to claim that is not true they must come bearing evidence.

Cassius Amicus When I wrote above I wrote "Since those things do not exist **outside our minds** one possible term for that would be "imagination." From a very practical point of view we have to decide what it means to say something is "real".....

Poster7 Think of it this way...Plato's Cave REQUIRES us to visualize a cave, fire, shadows and a starry night outside. All things that belong to this universe and the realm of experience. He's trusting that we all have senses and a shared experience. He needs ...See More

Cassius Amicus It is very easy to use the word "real" loosely and then to get caught in hopeless confusions and contradictions about what we are talking about. That is an area where we ought to flesh out an Epicurean definition of "true" and "real" so that we don't fall into either total relativism or thinking that there are universal absolute concepts (like triangles).

Poster7 Idealists ask for the impossible. All the while requiring their audience to utilize their natural senses for reference. Plato's idealistic realm doesn't contain ineffable qualities. I.e. He never brought up an object or thing that hasn't already been t...See More

Poster2 Real: consisting of elementary particles, in motion, and interactions between them including, collisions, emissions, absorbtions, binding/breaking. These lead to bodies and emanations. The interactions we call events. The events and succession of events are ordered and this leads to "time".

Poster2 True: in agreement with what is real.

Cassius Amicus We're immediately put on the defensive when the religious / idealist crowd suggests that they have access to a universal truth which we do not. We can't just let the game be played on that field. We have to clearly state that universals don't exist i...See More

Cassius Amicus smile emoticon:-) We're far from it yet, but at some point the day may come that someone will have to say in kindly Epicurean counseling: "TH, repent! Because you sir are at risk of becoming a FLATTERER OF DIONYSUS! ??

Cassius Amicus Dewitt EAHP, page 298:

Poster3 "Real" is usually defined as that which isn't dependent solely on our minds. So dreams and pure ideas aren't real (although not valueless). I'm not sure how an Epicurus would define it.

Cassius Amicus I agree Poster3 This is something that would be nice to look up some references and post them somewhere, because it's ALWAYS going to be a core question.

Poster3 Well, the dictionaries and philosophy generally follow the usage that I gave above, if that helps.

Philip K. Dick also put it thus: "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away."

Cassius Amicus Scanning through the posts so far, we have at least the following list of "word pictures" that might be usable for graphic memes responsive to Plato's cave, the first several all from Lucretius:

- 1) Epicurus as the conquering hero who has broken the bars separating us from nature.
- 2) Epicureans as viewing the world below from a safe fortress of wisdom, immune to the problems of those wandering in hopelessness afar.
- 3) The architectural analogy of a building that is infirm because it is built on false premises.
- 4) The canyon/ditch analogy of avoiding pitfalls that come from the nonsense of not trusting the senses.
- 5) Changing the cave analogy 1 - "break your chains and leave the cave"
- 6) Allegory of the Stars with telescope and other instruments (as elaborated by Nathan's post with suggestions by Martin)
- 7) The astronaut crashed on a distant planet analogy (hazardous to use due to Rand connections, but might lend itself to other scenarios)

Any one, several, or all of them could be used to develop a graphic meme, but the missing element so far is graphics talent to even sketch a scenario. Any ideas how we can find someone or some art program or whatever that might be able to help with that? In the end it is going to take a single person with vision to push through to visualization - this kind of thing does not work well by committee, but the discussion ought to be helpful to get creative ideas flowing.

Nathan Bartman Cassius, I posted an initial draft below. I discovered [<https://sketch.io/sketchpad/>] and found it very easy to use. I'm sure that many of us can take advantage of this program.

Sketchpad 4.1 - Draw, Create, Share!


Sketchpad; multi-touch, multi-user, non-destructive drawing application written in HTML5.

sketch.io

Poster2 Cassius Amicus Try this

<https://quickdraw.withgoogle.com/>

Quick, Draw!

Can a neural network learn to recognize doodles? See how well it does with your drawings and help teach it, 

quickdraw.withgoogle.com

Cassius Amicus interesting site!

Poster2 Is it useful?


I heard about it but have not tried it yet.

Cassius Amicus it seems to be the opposite - you draw and it tells you what you drew

Poster2 Oh. Maybe I sent you the wrong link. They have another where they guess what you drew and then they show you a palette so you can choose more professionally done ones, and composite them.

Poster2 Try this Cassius Amicus

<https://techcrunch.com/.../googles-autodraw-uses-machine.../>

Google s AutoDraw uses machine learning to help you draw like a pro

Drawing isn't for everyone. I, for one, am definitely not very good at it. But with AutoDraw, Google is launching a new experiment today that uses machine.. techcrunch.com

Nathan Bartman Here's what I came up with! I used the following online tool to generate this image: [<https://sketch.io/sketchpad/>].

Nathan Bartman Perhaps I should also include a narrative, much like the narrative of the 'prisoner escaping the cave and transcending their ignorance by embracing the light of truth.' I suppose that our protagonist could simply be a person in the desert, deprived of their biological needs, malnourished, dehydrated, and delusional. Our hero chooses not to give into the hallucinations caused by their physical deterioration, and, instead, presses onward, knowing that they will only reach their destination by searching for water; those who wander the desert too long will find themselves lost. Our hero begins to recognize helpful oases from perilous mirages. They notice philosophical quicksand before getting caught in it, therein being condemned to needlessly struggle against the sand. In the desert, our hero finds that the simplicity of 'water' is more pleasurable (and useful) than precious metals and delicacies. Eventually, perhaps by following the guiding, scientific light of the stars, they emerge from the desert to a lush oasis, and, using the natural elements of the oasis, constructs a domicile, cultivates a garden, and invites their friends, so as not to lead others into a desert. (Isn't there a story somewhere about a certain group of monotheists being lost in the desert for several decades? All they needed to do was keep going straight, and they would've been out in a few

months. That is religion: trying to get to a destination right in front of you by constantly making turns.) Anyway, let me know what you guys think!

Cassius Amicus GREAT START!Cassius Amicus Nathan Bartman Wow that must have taken a lot of work!

Nathan Bartman It was fun! wink emoticon;)

Cassius Amicus Did you draw all that freehand?

Poster1 Love this. Plus the reference to water and simplicity which has Taoist resonance. Add a fortress of peace, friends and pleasure and the saga is complete

Nathan Bartman I only drew the 'sand' freehand. Everything else was either from a piece of clipart that the website provides, or else, I uploaded a few images I found through Google, namely, Epicurus smiling, the dog, the pig, the mirage crucifix, and the telescope. Everything else the fonts, the stars was a tool they provide.

Poster3 Very good.

Nathan Bartman I would also like to include Epicurean vocabulary into the diagram. I think it would be useful to include the ancient Greek. Here, I've represented 'atomi' and 'eidola.' (Does our concept of 'Void' come from the word 'kenon?' I'm not familiar with the ancient Greek there). Perhaps I could re-label the pig 'aponia,' implying bodily pleasure, and re-label the dog 'ataraxia,' implying freedom of anxiety. Perhaps they could live in a pen labelled 'katastematic,' while a hummingbird, labelled 'kinetic' hovers outside the pen, sucking honey from the blossom. I can illustrate the 'atom' moving in spirals and curves labelled 'parenklisis' or 'clinamen' (I suppose the ancient Greek would be preferred to Latin?). I can rename the telescope 'aisth?sis,' for sensation. A thought bubble with a green [+] and a red [-] called 'path?' could float above Epicurus' head. I'd like to link the creatures' smiling with 'hedone' and 'eudaemonia.' I'm not sure how to include 'prolepsis' maybe some illustration of the influence of 'the gods?' Are there any other concepts or important vocabulary we should try to emphasize (or de-emphasize)?

Poster2 prolepsis... anticipating/predicting/expecting

not sure how to advise...

Poster2 how to add wisdom/prudence/planning?

Poster2 how to add choosing/avoiding via pain/pleasure consequences?