

The Socratic Black Panther: Reading Huey P. Newton Reading Plato

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Brian P. Sowers
bsowers@brooklyn.cuny.edu

#1. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 249

I tried to explain what a deep impression Plato's allegory of the cave had made on me and how the prisoners in that cave were a symbol of the Black man's predicament in this country. It was a seminal experience in my life, I explained, for it had started me thinking and reading and trying to find a way to liberate Black people.

#2. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 76–77

I would ask them, "Do you have free will?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe in God?"

"Yes."

"Is he omniscient?"

"Yes."

Therefore, I told them, their all-powerful God knew everything before it happened. If so, I would ask, "How can you say that you have free will when he knows what you are going to do before you do it? You are predestined to do what you do. If not, then your God has lied or he has made a mistake, and you have already said that your God cannot lie or make a mistake." These dilemmas led to arguments that lasted all day, over a fifth of wine; they cleared my thinking, even though I sometimes went to school drunk.

#3. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 77

I told them about the allegory of the cave from Plato's *Republic*, and they enjoyed it. We called it the story of the cave prisoners. In the cave allegory Plato describes the plight of the prisoners in a cave who receive their impression of the outside world from shadows projected on the wall by the fire at the mouth of the cave. One of the prisoners is freed and gets a view of the outside world—objective reality. He returns to the cave to tell the others that the scenes they observe on the wall are not reality but only a distorted reflection of it. The prisoners tell the liberated man he is crazy, and he cannot convince them. He tried to take one of them outside, but the prisoner is terrified at the thought of facing something new. When he is dragged outside the cave anyway, he sees the sun and is blinded by it. The allegory seemed very appropriate to our own situation in society. We, too, were in prison and needed to be liberated in order to distinguish between truth and the falsehoods imposed on us.

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