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# Overview of What We'll Cover

Plato's Republic

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## Plato's *Republic* Knowledge & Reality

Introduction  
Metaphysical ideas

The Theory of Forms

Sun

The Line

The Cave

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PHL110: Introduction to Philosophy  
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- Realism and idealism: two views about metaphysics.
- Rationalism and empiricism: two views about epistemology.
- Plato's theory of forms
- Plato's solution to the problem of change.
- Three models of Plato's theory of knowledge and reality.
  - The line
  - The sun
  - The cave



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# Where Are We, and What's Next?

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# What is Realism?

Plato's Republic

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  - Some general ideas about metaphysics
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- **Realism** is the philosophical theory that there are things that exist independently of our experiences, and that these things cause or explain our experiences. "Real" means (in part) "existing outside, and independent of, the human mind."
- One way to think about realism is to see it as the view that there are many facts about the world that would obtain regardless of what anyone thought, or even, if no one ever existed to have thoughts.
- The opposing kind of view is *idealism*, which is the view that minds and the thoughts they have are the only real things.



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# Rationalism versus Empiricism

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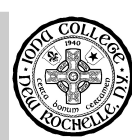
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- As will be seen, Socrates' holds a view about how knowledge is obtained that is called *rationalism*.
- Rationalism is usually contrasted with *empiricism*.  
 Rationalism The philosophical theory that all human knowledge is obtained by the faculty of reason.  
 Empiricism The philosophical theory that all human knowledge is obtained through the five senses.



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# The Distinction Between Empiricism and Rationalism Considered

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- Consider how the view about knowledge that one holds makes a difference to how one sees things and our place in them.
- A rationalist tends to doubt the importance of the flux of appearances, and of experience, for knowledge.
- An empiricist tends to think that only what's learned from experience is knowledge.



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# Examples

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- Question: how would a rationalist, and how would an empiricist, understand knowledge about the following?
  - Mathematical claims.
  - "The sun will rise tomorrow."
  - "Every object is attracted to every other, with a force inversely proportional to the distance between them, and proportional to their masses." (Newton's law of gravitation)



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# Where Are We, and What's Next?

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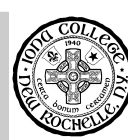
# Overview of the Theory of Forms

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- Plato is a realist about metaphysics.
- He is a rationalist about knowledge.
- The core of his view is that appearance, which changes, is deceptive, and that there are unchanging entities which are real, but not detectable by the senses.
- These entities explain the appearances.



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# “Two Worlds:” Visible and Intelligible

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- Plato claims that there are two “worlds,” one of which is more real than the other.
- Visible world Consists of what we experience through the senses: physical objects, images and other experiences deriving from them. Constantly changing; objects in it are impermanent, temporary. A world of illusion.
- Intelligible world Can only be detected with the “mind’s eye,” not the senses. Objects in it are permanent and unchanging. Contains the “forms” of objects and properties, including the good. The real world.



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# More on the Visible World

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- We notice immediately that change is a central feature of our everyday experience. Consider the following.
- Objects come into being and are destroyed.
  - People and animals are born, then die.
  - Food is first fresh, then rots and returns to the soil.
  - Buildings fall unless maintained.
- Before their destruction, many objects change state.
  - An infant becomes a toddler.
  - Fruit ripens before rotting away.
  - Mountaintops are slowly leveled by wind and water.
- Musical inspiration:
  - “Landslide.” Orig. Stevie Nicks; lately covered by The Smashing Pumpkins and Dixie Chicks.
  - “Dust in the Wind.” Toto (?).



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# For Everything There is a Season, and a Time: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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The prophet’s description of the flux of experience

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.”



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## More on the Intelligible World

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- Plato proposes that the visible world is not the *real* world.
- The “intelligible world” is an ideal world whose objects are not detectable by the senses.
- These objects never change and are never destroyed.
- They cause and explain the physical objects that appear to us in the visible world: the visible objects are the physical manifestation of a corresponding ideal object.
- A given physical object's counterpart (cause and explanation) in the intelligible world is the *form* of that object.
- The form is a thing's *essence*, which determines *what kind of thing it is*.



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## The Theory of Forms

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- Drawing together the lines of thought about the visible and intelligible worlds, consider the following.
- A person experiences a physical thing in the visible world with his or her senses.
- These things change in appearance, and eventually each will pass away or be transformed into something completely different.
- Each of the physical things of the visible world has a source in the intelligible world of forms.
- This source is a *form*, an object that is unchanging, permanent, and that is a perfect, pure sample—a paradigm—of the object.



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## Example. The Relationship Between the Visible and Intelligible Worlds. Phaedra's Bow & Arrow.

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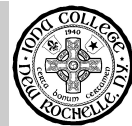
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- Visible** Phaedra can clearly see her bow and arrow with her eyes, feel it with her hands, and hear a “whoosh” when she shoots it. It once did not exist; it slackens if not regularly re-strung; and it will one day decay.
- Intelligible** The appearance of the bow and arrow is illusory, however. It is linked to reality because it is caused by the *form of the bow and arrow*. This is not a physical object that cannot be detected with the senses, but can be detected with the “mind's eye.” It will never change or be destroyed.



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## The Problem of Change

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- The problem of change: what is it?
  - the instability and impermanence (change) of the visible world can be disturbing—it can threaten one's sense of well-being. But change occurs constantly.
  - In order to feel and believe one's self to be safe from the instabilities and decay in the visible world, a person wants to find some source of stability, something that never changes.
- Plato's solution to the problem.
  - In the intelligible world, there is no change.
  - The instability is limited to the visible world.
  - The ultimate change—passage from life to death—results in one's passage from the flux of impermanence into the realm of reality, where nothing changes at all.



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# An Argument for Forms

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- 1 In the *Phaedo*, another dialogue by Plato, arguments are presented for the existence of the forms.
- 2 One of the more compelling arguments is that the visible world can't be understood at all, unless one assumes the existence of an intelligible world.
- 3 We now turn to this argument.

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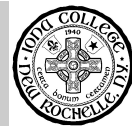
# The Argument

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- 1 We all agree that we can correctly determine when two objects are roughly equal in length, and we can reason about what would be the case if two objects were equal in length, for instance, using geometrical theorems.
- 2 We could not have obtained this ability by our sense experience, because the physical world is imperfect: there is no way we could have ever experienced two objects that are precisely equal in length.
- 3 So, there must exist objects that are not a part of the physical world that we are able to have knowledge of; this explains (1), the premise that we can indeed identify and reason about objects equal in length.

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# Comment on The Argument

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- This argument, which is about objects equal in length, is one of many that can be generated, according to Socrates.
- For instance, we can ask about justice, beauty, courage, or other abstract notions.
- Together, Plato believes that these arguments show that all of our ideas come from somewhere other than the physical world.

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## Rationalism & the Forms

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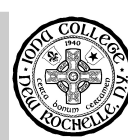
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- Pulling together the various lines of thought developed above concerning the forms, we can now see how Socrates' theory of forms, his realism, and his rationalism go together:
- The forms—real, in the sense that they exist outside the mind, and explain and cause our experiences—cannot be detected with the senses.
- So, it must be that we are able to detect and learn about them directly with our minds, bypassing the senses.
- This is a kind of rationalism, because the senses do not play a role in our initially obtaining knowledge.



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## Where Are We, and What's Next?

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## The Sun, the Line, and the Cave: Images of Truth, Knowledge, & Reality

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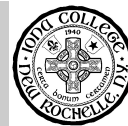
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- Plato offers three analogies to illustrate his theory of forms and the role of the Form of the Good in it.
  - 1 The sun
  - 2 The line
  - 3 The cave
- Plato's strategy is to point out similarities between familiar objects and the unfamiliar objects of philosophy, so as to explain the philosophical ideas.
- In this case, elements of the sun, the line, and the cave are claimed by Plato to correspond to elements of knowledge and reality.
- We consider each of these analogies now.



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## The Sun as a Model of the Good

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- Plato identifies two requirements for *visual perception*.
- He identifies each of these requirements with elements of being and knowledge, setting up an analogy between vision and knowledge.

The eye In visual perception, the organ that takes in light and produces an image.  
*Analogous to the soul.*

The sun & its light The object that produces light so that people can see. *Analogous to the Form of the Good and its power to generate knowledge of other forms.*



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# The Good & The Other Forms

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- Plato sees the intelligible world, on the whole, in the following manner.
- Each object and property has a form of its own, as described above.
- The Form of the Good has a special role.
- Knowledge of this Form is what enables someone to have knowledge of each of the other forms; *and*
- The other forms owe their existence to the Form of the Good.



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# Where Are We, and What's Next?

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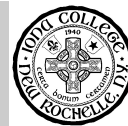
# The Parable of the Line

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- The second model of being and knowledge that Plato offers is the *line*.
- Plato divides a line into four parts, each representing a different element of the visible and intelligible worlds. Consider each part of the line, starting from the left end.
  - Line part 1 Represents reflections, shadows, other images of physical things. 4 units long.
  - Line part 2 Physical things responsible for the images just mentioned. 2 units long.
  - Line part 3 Basic shapes described by geometry, arithmetic, and other sciences based on hypotheses. 2 units long.
  - Line part 4 Reasoning using forms; philosophy; first principles. 1 unit long.



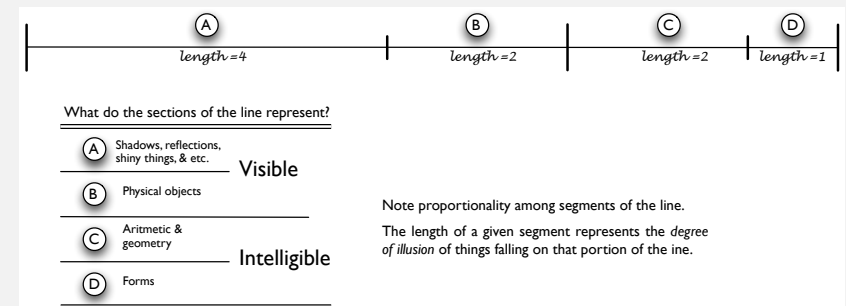
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# The Line

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## Where Are We, and What's Next?

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Darkness to Light

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## The Parable of the Cave: Description of the Cave's Physical Construction

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Darkness to Light

- Plato asks readers to imagine the following situation.
- Some people are in a cave, whose mouth is above them.
- The light from a fire outside the cave dimly illuminates the wall in front of them.
- Near the mouth of the cave, other people are walking back and forth, holding models of animals, people, and other objects.
- These people are on the opposite side of the fire from the people in the cave, so that the shadows of the objects they are carrying are projected on the cave's wall, in front of the people in the cave.



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## The Analogy of the Cave with Forms and Knowledge

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Darkness to Light

- The people in the cave are like those who can only understand the visible world. The shadows they see are analogous to the physical objects we see.
- The models of the objects carried by those outside the cave are like the forms.
- Someone leaving the cave is someone who is able, by understanding, to learn about forms directly.
- Someone might leave the cave. This person would be able to see the models ("forms") directly.
- He or she would also be able to see the sun directly.
- This is analogous to knowing the Form of the Good.
- This means that the person can recognize that the Form of the Good is responsible for the forms and knowledge.
  - This is just as the sun is responsible for sight, and nourishing all life.