

Research paper on epistemological metaphysics of plato

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



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Epistemology relates to the pursuit of knowledge and science – it raises questions about the nature of knowledge, the way in which we acquire it, and how to verify that this knowledge is, indeed, true. Plato's thoughts on epistemology had a profound effect on his metaphysics, including the theory of Forms. According to Plato, the theory of Forms has a profound effect on how man interacts with the world around him. This manifests itself in gaining true knowledge through Forms to understand the nature of being, as well as possessing strong ethics, which leads to living together gracefully through politics. This unique through-line of knowledge forms the basis for Plato's philosophy of life and society.

1) A) According to Plato, Forms are necessary due to their ability to define reality through abstract ideas, and their ability to distinguish between objects in thought. A Form and a thought are different things; the idea of a horse is not the same as the Form of a specific horse. Objects can be separated into sensible and intelligible realms, both existing at once within each other. With a Form, there is a set of universal properties that are consistent throughout each object, and make it what it is. Plato believes that this brings order to objects and beings, and therefore makes them more real and beautiful.

Physics is the means by which the sensible can be explained, breaking down an object into its component parts; Plato had his problems with this method, as it dealt mostly with appearance, which can be subjective and opinion-based. Metaphysics, on the other hand, deals with why these objects are there in the first place, whether they are created by a prime-mover deity such as God, or if they create themselves. It combines both the tangible and

the eternal nature of objects, stating that the world is both static and dynamic at the same time. Through Plato's epistemology of Forms, he mysticizes the world and indicates that, despite the permanence and appearance of objects, there is a fixed origin and template for them.

While Plato believes that it is impossible to live in a world of ideal Forms, he still imagined this world where Forms were not corrupted by the real objects that were patterned from them. They are merely imitations; the actual Form eludes us in any real sense. The only real recourse is to consider the notion that sometimes these Forms inhabit the same space as their imperfect counterparts. There are both Forms and forms; one object is the Receptacle of Becoming, the physical shell, and the other is the soul that inhabits it. The soul is the mediator between intelligible and sensible; it links the imperfect object to its Form. The soul existed long before the actual object was created.

1)b) The Theory of Forms can be explained through the analogy of the divided line.

In it, the line moves from left to right, left being the Visible World, what is sensible and tangible by the many. The further right one travels, the more they move into the Intelligible World, the world of Forms, where the shapes and understanding of the physical world as seen by the unenlightened are found. Greater knowledge is found through enlightenment and a comprehension that the objects of the world have a greater metaphysical component to them that cannot be discovered through the human senses.

2)a) The Theory of Forms is particularly interesting and evocative when you consider Plato's application of these principles to Man. The third man

argument suggests that there must be three men at least to recognize the theory of Forms as it relates to mankind. The first is the Form of man, the template from which others can take their own shape; the second is the object of man, the imperfect, sensible being who exists as we understand it in the physical world; and the “third man” who witnesses this exchange and therefore recognizes and justifies it. This third man is tasked with explaining the relationship between man and its Form.

2)b) In this way, man and the state are quite similar, in that the state requires men to justify its existence; if no one noticed the state existing, it might as well not exist. The nature of man is varied depending on its specific sensible form; they are all derived from the same Form, but their virtues are quite different, creating differential participation in the state where some have more to contribute than others. Regardless of their level of contribution, this action is required by the application of ethics to human morality. Within the idea of ethics is the notion that, if a man can provide for others, he must do so for the good of society. Behaving justly and correctly is the cornerstone of an effectively functioning state; ideas like justice and courage help to facilitate this behavior.

2)c) Being virtuous and just in the state involves acting as your role requires. People are divided by Plato into rulers, guardians, and producers, with each successive class of man having less of a grasp on the Form of objects in the universe, and therefore a lesser understanding of the world. Rulers have the greatest amount of understanding of Forms, and producers the least; all of these different classes must work together in order to perform their unique functions to the best of their ability, creating a harmonious society. At the

same time, they must find happiness within these duties, which is discovered through virtue. The process by which to get all classes of man to behave ethically for the good of a society is known as politics.

3)b) When exploring Plato's political stance, it is important to understand his use of the 'allegory of the cave.' In it, he describes the philosopher as someone who is able to free themselves from seeing just the 'shadows' of reality, and can now see the true shapes of it. This ties back to his ideal of an aristocracy in society, wherein those same philosophers would go back to the cave in order to share the true Forms of reality and knowledge with those still in the cave (who do not understand that they only see shadows).

3)a) After all, individual men are quite different from the Form of men; there are only a select few who possess the knowledge and prescience to become rulers of others. These would be representative of the unenlightened followers of the philosopher-king, who allots for them parts to play in the society they live in. These decisions would be made rationally, because the rulers have the benefit of seeing true Forms, and therefore possess a greater understanding of the world around them. In this instance, the people can be happy knowing that their part is important to the overall whole of society, overseen intelligently by the philosopher-king.

This is in direct contrast with the idea of a democracy, where everyone in the cave, regardless of whether or not they had left it and seen the true Forms of reality, was able to dictate the rules of this society, and leaders are picked not by their knowledge and wisdom, but by their likeability and level of flattery towards the rest. Opinion rules this society and not knowledge. In

order to prevent this, according to Plato, aristocracy must be established to let the natural rulers gain power over those who need to be ruled.

In conclusion, Plato's theory of Forms extends through all stages of the basis for society. First, one must understand that there are Forms that determine the basic properties of all objects, including Man. Seeking that level of knowledge brings one to know a bit more about the reasons why we exist (metaphysics). Next, that Men need to behave and interact with each other in order to construct a fully functioning state consisting of a group of like-minded participants who will work toward the greater good. Finally, politics, particularly in an aristocracy, allow the rulers and those with greater knowledge of Forms and the universe to oversee those who understand less, granting greater wisdom to the whole as the state chugs along according to their design.