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Televisual Paper: Plato's Allegory of the Cave in Disney's Brother Bear

Although philosophical ideas and messages can often be misunderstood, regular media like movies and tv shows can often be used to transcribe those messages and help individuals better understand. Plato's Allegory of the Cave in *The Republic* explains to readers how people can be trapped by something they believe is reality, whether that is true or not, making it more difficult to see the truth once it is revealed (Plato, 514a). In this story, prisoners are chained in a deep cave, only being able to look straight forward, watching the shadows on the cave walls which are illuminated by a fire. These prisoners believe the shadows are real things until one prisoner somehow breaks free and escapes the cave, seeing the real world for the first time. In Disney's Brother Bear, a story is told in a similar way where the main character Kenai is stuck in a more metaphorical cave in the beginning of the movie. Throughout the movie, Kenai's journey shows the process of leaving certain biases and ignorance behind, allowing him to see the world differently.

In *The Republic*, Plato uses the cave to show the difference between what is being shown and what is reality. The prisoners have only known shadows. Being born in the cave, all they ever see are illusions of the objects being cast behind them (515a-c). Though, due to the restriction in movement, the prisoners are not necessarily aware that these 'figures' are only

shadows. When one prisoner has the ability to escape, they are initially in shock due to the brightness of the sun, taking them some time to adjust. After some time, they can see the reality around them, nature, streams, wildlife, etc., helping them see the truth (515d-516c). It can be interpreted through the allegory that one must help others understand what reality/the truth is once they have gained that knowledge, despite how hard it may be. Overall, the story can be seen as teaching individuals that no matter how hard or uncomfortable facing the truth may be, it will take effort to do so, while also affecting how you then view the world around you.

As Brother Bear begins, the audience sees Kenai dealing with significant rage and hatred towards bears, blaming them for his brother Sitka's death. He is stuck in his own version of the cave. Everything he believes about bears is based on fear, misunderstanding, and folklore; this perception of hatred represents the shadows on the cave. When Kenai ends up transforming into a bear due to his killing of not just the bear that killed Sitka, but the mother of a cub named Koda; he is forced to step into an entirely new world. This is like the prisoner leaving the cave and being confronted by the sunlight, at first being confused and disoriented. As Kenai meets and travels with Koda, he begins to see that bears are not monsters like he assumed. He is pushed to learn about friendship, empathy, and how his actions have affected others. Through this experience, Kenai gains a new understanding of life and how everything is connected. Like the prisoner, Kenai comes to see the world in a much deeper way, allowing this transformation (the sun) to reveal reality from a new perspective.

Kenai's new awareness motivates him to act more compassionately towards others, creating new relationships between supposed enemies and fostering understanding. Plato emphasizes that the enlightened individual has a new responsibility to return to the cave to help others perceive the truth they have just discovered; in the movie, Kenai enacts this responsibility

by protecting Koda and creating a truce between humans and bears, changing the way they interact. This responsibility is taken on by Kenai towards the end of the movie when he is forced to face the challenges of explaining to his other human brother Denahi that he has been transformed into a bear and that he had chosen to remain as one for the sake of Koda. The moment highlights the difficulty of settling a new understanding with those (his brother) who are still 'in the cave.' Denahi represents familiar beliefs and perceptions, not fully understanding Kenai's transformation or growth. Kenai's transformation demonstrates that enlightenment includes both knowledge and moral growth. The movie also depicts how understanding something requires experience on top of thinking/imagination. Kenai's journey embodies Plato's insight that true knowledge extends beyond perspective, needing the actual experience with that truth, as well as the willingness to confront the discomfort yet move beyond it so that it can be shared with others.

The final scene of the movie illustrates Plato's point that enlightenment can create tension and distrust between the enlightened individual and those who have not yet seen it. Kenai must communicate this new perspective and convince his brother to accept that his understanding and way of life has changed. Like the prisoner returning to the cave, Kenai's task is not easy, requiring patience and empathy. The movie does a great job at showing how enlightenment is not about personal gain, but also about the desire to teach others and use the knowledge for good. His decision to remain a bear reinforces that actually understanding will require making choices that challenge norms, even if it may be difficult.

Disney's Brother Bear acts as an animated dramatized version of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, displaying how a movie can explore philosophical themes and portray them properly. Kenai goes from pure ignorance to enlightenment, similar to the prisoner's path, highlighting the

struggles, confusion, and clarity described by Plato. The movie shows that leaving behind false beliefs can be hard, but it is necessary for personal growth and for understanding others. By showing enlightenment in a way individuals can better understand, Brother Bear helps viewers connect with Plato's ideas.