

# Plato's Divided line

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## The Divided Line

One way the theory of knowledge is explained is through a diagram called the divided line, this diagram is presented by a Greek philosopher named Plato in the book “Book VI of the republic” (Section 509 to the end). The diagram begins with a simple vertical line that is divided into four segments each segment from the bottom up ranks from the lowest level of knowledge to the highest level of knowledge, Sections A, B, C, and D. Plato divides sections A and B from C and D, and A and B are in a group called the visible realm, while C and D are in a group called the intelligible realm, this division and grouping is Explained in the book “From Socrates to Sartre: The philosophical quest. By T.Z. Lavine”. Starting with section A which is the lowest form of knowledge is your imagination, that of which is the images of bodies. One of the reasons why Plato considers this as the lowest level of knowledge is because he believes that it is where mental activity is at its lowest point, therefore that with each section there is an increase in mental activity.

The images of bodies (Section A) are as follows, poetry, paintings, optical illusions, reflections, dreams, shadows, etc. Plato sees these things as only shadows; a copy of what is actually real, while the actual objects are known by perception which is a higher level of knowledge that is Section B of the divided line. Plato describes this next level of knowledge as belief which applies to the perception of actual objects that of which is considered as follows, plants, tools, animals and any other three dimensional visible objects. Plato describes these three dimensional objects as having continues change, therefore how can we know the true knowledge

of them? which means our perception of them is opinion but it is true opinion sense it is a prediction, making the level of imagining (Section A) a false opinion.

This higher level of knowledge (Section B) makes the level of knowledge under it (Section A) more intelligible. This symphony of the higher sections making the ones before it more intelligible will apply for all sections of the divided line (A, B, C and D). Now that we covered Plato's thinking of the visible realm of imagination (Section A) and belief (Section B) we move onto the intelligible realm starting with Section C which is the understanding and or thought of abstract, unchanging and universal concepts such as numbers, shapes, geometry and other mathematical sciences. Plato believes these forms or ideas are the true concept/knowledge. For that they are immutable, unchanging, unchangeable and real; such as angles of a triangle.

The angle of a triangle is not relative to the visible realm (Sections A and B) thus making Section A and Section B more intelligible for that geometry does not prove that the angle of a triangle actually exists but rather it just assumes in order to prove theory's and with this we move onto section D. Section D is reason, on this level of knowledge the mental activity is at its full potential for that the mind uses the methods of dialectic which is to take a hypothesis and move it towards a first principle (the fundamental concepts or assumptions of which a theory, system or method is based).

Dialectic takes a hypothesis which have been formed by lower sciences that have treated them as first principles such as sections A and B of the divided line and or other natural sciences/world images and contemplates, investigates and debates these hypotheses by philosophers and then it is placed in their own group which then it gets into the category of a first principle therefore turns into the form of the good. a first principle of science needs a foundation for that

particular area and ground all other principles of sciences the rest of the elements are producing theories from the first principle of science.

This method of analyzing the forms is one of the greatest achievements of Plato for that it establishes true first principles for mathematics and the sciences without deploying diagrams or anything from the visible world, Plato uses dialectic coordinates that forms and unifies fragmentary isolated unrelated sciences and mathematics into one whole. With dialectic; Plato not only establishes the truth of these forms but forms it into a single order of truth and value. Plato then compares the idea of the good to the sun in order to give a visible example that the sun is the source of life and growth meanwhile the idea of the good gives truth which makes the forms intelligible. Dialectic identifies a variety of forms such as love, beauty fruit, animals and even justice.

To recap, Section A which is the images of bodies that are none physical but rather are used by our imagination and section B that is of the physical bodies that are visible three dimensional objects and with both sections together we have the visible realm which is subject to change. With section C of thought we have mathematical sciences that are unchanging and unchangeable; along with section D that explains forms themselves by themselves and the sciences of dialectic, and with these two sections together we have the intelligible realm which all together creates a diagram (The divided line) for the theory of knowledge. Plato also illustrates his dualistic theory called the allegory of the cave which is a hypothetical event of humans being chained up by their hands and feet in a cave sense the day there were born, they also cannot see one another or any other actual being. The only thing they can see is the what the light of the sun hits from behind; shadows of animals, other humans, trees, birds and other objects of being that are portrayed by the shadows.

These objects of beings (not the shadows) directly correlate to section B of the divided line which is that of physical bodies which we see in the visible world. These chained up humans have only seen shadows from within the cave and those shadows have become their only source of seeing what is real rather than the objects or beings themselves. Therefore, the non-three dimensional shadows have become their only thought of what is an actual being. Plato then mentions that if the humans would break away from their chains and exit the cave, they would see beings of what they truly are but have a very difficult time adjusting to what is real (three dimensional objects) and what is not, such as the shadows that they are so accustomed to. This is one of the reasons why Plato devalues paintings, poetry, reflections and any other images of bodies (Section A of the divided line) as true knowledge, to explain further; Plato also views politicians the same way for that they give false information and clever images rather than the truth, therefore Plato defines them as artists of manipulation much like the cave itself which only shows distorted images (the shadows) of actual beings or objects (anything three dimensional).

Plato believes that any human (prisoner) from the cave that escapes to the outside world and recovers from the distorted images that he/she is accustomed to, has reached the requirement for becoming a philosopher king of society, for that they have reached superior intelligence of what is actually true despite the fact that they have lived in a world of illusions their whole life which they considered real until they slowly reached enlightenment of true knowledge with the help of actual physical bodies, the sun and their own wisdom. Plato believes that not everyone from the cave is capable of reaching the enlightenment of true knowledge, for that they would become too angry and stubborn to have an open mind after seeing the real world and they would choose to only believe in their accustomed shadow-world.

Bibliography

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