595d-596b Returning to the definition of *mimēsis,* which was set aside at the end of Book III, Plato refers very obliquely to "the Forms" and his theory of Forms, a key aspect of his metaphysics covered in detail in previous sections of the *Republic*.

Could you tell me what imitation in general is? I don't entirely understand what sort of thing imitations are trying to be.

Is it likely, then, that I'll understand?

That wouldn't be so strange, for people with bad eyesight often see things before those whose eyesight is keener.

That's so, but even if something occurred to me, I wouldn't be eager to talk about it in front of you. So I'd rather that you did the looking.

Do you want us to begin our examination, then, by adopting our usual procedure? As you know, we customarily hypothesize a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name. Or don't you understand?

I do.

What follows is a very brief introduction to the main ideas and the kind of reasoning that leads Plato to posit the existence of Forms. If you've never encountered Plato's theory of Forms, you'll probably find it obscure at first. But if you read all the sections below a few times, you'll catch on. Let me know if you have questions.

507b ff The world (everything that exists) includes both sensible objects and Forms. But if that's true, several complications arise.

Qualification

A Form has its defining characteristic **without** qualification. A sensible object has characteristics only **with** qualification.

Consider the following examples: 1. An object can be large only compared to another object. No object is **simply** large. Thus, an object's being large is **relative**.

2. A thing is beneficial or good only for someone or thing. It is never **simply** good. Thus, a thing's goodness is **relational**.

Problem

How can something be large without qualification? What could this mean? Isn't a standard of comparison implied? Can the Form of **largeness** be larger than everything? What about the form of **half** or **double**? Isn't the half always half of something else, i.e. *with* qualification?

Opposites

Sensible objects contain characteristics and their opposites. Forms do not.

Consider the following examples:

1. Something can be large compared to A but small compared to B. For example, the moon is large compared to a penny, but small compared to the sun.

2. An action or event can be beneficial in one case but harmful in another. For example, telling the truth can be beneficial if it alerts one to the presence of an attacker but harmful if it tells the attacker the whereabouts of the potential victim.

Plato also seems to think that a thing may **appear** to be both large and small and in fact **be** both large and small. (Cf. the moon illusion.)

Direct Perception

The Forms are not **inferred** but grasped directly by the mind. A sensible object can assist in grasping the Form, but in most cases Plato thinks that sensible objects are a beguiling distraction. In fact, Plato advocates studies (e.g. geometry) that take one's mind away from the senses.

Objectivity

The Good is good without qualification—it is not good **relative** to anything. In other words it is **objectively** good, i.e. independent of what anyone thinks. Beauty is similarly constituted. (Does this mean that the Form *Beauty* is beautiful?)

Sensible objects are in a sense **copies** or **imitations** of Forms. They **resemble** the Forms. (This contrasts a particular circle with the Circle — the abstract Form by reference to which a particular shape is or is not a circle.)

Thus, the Form is a model or **paradigm**. It is eternal and immutable (free of changes).

Questions that motivate Plato's Explanation based on Forms:

How can a thing change and yet be the same, i.e. remain the same **thing**? 1. Cf. Descartes' piece of wax.

2. How can you be both the same and different, e.g. when you change from being a child to being an adult? How can the same person be both young and old?

3. What is the nature of the "thing" that survives the change?

How can things appear to be other than they are in reality? [Appearance vs. Reality] 1. Sensible objects always partake of opposite characters. They are in some respects beautiful and in other respects ugly; or just and unjust. How is this possible? 2. It must be due to the "**unreality** of sensible objects".

Plato explains these puzzles by positing two "orders of existence":

- 1. Ephemeral world of changing things (appearance).
- 2. Eternal world of ideas (Forms; reality).

Nature of Forms.

- 1. They cannot be **perceived** directly—not accessible to the senses.
- 2. They are known only in thought (as objects of thought).

Consider a triangle—its properties are known only by thought and reason. That's because they are absolute and "general" (abstract) not particular. Particulars are instances of things that are variable, unique, and known through the senses. But the **properties** of the triangle are general and embodied in **all** triangles.

The Divided Line [509b]

Visible World (Appearance)			Intelligible World (Reality)
Ontological Order			
Α	В	С	D
shadows reflections	physical objects	lower forms (types)	higher forms
conjecture	belief	understanding	reason
Epistemological Order			

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