

Sample B

Title: A Comparison between Evanescence's 'Everybody's Fool' and Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Part of the syllabus to which the exercise relates: Prescribed Text, Plato. *The Republic*

Word count: 1718

Source material: Song lyrics - 'Everybody's Fool' by Evanescence

In today's day and age, it seems that a majority of popular songs focus on one of three things: love, sex or drugs. Their lyrics are insubstantial, their melodies repetitive, and one would be hard pressed to discover any philosophically relevant themes in them. Yet what of those songs that actually do speak of something more? One such song might be "Everybody's Fool" by the Grammy winning *Evanescence*. It speaks of ignorance, blindness to the truth, the struggle for enlightenment, the joy of self-discovery and how, in the end, no one is hurt but the ignorant themselves. A critical analysis of the song's lyrics may promise to unearth some very interesting philosophical ideas. Also, the ideas found in the lyrics of this song might even be related to some of the ideas found in Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave. Both tell the story of how it is possible to be fooled by one image or idea. Both try to describe the struggle for enlightenment and the discovery of truth. Both try to describe the happiness of realising that one has been set free and the surprise of becoming aware of the extent to which one was once trapped before. The similarities between "Everybody's Fool" and The Allegory of the Cave are certainly worth exploring.

The Allegory of the Cave begins with Plato painting an image for his companion Glaucon. He goes into great detail of how the cave is shaped, where the fire pit hidden by a screen is positioned and how the prisoners are bound, "their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead" at "shadows thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave opposite them." (Plato 256) While such a level of detail is not achieved in "Everybody's Fool", the lyrics do tell of similar phenomena that are "perfect by nature", "icons of self indulgence" and "lies about a world that never was and never will be." The song also tries to hint at the fact that people are fixated on these icons and false images.

The Allegory of the Cave goes on to describe the experiences of one of the prisoners who managed to find freedom from his imprisonment, coming to an understanding of the ignorance that he used to live in and that his former companions continue to live in. As Glaucon states, "He (the liberated prisoner) would prefer anything to a life like theirs." (Plato 259) "Everybody's Fool" follows the same metaphorical path, concluding with the realization that a once revered symbol of life is no more than a sham that "got everybody fooled." "I know the truth now", belts out *Evanescence's* singer, Amy Lee for she, like the prisoner, now free, has had her eyes opened to the truth – a painful but necessary experience on the road to the discovery of truth and reality.

To truly draw the connection between the song and Plato's analogy, one must see the similarities between the "icons" referred to in the song and the shadows on the wall referred to in Plato's analogy.

Clearly, the shadows on the wall are only representations of reality and are little more than illusions. The images are simply shadows cast by “men carrying all sorts of gear along behind the curtain-wall.” (Plato 256) However, the prisoners “believe that the shadows of the objects [are] the whole truth.” (Plato 257) To truly understand the connection between the two works, one must keep in mind that the prisoners actually believe that the shadows are fully real and are, therefore, fully and completely true regardless of the fact that they are not. With that thought in mind, consider the “icons of self indulgence” mentioned in “Everybody’s Fool.” These icons represent celebrated people who, when seen or approached, inspire such awe in others that their only reaction is to “bow down and stare in wonder” without searching for the reasons why or justification for such an approach. Such a response is proof that the average person could be likened to a slave – a slave to their blind admiration of those that are simply regarded as “perfect”. Admiration, a high regard for something that is seen as desirable, is most easily circulated among humans. This idea solidifies the fact that the “icons” are seen as a perfected reality by the observer, just as the shadows are seen to be real by Plato’s prisoners. While the true philosophers come to know that the shadows are only illusions, the most incomplete and imperfect representations of reality and truth, Amy Lee also labels the “icons” as “lies about a world that never was and never will be.” Therefore, in both situations, those telling the story realize that reality has been twisted and shrouded by a cleverly instituted ideal. Suffice to say, the falsehoods of the song and of the analogy have “everybody fooled” causing them to “bow down and stare in wonder” to quote the song.

Like the lies that they are, once they have been exposed, these misconceptions of reality do not maintain their enchanting power over their followers. In both the Allegory of the Cave and “Everybody’s Fool”, the ones realizing that they used to follow a lie will never again run the risk of believing the same lies to be true. Instead, they discover how unimpressive the lies were and how much better off they are now that they have discovered the truth. Plato observes that the released and enlightened prisoner “...would far rather be ‘a serf in the house of some landless man’ or indeed anything else in the world, that hold the opinions and live the life that they (the other prisoners) do?” The song lyrics directly support that point by bluntly saying, “You’re not real and you can’t save me” and, therefore, “I don’t love you anymore.” Further comparisons to the Allegory of the Cave feels could be formulated. Plato describes the free man’s feelings by presenting Glaucon with the rhetorical, “Don’t you think he would congratulate himself on his good fortune and be sorry for [the others]?” The fact of the matter is, once one has had a taste for the truth, an insatiable curiosity is developed, a curiosity that will yearn for everything that leads to knowledge and truth. In fact, it is only natural for people to be curious when experiencing something new for the first time, which is evident through watching infants and very young children interacting with their surroundings. Conversely, preventing people from having access to truth and outside influences is the secret to the life spans of various dictatorships or Communist regimes that would otherwise be overthrown much sooner. This leads me to a consideration of the final similarity between the ideas presented through “Everybody’s Fool” and the Allegory of the Cave.

While the exact wording between the two works differs, the message delivered is identical; both the prisoner in the cave and Amy Lee are aware that being sheltered from the truth cannot be beneficial. In fact, living life in such a way in the shadow of “what passed for wisdom” in the cave would only result in further pain or suffering for those in that situation. Philosophically, this loss can be appreciated in two ways: it is either a descent “from contemplation of the divine to human life” (Plato 260), or an inability to ever reach a level of higher thinking. Instead of better understanding one’s environment and other people with whom one shares life, one would remain ignorant and susceptible to any propaganda or further lies that may be presented in the future. Since the liberated prisoner has experienced moving to a higher realm of thought, he will face each new situation by wondering if he has come from a “clearer world and is confused by the unaccustomed darkness, or whether [he] is dazzled by the stronger light of the clearer world.” (Plato 261) The meaning of “Everybody’s Fool” is left somewhat to the listener’s interpretation, but, through comparison to the Allegory of the Cave, one can see that the last line, “Somehow now you’re everybody’s fool”, is in reference to the clash of knowledge and experience that is explained more thoroughly in Plato’s analogy. While the lyrics convey the thought that attempting to be perfect causes one to become slave to the whims and desires of others because of the insatiable desire to please, they also can be connected on a deeper level to the message of the Analogy of the Cave. Ignorance hurts the ignorant before affecting anyone else. By not realizing that the perfection they are striving for is unobtainable, the “icons” are actually living under the influence of the same misconception that their followers are. The followers look at the “icons” in awe for the represent people who seem to have “no flaws when [they’re] pretending.” However, the “icons” in turn must forever strive for perfection and to impress those that view them as something more than human. Therefore, a parallel can be drawn not only between the allegedly perfect beings and the shadows on the wall, but also between them and the prisoners that believe the shadows to be reality. The cycle is unbreakable for even the “icons” cannot break free for they are “lost in [their] lie.” A celebrity cannot avoid the song’s warning that you “can’t find yourself lost in your lie.” By comprehending this connection, one can only conclude that the song and the Allegory of the Cave convey similar philosophical messages.

Drawing connections between non-philosophical and philosophical elements, or deriving philosophical significance from non-philosophical material are important tools in applying philosophy to daily life and to understanding how and why philosophers created new branches of philosophy. Be it existentialism or stoicism, a specific philosophical approach was initiated because it could be directly applied to people’s lives. Philosophical perspectives explore timeless truths, ideas and challenging issues that can be related to many levels of thinking and to countless groups of people. An analysis of some of the connections between the Allegory and the Cave and “Everybody’s Fool” is only one example of how philosophical elements can be found in the most unlikely of places. In this case, a song that youth worldwide could listen to becomes a channel through which interesting and important philosophical ideas are presented.

Bibliography:

Evanescence. *'Everybody's Fool'*. Fallen. Wind-up Entertainment, Inc. 2003

Plato. *The Republic*. London, England: Penguin Books, 1987