Why Plato's Cave?
Ancient Greek Philosophy

Instructor: Jason Sheley

Why is Socrates not afraid to die?

What is Philosophy?

- At this point, we can check in with one of our original questions.

- I like this as a provisional definition:

> "Philosophy is the analysis of concepts necessary for living well."

Do we ever make progress in Philosophy?

What would progress look like?

How to Rule a City (According to Plato)

- Plato says that in order to rule the city well, his rulers must “see” Justice itself, and be able to “see” the Good itself.

- By looking at this idea, they compare the city and make adjustments

- To accomplish this, the ruler must be trained for many years...

The City

Artisans

(Provide goods)

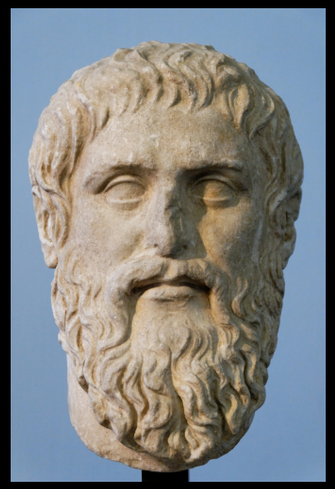
Warriors

(???)

Rulers

Ruling the City, Plato Style

JUSTICE



According to Plato,
How do we acquire knowledge?

The Oracle at Delphi

γνώθι σεαυτόν

μηδέν άγαν

"Know yourself"

"Nothing overmuch"

How do you motivate someone to seek knowledge?

The Gadfly (again)

- Recall the person who thinks they know the answer, but has the wrong answer.
- What is the problem?

The Paradox of Inquiry

- How will you search for anything?
- If the person knows what it is, there is no need to search.
- If the person does not know what it is, how will they start to look for it at all? (And how will she know when she has found it?)

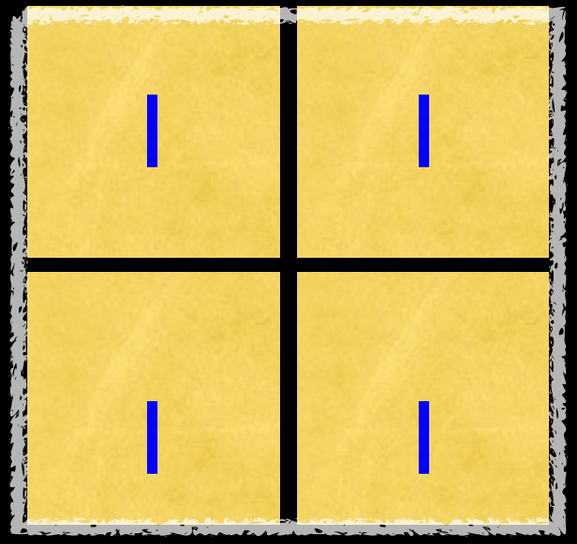
- Let's compare different kinds of searches.
- Suppose I send someone on a search for a pen, or a key.
- How would we direct such a search?
- How does this compare to searching for a concept?
- Can we generate the paradox for that kind of searching?

Conditions on Searching

- 1: Targeting
- 2: Recognition

- As an experiment, let's see if we can reconstruct this case for ourselves...

2

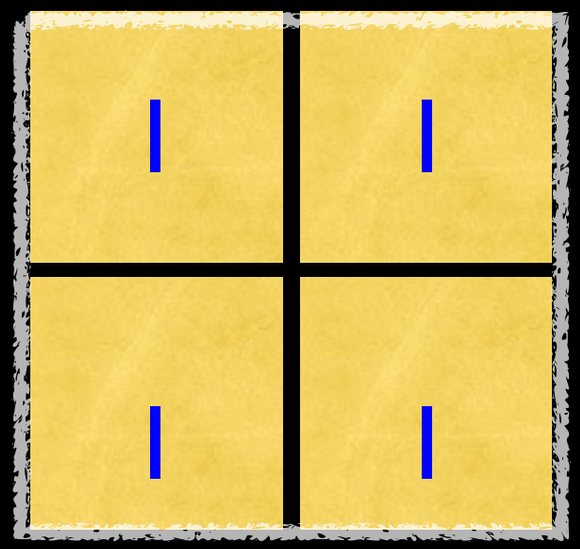


2

Area = 4

original area = 4

2



area = 8

Problem: what is the length of the side of a square double the area?

Let's try a solution...

- What about a square with a length of 4?

4

- Problem: to find the side of the square double the original square's size
- Initial proposal: double the original side
- Problem: gives us area of 16, not 8

Let's try another solution...

- What about a square with length of 3?

3

?

- Next proposal: side of length 3
- problem: gives us an area of 9

- The boy thought he knew before, but now realizes he does not know
- Socrates says they have benefitted him.
- Why?
- Because, before he was mistaken, but had no motivation to search. But now that he realizes the mistake, he wants to know the answer.

Do you acquire knowledge from the senses?

Have you ever seen a perfect square?

Plato's argument goes something like this...

- Do you have the idea of a perfect square? Yes.

- Where did the idea come from? Have you ever seen one? I'm not sure.

- All of the squares we see around us are imperfect. Yes, you're right.

Plato's argument (cont.)

- Nevertheless, you possess the idea of a perfect square, do you not? Yes.
- And that idea must have gotten into your mind somehow. Yes, that seems to be so.
- But it did not get into your mind by means of the senses. Not at all.
- Therefore, the idea of the perfect square came from another source.

- We can run the same argument for concepts such as love or justice or beauty.

- How do they respond to the paradox?
- Meno says: "does this argument seem correct to you?"
- Socrates: No
- Meno: Why not?
- Socrates: because....

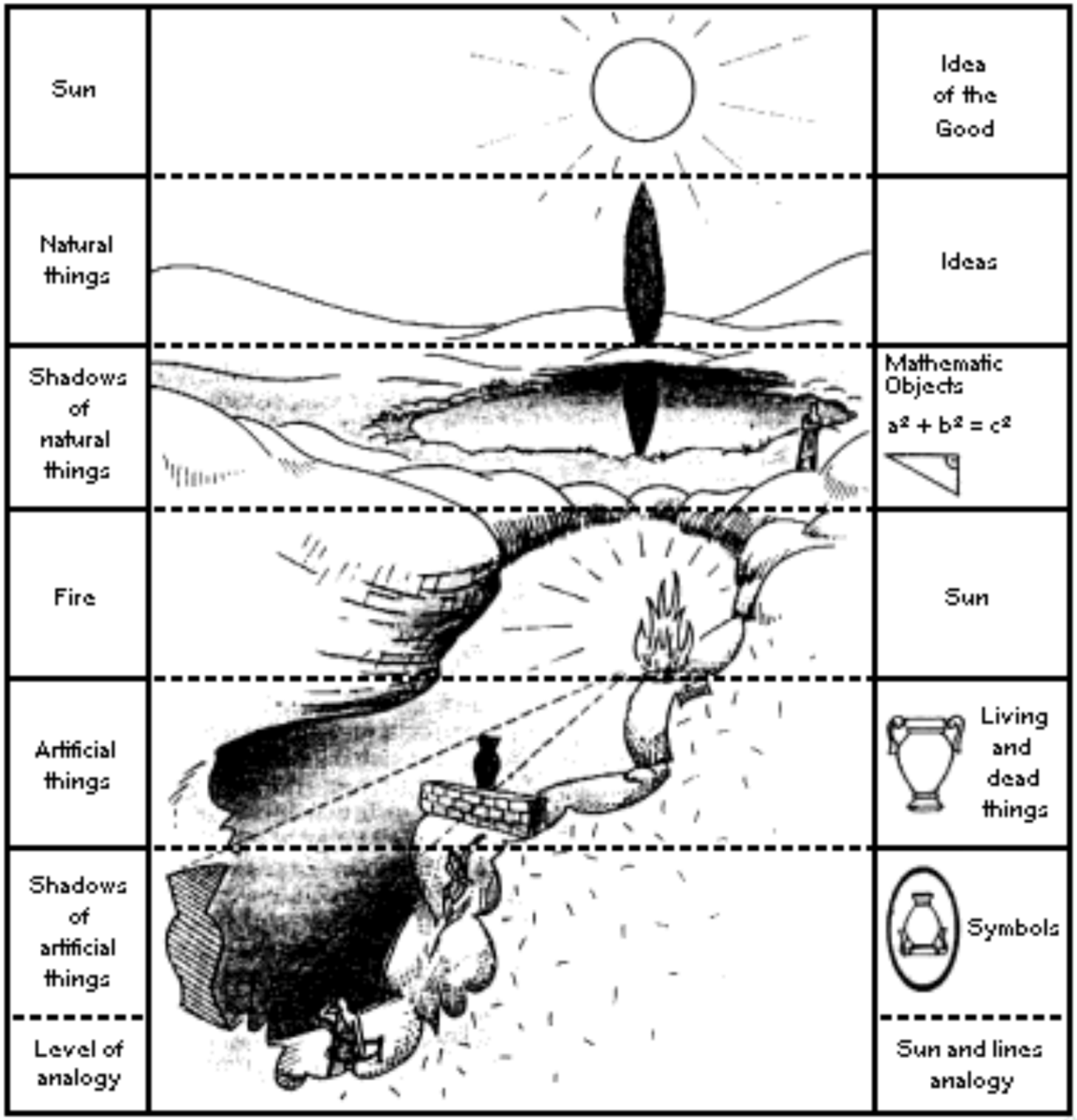
- “Because, Meno, if we keep searching as we have searched before, we will come upon someone who has the correct definition. I have heard of a man from Chios who is reputed to be a wise fisherman. Let us go ask him and see what he says the definition is.”

Recollection

- Meno 80 and following ("as the soul is immortal, and has been born many times"...)
- Phaedo 73-80

The Cave

- Republic 514 and following


Sun
Idea of the Good
Natural things
Ideas
Shadows of natural things
Mathematic Objects
$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$
Fire
Sun
Artificial things
Living and dead things
Shadows of artificial things
Symbols
Level of analogy
Sun and lines analogy

THE FORMS

- **Plato says that the forms (eidos) are, in some sense, paradigms of things here:**
- **Ethical and aesthetical Ideas – the Form of the Good, the Form of the Just, the Form of the Beautiful**
- **Ideas for certain very general notions, such as the Ideas of Sameness and Difference, Being and Not-Being, Likeness and Unlikeness, One and Many**
- **Mathematical Ideas, such as the Idea of the Circle, the Idea of the Diameter, the Idea of Two, Three, etc.**
- **Ideas for natural kinds, such as the Idea of Man, Ox, Stone**
- **Ideas for kinds of artifacts, such as the Idea of Table, Couch, etc.**

- Recollection is the vehicle by which we come to see the forms.

- In the case of the Rulers of the City, this can only be done, Plato says, after many years of hard work.

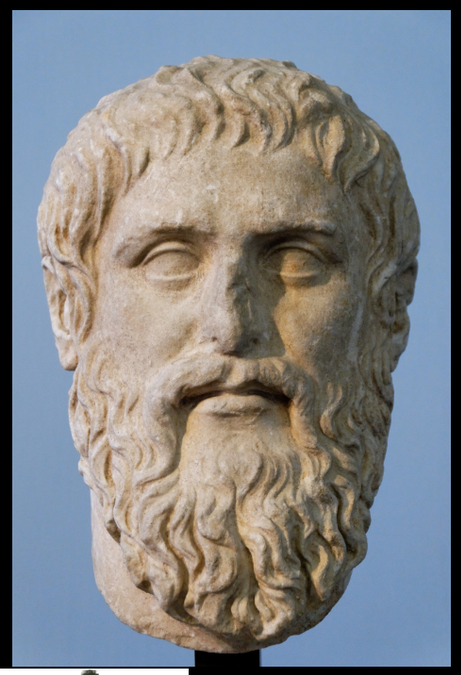
Plato’s Remix of Earlier Philosophers

- The theory of Forms (and sensibles) could be thought of as a response to the claims made earlier by Heraclitus and Parmenides.

- Sensibles provide the “flux” and change.
- Forms provide the unchanging portion.

- We can now also see the beginning of the answer that Plato might give to the Ship of Theseus problem.

The many-headed beast



The many-headed beast

The Conclusion of the Phaedo

- Phaedo 114c and following
- What is Socrates' attitude towards his own fate?
- What is the significance of the rooster/ Asclepius passage at the end?