

WHGC Notes on Plato's Republic, Book VII
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As with many of the readings this semester, there are existing resources for Plato on the Moodle site. We are following the lead of Barney and Nick by isolating the resources most useful to the current discussion before moving onto some new ideas. (Note: Since we will also have Plato readings in the spring, here we are only highlighting the documents that relate to Book VII specifically. If you'd like to get a head start or get a broader sense of what's available, feel free to click through all the links!)

Plato

- [Republic - ideas for discussion](#)
- [What is truth](#)
- [Allegory of the Cave class assignment](#)
- [Looking at Philosophy](#)
- [Plato - Suggestions for Discussion](#)
- [Structure of Republic](#)
- [Republic - discussion topics](#)
- [Plato - knowledge - being](#)
- [Plato - Hilliker](#)
- [Plato - Ellis](#)
- [Plato Discussion - Plato](#)
- [Plato Influence on Christian Thought](#)
- [Ideas for Plato](#)
- [Republic Comprehension Check](#)
- [Plato's Allegory of the Cave](#)
- [Practice Dying](#)
- [Republic and Science](#)
- [The Republic; Background, Themes, and Analysis](#)

“Allegory of the Cave class assignment”:

- Description of an in-class version of the “cave” with the instructor acting as the puppeteer. Potentially useful if you can locate a slide projector or other large light source.

“Looking at Philosophy”:

= Excerpts from *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter* (McGraw-Hill 2009) by Donald Palmer. N.b. If you download cartoons or portions of this document for your students, *please include a full citation*.

- THE MOST USEFUL DOCUMENT. WITH CARTOONS!
- The chart for the “simile of the line” may be a useful visual aid in your discussions:

We have our own modified version below.

“Structure of Republic”:

- Useful diagram of the entire work. Perhaps more useful next semester?

“Plato Discussion - Plato”:

- Great suggestions and comments from Harry Ellis.

“Ideas for Plato”:

- Some discussion questions for Book VII.

“Republic Comprehension Check”:

- Two applicable multiple choice questions for your possible quiz-giving needs.

“Plato’s Allegory of the Cave”:

- More commentary on the allegory. Palmer’s commentary is more in depth.

“Republic and Science”:

- If you want to go there.
- Description of a drawing assignment, where students draw their own version of the cave.

Some more ideas, discussion topics, and themes:

1. Darwin and Wilson vs. Plato

- Compare the scientific method as a method of discovering “truth” to the “simile of the line” below.
- Plato as an inversion of modern epistemology.
- Is the scientific method a poor shadow?

2. Plato and modern cinema

- An animated version of the story, which you might use in conjunction with the exercise above titled “Allegory of the Cave class assignment” or with the drawing assignment described in “Republic and Science”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQfRdl3GTw4&feature=related>

The cartoon is somewhat elementary but faithful to the text.

- The film the *Matrix* explores the nature of reality, and it’s central thesis aligns nicely with the Allegory of the Cave:

i. “Red Pill, Blue Pill” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFhn_GUAhGU&feature=related

ii. “What is Real?” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnEYHQ9dscY&feature=related>

- *Inception*:

i. Christopher Nolan’s hand-drawn story board

1. <http://boingboing.net/2010/12/21/christopher-nolans-h.html>

2. <http://www.incontention.com/2010/12/07/christopher-nolans-interview-with-brother-jonathan-in-the-inception-shooting-script/>

3.

ii. “I Need an Architect” scene, *Inception*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9H9VVBVeZ8>

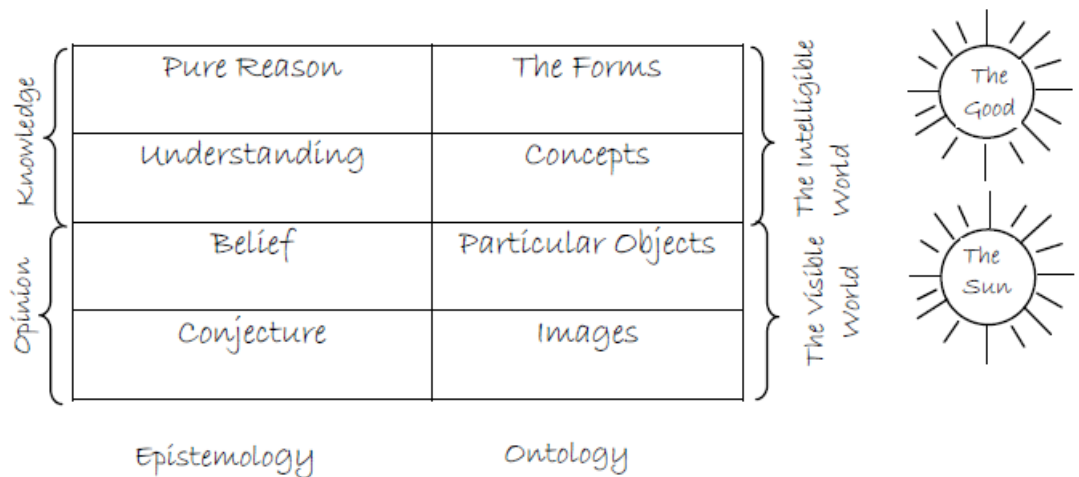
- Compare Ariadne’s dream constructed by Cobb with Plato’s puppeteers.

iii. Ending scene, *Inception*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeN-jDGOlpQ>

- What would Plato have to say about the spinning of the totem?

3. Classroom exercise on sensory perception (The “chair exercise”). You might begin by placing Palmer’s (67) diagram of the “simile of the line” on the board to use for reference later. The diagram is reproduced below.



a) Place a chair on a center table. Ask students What it is? A chair. How do you know? (Allow students to move around, touch the chair.)

- Materials?
- Shape?
- Function?

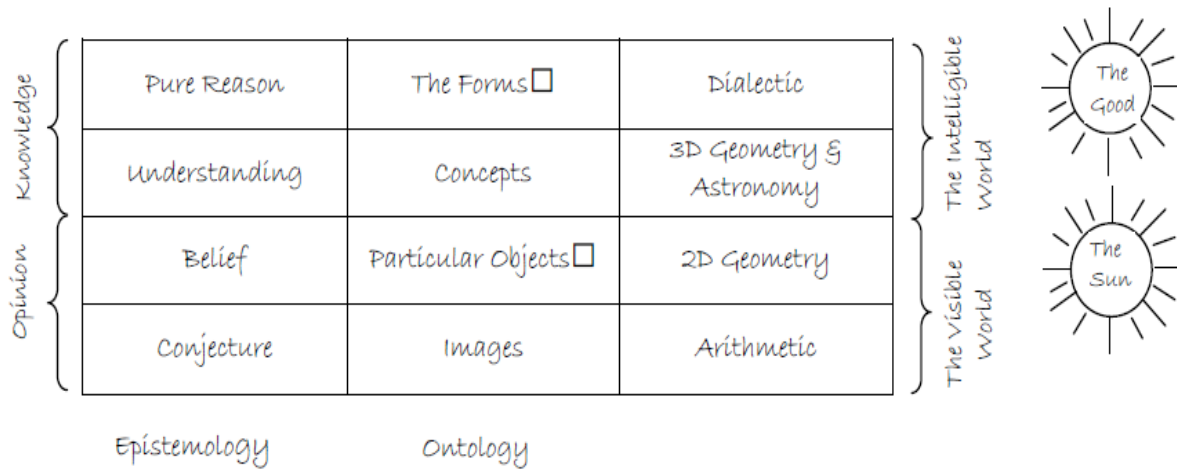
All of the above answers rely on sense perception in the visible world. Using Plato’s simile of the line, we could say that they are reasoning at the level of Belief/Particular Objects (in Greek: *pistis/ta horōmena*).

b) Now ask the students to remain seated, close their eyes, and then tell you what is on the table. How do they know?

- Memory of this particular sight from a moment before? (Here we have moved away only very slightly from the realm of Belief/Particular Objects)
- Memory and comparison with mental images of other chairs of various types? For Plato, only at this point is the chair becoming intelligible. It is now a concept that can be understood in the absence of physical experience. We have now

progressed to the level of Understanding (*dianoia*) /Concepts (*hoi hypothemenoi & ta mathematika*).

c) Refer students to pp. 220-227. In the text, mathematics provides the analog for the acquisition of true knowledge. The student begins with arithmetic and progresses toward a more true and abstract knowledge of mathematics culminating in Dialectic. Using Palmer’s diagram, we can model this argument as follows:



4. Discussion of the dialectic method/Socratic dialogue. Students may have misconceptions about what the Socratic method of discourse actually is and may miss the structure of the argumentation.
 - What do we mean when we say ‘Socratic method?’”
 - How does your definition conform or fail to conform to the dialogue in Book VII?
 - Construct a Socratic discourse of your own using the chair exercise above.
 - i. Can you construct a deductive, rational series of questions and answers whereby the chair can be defined?
 - ii. Try to use 10 questions/responses to define the Platonic Form of “CHAIR” as completely as possible.
 - iii. Remember: each question must logically lead to the next, and every statement must be refutable. Key characteristics/strategies for them to note/employ:
 - Focus on the questioner. Emphasis is on allowing the student to confront the truth or falsehood of his/her proposal via leading questions. It’s always left to the student to conclude whether a premise has been shown to be true or false.
 - Importance of deductive reasoning to demonstrate contradictions, falsify proposals.

- Every statement must be shown to be true or false.
 - Importance of inductive reasoning for the development and refinement of the hypothesis. Questions lead the student toward a particular predetermined end.
 - See suggestion re: the scientific method above, s.v. “Darwin and Wilson vs. Plato”.
5. Discussion of liberal arts education/public education. What would Plato say about our current education system? Force students to argue FOR Plato’s system. How would it change the way we perceive the world?
 - How does Plato’s system tie into the current, local debate over funding for STEM/ non-STEM education?
 6. Discussion of the relationship between physics and metaphysics, then and now. Plato as a physicist?
 - Would Plato have distinguished between our modern conception of physics and his forms?
 7. Playdoh with Plato
 - Unity as one and as infinite. How can we determine the “true” unit of playdoh if our eyes and other senses deceive us?
 - How can we get to the *atomos*, the indivisible? Wouldn’t this be the definition of unity?
 - Have we yet found the *indivisible* unit? Here would be a good place to insert a discussion of the Higgs boson if interested.
 - “But if unity is always paired with its opposite so that it appears to be one thing and equally something else, there would be an immediate need to judge between them....Hence the study of unity will be among those studies that guide and turn the soul to the contemplation of reality.” (p. 219)
 - “Well, unity certainly provides a good illustration of how sight can generate contradictory impressions. For we see unity both as one and as infinite multiplicity.” (p. 219)