

Explain plato's theory of the forms essay sample



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Explain Plato's Theory of 'Forms'

Plato's theory of the forms can simply be described as metaphysical existences which are found in a different world from the physical world; the realm of forms. There is only one form of everything and it exists in this world of forms, everything else is just a copy. Ideas are perfect, the copies are imperfect. The forms themselves, according to Plato, are everlasting and eternal. For instance, the idea of beauty remains consistent and unchanging. Instead, the beauty we see in the physical world may be perceived and seen animals, colours or even humans in varying degrees of beauty; however these are just copies of the forms. Beauty is detected using the senses, but we can only have opinions and never true knowledge to what is beautiful. Using this concept, what is beautiful to one person may not be to another, leaving us unable to give a clear definition of beauty. Plato believed things in the physical world that we learn about using our senses are imperfect imitations of their ideal form. He believed we only recognise things for what they are because of our knowledge of their Forms, since we have never actually seen them in their true form, only copies of them. In his Analogy of the Cave, Plato argues that people are trapped by the illusory world of the senses, much like the prisoners trapped in the cave.

In the analogy, the Forms are the world beyond the shadows and we take these shadows to be reality, but are really only copies of the Forms. Plato believed that the real world is fact, invisible as it lies beyond our sense of sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. Plato also believed we have an understanding of forms from Birth. He supported this by saying how we know just by intuition, for example, what the Form of Beauty is, and we

automatically make judgements about different qualities of physical thing, such as women, by comparing them to our concepts. So he decided as we seem to have this intuition it must be because we experienced Forms before we were born which led him to the conclusion people must have immortal souls and lived in the realm of Forms before being born into the physical world. He ultimately believed that instead of being born empty slates empty of knowledge, we simply already possess this knowledge within our souls. According to Plato the Forms were related to each other in a hierarchy with the Form of the Good above these; the Form of the Good. The Form of the Good gives all the other Forms their value and purpose. For example Justice, Wisdom and Beauty are aspects of goodness.

However, Goodness is something we have never seen perfectly depicted but we recognise it because we understand how they correspond to our knowledge of the Form of the Good. For example, you may think you know what the Form for correct behaviour is, but the Form of the God reveals why you should behave in this way. In conclusion, the Forms are perfection, truth and reality. Compared to the world of senses which is imperfect, unreliable, and changing, the Forms are perfect, everlasting and unchanging. According to Plato, Knowledge of the Forms cannot be obtained by the senses, by opening our minds to the Realm of the Forms and eventually entering their world. Therefore, when you are aware of the Form of the Good you have achieved enlightenment and are able to truly understand the world's true form.

To what extent is it true to say that the forms teach us nothing about the physical world?

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