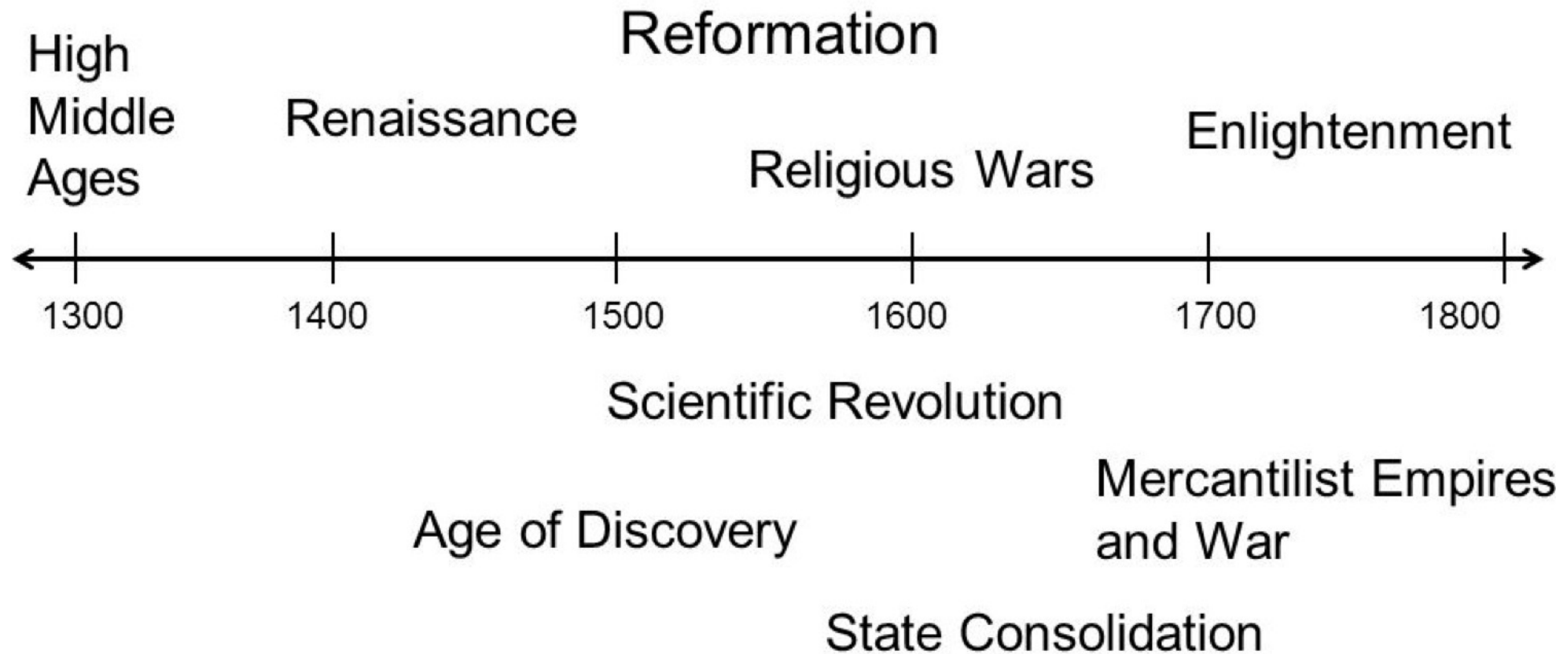


Lecture 1

Plato

GFN1000 In Dialogue with Nature

Intellectual History



Content

- Socrates
 - The Person
 - The Socratic Dialectic
- Plato
 - The Republic
- The Allegory of the Cave
 - Two Realms
 - Education and The Soul's Ascent
 - Platonic Philosophy



Socrates

- Socrates is the **main interlocutor** in Plato's dialogues.
- Socrates compares himself to a **midwife** and his method of dialectical questioning to the midwife's art of delivery.
- Socratic **ignorance**: "I know that I know nothing."
- Charged guilty in 399 BCE for impiety and corrupting youth; ordered by Athenian court to commit suicide



Jacques-Louis David - The Death of Socrates

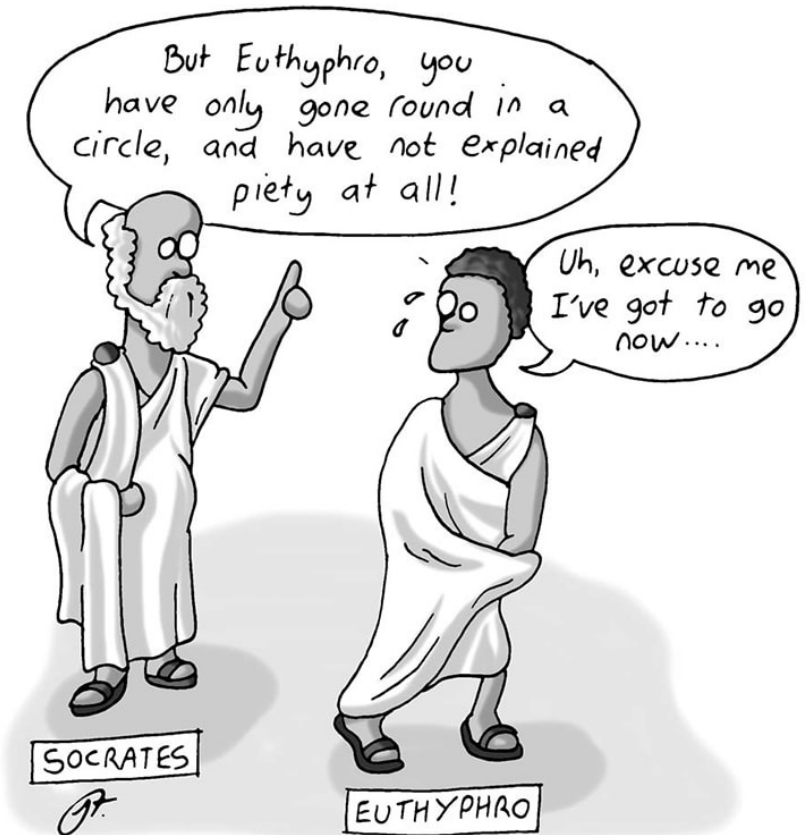
Socratic Dialogue

- Plato wrote dialogues – They are philosophical discussions or debates rather than literary dramas.
- The choice of **dialectic** over **rhetoric**
 - Philosophers vs. sophists
 - Plato invites the reader to join the conversation.



Socratic Dialectic

- An image of philosophical **education**: Philosophy happens in conversation.
- The Socratic method: The back-and-forth debate between opposing sides will help people change or refine their views in response to Socrates' challenges and come to adopt more sophisticated views.
- The dialogue genre gives rise to a philosophical approach called **dialectic**.



Plato (427-347 BCE)

- After Socrates' execution, Plato left Athens in disgust and traveled widely.
- Lure of Syracuse: Plato tried unsuccessfully to reform the rule of the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius II three times.
- He founded a school of philosophy in Athens known as the Academy.



Plato's Work

- Plato made foundational contributions in many areas of philosophy, including ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, political philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of religion and language.
 - Alfred North Whitehead: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." (Process and Reality, pp.39)
- "What is piety? (*Euthyphro*)
 - "What is virtue?" (*Meno*)
 - "What is meaning?" (*Sophist*)
 - "What is love?" (*Symposium*)
 - "What is justice?" (*Republic*)

Republic

- *Politeia* (Greek: constitution)
 - Not limited to political institutions, e.g. executive, legislature, judiciary
 - Comprises entire way of life; includes education, culture (poetry, music)
- The primary quarry pursued through the ten books of the dialogue is the nature of justice.
- Numerous other topics receive philosophical attention, including aesthetics and education.



Content of the Republic

- Book I: Introduction. “**What is justice?**” Thrasymachus: Justice as the advantage of the stronger
- Book II: Glaucon requests Socrates for an analysis of justice
- Books II-IV Definition of a **just city** and a just individual character
- Books V-VII Organization of the ideal city, in charge of the **philosopher king**
- Books VIII-IX Injustice (degenerate types of constitution: timocracy/honor, oligarchy/money, democracy/the people, tyranny or despotism/individual caprice)
- Book X: Conclusions. Advantages of justice over injustice

Allegory of the Cave

- In The Republic, Plato explains the route to knowledge and the responsibilities of philosophers through an allegory about **prisoners** in a cave.
- For Plato, the philosopher has a duty to **enlighten** the uneducated. The key is to show the real causes of the phenomena that are sensed by the unenlightened.



Plato's Two Realms

World of Senses

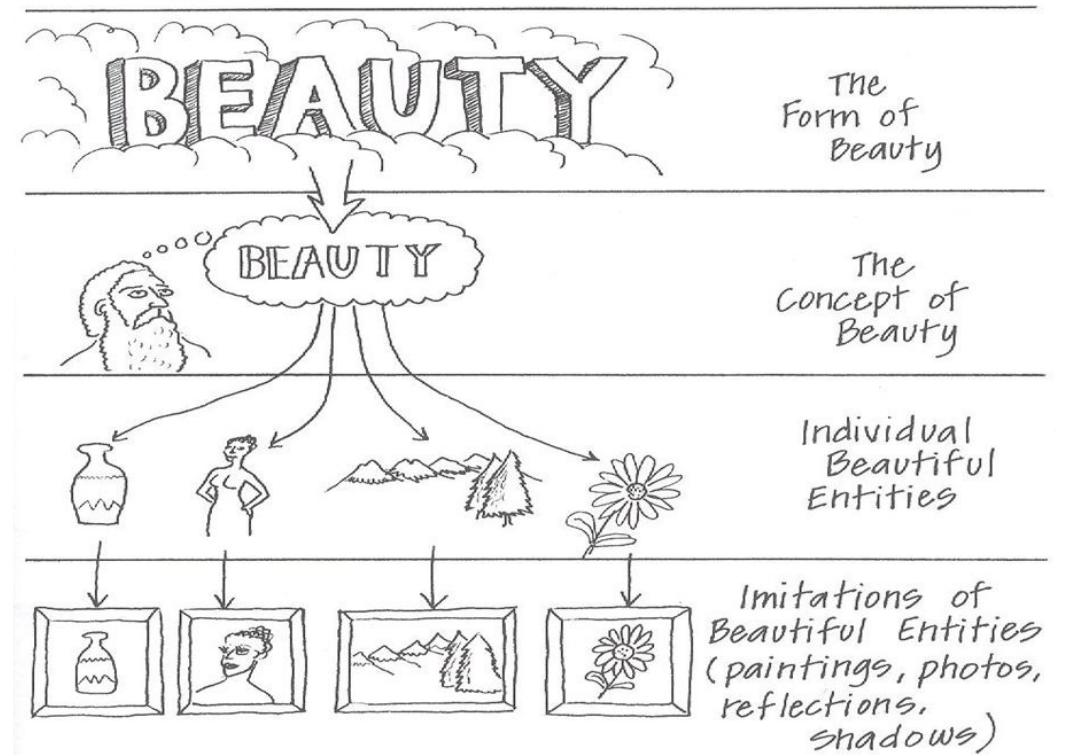
- Accessed through **senses**
- **Material**
- **Changing**
- **Imperfect**
- Not really real (only a **copy**)
- Does not allow for knowledge but only opinion

World of Forms/Ideas

- Accessed through **reason** (*logos*)
- **Immaterial**
- **Eternal** and never changing
- **Perfect** and real
- Give **reality** to things in the sensible world
- Allows for knowledge

Platonic Forms

- For every physical object, there is a perfect idea (ιδεα) of that object. Forms are independently existing entities.
- Opinions (δόξα): beliefs unrelated to reason
- The changing, temporal, tangible world instantiates the forms that are invisible, eternal, and unchanging.

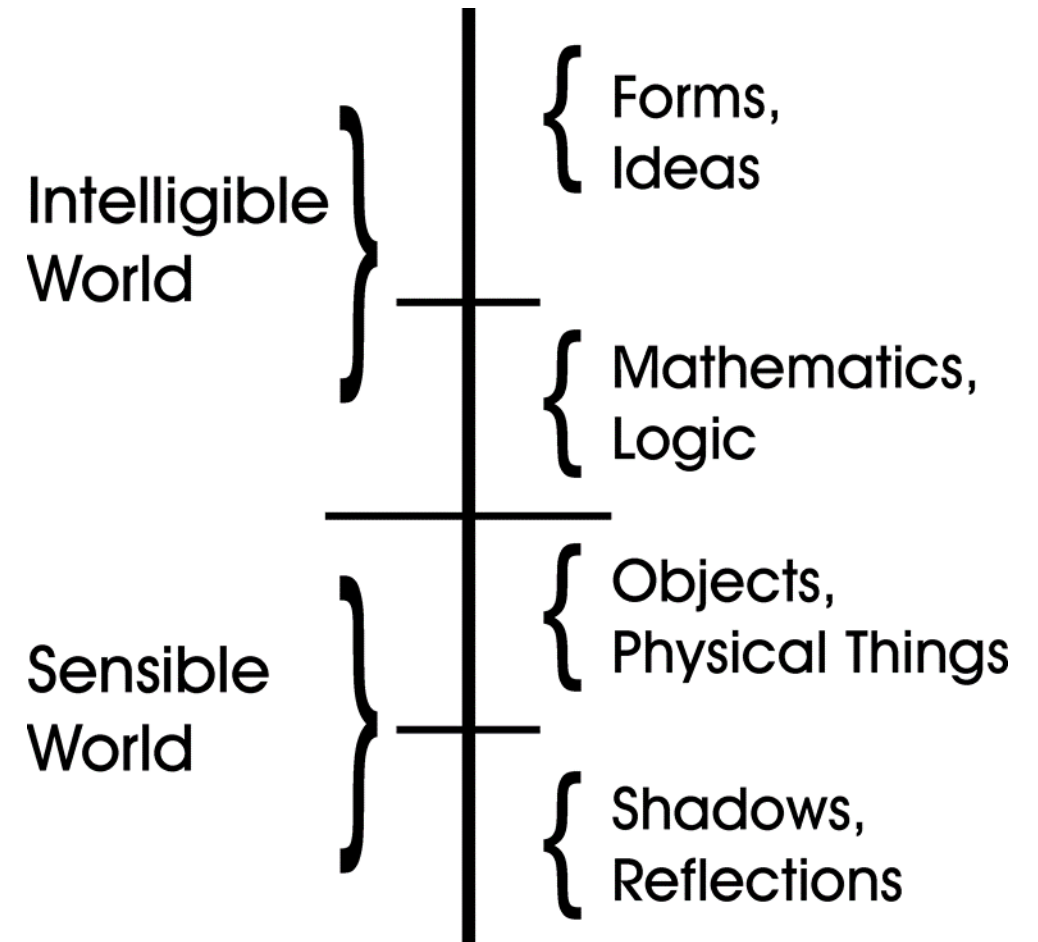


Descartes' Dreams



Implications of Platonic Philosophy

- Plato's project is a **continuing** project, a continuous conversation.
- Most of Plato's writings are not about nature per se, but his concepts of reality and form/idea have had a profound impact on our understanding of nature
- Idealization → finding **universal** concepts, frameworks, and theories



Critics

- Karl Popper (1902-1994) charged that Plato emerged as the philosophical champion of the closed society and laid the groundwork for totalitarianism.
 - Volume 1: The Spell of Plato
- Popper charged that three deep philosophical predispositions (holism, essentialism, and historicism) underpinned Plato's defense of the closed society.

