

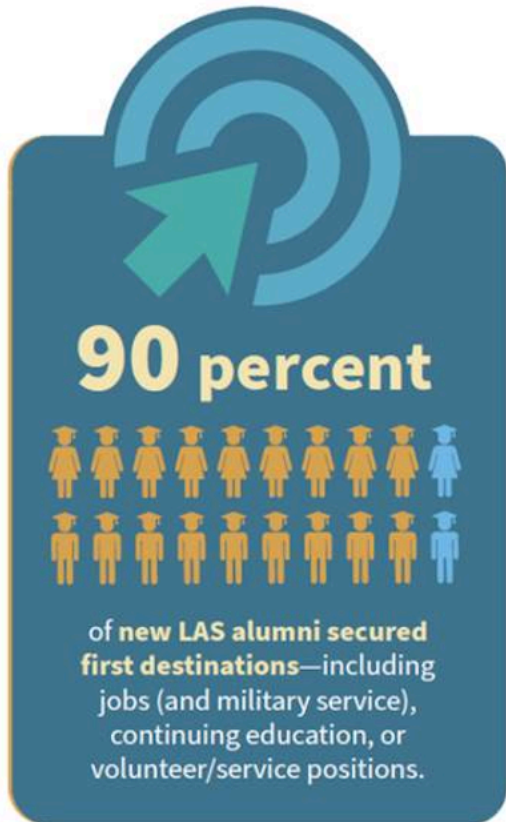
ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE & CRITO



C. 428 – C.348 B.C.

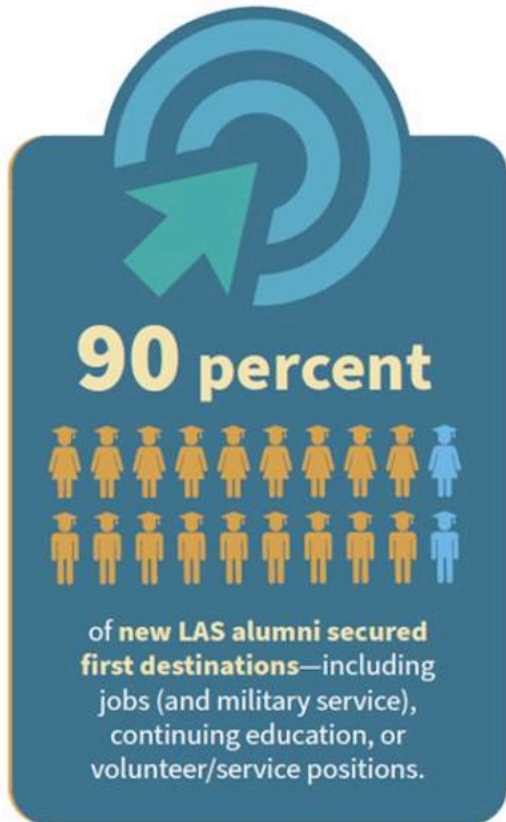
LAS by the numbers

Results of the latest [Illini Success survey](#) revealed some promising career tracks among August 2019, December 2019, and May 2020 graduates (the latest to be surveyed) within six months of earning their bachelor's degree.



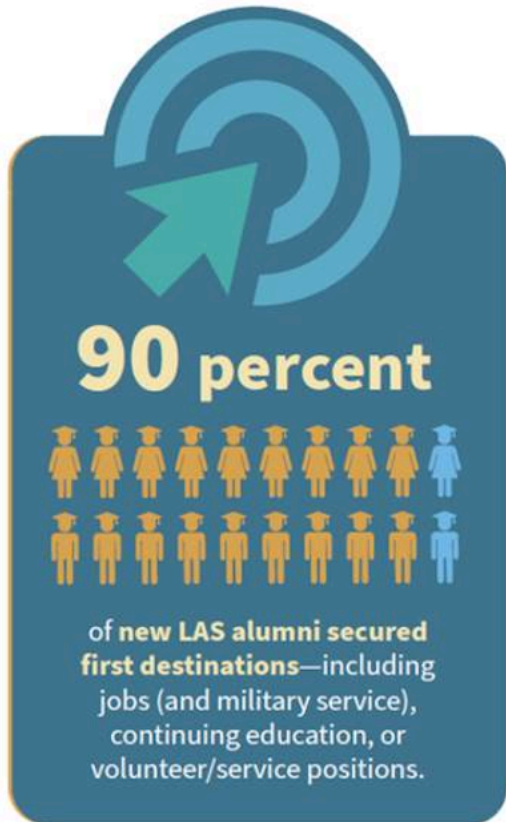
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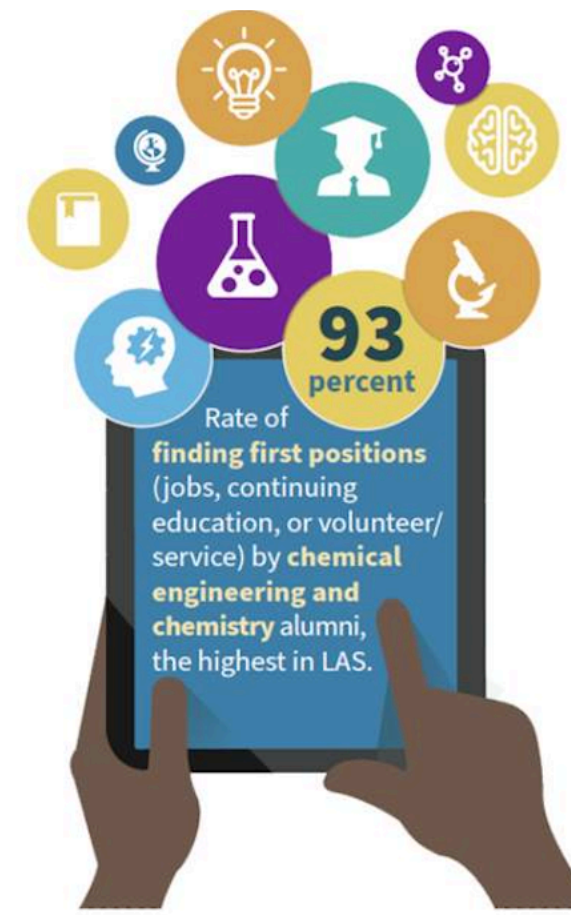
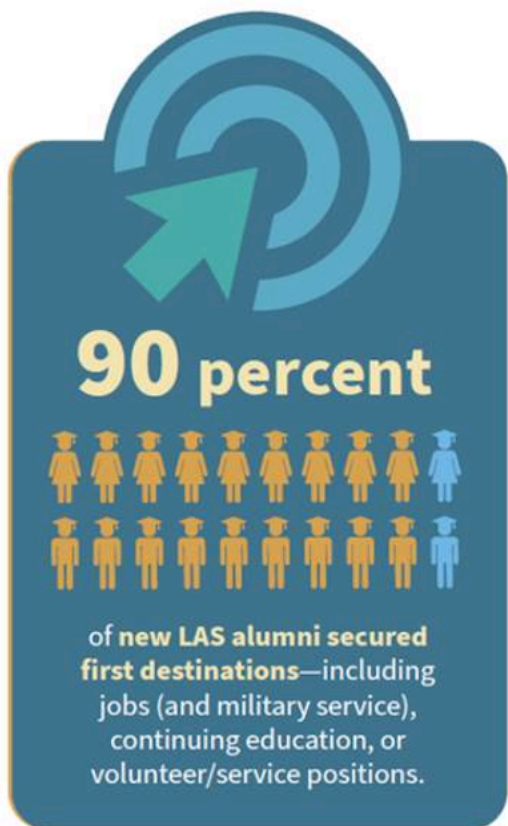
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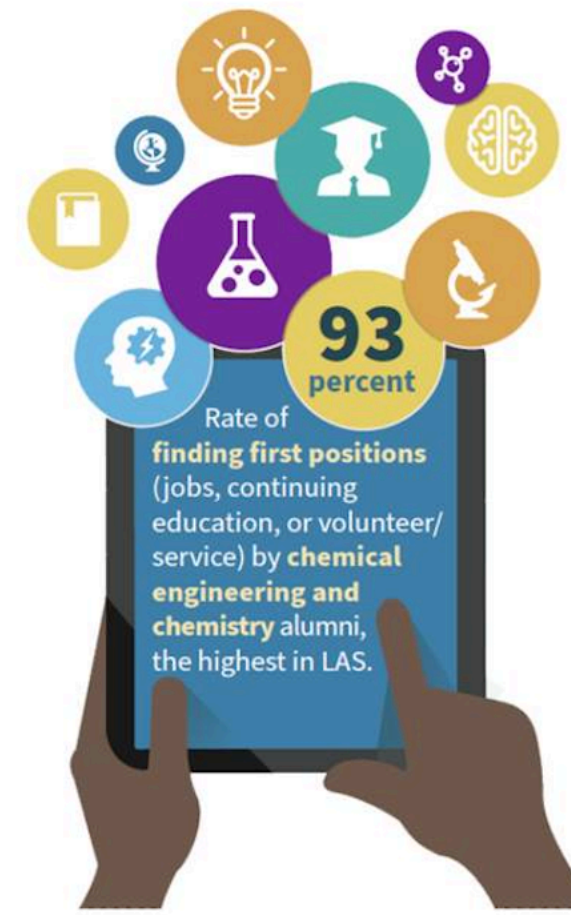
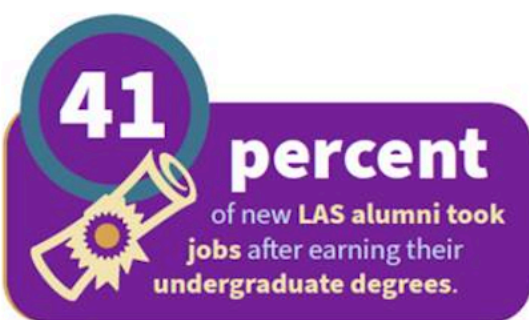
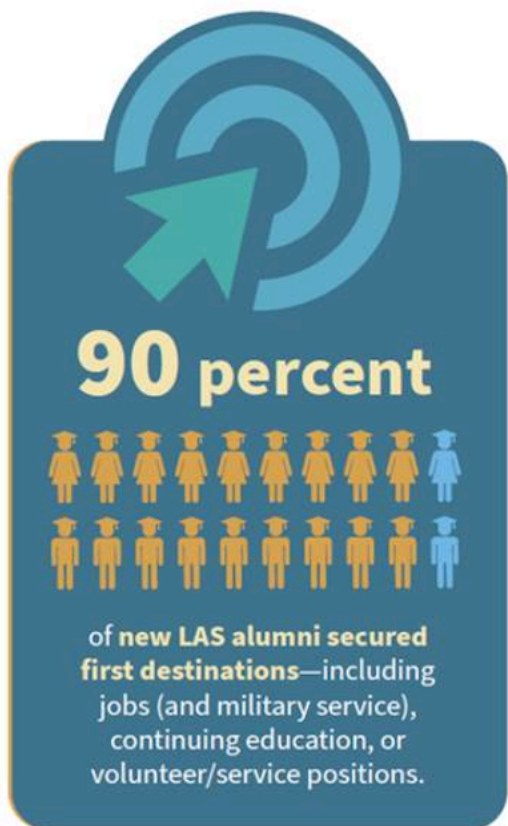
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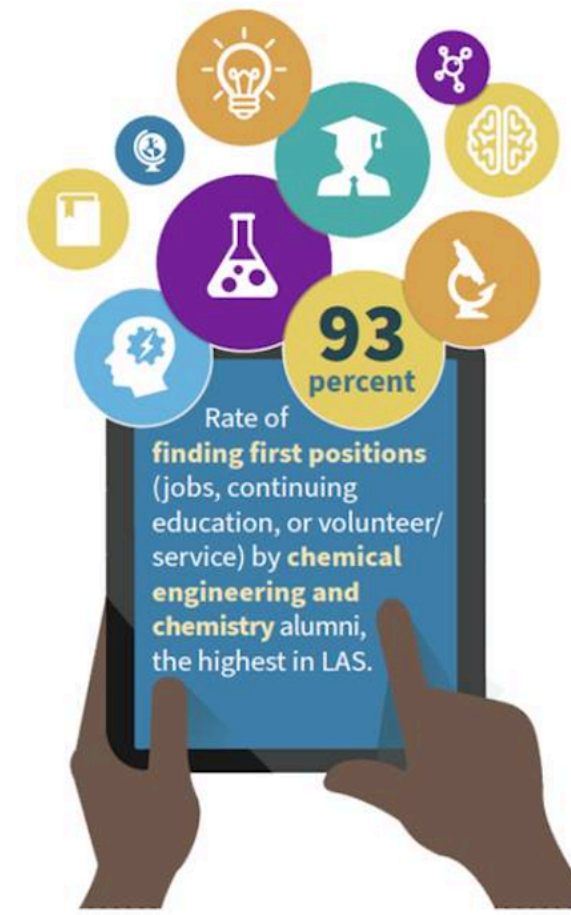
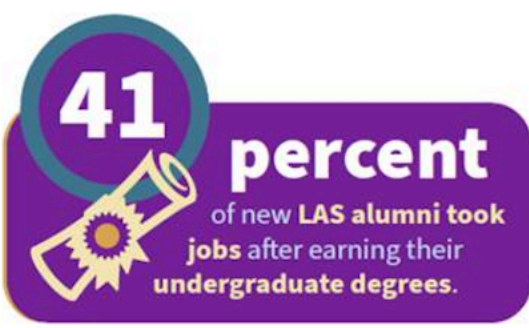
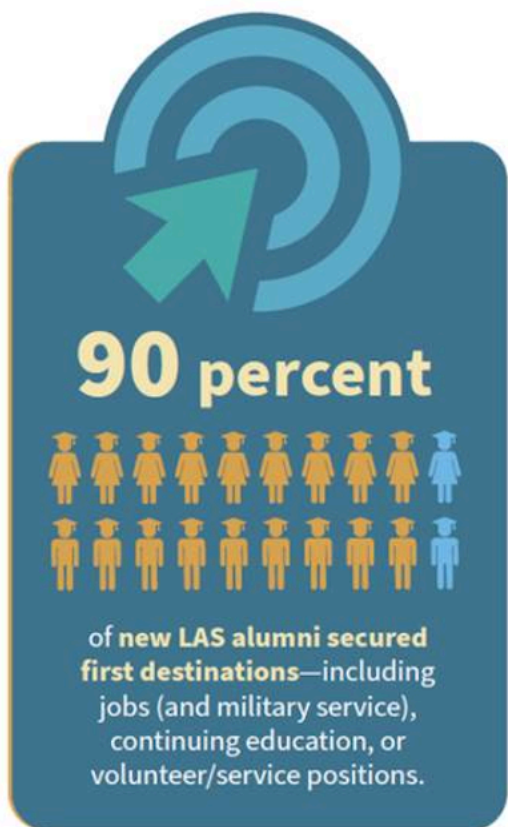
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PLATO/SOCRATES

- Socrates, the teacher (470–399 BC), famously irritating figure in Athens (didn't bathe, argued with randos on street)
- Plato, his student (428–348 BC)
- real historical figures, but relationship and degree of appropriation unclear
- Socrates believed nothing should be written down; it weakened memory
- as a result, the only Socrates we have is the one Plato created

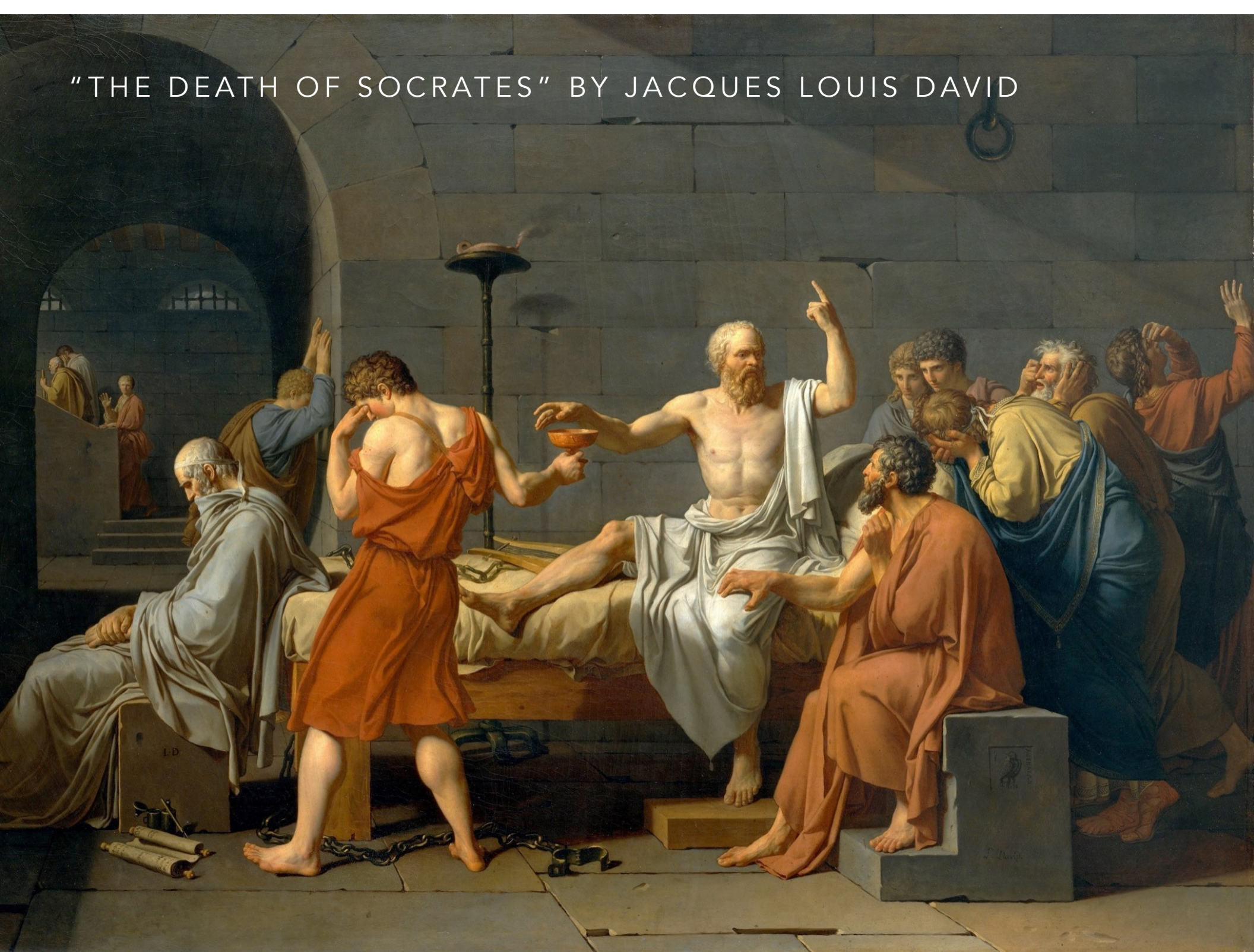


PLATO/SOCRATES

- During Peloponnesian war (431-404): Athens was most powerful, now weakest city-state
- teeters between democracy and oligarchy (rule by the wealthy few): Socrates criticized both
- Socrates: trial and death symbols of intellectual, ethical commitment
- Plato: only ancient philosopher whose entire *corpus* survives
- Aristotle: Plato's student



"THE DEATH OF SOCRATES" BY JACQUES LOUIS DAVID



"THE DEATH OF SOCRATES" BY JACQUES-PHILIP-JOSEPH DE SAINT-QUENTIN



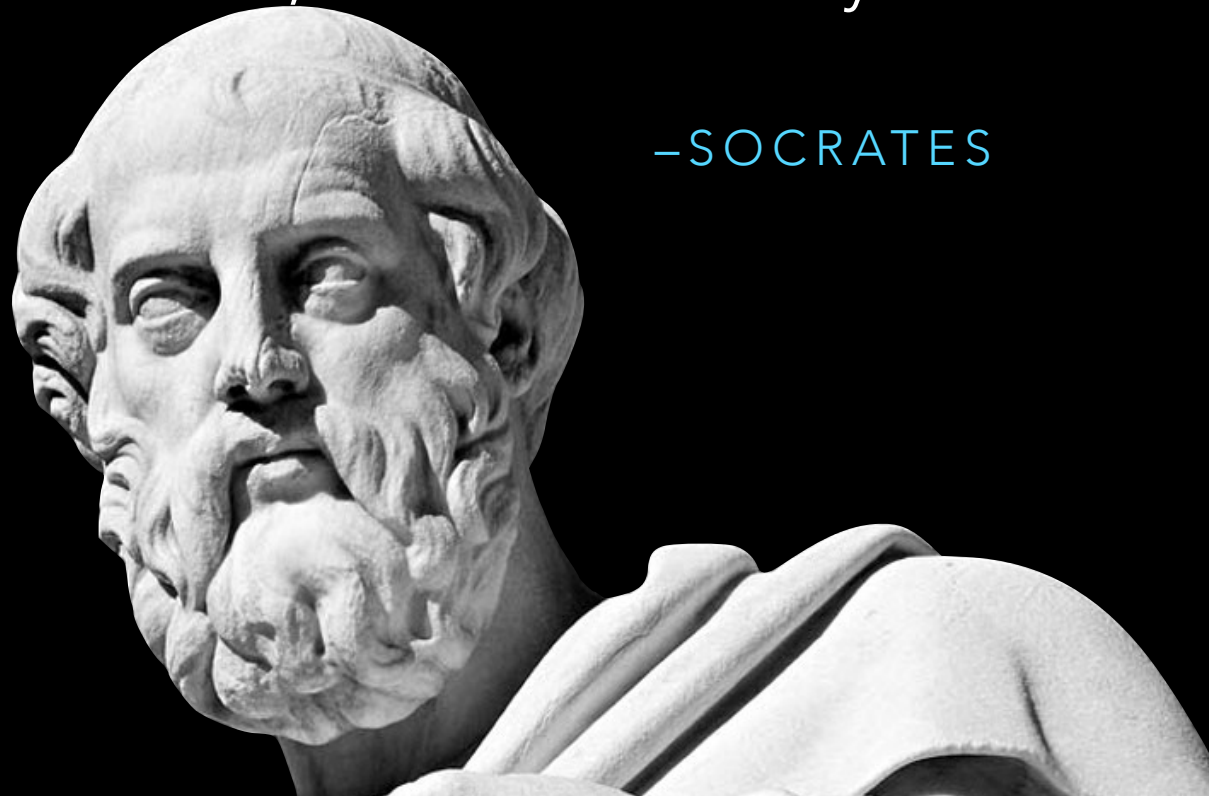
FORM

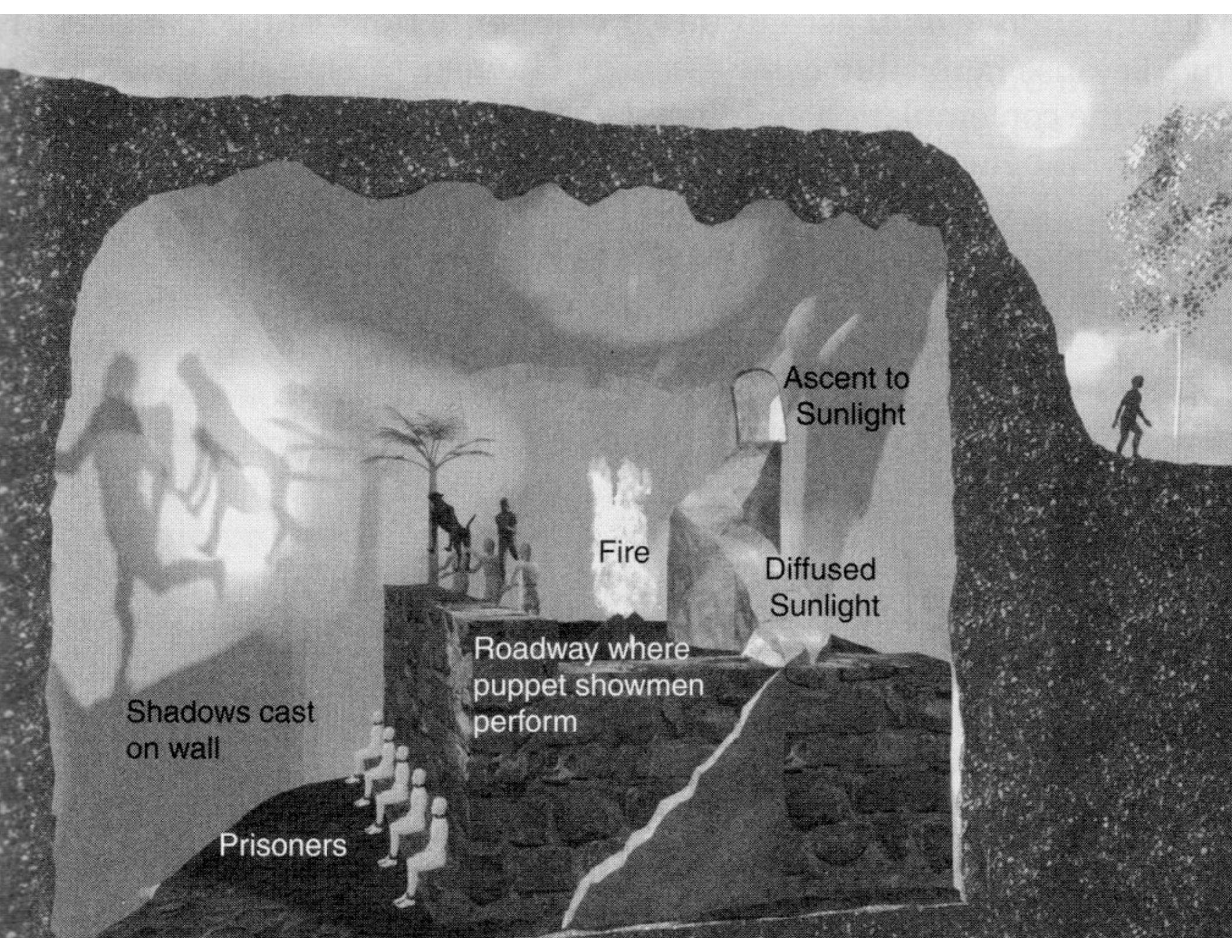
- the dialogue: a sterile, one-sided affair: "yes, Socrates, most certainly!"
- sometimes, however, a rich and literary form (such as in the *Symposium*, Plato's greatest literary work)
- as a form, privileges speech over writing, the personal
- emphasizes foolishness of listener



“Behold! human beings living in an underground cave, which has a mouth open towards the light; here they have been from their childhood, their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and you will see a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.”

—SOCRATES





Ascent to Sunlight

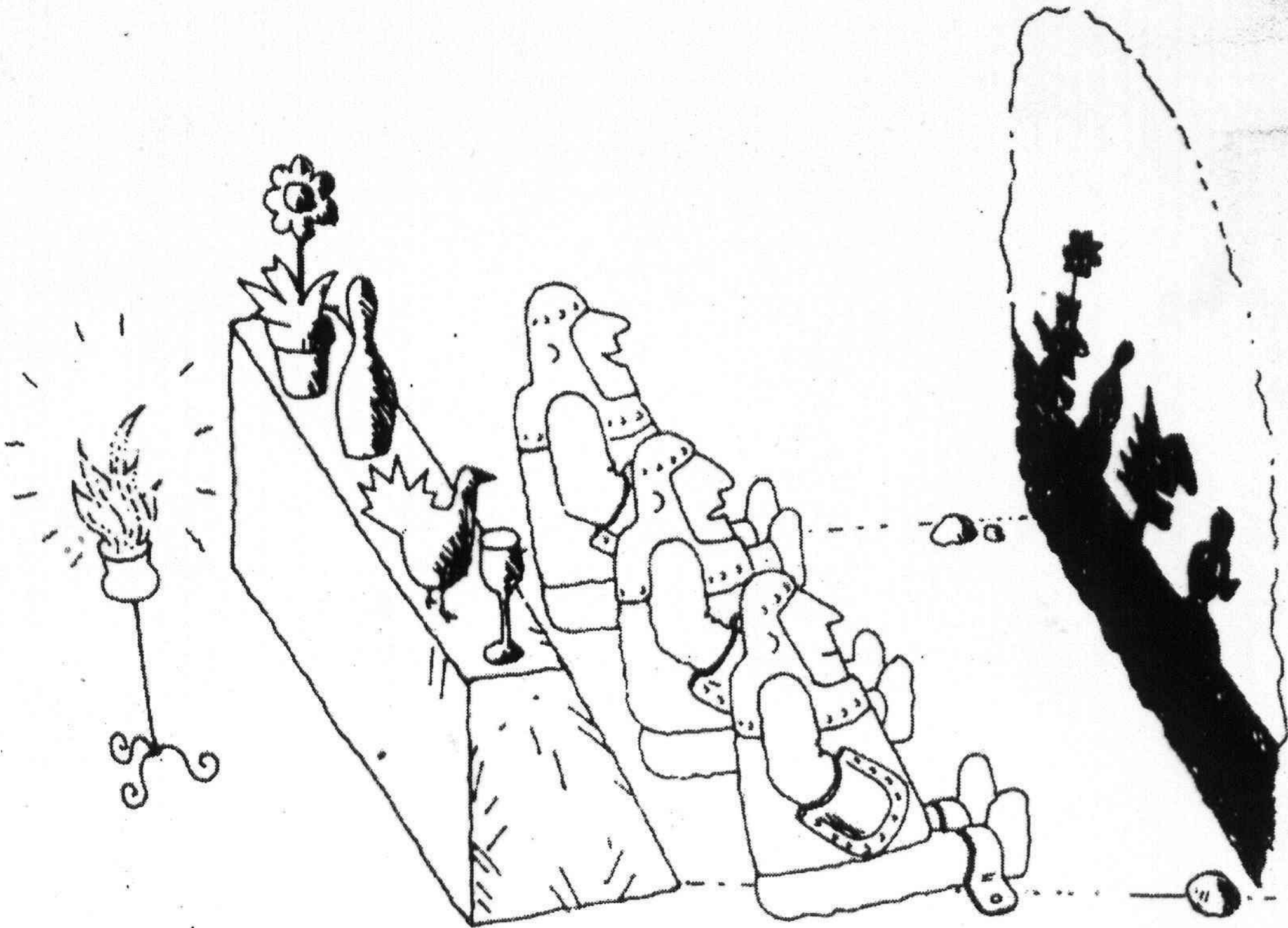
Fire

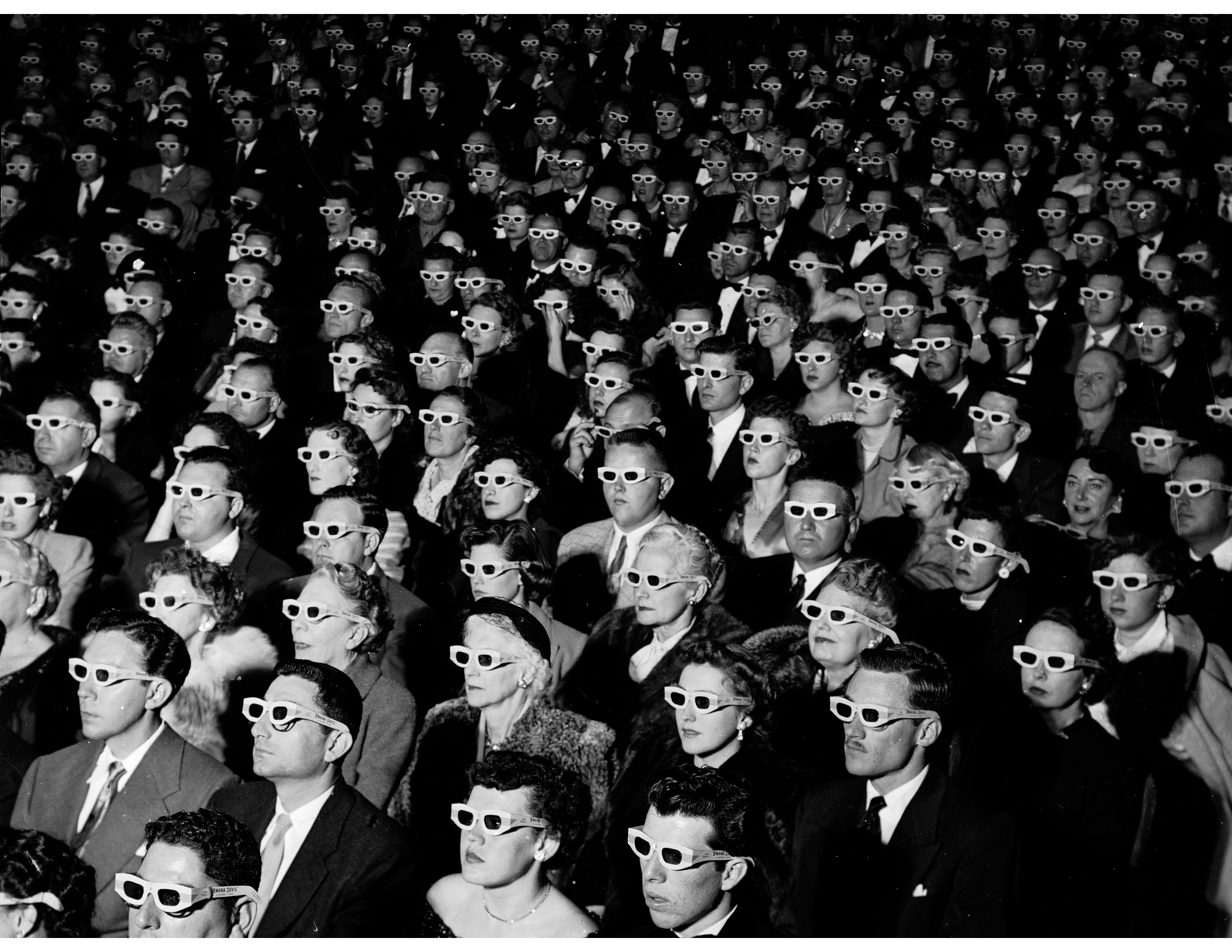
Diffused Sunlight

Roadway where puppet showmen perform

Shadows cast on wall

Prisoners





THE ALLEGORY

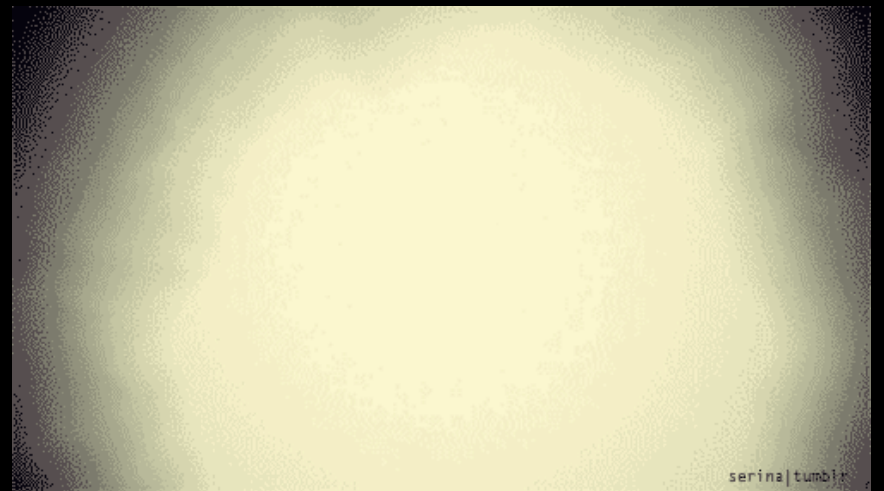
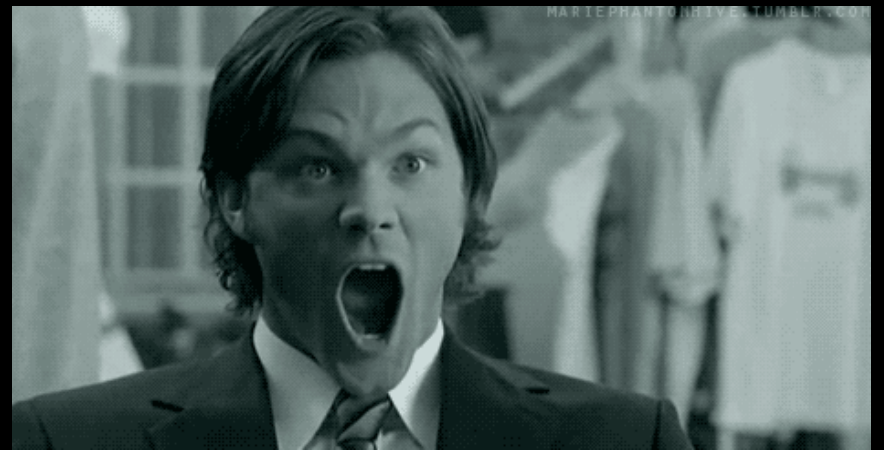
- scene: prisoners, chained in place, light source behind them, mistake shadows for real things
- consequences:
 - prisoner taken into the light will resist truth as painful, blinding
 - seeing the truth will take time
 - returning to the dark will (temporarily) also blind the enlightened, making them ridiculous to the prisoners
- an allegory for...



THE ALLEGORY

- Yeah, yeah: the light of philosophy and wisdom (something annoying and elitist about this; 'false consciousness')
- All forms of human ignorance that people cling to, both individual and collective
- Inherently political, then: Plato's cave is the Cave of Ideology, false beliefs we wrongly assume
- But Plato means this allegory *literally*. You are literally looking at a shadow of reality. *Literally*.





THE ALLEGORY

- the reality around you *right now* is an illusion, mere shadow of the Real, which can only be perceived through an arduous journey into the blinding light of philosophy
- Philosophy's quest: to find the *real* nature of reality, not its mere appearance (this is called *metaphysics*)
- Still connected to politics, the "world of the shadows"; our leaders should not be the blind and unenlightened



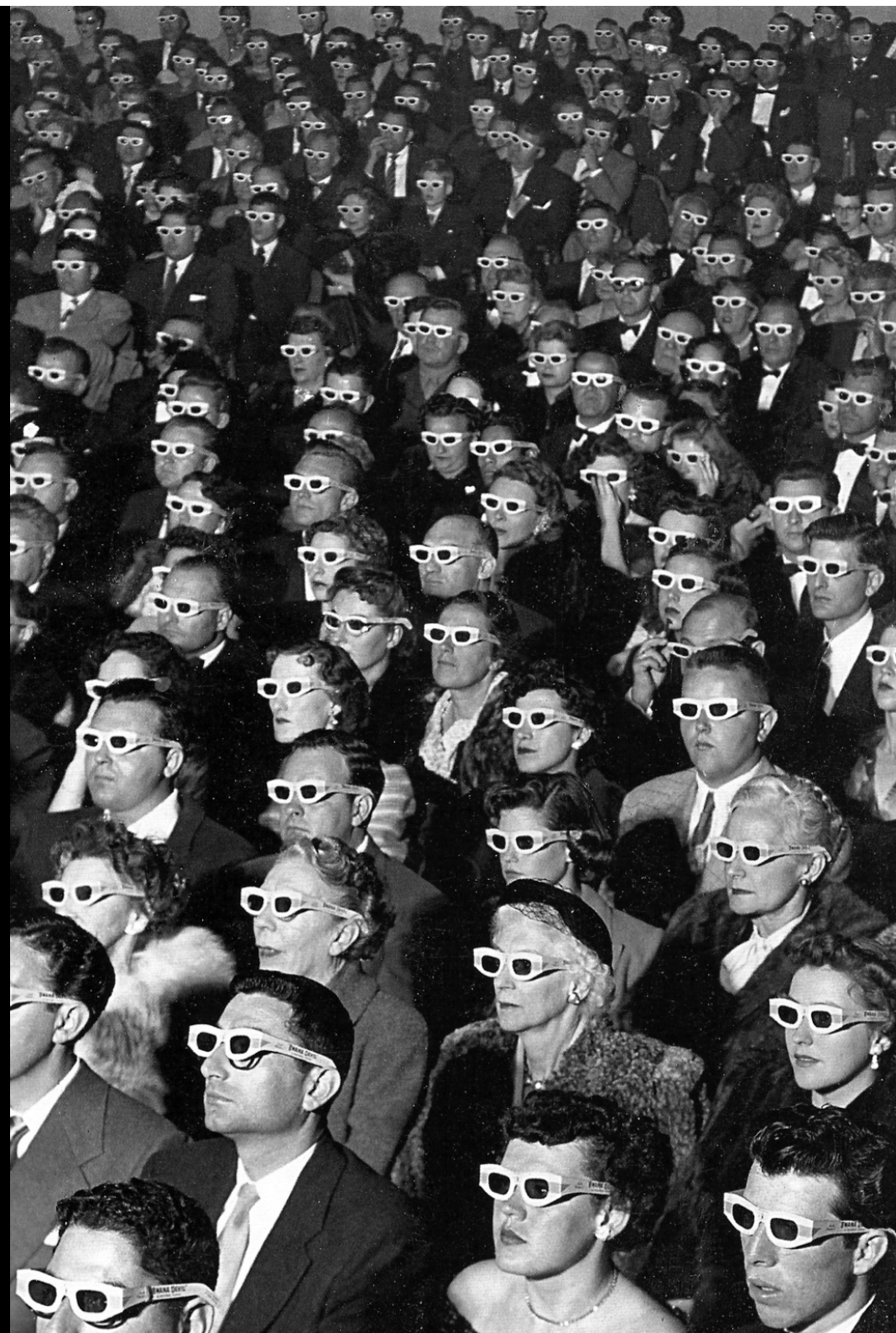
THE ALLEGORY

- bad allegory vs. good
- the allegory of the cave is a very good allegory indeed
 - spiritual enlightenment, scientific enlightenment, political enlightenment, etc.
 - e.g., ideology: the naive are blind to their own true conditions (the big lie); they are *in chains*
 - cinema and all forms of projected illusion



MASS MEDIA

- a seductive world of phantoms and shadows, projected onto a wall by a light source behind us, with audio added to complete the illusion
- audience “trapped” in position, lost in the illusion, totally passive
- essentially negative view, but embraced by cinema, which often depicts the “shattering” of the illusion, always a paranoid (political) fantasy



The Truman Show (1999)



The Matrix (1999)



“The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth—that you are a slave. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, a prison for your mind.”

—MORPHEUS



The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (2013)



CRITICISM

- elitist, narcissistic, messianic
- Is a representation a lie, less true and less real?
- is a painting of a bed less true than a bed? less real? less? Is a shadow not a thing? *Ontology*
- Western thought becomes biased against representation
- Plato: our world is an imperfect image of the Truth (*metaphysics*)
- Nietzsche: "stop seeking truth *behind the world*"



CRITO

- Surely Socrates would be justified in fleeing Athens to escape his (wrongful) death!
- I mean, *everyone* thinks this would be totally justified!
- Socrates begins by professing *Socratic ignorance*: maybe I was right when I said I'd prefer death to exile, but maybe I was wrong — let's talk about it and see
- *Socratic irony*: obviously this is an act, but one designed to teach



CRITO

- “Everyone thinks the verdict was unjust and that you should flee.”
- But we don’t value what everyone thinks; don’t we care more about what the experts think?
- Think about an athlete: should he listen to his trainer, or to what the fans and spectators think?
- If he doesn’t listen to his trainer, won’t he probably hurt himself?
- How much more important is the soul than the body? So more important to listen to your soul’s trainer, the philosopher, no?



CRITO

- Let's assume the verdict was wrong. Should I mistreat the law because it has mistreated me?
- Isn't the truly virtuous man the one who *doesn't* punch back? Surely two wrongs don't make a right!
- Plus, the law and I aren't on equal footing: I owe it more respect than it owes me; it makes me possible
- Social contract theory: didn't I *choose* to live here, with these laws? Haven't I made an agreement, a contract, to follow these laws whether they benefit me or not — even whether they are just or not?



CRITO

- Appealing because it suggests the hard path is the right path
- Socrates comes before Civil Rights, non-violence, etc.; there is another path that neither replies with violence to the law, nor simply acquiesces to it.
- The argument is not democratic (the law is superior to the individual, the expert knows better) and perhaps does not recognize the embodied nature of the subject: don't like it? Just move somewhere else!
- Has a certain amount of resonance in our era: doctors or Twitter? (But the paranoia of the Allegory!)

The Socratic Method:



The Sarcastic Method:

