



Ancient Greek Philosophy: Plato



The influence of Socrates:

Socrates was greatly admired by Plato. Socrates never wrote any of his work down. Plato, however, wrote a series of dialogues, the most famous of which is called The Republic. The dialogues put across philosophical ideas through conversation. Socrates appeared in many of Plato's dialogues. It is thought that in his early dialogues the character of Socrates actually shows us what Socrates thought. **Socrates was sentenced to death for "corrupting the youth".**



Plato and the Soul:

Plato was a DUALIST. This meant he believed body and soul were different entities. He also believed that the soul was **IMMORTAL**, meaning it was endless. It cannot stop existing or be destroyed. The soul, according to Plato, is **ETERNAL**. Meaning it always has and always will exist.



Plato believed in to separate realms/ worlds:	
Realm of Appearances	Realm of Forms
This realm contains MATERIAL BEINGS . Humans, cats, dogs, worms etc. 	This realm contains SOULS or spiritual essences. No material beings. 
Things in this world CHANGE . People grown and die. Trees grow. Dead things rot. These things are CONTINGENT - they didn't always exist, they rely on something else to exist and will stop existing.	This realm is UNCHANGING and PERMANENT . 
Supported by Heraclitus: "You can never step in the same river twice". 	This realm is TRANSCENDENT . It is beyond human understanding. 

Doctrine of the Forms:

In the Realm of Forms exists a true or perfect form of everything. EG. A form of beauty. A **FORM** is unchanging. It is not a physical thing, but a **CONCEPT** or idea. It is the eternal idea of what a thing is. Our soul originally existed in the Realm of Forms (how it got to our body is never really explained). We have some recollection of the forms and that is why we are able to recognise beauty...and cats. We have **A PRIORI** knowledge of these forms. We can recollect these forms without experience. Although only vaguely.

In the realm of appearances there are imitations, shadows and imperfect images of the forms which we experience using our senses. You may also refer to these as the 'PHENOMENA'. Experiencing something with your senses is called **EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**. (Knowledge gained through our 5 senses). Knowledge gained from experience is called **A POSTERIORI**. So what we experience in the Realm of Appearances is like when you look into some water and see a very blurry image being reflected. You know what is is, but the image is far from perfect.



The Form of the Good:

All the forms are related and are in a hierarchy (order of value). At the top is the Form of the Good. The most important form is the Form of the Good and this forms gives value to all other forms. Justice, wisdom, honesty and courage etc. are all aspects of good. True knowledge = knowledge of the good, and this is what philosophers seek. Ignorance causes immorality. If someone knows what good is and what bad is, they will choose good.



Strength	Weakness
Shows that there is MORE TO REALITY than that which we observe.	Is the Realm of Forms really "more real"? Stubbed toe example or Scientific discovery. No practical use to forms. Are we really happy to accept there is a perfect form of cat, dog, and computer mouse? Reductio ad absurdum.
	Many people would argue that people who do wrong know that their action is wrong but do it anyway.
	Use of empirical evidence cannot prove the existence of the Realm of Forms.
	People's idea of perfection changes.

The Cave Analogy: aim- to help us understand our position in the realm/ world of appearances and the importance of gaining an understanding of the truth

Analogy	Understanding
In an underground cave prisoners have been kept chained there, their whole life. They are chained with their backs to a wall and their heads facing forward.	These prisoners are living in the Realm of Appearances. They are trapped by the chains and are unaware of reality. They symbolise humans who are imprisoned in the physical world of appearances, who cannot see the forms.
Behind the prisoners is a road. People walk along the road carrying various models and statues. The fire casts a shadow of the models on the wall the prisoners face. The prisoners know no reality other than these shadows.	The models could be seen as the Forms of which the prisoners can only see a very weak imitation of. Just as we see imitations of the true forms.
A prisoner is then released. When he turns around he sees the fire and the models. The fire will hurt his eyes and he won't recognise any of the objects being carried. He will think the shadows are more real. However, his eyes will become accustomed to the fire and his understanding of the models will improve.	The fire represents the sun which illuminates the world we live in. It gives light to the world. The pain and confusion he is experiencing represents the pain we feel when we begin to question the world around, realising we may have been wrong.
The prisoner is then forced from the cave- he doesn't want to leave. The sun dazzles him, once again he is in pain and can't see clearly. The longer the prisoner is outside the cave the more he is able to understand, learn about his surroundings. His wisdom grows. He realises that the sun is illuminating the world, helping him gain new knowledge. The sun also supports all life and the seasons.	The forced exit from the cave and the pain represent his struggles with have new views and understandings forced on him, challenging his view of reality. The prisoner is now in the Realm of the Forms. The sun- which lights up his new world and allows him to understanding the true Forms is the Form of the Good. Without the sun we cannot survive and without the form of the good we cannot understand the other forms.
Whilst the prisoner does not want to leave this world of new understanding, he feels he must go and educate the prisoners still in the cave. However, the prisoners are very hostile to the suggestion they should leave the cave. They are so reluctant they are willing to kill the freed prisoner if he tries to lead them out the cave.	This represents the hostility faced by philosophers when trying to enlighten others about the truth. More specifically it represents Socrates who was killed for 'corrupting the youth'; with his ideas and philosophy

Positive	Negative
It parallels real life. <u>Robin Waterfield</u> comments how the prisoner could be drawn back to the shadows, like we are drawn back to our traditions and cultures because it is where we feel comfortable.	"It fails to illustrate the attractiveness of the physical world; the scene inside the gloomy cave hardly represents the delights of the senses." <u>Mel Thompson</u>
It encourages us not to accept things at face value.	It can be interpreted many ways, making it unclear.
Provides clear imagery to help illustrate the Doctrine of the Forms.	It implies that our senses are useless- yet we have survived for a very long time using them.
	Plato tries to make his analogy out to actually be a fact of how we live our lives, rather than a hypothetical situation. The jump to a real life situation isn't really there.