Study Questions for Plato’s “The Allegory of the Cave”

Please write out your answers to the questions that follow and/or take notes on the relevant areas in the text. It is best to get into the habit of doing this while reading. You should complete this exercise after you have read and highlighted, or noted, areas of the text that you think are important. The purpose of this exercise is to help you follow the author’s intent and to think critically about his arguments. Below are a list of questions that, once answered, will ensure that you have a good outline of the story’s purpose and an in-depth understanding of its historical importance.

Context:

*The Allegory of the Cave*, also known as *The Myth of the Cave*, is Classical Greek philosopher Plato’s most famous and ingenious composition. It occurs in the seventh book of *The Republic*, the magnum opus of his political philosophy. Plato’s *The Republic*, particularly *The Allegory of the Cave*, is instrumental in the development of traditional Western philosophy, particularly for the introduction to a fundamental and abiding theme in philosophy, “the essence of truth.”

*The Allegory of the Cave* is a parable designed by Plato to illustrate the power of philosophy to free and enlighten men. This narrative unfolds Plato’s notions about the structure of the world and “the essence of truth,” challenging many of our conceptions of the cosmos and political beliefs. In this allegory, abstract thinking is portrayed as the key element which holds access to real truth. Building upon the teachings of his mentor, Socrates, *The Allegory of the Cave* represents Plato’s own reflections on the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge (epistemology), as well as on the real nature of things (metaphysics).

Questions:

1. How does *The Allegory of the Cave* illustrate Plato’s view of the physical world?
2. According to Plato, how can we find the “true essence” of an object?
3. In this parable, how is the human soul described?
4. How does the allegory describe the process of acquiring knowledge?
5. After reading this allegory, how do you think Plato would describe “happiness?”
6. Who are the “people chained in the cave?”

7. According to *The Allegory of the Cave*, how should the process of education be approached?

8. According to *The Allegory of the Cave*, what is the main task of the philosopher?

9. Who are the “guardians” or philosopher-kings?

10. Why should philosopher-kings rule?

11. How does Plato’s *The Allegory of the Cave* relate to science and scientific research?