

Cover Letter:

Dear reader,

This actually turned out a lot better than I expected. My expectations for this paper were basically me trying to write as quickly as possible so that I could spend minimal time on this class. However, while I did write my paper in a very efficient manner, I also almost had fun doing it. Maybe it was just because I was dreading this paper so much that once I actually wrote it, it exceeded my expectations. But I found the analysis and connecting the two texts rather satisfying at the end, which is probably a result of Dr. Choi hand holding me through a decent chunk of the idea development.

Anyways, after the conference, I walked away with completely new idea, ready to spend the rest of my week laboring 24/7 to finish the paper. Surprisingly, it went much differently: I spent a few days finding evidence and creating an outline of what I wanted to talk about, then wrote for a couple more days and finished by Wednesday. Then I proofread a couple times and visited the writing center, which helped improve my structure and scope of my paper.

Having a solid roadmap was extremely helpful as it helped me keep the big picture in mind and also helped my paper be much more organized than it would have otherwise. My outline was just a bunch of bullet points with main ideas and some support / analysis, and it also acted as a guide for whenever I was on the fence about how I should frame a question or piece of analysis.

While outlines are great and all, I feel like they can't be used to their full potential due to how quickly our pre-drafts and drafts are due. We barely get enough time to skim the readings, so how are we supposed to put together a coherent thesis with textual support and analysis? Well, I guess that's why the drafts aren't graded, so for future papers I will try and use the drafts more as a tool to create a solid outline rather than have it be a mini-paper.

The writing center helped a lot - I got insight into how writing sem papers are supposed to be written, and they showed me how to tailor a paper to a prompt. It is unfortunate that all our papers are academic-based, as I feel like the very purpose of writing is to express ideas, and there are always many ways to express an idea, each of which has its own use and style.

Something that I could improve on is the idea generation process, which Dr. Choi assisted me greatly on. I have a feeling that a big part of it was that I didn't fully understand / read the texts, which I will try and work on for next time. Overall, I am very proud that I managed to BS quickly at a (hopefully) acceptable level.

Best regards,
Hollis Ma

Hollis Ma

Dr. Daniel Choi

WRI149

1 March 2019

The Role of Introspection in the Transition of Knowledge

In *The Republic*, Plato describes a cave in which prisoners are chained to a wall from childhood, unable to turn and bound to see only in front of them. Behind them, a fire projects shadows onto the wall in front of the prisoners - shadows of puppets in the form of human beings carrying all sorts of items on a road high above. One day, a man is released from this cave and ventures outside, where he sees things that he had only seen through shadows before. When he goes back into the cave to tell the others what he's learned, they laugh at him and kill him.

This man is supposed to be one of Plato's philosophers, a group of people picked out from childhood to be trained to become truth seekers and the future leaders of society. Plato believes that by training and teaching certain people how to think and approach life, they can discover the fundamental truths that govern the world, making them capable of moving society forward. Why then, does this man who attempts to explain the secrets he's learned get killed by those he tries to teach? How are Plato's leaders supposed to govern if their people laugh at them rather than listen?

A seemingly unrelated problem arises in *Technopoly*, where Postman describes how technopolies exercise power over society through an advantage in knowledge. However, in this age where the world's information is at our fingertips, how does this knowledge gap exist? Plato argues that in order to have a successful transition in knowledge, there exists a necessary process

involving self-reflection, revealing that Postman's technopolies are able to maintain power by distracting people from introspection.

Both Plato and Postman believe that the defining aspect of how society is structured is a difference in knowledge between those in power and those not. While Plato views it as a way of differentiating the leaders from the followers, Postman argues that power is inadequately proportioned to those who have knowledge in certain topics. He introduces the concept of winners and losers, where the winners "cultivate competence in the use of a new technology (to) become an elite group that are granted undeserved authority and prestige." (Postman 9) One of the reasons why he says technopolies have "undeserved" power is because of the way they communicate, where they tell citizens that "their lives will be conducted more efficiently... but discreetly they neglect to say from whose point of view the efficiency is warranted or what might be its costs." (Postman 11) The technopolies are self-centered and willing to disillusion their citizens to further their own power. Although Postman's "winners" don't have society's best interests in mind, they are still able to effectively communicate with the uneducated without being overthrown.

While Postman's winners are taking control of the uneducated, Plato's winners wish to enlighten them. In Plato, the winners are the philosophers who have knowledge about the truth and aim to lead society with their greater analytic abilities and wisdom. Even though they have society's best interests at heart, the philosophers are still killed for attempting to share their knowledge, begging the question of how they can connect with their people without complete rejection, and also why the people are so against this learning that they go as far as to kill their teachers.

Plato offers an explanation as to why this backlash occurs - the philosophers are portrayed as being able to see in the light that illuminates the truth while the others live in a cave, shut off from the sun so that they can only learn through the dim shadows. The goal of the philosophers is to have people transition from seeing through shadows to seeing the truth, however, Plato shows that moving from the darkness to light must be a gradual process and if done too quickly, will blind people and cause them to reject the light. The man who steps out of the cave into the light would "have his eyes full of [the sun's] beam and be unable to see" and would "flee, turning away to those things that he is able to make out." (Plato 515) By living in a cave for so long, the man is accustomed to seeing things in a certain way, and when his fundamental beliefs are challenged by viewing them in a new light, he shrinks back, unable to grasp the entirety of what he sees. This dissonance between the light and the dark necessitates a way of being able to gradually transition between one to the other without causing conflict.

Plato provides a solution to making a smooth transition when he describes how the cave is set up - between the fire and the shadows is the road "over which [puppet-handlers] show the puppets." (Plato 514) Since their childhoods, the cave dwellers have learned by watching these puppets' shadows, so it makes sense that if the philosophers act as puppeteers and teach through shadows, they will be able to communicate with the people at a level they understand. But this raises a paradox: the philosophers are to convey the truth they've learned by teaching through shadows, which are inherently fake versions of real objects. That is, how do philosophers teach the perfect truth through an imperfect medium?

To bridge this gap in knowledge, Plato lays out a process that involves introspection, which technopolies actively prevent in order to halt the transition. According to Plato, in order

for a man to become accustomed to seeing the light, “at first he’d most easily make out the shadows; and after that the phantoms of the human beings and the other things in water; and, later, the things themselves.” (Plato 516) The first step clearly refers to learning through shadows, and the last part is seeing things as they truly are. The missing piece that links the two is seeing the “phantoms of the human beings” and finding “things in water.” By referring to phantoms and reflections in the water, Plato shows that the key to transitioning between two drastically different ways of thinking is introspection. The definition of a phantom is something apparent to sense but with no substantial existence. Everything people perceive are translated into thoughts and feelings that feel real but have no tangible presence, and thus our minds are simply the “phantoms of human beings.” Similarly, the images people see in water are not real - they are distorted and reflected, just like how the stimuli that people receive are put through a personal filter created through the shadows they have learned to see through. By studying one’s mind and reflecting on the things one sees, one is able to resolve the cognitive dissonance between two contrasting groups of thought and change the axioms that one lives by, making introspection the perfect tool to bridge the gap between seeing in shadows and seeing in light.

However, Plato’s three steps process doesn’t seem to be able to bridge the gap between Postman’s technopolies and the rest of society. The only difference between technopolies and the regular person is the amount of knowledge the respective party has. In his book, Postman describes how powerful the modern day computer is, and with all the information and computing power available, people can learn almost anything, so what’s keeping people from having as much knowledge as the technopolies do?

Plato showed that introspection is a necessary step in learning because it allows people to question the shadows they live in and to venture into the truth. Technopolies take advantage of this fact by preventing introspection through changing fundamental, society-wide beliefs that disrupt people from reflecting, thus reducing the transfer of knowledge and allowing technopolies to retain their power. Postman claims that the introduction of new technologies can “alter those deeply embedded habits of thought which give to a culture its sense of what the world is like - a sense... of what is real.” (Postman 12) By giving people new devices and toys to play with, technopolies engrain in people a certain type of feeling and desire, and over time, these thoughts become reality as they are cemented in society-wide thought patterns, changing how society perceives and responds to things.

Using business as an example, Postman shows that the introduction of new technologies causes institutions to feel threatened, making them to ask shallow questions like “which medium can we sell more products? ... Can we reach more people through television than through radio? ... How effective are messages sent through different media,” questions that are immediately helpful but also “diversionary (to)... the serious social, intellectual, and institutional crises that new media fosters.” (Postman 18-19) Instead of focusing on a vision and how that vision might impact society, companies focus on selling more products and reaching more people, leading to a numbers based society with less opportunity for deep, undistracted thought. By utilizing this method of distraction, technopolies are able to shift the core values and beliefs of society towards one that dehumanizes people into optimization problems.

After years of disturbances caused by every shifting technology, it is not difficult to see how these thought processes can become rooted in the way a society thinks. Postman notes that

“children come to school having been deeply conditioned by the biases of television” and can’t read, organize their thoughts, or concentrate for more than a few minutes at a time. (Postman 16) As technopolies instill these habits and thought patterns into people, technopolies successfully prevent people from the one thing they need to bridge the technology gap: introspection. Plato’s plan to develop philosopher involves learning how to think and required enough determination to concentrate for decades. If even schools are not able to make people read, think, and concentrate, then it would be almost impossible to have an entire society benefit from introspection, allowing technopolies to maintain their dominance as long as new technologies continue to be introduced.

From Plato’s cave allegory, a puzzling moment arises when the man who ventures outside the cave and learns the truth is killed for trying to enlighten the others in the cave. A similar gap in knowledge occurs through Postman’s technopolies who are winners that are able to communicate with and take advantage of the losers who have less information. Plato offers a way to bridge the knowledge gap that involves teaching through shadows and introspection, revealing how technopolies are able to maintain ignorance in such an information-rich world. Technopolies use the introduction of new technologies to change the fundamental beliefs of society, preventing people from introspection and thus preserving the knowledge gap.

Considering how rapidly technopolies are growing today, it would not be unlikely in the near future for them to have complete dominance over matters ranging from technological advances and the news to the economy and politics. Society needs more introspection - even if it’s too late to bridge the gap completely, the first step towards reconciling this inequality of knowledge and power is to become aware of it.

Works Cited

Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Allan David Bloom. Second ed., Basic Books, 1968.

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. Random House, Inc., 1992.

Acknowledgements: Thanks Dr. Choi for guiding me through a bunch of ideas and for talking with me about life and stuff. Also thanks Alan for telling me this is due Sunday lol.

I pledge my honor that this paper represents my own work in accordance with university regulations.