

PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS

Dr. Barnali Deka

Associate Professor

Dept. Political Science, Mangaldai College

WHAT ARE THE FORMS?

- Eternal, perfect, unchanging realities
 - Exist in the intelligible realm (beyond the physical world)
 - Particular objects participate in the Forms (e.g. a beautiful flower partakes in the Form of Beauty) Abstract representation of Forms above physical objects
- Forms are not physical—they are concepts like Justice, Beauty, etc., existing independently.*

THE DIVIDED LINE

- Four levels of knowledge: Imagination, Belief, Thought, Understanding
- Lower half: world of appearances- visible world (change and variations)
- Upper half: world of Forms-intelligible world (constant and absolute)
- Visible world – imperfect or incomplete version intelligible world
- Can be moved to intelligible- knowledge-understanding

To support this complex argument we need to understand the allegory of cave

ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

- Caveman/Prisoners see only shadows on the wall
- Shadows are shown by mythmakers/storytellers
- Create the imaginary world with some dummy objects
- Plato's msg-Cave world represents visible world/us
- To bring them out of the cave/illusion/ forcefully (at least one/two)
- To drag out from comfort zone full of beliefs, culture –Through the process education, knowledge –not easy...
- One escapes, discovers real objects in perfect/complete version and sunlight (truth) slowly
- Return to cave symbolizes philosopher's duty

most people live in ignorance of the Forms, mistaking shadows for reality.

THE FORM OF THE GOOD

- Supreme among all Forms
- Source of truth and knowledge
- the Sun illuminates the visible world; the Good illuminates the intelligible world

Form of the Good can be used in understanding all other Forms.

PHILOSOPHER-KINGS AND THE JUST SOCIETY

- Only philosophers understand Forms and the Good
- They should rule the ideal state
- Justice = each class doing its own work; reason governs appetite and spirit

Relate Plato's political philosophy to his theory of knowledge and metaphysics.

CONCLUSION

- The Forms represent ultimate reality and truth
- Physical world is a shadow of the real world
- Education, philosophy, and reason are the keys to accessing truth