

# Theory of knowledge

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## A Dialogue between Platonist and Modern Philosopher

James and Plato discuss the metaphor of the "cave" by the lake Constance:

James: I think this is the most magnificent place in my 'cave'. I can't believe, there can be a more beautiful picture on the upper level.

Plato: You might be disappointed. The higher you go, the clearer the view, and not necessarily the more beautiful the picture.

James: As far as I understand the metaphor with a cave, its bottom tends to infinity. Assuming we are initially closer to the bottom, there is always long way to go. In my case, this is where I want to stop, I like the view, and I am not sure I'll find anything 'truer' for me, even if it's closer to the 'real' reality. Afterwards that's why we created religion.

Plato: You wanted to say discovered.

James: You mean it existed before the idea has entered our minds.

Plato: The idea is a keyword. We don't actually invent things. Everything has its idea - unperceived, initial, the thing in itself. There is an idea of a 'bookness' in contrast to a book, any book. A book as we see it, is limited by our visual sense, which is not perfect, the sound of turning pages is limited by our hearing sense, which is not perfect. Our overall appreciation of a book is far from reality, as we perceive it with our senses, which are not perfect. We can not rely on our senses, as the information about any object, becomes distorted, while being transformed into the images, into the terms in which we perceive reality by our senses. Our senses fool us. Our limited

imagination and knowledge fool us as well. We can not make our senses keener or enhance them drastically. But we can climb up, enhancing our knowledge.

James: But the book will always be a book.

Plato: And still your comprehension and appreciation of a book will improve. On the lowest level of perceiving a book, a child will play with it. Also on the lowest level people on the bottom of the cave will use it in the toilet, of ignorance and unawareness.

James: Are they evil then?

Plato: Yes they are. They are evil because they don't know. They are evil because of ignorance. People cannot be evil and do evil, unless they are not of their actions being evil, therefore should not be committed. Evil is ignorance and lack of knowledge in the strong sense.

James: But can't I just choose vice and be evil?

Plato: You are contradicting yourself. In this case you are not developed and aware enough, if you prefer vice to virtue. Any shift of your personality, however conscious towards evil, can be explained in terms of ignorance, unless you are going to apply sophism to prove the opposite.

James: Hmm... Let's come back to our 'bookness'. You say that the more I improve, the faster I approach the idea of 'bookness' free from any subjective distortion. But, I can never reach my final goal, perceiving the book as it is.

Plato: You cannot do it by experience, as your senses fool you. But you can try to do it empirically, applying mathematics and logic.

James: To grasp the idea of 'bookness' applying logic? Firstly your brain is not perfect as well. Secondly how can you say that my way up is infinite, if I already know the finite destination, which is perceiving things as they are, regardless of me perceiving them?

Plato: I said you can try, and by trying you improve, become aware, good and true. And I didn't say your way up is infinite, I just stated you could never attain the idea of 'bookness'. However perfect you are to grasp the idea, you should perceive it and when it's perceived, it's already subjective. And so, ideas of things exist absolutely separately from our appreciation of them.

James: And not a single thing can exist without its idea.

Plato: Not even one.

James: So do you agree that during some period of history and evolution of humanity there were no books. Meaning that there were no objects people would have described as books or have called books. There were no objects having the same physical characteristics and functions. There was no object which could have been defined by a human perception as a book, as it is defined a book throughout the period in history of humanity where there is an object called a book?

Plato: Yes, go on.

James: By that period, does the idea exist of a book?

Plato: Yes, there is always the idea.

James: But it could have happened, that humanity never would have attained the idea of writing books, you would not argue that it could have been possible, as the process of arriving at certain knowledge is rather chaotic. Okay, book cannot exist without 'bookness', but how can 'bookness' exist without a book? Had the ape not evolved into human, would there still be the idea of "humanness"? Is there already the idea, of what we will be in future, and what we will use in future?

Plato: I am happy you have asked that question. The answer is: yes. The point is that 'bookness' exists independent from time. Time is what people call their perception of changing reality. We can feel time - perceive it. We can not attain the idea of time empirically. Experience does not count. Experience is subjective. As I said, we can never invent, we can attain, discover. All this infinite number of 'booknesses', 'chickennesses', whatever, already exists, in other time, in other space perhaps. And whether we attain them and insert them to our world of perceptions rests on us and on the chaotic connections, causations and associations of events.

James: Yes, I think it makes sense. However, I have another question. Shouldn't we define the idea of 'bookness' from the idea of 'wateriness', for example. The latter was subjectivised in the world long before humans, which can be proved empirically. By whom, then, was it subjectivised? Or had everything existed as ideas, before humans came and started perceiving things, making them subjective?

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Plato: Hmm... Yes, you are on to something... I need to think this through.

James: Me too. See you around. Some other time, some other place.

Authors' note:

All characters of the play are fiction. Any resemblance with the names of real individuals is a mere coincidence.