

## The Divided Line

In the Republic Plato investigates being and knowledge more closely by using the famous illustration of the divided line.

What we have is a line divided into two unequal sections, the inequality denoting the greater importance of the top section. The lower section represents the visible world – the world we live in – the world of opinion. The top section represents the intelligible world – the world of the forms – the world of knowledge.

Each of the two sections is divided according to the same ratio into two unequal subsections, again by reason of the upper part's greater relative importance in each case.

If you look at the lowest subsection this is where the shadows belong, and the reflections and images of sensible things that appear in water or on polished surfaces. The type of cognition that is based in this section is called conjecture.

In the immediately higher subsection of the line are located sensible things. They are grasped by a type of cognition called belief. The two subsections taken together form the realm of opinion, which makes up the lower section of the entire line.

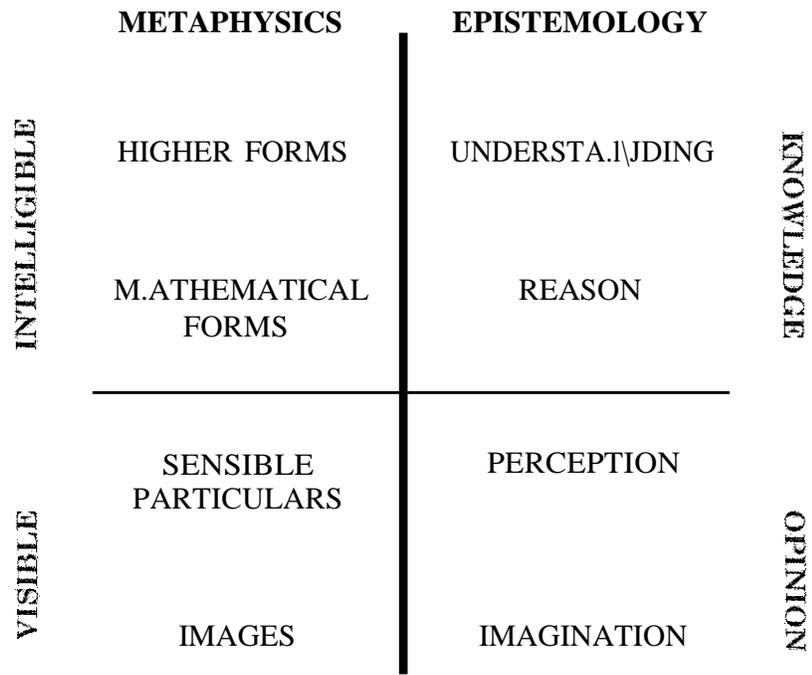
Now look at the top of the divided line to the region of the knowable. This region is itself divided into two subsections. In the lowest of the two subsections sensible things are used as images, and the procedure is from "hypothesis" to a conclusion and not to a first principle. It is a mathematical procedure. Examples of such a "hypotheses" are the odd and the even, the three kinds of angles and such. These things are obvious to everyone and are accepted by mathematicians at their face value without further question.

The whole mathematical procedure is held down to the lower level of the knowable because of its inability to rise out of the confines of these "hypotheses" and their use of sensible things.

But when we get to the level of that which is knowable, unchanging, etc. we have to move to the level of the ideas.

Please note Plato argues that common-sense cognition is regularly given first place by most people, with mathematical knowledge appearing more vague and knowledge at the upper level most vague. Plato is arguing that it is knowledge at the lowest level that is most shadowy and unreal in the extreme.

This is the same argument we see in the Myth of the Cave.



# The Myth of the Cave

PLATO

*Socrates:* And now, let me give a parable to show how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened. Imagine human beings living in an underground cave with an opening upward towards the light, which filters into the depths of the cave. These human beings have been here since birth, and their legs and necks have been chained so that they cannot move. They can only see what is directly in front of them, since they are prevented by the chains from turning their heads to either side. At a distance above and behind them is a blazing fire, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised path. And if you look closely, you will see a low wall built along the path, like the screen used by marionette players to conceal themselves from the audience while they show their puppets.

*Glaucon:* I see.

*Socrates:* And do you see men passing behind the wall carrying all sorts of objects, such as figures of animals and humans made of wood, stone, and various materials, which they are holding above the wall? Some of the men carrying these objects are talking, while others are silent.

*Glaucon:* You have shown me a strange image, and these are strange prisoners.

*Socrates:* They are similar to us. For, initially, how could they see anything but their own shadows, or the shadows of each other, which the fire projects on the wall of the cave in front of them?

*Glaucon:* That is true. How could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to turn their heads?

*Socrates:* And wouldn't they also see only the shadows of the objects that are being carried by the men?

*Glaucon:* Obviously.

*Socrates:* And if these prisoners were able to talk to each other, would they not suppose that the words they used referred only to the shadows that they saw on the wall in front of them?

*Glaucon:* Undoubtedly.

*Socrates:* And suppose further that the prisoners had an echo which came from the wall in front of them. When one of the men passing behind them spoke, would they not surely believe that the voice came from one of the shadows on this wall?

*Glaucon:* Without question.

*Socrates:* To them, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of themselves and of the objects being carried behind them.

*Glaucon:* That is certain.

*Socrates:* Now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are suddenly released.... At first, when one of them is liberated and forced to stand up, to turn his neck, and to look and walk towards the light, he will suffer many pains. The glare will hurt his eyes, and he will be unable to see the objects that had been the cause of the shadows he had formerly seen. Suppose someone saying to him at this point that what he had formerly seen was an illusion, and that now he was approaching nearer to being, that now his eye was turned towards more real existence, that now he had a clearer vision. What would be his reply? And suppose further what would happen if someone pointed to the passing objects and asked him to name them. Would he not be confused? Would he not believe that the shadows which he formerly saw were truer than the objects now being shown to him?

*Glaucon:* Far truer.

*Socrates:* And if he were forced to look straight at the light, would not the pain in his eyes make him turn away from it? Would it not make him take refuge in those things that he could see? Would it not make him believe that what was now being presented to him was less clear than what he had previously seen?

*Glaucon:* Certainly.

*Socrates:* And suppose further that he were dragged reluctantly up the steep and rugged ascent, being finally forced into the presence of the sun itself. Would he not likely be pained and irritated? When he approached the light his eyes would be dazzled, and he would not be able to see anything at all of the realities outside the cave.

*Glaucon:* Not immediately.

*Socrates:* He would have to grow accustomed to the sights of the upper world. First he would be able to see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other things in the water, and then the things themselves. Afterwards he would be able to gaze upon the light of the moon, the stars, and the spangled heaven. Would it not be easier at first for him to look upon the sky and the stars by night than upon the sun or the light of the sun by day?

*Glaucon:* Certainly.

*Socrates:* Last of all he would be able to see the sun, not merely as it is reflected in the water, but in its true nature and in its own proper place.

*Glaucon:* Absolutely.

*Socrates:* He will then begin to conclude that it is the sun which causes the seasons and the years, which is the guardian of everything in the visible world, and which, in a certain way, is the cause of all the things that he and his fellows have formerly seen.

*Glaucon:* It is evident that he would first see the sun and then reason about it.

*Socrates:* And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the cave and of his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would be happy about his change and pity those who were still prisoners?

*Glaucon:* Certainly, he would.

*Socrates:* And if they were in the habit of honoring those who could most quickly observe the passing shadows and decide which of them went before others, which came after, or which occurred simultaneously—being therefore best able to draw conclusions about the future—do you think that he would care for such honors or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, "Better to be the poor servant of a poor master,<sup>1</sup> and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?"

*Glaucon:* Yes, I think that he would rather suffer anything than accept these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

*Socrates:* Indeed, imagine what it would be like for him to come suddenly out of the sun and to return to his old place in the cave. Would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

*Glaucon:* Most assuredly.

*Socrates:* And while his eyes were filled with darkness and his sight still weak (and the time needed to become re-accustomed to the cave might be very considerable), if there were a contest in which he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never been out of the cave, would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that his ascent and descent had destroyed his eyesight, and thus that it was better not even to think of ascending. And if they caught anyone trying to free another and lead him up to the light, they would put the offender to death.

*Glaucon:* Without question.

*Socrates:* You may append this entire allegory, dear Glaucon, to what I have said before. The prison-house or cave is the world of sight; the light of the fire within the cave is the sun. And you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intelligible world, which, at your request, I have described. Only God knows whether or not my description is accurate. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the Form of the Good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort. When seen, however, it can only lead us to the **conclusion** that it is the universal author of all things beautiful and right, that it is the origin of the source of light in the visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intelligible world. Without having seen the Form of the Good and having fixed his eye upon it, one will not be able to act wisely either in public affairs or in private life.

*Glaucon:* I agree, as far as I am able to understand I

HIPHOP:

<http://docawkward.bandcamp.com/track/03-allegory-platos-cave>

## Philosophy of Art (1)

It is too easy to simply say that Plato rejects art and Aristotle thinks art is great.

Are works of artist frivolous or even dangerous distractions, or do they exhibit something deep and essential about human nature?

What is the relationship between art and “reality?” Is art a poor imitation of reality?

Is art a spiritualization and enrichment of nature – an improvement on the world?

Plato’s objection to art is based on his metaphysics and can be stated in three parts.

- a) Ontological Objection
- b) Epistemological Objection
- c) Moral Objection

Aristotle’s theory of art and his backdoor Platonism.

Aristotle gives us a common-sense metaphysics. In one sense the Forms exist in the objects. The full-blown Form is something that arises in our minds operating on the material of experience. The induction comes for experiencing particular objects.

So what does Aristotle say about the philosophy of art?

- a) Rejects Plato’s ontological objection but still sees art as a form of imitation.
- b) Rejects Plato’s epistemological objection as a matter of fact he sees art as superior to history.
- c) Rejects Plato’s moral objection

HIPHOP: <http://docawkward.bandcamp.com/track/03-allegory-platos-cave>