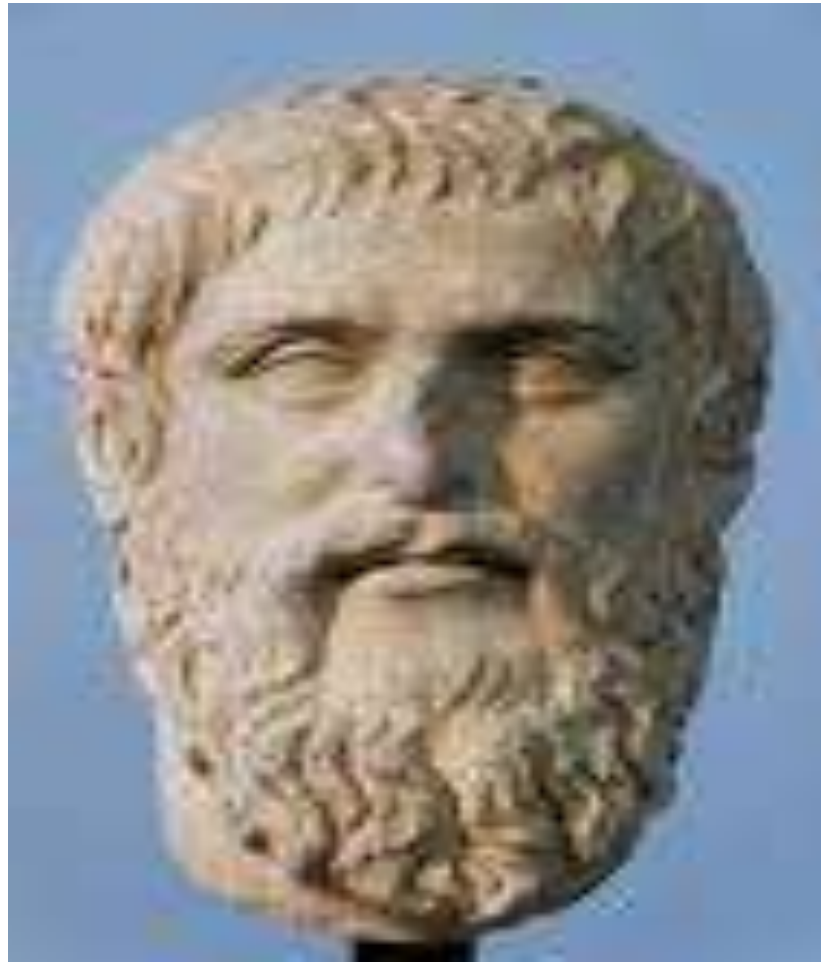


HS 109

Plato: *Allegory of the Cave* & Theory of Ideas or Forms



About Plato

- 427-347 BCE
- Son of wealthy and influential Athenians
- Student of Socrates & studied with Socrates
- Most of his writings are dialogues with Socrates
- In 386 BCE, founded his own school of philosophy, the 'Academy'
- Aristotle was a student at his 'Academy' in Athens

Plato's Philosophies

- Plato wanted students to become independent thinkers (think for themselves).
- The only good life or life worth living is a life reasoned by your own mind, not other's ideas and opinions; change your life and mind!
- Examine your life, history, and ideas, once you self examine, then you are ready for knowledge.
- All knowledge begins in not knowing. To state 'I don't know' is the first step – open to learning.

Plato's Philosophies

- Human life always involves our fellow man and our personal and societal destiny.
- Philosophy is not specialized nor technical but a way of life, requiring intellectual ability and moral goodness to pursue the good and truth.
- Society is our ultimate teacher, and it may produce errors and evils, as well as wrong values. Previous generation may have been wrong and transmitted bad ideas and practices.

Plato's Writings

- 35 Dialogues
- Republic
- Plato's writings are on concept of reality and knowledge.
- World of Ideas, Forms and Rationalism
- Justice, Equality, Love, Beauty, Good, Democracy and many immortal ideas
- Plato claimed that knowledge gained through the senses is no more than opinion and that, in order to gain real knowledge, we must gain it through philosophical reasoning.

Plato's Method

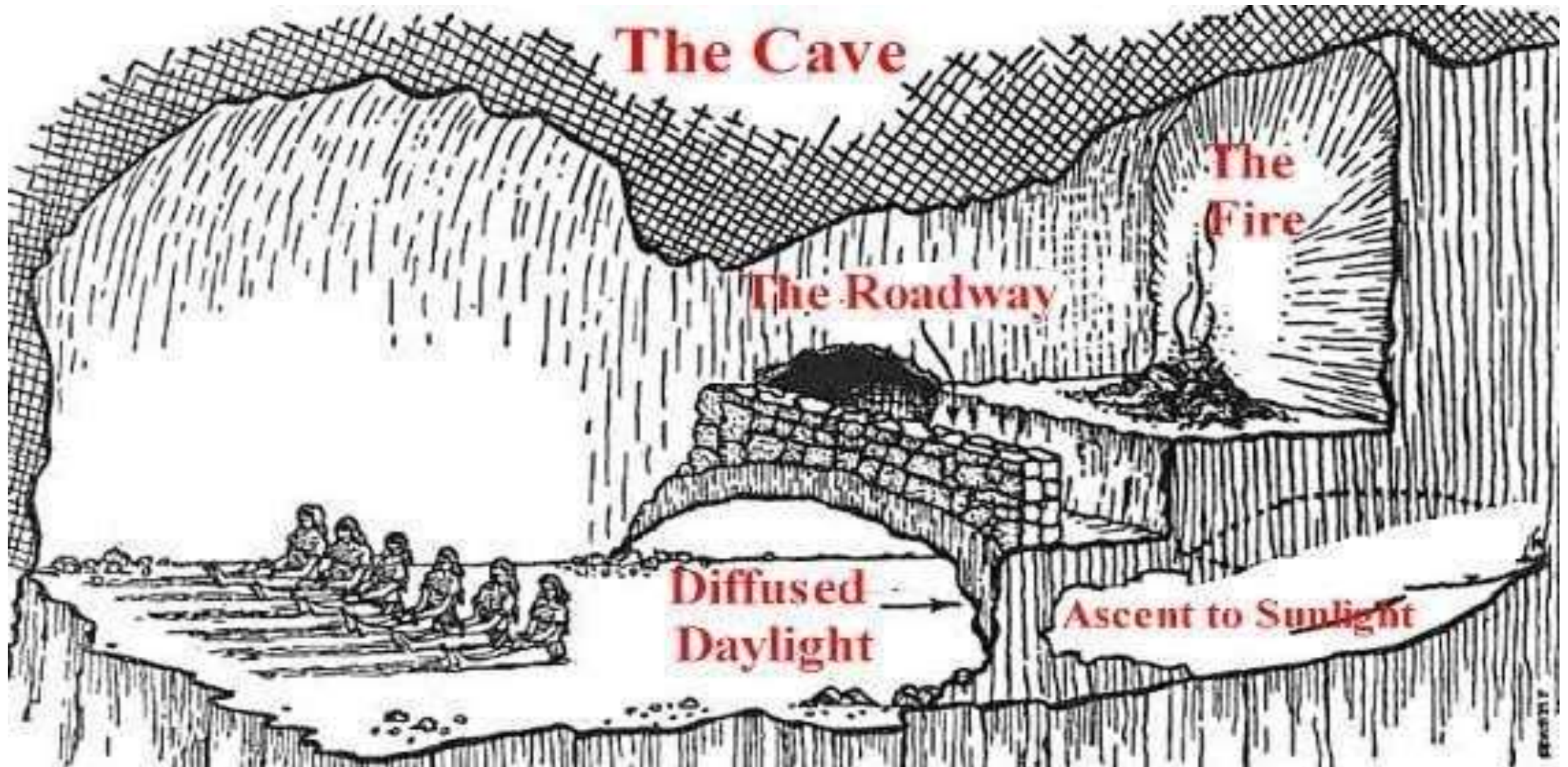
- Plato used the dialogue form of writing...
- It was not Plato's intention to answer specific question or to propose final and dogmatic solutions to any of the problems that were being discussed.
- Plato preferred instead to do something that would stimulate original thinking on the part of the reader.
- Plato to present contrasting points of views as they would likely occur in a series of conversations taking place among individuals having different points of view.
- By using conversational method (dialogue), it would be possible to illustrate ways in which current issues of the day were related to one another.
- This is one of the reasons why none of Plato's dialogues are devoted exclusively to the discussion of a single topic. Plato wanted to make it clear that in order to understand any particular subject, you must see how it is related to other subjects and to the field of knowledge as a whole.

What is allegory of the cave?

- From Book 7 of the *Republic*
- An allegory is a metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself.
- Dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon
- The fundamental meaning has moral, societal, religious, political significance are often embodiments of abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy. Therefore, an allegory is a story with two meanings: literal and symbolic.

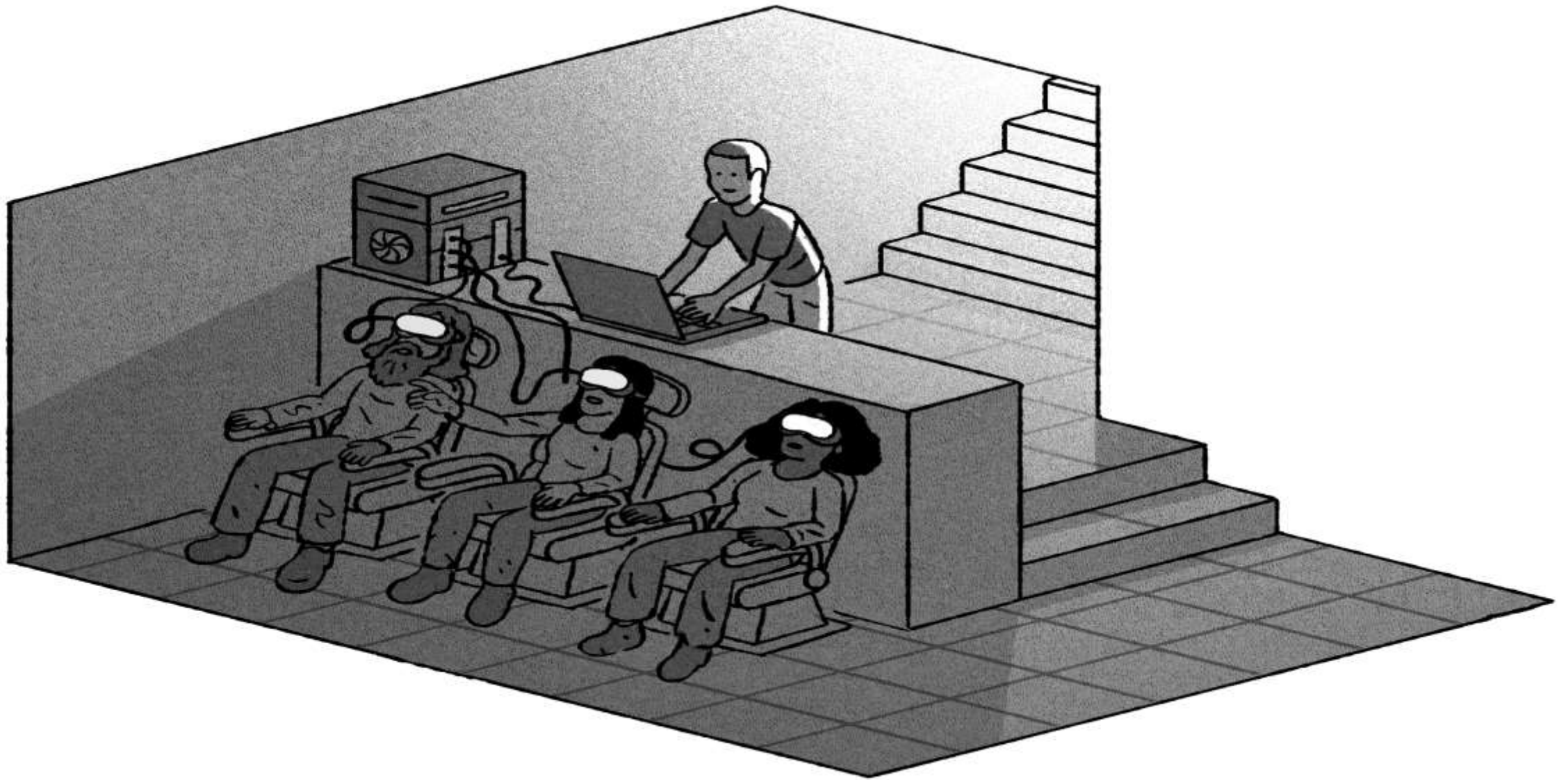
What is allegory of the cave?

- Through the story we come to learn that to explain sensible particulars we must take recourse to universals or forms. The stages in the story of the persons in the cave correspond to stages in their learning about the nature of reality or being.
- They go from thinking that sensible particulars are the most real beings to realizing that the Forms are the most real.
- The cave itself represents the visible world, the common-sense world of sensible particulars in space and time, while what is outside the cave represent the invisible world of the Forms.



Imagine a cave in which prisoners are chained and seated so that they all face one way, towards wall

- Persons are in the rear of the cave, bound, and can only see shadows projected against a wall by a fire.
- Persons are then unbound, turned toward the fire in the cave, and can see the figures projecting shadows. Persons are then dragged out of the cave.
- They are dazzled by the sunlight and can only first see shadows. But then are able to see things-themselves and the heavens.
- Persons can then perceive the Sun itself, the source of all light.



- David Chalmers

I.Question?

What would happen if one of the prisoners was unchained, forced to stand up, turn around, and walk with eyes lifted up toward the light of the fire?

- All of his movements would be exceedingly painful
- Would the objects being carried be less meaningful than the shadows seen before?
- Would his eyes ache from looking at the light of the fire?
- He undoubtedly would return to the things he could see with clarity and without pain, convinced that the shadows were clearer than the objects he was forced to look at in the firelight

II.Question?

What if the prisoner could not turn back and was dragged forcibly to the mouth of the cave and released only after he had been brought out into the sunlight?

- The sunlight would be so painful on his eyes that he would be unable to see any of things he was now told were real
- It would take time for his eyes to become accustomed to the world outside the cave
- Would at first recognize some shadows
- Would next see reflections of things in water
- In time, he would see things themselves
- Next, he would see heavenly bodies at night
- Finally, the sun

Prisoner's Conclusion

- The sun is what makes things visible
- It is the sun too that accounts for the seasons and is the cause of life in the spring
- Shadows and reflections differ from things as they are in the visible world
- Without the sun there would be no visible world

III.Question?

How would such a person feel about his previous life in the cave?

- He would recall what he and his fellow prisoners took to be wisdom, how they had a practice of honoring and commending each other (i.e. prizes for the sharpest eye, best memory, etc.)
- Would the released prisoner still think that such prizes were worth having?
- Would he envy those who received honors in the cave?
- Instead of envy, would he have only sorrow and pity for them?

IV. Question?

What if the released prisoner went back to his former seat in the cave?

- He would have trouble distinguishing the shadows on the wall
- Those who had their permanent residence in the cave would win every round of competition with him
- Those in the cave would find this very amusing and would taunt him saying that his sight was perfectly fine before and was now ruined
- They would argue that it was not worth going out of the cave

The Metaphor

- The cave and the blurred world of the shadows = ignorance
- The bright world of light = knowledge

Education

- It is the function of education to lead people out of the cave into the world of light
- Education is not simply a matter of putting knowledge into a person's soul that does not possess it, any more than vision is putting sight into blind eyes. Knowledge, like vision, requires an organ capable of receiving it
- Education is a matter of *conversion*, a complete turning around from the world of appearance to the world of reality
- However, even the “noblest natures” do not always want to look that way, and so Plato says that the rulers must “bring compulsion to bear” upon them to ascend upward from darkness to light
- In addition, when those who have been liberated from the cave achieve the highest knowledge, they must not be allowed to remain in the higher world of contemplation, but must be made to come back down into the cave and take part in the life and labors of the prisoners

- ...the philosopher is for Plato as much a political agent as a prophet, conducting the sight of the community up to the light of the sun of ideas...
- In this rule of the one of justice over the many of freedom, Plato set his city against what he saw as the ugly and inevitable consequences of democratic pluralism.
- Revolutionary implications of the allegory of the cave and the hierarchy of knowledge illustrated in the doctrine of the divided line.

The Divided Line...

Metaphysical Realm	Visible Realm (opinion) The Cave		Invisible Realm (Knowledge) Outside the Cave	
Mental State	Imagination	Belief	Thinking (Reasoning from the premises to the conclusion)	Knowledge (grasp through dialectics)
Object	Images	Visible things	Mathematical objects	Forms

Example of a Triangle

- **Image**: An equilateral triangle that is part of a painting of a real building that has a triangle as part of its cornice.
- **Visible thing**: The particular equilateral triangle as part of the cornice of the building.
- **Lower form**: Definition of the type of triangle it is, equilateral, a plane figure where all three sides and angles have the same length.
- **Higher form**: The definition of a triangle in general, a plane figure with three angles and three sides. This gives the Form for all types and particular triangles, including the equilateral triangle.

How to Explain?

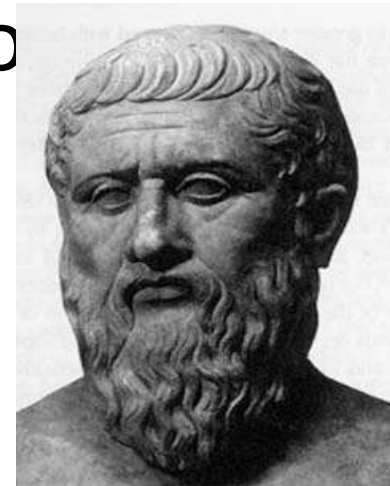
- The image – visible.
- knowing its form.
- To know the form from particular kind.
- The form is more general, universal and abstract.

Theory of Ideas or Forms

Theory of Forms or Ideas

- The theory is taken up in Book X of *The Republic*, is discussed in the *Phaedo*, taken apart in the *Parmenides*, and revisited in two later dialogues, the *Timaeus* and *Laws*.
- What is Forms/Ideas?
 - The theory of forms or theory of ideas is a philosophical theory, or world view, that the physical world is not as real or true as absolute unchanging ideas.
 - Plato's theory of Forms or theory of Ideas asserts that non-material abstract forms (or ideas), and not the material world of change known to us through sensation, possess the highest and most fundamental kind of reality.
- What is truly real?

- Plato –states that everything that is intelligible (universal) has an essential form...meaning, anything intelligible will have an essential quality that renders it intelligible or universal...
- Therefore, to accept the principle “Each being is WHAT it is” is to say that each being (intelligible/universal) thing is in its essential form...
- The WHAT of a thing bears upon the *quality* of a thing...its *kind, type, nature...its* essence or essential form
- Plato employed 4 concepts to help identify a “things” essential quality...



Universal Qualities

- The 4 terms to help explain a “things” essential *quality*...
 - **Eidos**: a things common idea or form.
 - **Genos**: kind or type, as in “the kind or type of thing it is”.
 - **Physis**: a things nature or its natural state/qualities.
 - **Ousia**: a things essence or being...what is it essentially – its force of necessity.

- Ideas: Particular and Universal

Arguments

- Perception: Blueness, Treeness, etc.
- Perfection

The problem of the One and the Many

- There are many human beings in this classroom, but they are all human.
- What makes us different?
- What makes us similar?



There are many particular trees, i.e., oak, maple, palm, apple, orange, etc., and they all look different. And yet they all have one quality in common: each one is still a tree!



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- Plato saw that many particular things can belong to one and the same species, or have one and the same nature, kind, type, essence. If they all belong to one and the same thing, then they must have a universal quality.
 - Questions
- Are all particular individuals in this classroom really one at some level? Is oneness a reality?
- Is there one quality that all humans hold in common?
- Or, is oneness just an appearance that results from language?
- For example: we just call every individual “human”, but outside the mind is there no real oneness or sameness.

Questions?

- Can we accept his theory of the immaterial forms?
- Should we be comfortable with his political arrangements?

Thank you