

# History & Philosophy of Science (Erasmus L3)

# Socrates / Plato: Theory of forms (ideas)

- According to Socrates (as presented in the Platonic dialogues) there exist non-physical forms (ideas) in a noetic world separated from the sensible world. The ideas themselves are indestructible, stable, unchangeable. All the sensible things exist because they participate in the corresponding ideas, which are their standard and paradigm.

# Socrates (early Platonic dialogues)

- Socrates, in contrast to the Presocratics , supports that the most important research concerns the nature of the human being, not the nature of the surrounding world. He suggests to try to know ourselves (γνώθι σαυτόν) and to define (understand the meaning) of some eternal ideas, such as the true, the good, the beautiful, the just, the pious etc.
- In Symposium declares that the ideal way for human is the way of the erotic desire of human for the Good Itself and of his necessity to possess it forever.
- Socrates looks past or even censures the research about the nature of the world, since everything in this world is changing all the time. His interest focus on the eternal and unchangeable, that is the ideas, the beings of the noetic world

# Plato (beyond Socrates)

- Plato, in his late dialogues, exposes also his personal beliefs. In *Timaeus* he describes the creation and the structure of the world, as well as of the human body. In *Sophist* he speaks about the main principles of the universe, the one, the identical, the different, the stop and the move, paying attention not only to the unchangeable but also to the change.

# Plato – The Republic (the cave)



# The cave

- In the allegory of the cave, Plato likens ordinary people of the world (not philosophers) to prisoners chained in a cave, unable to turn their heads. All they can see is the wall of the cave. Behind them burns a fire. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a parapet, along which puppeteers can walk. The puppeteers, who are behind the prisoners, hold up puppets that cast shadows on the wall of the cave. The prisoners are unable to see these puppets, the real objects, that pass behind them. What the prisoners see and hear are shadows and echoes cast by objects that they do not see.

# The cave (cont)

- When the prisoners are released, they can turn their heads and see the real objects. Then they realize their error. What can we do that is analogous to turning our heads and seeing the causes of the shadows?
- We can come to grasp the Ideas (Forms) with our minds.
- **Physical forms stimulate us to see the real noetic forms**

# Plato's dialectics

- Plato presents his philosophical arguments as a back-and-forth dialogue or debate, generally between the character of Socrates, on one side, and some person or group of people to whom Socrates was talking (his interlocutors), on the other. In the course of the dialogues, Socrates' interlocutors propose definitions of philosophical concepts or express views that Socrates challenges or opposes.
- The back-and-forth debate between opposing sides produces a kind of linear progression or evolution in philosophical views or positions: as the dialogues go along, Socrates' interlocutors change or refine their views in response to Socrates' challenges and come to adopt more sophisticated views.

# Exercise

- Influences on Plato and influences of Plato