

PLATO: INDEX

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PLATO'S BIOGRAPHY, THE ACADEMY



- Plato (ca. May 21? 427 BC – ca. 347 BC) was born in Athens into a moderately well-to-do aristocratic family.
- His father was named Ariston and his mother Perictione.
- His family claimed descent from the ancient Athenian kings; and he was related to the prominent politician Critias.
- Plato's own real name was "Aristocles"; however, his nickname, Plato, originated from wrestling. Since "Plato" means broad, it probably refers either to his physical appearance or to his wrestling stance or style.
- Plato became a pupil of Socrates in his youth, and — at least according to his personal account — he attended his master's trial, though not his execution.
- Unlike Socrates, Plato wrote down his philosophical views and left a considerable number of manuscripts.
- He was deeply affected by the city's treatment of Socrates and much of his early work records his memories of his teacher. It is suggested that much of his ethical writing is in pursuit of a society where similar injustices could not occur.
- Plato was also deeply influenced
 - by the Pythagoreans, whose notions of numerical harmony have clear echoes in Plato's notion of the Forms
 - by Anaxagoras, who taught Socrates and who held that the mind or reason pervades everything; and
 - by Parmenides, who argued the unity of all things and was perhaps influential in Plato's conception of the Soul.
- Plato founded one of the earliest known organized schools in Western civilization when he was 40 years old on a plot of land in the Grove of Academe. The Academy was "a large enclosure of ground which was once the property of a citizen at Athens named Academus... some however say that it received its name from an ancient hero." (Robinson, Arch. Graec. I i 16)
- and it operated until it was closed by Justinian I of Byzantium in AD 529. Many intellectuals were schooled here, the most prominent being Aristotle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Plato lectured extensively at the Academy but he also wrote on many philosophical issues.
- The most important writings of Plato are his dialogues; although a handful of epigrams also survive, and some letters have come down to us under his name.
- We have very good reasons to believe that all the known dialogues of Plato survive; some of the dialogues which the Greeks ascribed to him are considered by the consensus of scholars to be either suspect or probably spurious.
- Socrates is often a character in the dialogues of Plato. It is usually disputed how much of the content and argument of any given dialogue is Socrates' point of view, and how much of it Plato's.
- However, Plato was without doubt under a strong influence of Socrates' teachings, so many of the ideas presented in his early works were probably shared (at least partially).

BIBLIOGRAPHY: SOCRATIC DIALOGUES AND TRANSITION.

- Socratic dialogues: first works under the very influence of Socrates. Traditionally they have two titles, first with the main character in dialogue with Socrates, and the second title with an allusion to its content (the searching of a definition for a virtue).
 - *Euthyphro*, or about piety.
 - *(The) Apology (of Socrates)*, defense of Socrates
 - *Crito*, the last hours of Socrates in jail
 - *Laches*, or about courage
 - *Ion*, or about poetry as a god gift.
 - *Protagoras*, or is possible to teach virtue?
 - *Charmides*, or about temperance
- Period of transition works: Plato's thought is becoming progressively independent from the ideas of Socrates. His bad experiences in Syracuse's political life are present on his theory of forms and politics.
 - *Cratylus*, or about the meaning of words
 - *(Greater) Hippias (major)*, about beauty
 - *(Lesser) Hippias (minor)*, or about truth
 - *Menexenus*, or a parody about the funeral prayer
 - *Euthydemus*, or about eristic of the sophists
 - *Gorgias*, or about rhetoric and politics
 - *Meno*, is possible to teach virtue?

BIBLIOGRAPHY: MATURITY AND OLD AGE.

- Maturity works: the theory of forms, his political theory, his ontological dualism and the cave's myth are part of his maturity though.
 - *Phaedo*, or about the immortality of soul.
 - *(The) Symposium*, or about love as form of knowledge.
 - *Phaedrus*, or about love, beauty and destiny of the soul
 - *(The) Republic*, or about political theory and other subjects.
- Old age works: Plato revises and looks over his main theories with a critic perspective.
 - *Theaetetus*, or about knowledge
 - *Sophist*, or about language, rhetoric and knowledge.
 - *Statesman*, or about politics and philosophy.
 - *Parmenides*, or about the critique of the theory of forms.
 - *Philebus*, or about pleasure and The Good.
 - *Timaeus*, or about cosmology.
 - *Critias*, or a description of the old Athens, myth of the Atlantis
 - *(The) Laws*, or about the ideal city, a pessimistic vision of *Republic*.
 - *Letters, letter 7th*, autobiography of Plato.

THE PROBLEM OF *PHYSIS*.

- The polemic between Socrates and the Sophist was based on two opposed perspectives over the same philosophical question: is it possible to define virtue (excellence or *areté*)?:
 - Sophists defended that each human being or city has a different definition or concept of virtue. Sophists considered that virtue was relative to each person, not universal, not unique.
 - Socrates defended that, even if difficult, that universal definition must be searched: truth exists even if is that difficult to find. True virtue, or the true scientific definition of something, must be universal, unique and the same for everyone. That is real knowledge and not mere opinion.
- The polemic was also about the *arché* of *physis*: who of the pre-Socratic philosophers found the *arché*.
- Plato inherited this problem and solved on his philosophy: the distinction between knowledge and opinion, his dualistic ontology, his ethics and political theory are his answer to the problem of *physis*.

HERACLITES VS. PARMENIDES: THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE.

- Parmenides defended that truth *arche* was being: the only, unique, eternal object of science. Science, and Plato agreed, needs an permanent not changing object of study.
- Heraclites defended that reality was always in change. Science, from the point of view of Plato's could not be based on sensitive reality.
- Plato found two contradictory statements: truth knowledge is possible, and at the same time that truth knowledge can not be about the world that surrounds us.

PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE; DUALISM AS PLATO'S SOLUTION.

- Plato solves that apparent contradiction with his theory of two worlds (ontological dualism).
- **Sensible world** where we usually live, visible through our senses but that cannot be the object of science. He saw the perceptual world, and the things in it, as imperfect copies of the intelligible forms or ideas.
- **World of Ideas or Forms** where the universal, eternal objects of science live. Forms are the authentic reality out of which sensible things were just copied. These forms are unchangeable and perfect, and are only comprehensible by the use of the intellect or understanding (i.e., a capacity of the mind that does not include sense-perception or imagination).

DUALISTIC METAPHYSICS AND ONTOLOGY

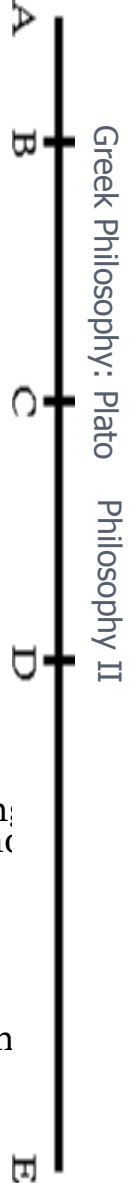
- In the *Republic* Books VI and VII, Plato uses a number of metaphors to explain his metaphysical views: the metaphor of the sun, the well-known allegory of the cave, and most explicitly, the divided line.
- Taken together, these metaphors convey a complex and, in places, difficult theory:
 - there is something called The Form of the Good (often interpreted as Plato's God),
 - which is the ultimate object of knowledge and which as it were sheds light on all the other forms (i.e., universals: abstract kinds and attributes)
 - and from which all other forms "emanate."
- The Form of the Good does this in somewhat the same way as the sun sheds light on or makes visible and "generates" things in the perceptual world.
- In the perceptual world the particular objects we see around us bear only a dim resemblance to the more ultimately real forms of Plato's intelligible world: it is as if we are seeing shadows of cut-out shapes on the walls of a cave, which are mere representations of the reality outside the cave, illuminated by the sun

CAVE'S MYTH

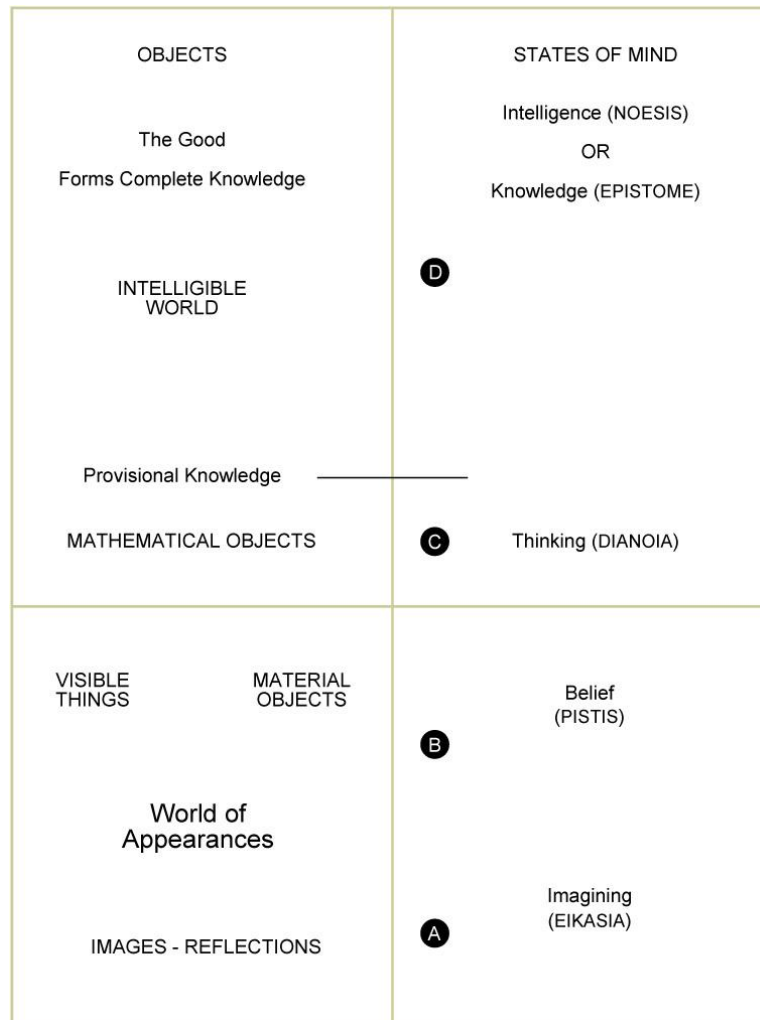


THE DIVIDED LINE

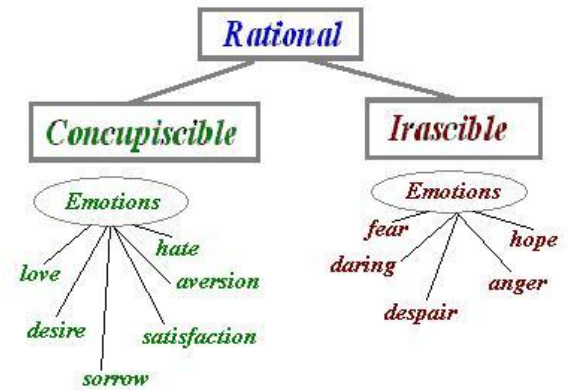
- Plato, in *The Republic* Book VI (509d-513e), uses the literary device of a divided line to teach his basic views about four levels of existence (especially "the intelligible" world of the forms, universals, and "the visible" world we see around us) and the corresponding ways we come to know what exists.
- We can imagine everything in the universe represented on a line of increasing reality;
 - It is divided once in the middle, and
 - then once again in each of the resulting parts.
- It is important to note that the line segments are said to be unequal: the proportions of their lengths is said to represent "their comparative clearness and obscurity" and their comparative "reality and truth," as well as whether we have knowledge or instead mere opinion of the objects. Hence, we are said to have relatively clear knowledge of something that is more real and "true" when we attend to ordinary perceptual objects like rocks and trees; by comparison, if we merely attend to their shadows and reflections, we have relatively obscure opinion of something not quite real.
- The first division represents that between the intelligible and the perceptual worlds.
- Then there is a corresponding division in each of these worlds:
 - the segment representing the perceptual world is divided into segments representing "real things" on the one hand,
 - and shadows, reflections, and representations on the other.
- Similarly, the segment representing the intelligible world is divided into segments
 - representing first principles and most general forms, on the one hand, and
 - more derivative, "reflected" forms, on the other.



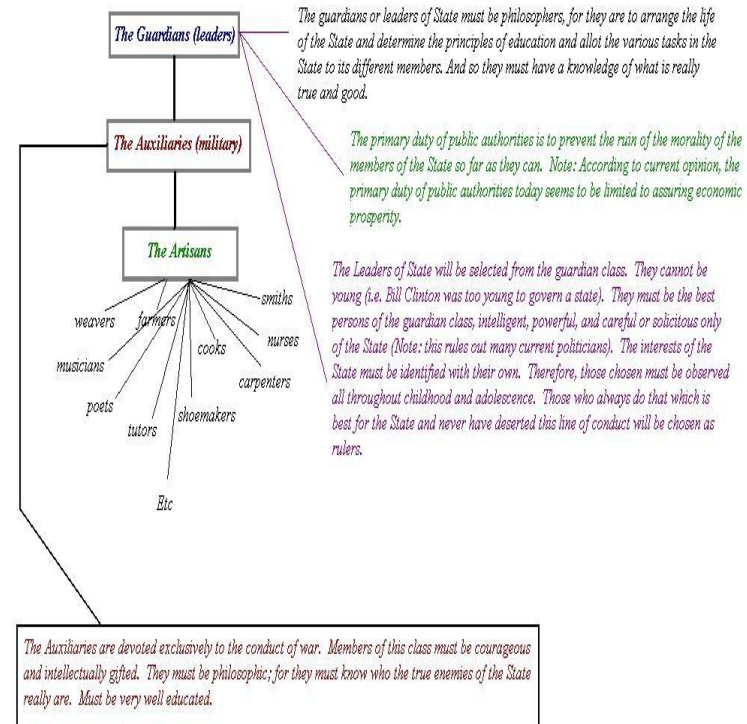
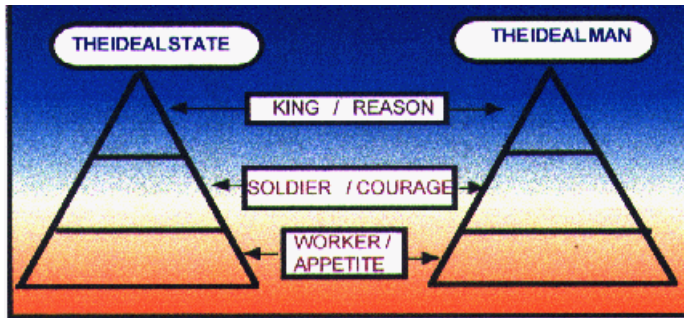
THE DIVIDED LINE.



PLATO'S ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHICS



PLATO'S POLITICAL THEORY



CONCLUSION

- “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929
- Plato's metaphysics, and particularly the dualism between the intelligible and the perceptual, would inspire later Neoplatonic thinkers (Plotinus and Gnosticism) and other metaphysical realists.
- Plato also had some influential opinions on the nature of knowledge and learning which he propounded in the *Meno*, which began with the question of whether virtue can be taught, and proceeded to expound the concepts of recollection, learning as the discovery of pre-existing knowledge, and right opinion, opinions which are correct but have no clear justification (see Platonic epistemology).
- In Plato's writings one finds debates concerning the best possible form of government, featuring adherents of aristocracy, democracy, monarchy, and others.
- A central theme is the one between nature and convention, concerning the role of heredity and environment in human intelligence and personality
- Problem of universal in Middle Age.