

Part 2: Why Philosophers Should Rule: Plato's Metaphysics and Epistemology

First Answer: The Society described cannot be actualized until Philosophers become Kings (473d).

IV. Theory of Forms

1. Each quality (e.g. justice, goodness, beauty, redness, equality, etc.) has both a *singular concept* or definition and *many instantiations* that *resemble* the concept or definition. E.g. Strawberries are all red, but they are each slightly different instantiations, examples, or tokens of red.
2. Knowledge vs. Opinion. Knowledge concerns the definition or concept of a quality and is singular. Opinion concerns particular instances of the concept (e.g. particular examples of red) and can be multiple—because there are many different instances of, e.g., the concept of red. Opinion lies between knowledge and ignorance (478d).
3. Knowledge of the definition or concept is knowledge of the form. E.g. Red is a certain wavelength of light (approx. 680nm); Water is H₂O.
4. Knowledge of the form keeps one from confusing opinions for knowledge.
5. Knowledge of forms is knowledge of what is eternal and unchanging (479e). E.g. The concept of red never changes. So to have knowledge of forms is to have eternal truth.
6. Philosophers are precisely those people “whose hearts are fixed on the true being of each thing,” i.e. the forms (480a).

(REASONS WHY PHILOSOPHERS SHOULD RULE)

7. Knowledge of forms has both a descriptive and normative component. That is, one knows what the truth is (can *describe* justice, beauty, redness, etc.); and also know how particulars *should* be (can set appropriate *norms* for achieving justice, beauty, etc) (cf. 484c).
8. Being fixed on the true being of each thing also implies that the Philosopher will be supremely truthful insofar as he or she will be intolerant of untruth in all its forms (485c).
9. Because the realm of truth and the forms are grasped with the mind, the genuine philosopher will forego physical pleasures and worldly pursuits (e.g. wealth) and thus be far less corruptible than the average person.

V. Form of the Good and Simile of the Sun

- i. The Good is what is most real, only exists as actual, thus is pure actuality, reality, truth (505d-e). The Form of the Good is the source of intelligibility of objects of knowledge and their being and reality (509b). The forms are or exist insofar as they partake in the form of the good=have actuality. By contrast, what is not good is what is not real, not true, capable of change. Thus the good is the true is the divine.
- ii. Simile of the Sun
 - a. Visible World: Sun is source of growth and light which gives visibility to objects of sense and the power of seeing to the eye—the faculty of sight. (507dff.)
 - b. Intelligible World: The Good is the source of reality and truth which gives intelligibility to objects of thought and the power of knowing to the mind—the faculty of knowledge=cognition

(508dff).

--The “mind’s eye” must be fixed on objects illuminated by truth and reality in order to know them and possess intelligence; the “twilight world of change and decay” gives only opinion and confusion (508d).

VI. The Divided Line (see diagram)

- i. Two basic realms: intelligible and sensible/visible/physical, or forms and appearances/instances.
- ii. 4 subdivisions:
 - 1) Intelligence: full understanding reached by philosophy via dialectic.
Attainment of 1st principles unconditioned by assumptions.
 - 2) Reason: procedures of mathematics; purely deductive and uncritical of its assumptions—like pure logic.
 - 3) Belief/Opinion: common sense practical guides lacking firm foundations of dialectical and deductive thought.
 - 4) Illusion: 2nd hand impressions and opinions.

VII. The Allegory of the Cave (see diagram)

The allegory of the cave encapsulates all the basic features of Plato’s metaphysics. With it, he illustrates his theory of forms, the distinctions between knowledge and opinion and between the visible and intelligible realms, the difference between ordinary life and the philosopher’s life, and the argument for why philosophers should rule.

Key to the elements of the allegory

- i. Shadows in cave: world of appearance and conjecture
- ii. Chains binding people in cave: our desires
- iii. Fire in cave: our sun, what enables faculty of vision and formation of opinion about changing world
- iv. Objects of shadows in cave: physical objects of reflection

(DIVISION IN DIVIDED LINE HERE)

- v. Objects reflected in water outside cave: imperfectly apprehended forms (e.g. knowledge of artisans)
- vi. Objects outside cave: the forms themselves
- vii. Sun outside: the form of the good

Process of going up out of cave: the education of philosopher

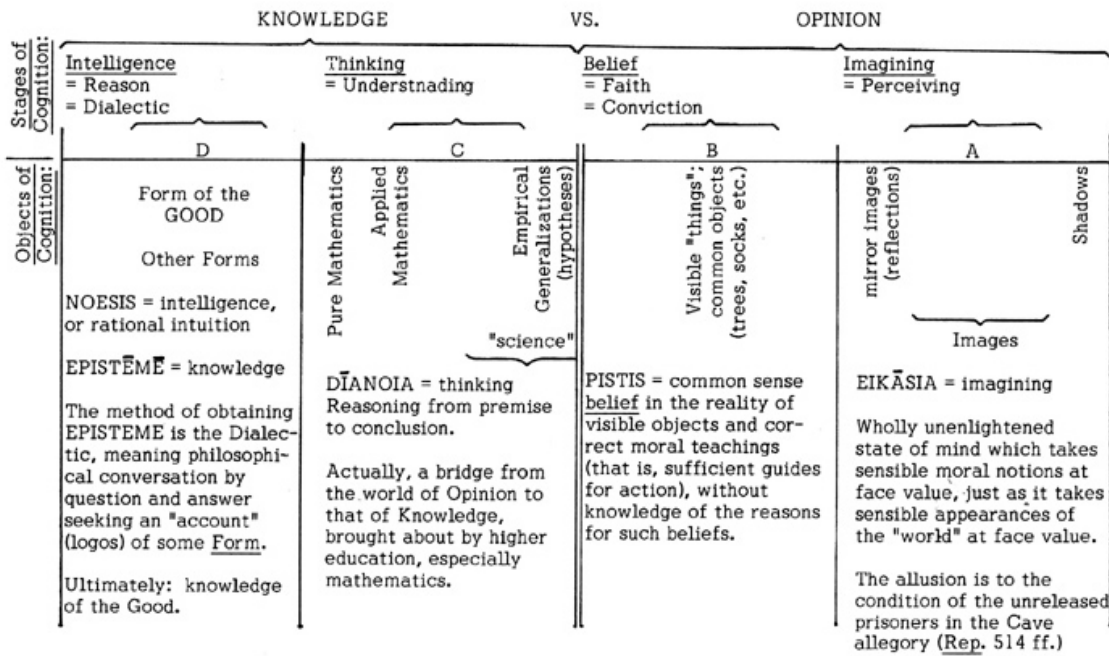
Returning to cave: the responsibility and obligation of the philosopher

Some Critical Questions

1. How viable is Plato’s vision of the Republic?
2. Does the principle of natural specialization, in terms of human professions, really make sense? Is anyone naturally born to be a carpenter, cobbler, or farmer? What could “nature” have to do with these “cultural” artifacts (making houses, shoes, farming, etc.)?
3. Are you convinced that forms really exist? If not, how do we explain our ability to organize our experience and communicate successfully?
4. What problems might rule by philosophers generate? Is Plato simply arguing out of his personal bias on behalf of philosophy or, perhaps, out of mourning for Socrates?
5. Is Plato justified in defining the Good in terms of truth and reality? Is Plato again simply privileging a certain philosophical bias? Are there alternative conceptions of the good?

Diagrams

The Divided Line



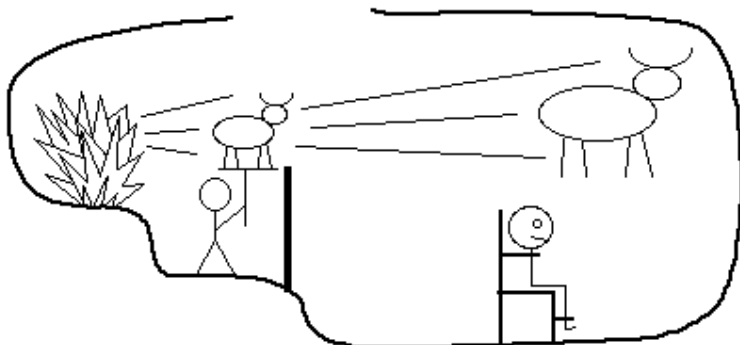
“the intelligible”

“the visible”

source:

http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhatch/HIS-SCI-STUDY-GUIDE/0019_platoDividedLine.html

The Allegory of the Cave



source: <http://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/philosophy/courses/hegel/HEGEL1.HTM>