

## Plato Outline

I am not going to talk about Parmenides today. He is not the focus of this lecture. But my goal is that when I finish talking about Plato the things that Parmenides said that seems so outlandish will make some sense. I am going to try to get a little agreement that Parmenides was on to something.

- 1) Where does Parmenides fit in the history of philosophy?
- 2) What is metaphysics? It is not really a single field or discipline, but rather a catchall for a number of problems whose scope and significance are so broad that they seem to have implications for virtually every other field of philosophy.
- 3) There are three things that can prove profitable if we are thinking about Plato.
  - a. The Theory of the Form
  - b. The Divided Line (See below)
  - c. The Allegory of the Cave (See below)
- 4) What justifies spending time with Parmenides? Parmenides raises a genuine point about epistemic reliability. Both Plato and Aristotle try to give us a picture of what reality must be like if knowledge is possible.

### The Divided Line (See below)

In the Republic Plato investigates knowledge and opinion 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 that the worth of the move up the divided line is exactly the opposite of Plato's estimation in the divided line. What I mean is 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.