Final Project Write-Up

For my final project, I decided to make a choose-your-own adventure game based on Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave’. Initially, this idea was conceived during a conversation of the open-ended nature of the final project during class. I thought that this metaphor was somewhat confusing for myself and other students as well. Therefore, I believed that a game that students could play would allow for a more hands-on experience to better grasp the nature of the allegory. Playing as a prisoner at the start of the game, students learn how the cave can be likened to early stages of life, where your first sight of something is real. The prisoner is utilized in this allegory as a normal person who doesn’t fully yet understand what reality can be. Then, by ascending up out of the cave, students discover the “enlightenment” of learning by finding more and more objects to look at. The person playing the game finds the true nature and reality of life that philosophers know about. Finally, the student, playing as the newly enlightened prisoner, must descend back into the cave. According to Plato, the newly-escaped prisoner must inform his fellow prisoners of life outside of the cave like a philosopher discussing his ideas with the average man.

These comparisons of education and becoming a philosopher is based on my interpretation of this reading. Plato was introducing the idea of philosophy as a better form of governing. To reiterate this metaphor throughout the game, I have included quotes from Plato from the *Republic* to illustrate his purpose for this metaphor. I believe having an actual experience as the prisoner helps students comprehend Plato’s concept of learning and growing as a philosopher. After winning the game, I also explain my understanding of Plato’s vision in the epilogue. In my interpretation, Plato alludes to his belief that philosophers should rule over the perfect city. Plato states that those who truly understand the one true good, which he alludes to as the sun due to its illuminating nature, are best able to rule as they are not worried about petty problems such as the unimportant shadows they see before them.

Other design notes from this game include the utilization of ASCII-art to best illustrate and immerse the player in what it would be like as a prisoner. The shadow-guessing game was a quick introduction to the unimportant aspects of life as an everyday person. You can win this game if you don’t pick up the key, but this success feels short and futile. Instead, by willingly seeking to improve one’s understanding of the world by picking up the key, this player acknowledges that there may be more to life than looking at shadows, just as Plato says. Another decision made by the player is what order to look at objects after they ascend out of the cave. If the player looks directly at the sun, they won’t be able to see it properly yet because their sight has not adjusted from the darkness of the cave. Plato talks about the difficulties in immediately looking at the sun at first, which is a metaphor for the slow and gradual ability to learn over time instead of all at once. Another important decision made by the player is whether or not to go back into the cave and help their fellow prisoners. They can only truly win the game if they return and teach their fellow prisoners about life above the cave, as Plato believes philosophers in his perfect city should be. One question that could be posited: why not help the prisoners escape? This is demonstrated by the prisoners mocking the player for ascending: the prisoners don’t want to go up as they believe their life in the cave is true reality. These prisoners cannot be taught unless they want to be taught, which happens once the player regains their vision in the dark cave. Plato mentions this when he talks about philosophers helping other everyday people learn.

Plato’s real purpose of the *Republic* has been debated since its inception, but this game does not attempt to answer these questions. Instead, this game acts as a conduit for teaching fellow political science and philosophy students about Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave’. In better understanding what Plato discusses about education and the perfect city, students are able to explain their interpretation of what the book is meaning to say as a whole. In including my interpretation only in the epilogue at end of the game, I allow students to discover their own true meaning of the game based on the decisions they make. This game does not answer all of the questions surrounding the *Republic*. Instead, it guides students to answering questions themselves as they try learn more about Plato’s vision in the ‘Allegory of the Cave’.