

The next Topical Seminar will be on Wednesday, December 14 at 3 PM in the Lewes library. To prepare for the session, please watch the video described below and read the section of Republic, 515a – 520a, paying particular attention to 515e – 517a. [Microsoft Word - Republic 7.doc \(platonifoundation.org\)](#) I would recommend you also read the excerpts from the NRSV of the Christian texts of Luke and Matthew 9 (see attached) to give yourself insight into the Inquisitor's reference to the Christ figure's temptations. And I also recommend a translation of "The Grand Inquisitor" should you find that you're interested in reading the text from which this performance was adapted. (see attached)

After considering what you've read and watched, write a response of between 200 and 400 words. Some writing prompts found at the end. Email your written response to [lewesseminar@gmail.com](mailto:lewesseminar@gmail.com) no later than Monday, December 12.

Plato gives us a great deal to think about in his allegory of the cave in "The Republic" (514a – 520a) [Microsoft Word - Republic 7.doc \(platonifoundation.org\)](#). For this discussion, I would like us to focus on the experience of the prisoner who is dragged outside (515e – 517a). In this episode, the prisoner is taken out of the cave and exposed to a reality he has not experienced before. As his vision adapts to this new reality, he begins to understand that what he is experiencing is, in fact, superior to that he has held as the truth before. In fact, he begins to understand that his experiences in the cave are entirely false, and he begins to understand a new type of freedom. But were he to return to the cave and, by virtue of the light that he has experienced, be unable to again discern the realities of the darkened caves, then he would be a target of pity or ridicule. The others would blame his changed perspective on damage done by his journey and would seek to kill anyone who would seek to draw another up to the light. The inhabitants of the cave believe that their reality, as given to them by other men, is truth. The new insight brought back by the man taken up is a threat to their understanding and, thus, must be dangerous. Insight into reality, even when it promises truth, must be quashed.

I believe that this is what Dostoyevsky is speaking of in "The Grand Inquisitor" story in The Brothers Karamazov (chapter 5). When we look past the obvious concern that the Inquisitor has for the threat that the Christ figure presents to the Inquisitor's power, we can see Dostoyevsky making a very salient point about mankind's nervousness with intellectual and spiritual freedom.

Recently, I found this performance from the 1970s featuring Sir John Gielgud: [The Grand Inquisitor - John Gielgud - Bing video](#) . While it's not a verbatim performance of the original text, it's a fine portrayal of the main ideas.

Give some thought to the following questions:

1. What is meant when we speak of "freedom"?
2. Is freedom antithetical to happiness?
3. Are we afraid of truth? Reality? Why?
4. "The Grand Inquisitor" is set ecclesiastically. Could the same story be told politically? Do we seek truth in politics?
5. There is a fundamental sense of power in "owning the narrative" and in defining "truth." Do we seek mutual truth in our relationships with others, or are we primarily seeking power?

Please remember to write a short to medium length essay (200 or more words) responding to these materials and bringing other materials into your response if you feel it appropriate and germane. Submit this essay to [lewesseminar@gmail.com](mailto:lewesseminar@gmail.com) by Monday, December 12 so that it may be posted for others to read on our website in advance of the December 14 session.

Some suggested writing prompts:

1. Dostoyevsky presents the Christ figure in silence. And nearly at the end, this Dostoyevsky has this figure kiss the Inquisitor. Why?
2. The Inquisitor focuses on three concepts, authority, miracle, and mystery. Can these be applied to political technique generally? How?
3. Both the Dostoyevsky and the Plato pieces refer to the idea of truth in terms of absolute reality in the context of governance of the polity. Do you agree that such a thing exists? Is it possible for humankind to attain it?
4. The Grand Inquisitor is set in ecclesiastical terms, but the character of the Inquisitor speaks to strictly profane political reality. Why is Dostoyevsky's story set in religious allegory? Could the Platonic piece be said to be based in religious tradition as well?

Please note: While it would not be possible to avoid thoughts and discussion of religion on this topic, given the underlying setting of "The Grand Inquisitor," it is really not my intent to spend time discussing the trials and tribulations of the Catholic church or of organized religion in general. Instead, I believe that Dostoyevsky is using religion as a foundation for exploring the idea of freedom of conscience. In my view, this is a compelling and, frankly, ingenious idea. Keep in mind that Ivan Karamazov, the narrator of this story in The Brothers Karamazov, is decidedly *not* religious and the grand inquisitor himself is, by his own admission and somewhat ironically, anti-Christian in his philosophy. Instead, I would hope that we focus on Dostoyevsky's and Plato's ideas on freedom and courage.

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Topical Seminars  
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