

Free book review on spiritual knowledge and truth and the highest form of knowled...

[Religion](#), [God](#)



As an Idealist, Plato's view of epistemology was hierarchical, and he drew a dividing line between various kinds of knowledge, with philosophical wisdom and Enlightenment (noesis) about the God, the immortal soul and the Perfect Forms being the highest kind, which only a few could obtain. In the actual dialogue, Plato-Socrates informs Glaucon that "there are two ruling powers, and that one of them is set over the intellectual world, the other over the visible", with one line that divides them into "unequal parts" and two more lines marking the subdivisions (Republic 6. 509d). He spends little time discussing shadows, reflections or knowledge obtained from the senses (pistis and eikasia) because none of this is particularly important to him. In the intellectual sphere, one subdivision concerns the understanding of abstract theories and hypotheses (dianoia), such as odd and even numbers, diameters, angles and geometric shapes, which are assumed to simply exist a priori, so that mathematicians "do not deign to give any account of them either to themselves or others; but they begin with them" (6. 510c) These cannot be perceived directly by the senses but only with the "eye of the mind" (6. 511a), but even so, these are but shadows and reflections of the Pure Forms and higher spiritual truths or "the first principle of the whole" (6. 511b). Both subdivisions of things and ideas therefore have their shadows and reflections, but materialist believe that mathematical and scientific theories are the highest form of knowledge, but they are not even aware of the eternal sphere of ideas and forms above it.

This highest Form of transcendental insight and wisdom was the type of knowledge that Plato expected his Guardians and philosopher kings to possess, while the slave-like masses of humanity would mostly remain like

blind mice, groping around in the darkened cave after shadows and reflections, possessing only a lower type of knowledge about the physical-material world. They assumed (wrongly) that knowledge came only through the senses rather than innate ideas in the mind and soul, but since they would be taking no part in governing the state, this limited information was good enough for their purposes (6. 511d). Mathematical and logical reasoning about arithmetic, geometry, lines, shapes and abstract scientific theory are also products of the intellect rather than the senses, but all this still ranks below eternal spiritual truths and The Form of the Good. Lowest of all on the scale are opinions and reflections about the physical world, which for Plato is merely temporary and transitory, just like physical bodies (6. 511e). Any type of practical information like this type is more suited to slaves, mechanics and artisans than rulers and philosophers.

For Plato, the masses of humanity were like blind fools and prisoners trapped in the dark cave, who simply confused the shadows and reflections with reality and were aware of nothing else except the physical world they perceived through the senses. They did not know about God, the immortal soul or the Perfect Forms and higher truths, and they were dominated by their lusts, passions and base desires rather than by reason. Because of this, most human beings would never even begin the long and arduous struggle to escape from the cave and attain true knowledge, because they had confused the shadows with reality. True philosophers, trained from childhood, would be able to free themselves from this prison of false consciousness, and their eternal minds and souls would then be masters over the body and physical-material desires. This is why they would also be

able to govern the entire society in the interests of all, rather than pursuing money, power, sex and material possessions like most people.

WORKS CITED

Grube, G. M. A. and C D. C. Reeve. *Plato's Republic*, 2nd Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992.