

1A

Explain what Plato meant by "The Forms" (33)

I intend to answer this question by detailing what Plato meant by "The Forms", and use examples of these to clarify his ideas and theories, which includes the Simile of The Cave.

Plato was born in 428 BC and was a Greek philosopher, one of the most creative and influential thinkers in Western philosophy. He was an ethical absolutist, and that moral absolutes such as justice, existed beyond our normal perceptions of the world called "The Forms".

Plato rejected empirical evidence (evidence that can be tested and proven) in favour of "The Forms". Plato believed that we have concepts of ideal "Forms" that exist beyond the physical, visible world (the "real" world to us). He believed "The Forms" exist in a separate, distinct realm, and that they are consistent, changeless and perfect. For example the Circle, a plane figure composed of a series of points all of which are equidistant from a given point. Plato theorized that in this separate "Realm of the Forms" there is the form "circularity", and that it participates within our idea of the circle in our world, or that we see "reflections" or "shadows" of the Form of the Circle within our world. This means that we can never actually see it but it exists. The form "green" participates in grass, the form "silver" participates in jewelry, and the form "beauty" participates within objects like paintings, faces, or sounds, and that without the form "beauty" there would be no beautiful things.

Plato supported his theory of the Forms by saying that the soul exists before the body, and that it is immortal, unlike our bodies which decay and die, and because of this it has acquired knowledge before being trapped in our bodies, for example a deaf and blind child knows how to smile and attract attention from an extremely young age before being taught or developing their emotional minds, or that small child knows the notion of fairness before they have been taught it e.g. crying when toys are taken away, and so the soul must have knowledge of the forms, otherwise the child would not know whether it was fair or not when the toy was taken away, the form of "fairness" participating through the child. The soul is distinct from the body, and can be compared to a form itself, just in the knowledge that it is immortal like the forms, unlike the body that is imperfect and mortal unlike the forms. Plato went as far as saying that the soul is the intermediate between the physical world and the realm of the Forms, and your mind must be trained to focus on the souls and gain knowledge of the forms. The soul is the synthesis that links and unites the Essence with the world.

Plato believed that goodness was the highest of all the forms and that it was the highest form of reality. He also said that all that can overcome our perceptions of the truth in our reality would know or "see" the forms; this means overcoming pleasure/pain physical or sensory perceptions of our world.

Using Plato's Allegory of the Cave is an excellent illustration of how the two worlds, the Realm of the Forms and our physical world, are distinct and separate from one another, and how it is the soul that can see "reflections" or "shadows" of the Realm of the Forms, and also how Plato can explain to us that sometimes all that we see may not be the "whole" truth, or "reality". Inside an underground cave, a row of men are facing the back wall, chained and fastened so that they cannot turn their heads towards the entrance to the cave, at which a great fire is burning. Between the prisoners and the fire runs a road, in front of which is a curtain wall, and all the prisoners can see is the shadows being cast from the fire. The prisoners have been kept like this since they were children, so their world is just the shadows cast on the

wall in front of them and the voices of men that are walking up and down the road carrying various objects. And so this is the reality of the prisoners, and all they believe is that the shadows of the objects and the echoes were the truth, but one of them breaks free, and clammers up the steep, rugged ascent, towards the entrance of the cave. He is blinded at first, as all his eyes have been accustomed to is the dark shadows of the cave, but as he gradually regains his sight he can see all around him, the fire, the men, the "real" world. He goes back to the other prisoners and explains what he sees, but they don't believe him, simply because this is not the "real" world to them, the "real" world is darkness, shadows and echoes. He urges the other prisoners to break free and see for themselves, but they retaliate by explaining that they would kill him if they ever broke free because he does not speak the "truth" and they believe he is senseless and mad.

The allegory is a symbol of various things. The cave represents our visible, physical world (a world of shadows, or "reflections"), the outside world represents the realm of the forms (the realm we cannot see, or do not believe in), the chained prisoners represent us (the skeptical individuals that have not been enlightened to the Realm of the Forms, or will not accept another theory to the world), the prisoner that broke free represents Socrates (or even Plato, and philosophers in general), a man killed for believing in a different "rule" or a different way of thinking than the current ruler, and the journey out of the cave represents an intellectual journey philosophers take.

1B

"Plato's theory of the 'Forms' is of little use in understanding the Physical world." Discuss.

Plato's theory of the Forms is of little use in understanding the physical world is a relevant argument many philosophers and also others make. For instance a criticism of Plato's theory is that there would have to be an infinite number of the forms, e.g. if we need a form of beauty to explain or participate in why things are beautiful, then we must need another form to explain why "Beauty" itself is beautiful, but Plato argued that the form of Beauty was perfect and that no other form behind it is more perfect, but it still does not explain the physical world. Plato has veered off the course of trying to explain the physical world, maybe because he doesn't himself understand, or maybe because he doesn't want to understand.

The allegory of the cave has shown us that we cannot trust our senses, which leads many of us to question, is our world real? Are the things we see, touch, smell, hear and taste real? Many would say yes, as we can use our sensory perceptions to "grasp" the physical world. Plato would say that this is untrue as we need to overcome pleasure/pain physical or sensory perceptions of our world to understand or "see" the realm of the forms and that the soul is more real than the objects we experience through our sensory perceptions as our soul lives on, and is consistent whereas "physical" objects do not. Others would argue that because our reality changes and develops it is real.

There is no physical or scientific evidence that the Forms exist, they only exist within our minds, and not in the physical world therefore they are of no help to understand it, and that the forms explain the realm they are in but no understanding of it.

All these things lead people to ask the questions, was Plato mad? Did he really understand his own theory? Does the Realm of The Forms actually exist, or is

our world a "reflection" or "shadow" of a perfect form? Or maybe neither of the two worlds actually exists, and so one world cannot be more "real" than another?