Plato's Divided Line and a Mythical Mode of Knowledge

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Introduction

Plato's famous divided line, which is described by Plato in the Republic, is an educational epistemology which divides all of the objects of knowledge into four categories and tells us what the corresponding ways of knowing those objects are. The further up the line the more complicated the mode of knowledge. The knowledge contained in the fourth level of the line is, for Plato, the highest sort of knowledge, the knowledge that we must reach towards to gain the best understanding of our world. The objects of knowledge in the fourth level are the Forms, mysterious objects of which every other known object is a representation. Knowledge of this level is knowledge of the truest things, those things which are "free from hypothesis at the beginning of the whole" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 511b).

The fourth level of the divided line presents us with some problems. At this level the knower is concerned with knowing objects like the Good. Unlike some of the objects of the first three levels, such as images or things themselves, we cannot touch the Good or see it. We know how to make contact with a desk, but it is much more difficult to make contact with or to investigate the Good. Plato does talk about fourth level knowledge in the Republic, but it is difficult to understand what he is saying about how we can
know fourth level things. The objects of the first three levels of the line are more familiar to us and this makes it easier to understand Plato's description of these levels.

Even though the fourth level is difficult to understand, it is the highest and most important category of knowledge in the divided line and it is important that we strive to reach it when we participate in education. How can we better understand level four so that we know what we are trying to reach? What is the mode of knowledge that we need to use on the fourth level? I think that we can gain an understanding of the fourth level by applying Plato's educational epistemology to two of his own works, the Republic and the Phaedrus. This will help us by letting us see the line in action. We will have examples of how Plato thought a person could make progress in obtaining an understanding of something. The Republic and the Phaedrus are dialogues. In dialogues the characters discuss important topics and change their understanding of these topics. For example, in the Republic Glaucon and Adeimantus wish to learn why justice is good in itself. Socrates discusses this with them and eventually they discover what justice is and how it is a part of the human good. Obviously, what Plato is depicting is an educational process. The characters learn something or at least try to learn something about their world. It seems reasonable to think that maybe this process mirrors the divided line.
True, we must keep in mind the fact that what people do isn't always the same thing as what they say. The process of education portrayed in Plato's dialogues doesn't necessarily have to follow the process of education described in Plato's divided line. Perhaps the line was described in the Republic simply as a way to move the characters on to a new point and it applies only to this particular dialogue, not because it reflected Plato's personal philosophy on education. But if we look to the dialogues and discover a pattern that seems to fit the levels of the divided line, then it does seem reasonable to say that Plato is following the line. I will show that when we examine the Republic and the Phaedrus we do find three steps in each of them which look like levels one to three of the line. These levels are rather easy to discover and it is easy to see how the characters advance in knowledge as they move through these levels. We also find what looks like it should be the fourth level. Not only does it fit chronologically, but it also seems to continue the progression of knowledge from the third level in the sense that understanding the concepts developed on the third level enables the character to advance in knowledge to the fourth level.

However, here the resemblance to what we expect the fourth level to be, according to Plato's description of it, ends. In both dialogues there occurs at this point a myth
or similar literary device. From Plato's description of the line we expect the fourth level to involve hypotheses used as steppingstones, dialectic, and other things belonging to the fourth level mode of knowledge. We don't expect to see myths. In the section on the divided line I will discuss the first level of the line and explain that myths are used on the first level. This makes the presence of myths even more puzzling, but we will see that the presence of the myths isn't so strange. They are there to help us gain knowledge in an area where we would not expect to be able to understand much of anything. Plato says in several different places that knowledge of the kind we expect in the fourth level is too hard for us to understand. In the Republic, when Socrates begins the discussion of the Good, an example of a Form that would be included in level four, he says that he can only tell us about "a child of the good", he cannot describe the Good itself (Plato, The Republic of Plato 506e). Herman L. Sinaiko says "Socrates emphasizes...that a clear perception of them [the Forms] is a very difficult attainment, a goal to be achieved, if at all, only by the most gifted of men after the most arduous possible training" (162).

The myths that we find in place of the fourth level are there as a substitute because fourth level knowledge is not available to us. Although the use of myths seems like a first level tactic, the fourth level mythical mode of
knowledge that we find where we expect to see the fourth level mode of knowledge that is described in the line is significantly different from first level myths. One of the most important differences is that the fourth level myth cannot be fully understood without going through the third level. The terms that are defined in the third level discussion give the person who has gone through the discussion a greater understanding of the myth. This is just what we might expect from something that is supposed to help us increase our knowledge from a third to a fourth level understanding. The fourth level myths also serve as a structure in which to locate the Form being discussed. The myth that Socrates tells in the Phaedrus gives us an idea of where Beauty belongs in the world and how it affects us. I will show that we have limited access to the fourth level of the divided line and the myths serve as a substitute to allow us to get a glimpse of the Forms.

I will begin by going through the four sections of the line in some detail and trying to work through the problems that I encounter. This first step is necessary because it gives us as clear an understanding of the line as possible so that it will be easier to find the levels in the dialogues. Also, the third level is tied up in the fourth level. In order to understand the fourth level we need to understand what kind of knowledge we have up to that point and how it helps us to make the jump to the fourth level.
After working out or at least acknowledging the difficulties within the divided line, I will move to the Republic and the Phaedrus. I will point out the four levels of the divided line in these dialogues and explain why I think the description of each level fits what is happening in the dialogue. I will also discuss how the fourth level myth brings the characters to some kind of an appreciation of the fourth level objects of knowledge. Finally, in the conclusion, I will bring together what we have seen concerning the fourth level in both dialogues.

There are difficulties in understanding each level of the divided line. So much so that it is hard to know what term is appropriate as a translation of some of the words that Plato uses to label the four modes of being and the corresponding modes of knowledge. This is indicative of the difficulty of understanding the line. Another problem is that when Plato describes the line he does not specifically explain what he wants us to include under each term. He does give us some examples for each level, but even these examples are unclear. There is some disagreement among philosophers as to which objects belong in which levels of knowledge. This disagreement is greatest with respect to the objects of the third level.
The Four Levels

Socrates begins his description of the line by dividing it into two segments called the visible and the intelligible. The visible segment is ruled by the sun and the intelligible segment is ruled by the Good. Each segment is again divided so that there are four levels. The bottom half of the visible segment is described as containing "images". As examples of "images" Socrates mentions shadows, reflections in water, and reflections "in all close-grained, smooth, bright things, and everything of the sort, if you understand" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 510a). What else might we add to this category under "everything of the sort"? Herman L. Sinaiko says that "The one crucial characteristic of an "image" would seem to be that it is primarily a likeness of something else" (149). He goes on to say that, keeping in mind this basic characteristic, we can expand on the examples Socrates gives us by adding sculpture, paintings, sound recordings, video recordings, verbal descriptions of things, and anything else which is a likeness of another thing. Verbal descriptions would include stories or myths whose primary purpose is to describe an event or give us a representation of reality. The term that Plato uses to describe the mode of knowledge which corresponds to images is "eikasia". Eikasia is often translated as "conjecture", "imagination" or "imagining".
It is difficult to know which translation gives us the best sense of the word because it is "one of those current terms to which Plato gives a peculiar sense, to be inferred from the context" (Cornford 222). Unfortunately, the context here gives us little guidance.

The top half of the visible segment contains the actual things which are in what we would call the real world, the world of our experience, and which the images reflect. Socrates gives as examples "the animals around us, and everything that grows, and the whole class of artifacts" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 510a). The corresponding mode of knowledge is "pistis" which is translated as "trust" or "belief". Perhaps Plato chose this term because it reflects our normal attitude toward ordinary objects. We don't spend much time in our everyday life analyzing the things around us. Instead we rely on them instinctively. Sinaiko comments that the images and the things have an interesting relationship. In one respect the images are very like the things that they reflect. In fact, the images must have some likeness to the objects, otherwise they couldn't be called images. It could also be said that the images are the same as the things. The reflection of a tree in water is in some sense a tree. However, the images are also not like the things. A photograph of my grandmother is not actually my living and breathing grandmother.
In describing the third level of the line Socrates lists mathematics and geometry as examples of the types of disciplines which operate at this level. Socrates mentions two characteristics of the third level. The first characteristic is the use of hypotheses. Mathematicians and geometers "treat as known the odd and the even, the figures, three forms of angles, and other things akin to these in each kind of inquiry. These things they make hypotheses and don't think it worthwhile to give any further account of them" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 510c). The second characteristic is the use of visible diagrams. Socrates says that "they use visible forms besides and make their arguments about them, not thinking about them but about those others that they are like" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 510d). The mode of knowledge at this level is called "dianoia" which is translated as "understanding". This level is problematic because of the difficulty in assigning the correct objects of knowledge to it. I will outline three different views on what the objects of the third line should be.

A standard view of the objects on the third level is that they are intermediates, objects between sensible objects and Forms, called "mathematicals". These mathematical are close to, but not quite Forms. The number five and the triangle are examples of mathematical. An argument in favor of looking at mathematical as
intermediates is that Aristotle says that Plato held the view that there was a class of objects, the intermediates, that was between the sensible objects and the Forms. (Aristotle writes about Plato's understanding of the intermediates in *Metaphysics* 987b14-18 and 997b1.) One reason that intermediates are not thought of as Forms is because they lack the unity that the "real" Forms have. We can think of only one Beauty, but we can imagine many perfect Triangles side by side. And it would be strange to talk about adding two Forms together as we would do in $5+5=10$. The intermediates are like Forms in that they are perfect and unchanging.

The similarity of intermediates to Forms makes them a good candidate for the objects of the third level. One advantage that this view gives us is that we have different objects for the third and the fourth level. Also, we can say that as a person moves in understanding from the third level of knowledge to the fourth level of knowledge he or she moves from an understanding of mathematical objects that are very similar to the Forms, to an understanding of the Forms themselves. The mathematical objects make the transition to the Forms easier because they introduce us to some of the characteristics of the Forms.

However, not all philosophers agree that the intermediates are the objects of knowledge that Plato was talking about in the third level. Another view is that the
objects of knowledge for the third level are the Forms. W. K. C. Guthrie writes "I think it must be agreed that the objects of thought, whose nature the mathematician studies through the medium of their visible images, are Forms (of square, etc.), not the 'mathematicals' which nevertheless Plato did posit as intermediate between Forms and sensibles" (509). A problem with the view of intermediates as the third level objects is that they don't follow the pattern of relationships that develops between the first and second level of the line and the third and fourth level of the line. The images and things relationship, discussed above, pointed out that images are very like the things being reflected in one way, the same as the things in another way, and not like the things in another way. The intermediates couldn't really be said to be reflections of the Forms. They are alike in some ways because they share similar characteristics, but they are different things in the sense that it is only an accident that they have similar characteristics. Images and the things they are reflections of, on the other hand, must share characteristics because without similarities to the things the images would not be what they are.

If, following Guthrie, we consider the Forms as objects of both the third and fourth level we can see that they have a relationship that is similar to the images and things relationship. Obviously, the Forms on one level will be the
same as the objects on the other level, but because we use a
different mode of knowledge to understand them at the two
levels they also have differences. When we look at a
reflection of a tree in water as a first level object what
we are seeing is the tree. In the same way, when we look at
the diagram of a triangle on a blackboard as a third level
object, a thing used to lead us to the Forms, we are seeing
the Form of a triangle. Without the tree there would be no
reflection of the tree and without the Triangle there would
be no diagram of a triangle. The differences come in
because the media through which we see the tree or the
triangle distort them and make them imperfect
representations. Both the fact that we see them as
reflections and the fact that we use a lower mode of
knowledge to understand them causes distortions. Also, when
we are on the lower level we don't realize as fully as we
would on the higher level that what we are seeing is a
reflection or an imperfect copy. We aren't aware of some
differences that we would see on the higher level. On the
third level we use a mode of knowing the Forms that doesn't
give us as much information about them as the fourth level
method does.

The last view of the objects of knowledge in the third
level that I will discuss is the view that the objects are
the diagrams and images used by geometers and mathematicians
to lead them to the Forms. Nicholas D. Smith, in his
article "The Objects of Dianoia in Plato's Divided Line", suggests that the objects of the third level should be the visible objects that the geometer and mathematician use in their work (131). One reason that he does this is because, unlike the intermediates, the visible objects are clearly mentioned in the section describing the third level. Another reason is that some people think that Plato deliberately constructed the line so that the second and third level would be the same length. If the second and third level have the same object of knowledge, then this would seem to fit with the construction of the line. However, Smith says himself that Plato doesn't talk about the second and third level being equal, so most people don't think that Plato meant to make them equal (132). Also, Socrates says that the mathematicians and geometers "make arguments for the sake of the square itself and the diagonal itself, not for the sake of the diagonal they draw, and likewise with the rest" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 510d). This appears to mean that what the geometers and mathematicians want to understand on the third level are the Forms, not the diagrams used to get to the Forms.

One problem with this view is that we could say that we are actually using the same objects for the second and the third level of the line. In constructing the line Socrates claims to split the line into the visible and the intelligible. If the objects of the second and third level
are both visibles, then there is a problem with this claim. Smith claims that there are two different ways of looking at the "geometer's images". We can see them as objects, which would keep the knower at the second level, or we can see them as images leading to the Forms. Using the second way of looking at the Forms "the geometer and Platonic astronomer view them as something quite different, ignoring their purely wordly [sic] aspects for their representative qualities" (Smith 132). However, if the geometers are using the diagram of a square to understand the Forms, then the real objects of the third level seem to be the Forms. Mathematicians are not trying to understand the numbers as they are on the blackboard, they are trying to understand the numbers themselves.

Socrates assigns the disciplines of geometry and mathematics to the third level. Sinaiko expands on this to add any activity which uses sensible objects as a way to get to the Forms. If, in an attempt to understand something, we use "hypothetical assumptions from which conclusions are drawn with the aid of empirical evidence, then the endeavor belongs more specifically in the third segment of the line" (Sinaiko 160). This would include activities such as biology, chemistry, the social sciences, and many of our everyday conversations. The people who work in these fields, like psychologists, use diagrams and hypotheses to answer questions about the Form of Friendship or Love, not
just the diagram that they draw on the blackboard. All of these people are trying to use their diagrams to enable them to understand the Forms as well as possible, not to enable them to understand the diagrams. I think this enlargement of the disciplines belonging under the third level helps us to see more of the type of information the third level mode of knowledge works with. It is not concerned only with numbers and geometrical figures. It also argues against Smith’s understanding of the third level because it points out that the pictures or diagrams are not crucial to the mode of knowledge.

One thing to keep in mind about the whole discussion of the third level objects is that what I am trying to understand about the fourth level of the line depends more on the mode of knowing in the third level than the objects of knowledge. Understanding the mode of knowledge on the third level will help me to understand what kind of information we have at this level and how that would help us move to the fourth level. I think that it is important to at least discuss the different views on what object belongs on the third level because that gives us a few clues as to what to look for in the dialogues when we search for the third level. However, deciding which view is correct is not a crucial issue for the purposes of this discussion.

Whatever Socrates meant for us to include in the third level we can at least be sure that the objects of the fourth
level are the Forms. In the fourth level we use the method of dialectic to examine the hypotheses of an argument. The goal is to find the ultimate principle. So, rather than starting with unquestioned hypotheses, Socrates says that the fourth level thinker uses the hypotheses as "steppingstones and springboards" to try and find the ruling principle on which they are based. Images or visibles are not used on this level. Socrates calls the mode of knowledge on the fourth level of the line "noesis" or "episteme". These are translated as "intelligence" and "knowledge" respectively.

The Divided Line and the Republic

Now we will turn the discussion to the Republic. I am using it because it is the dialogue that contains the divided line and because the characters in it seem to make clear transitions from one mode of knowledge to the next. I will examine this dialogue while keeping in mind the description of the divided line. As I discover characters who are using a certain mode of knowledge I will point them out and explain why I think they fit that particular mode of knowledge. I will pay particular attention to the characters when they are dealing with the fourth level.

The place to begin in the Republic seems to be the first discussion on the nature of justice. Cephalus and
Socrates begins talking about old age and how money makes old age more comfortable by giving the older person the resources to right any injustice he or she might have committed. Cephalus says the myths of Hades become more important in old age and older people want to be sure that they will not be found guilty of injustice because they fear being subject to a penalty in Hades. Socrates then questions Cephalus about his understanding of justice. Cephalus describes justice as the act of returning what is owed.

This understanding of justice is an example of a first level understanding. It is surrounded by a basic acceptance of the imagery of myths and poetry. It is not a complicated definition of justice and perhaps it is not very well thought out. The definition fits with the image (the myth of Hades) and so, in Cephalus' view, no more investigation is needed. Cephalus' definition of justice works well with the vision of reality that is given to him by the images and he is content to take it at face value. He is like a child who bases her understanding of right and wrong on a story about Heaven and Hell. Basing an understanding on images may be all right for children, but as people grow older they should begin to base their knowledge on more reliable sources such as experience or investigation.

The first level mode of knowledge that Cephalus uses is not unusual. John Paul Dreher, in his essay "The Driving
Ratio in Plato's Divided Line", makes the point that "Like many of the characters in Plato's dialogues, we live by unexamined traditions, by the sayings of poets, by rumors we hear, by stories, pictures and dreams which influence our expectations and perceptions" (167). What is even more interesting is that Dreher points out that the first level is also the place where we start "to wonder about copies and shadows, and about what might be their originals" (167). It is the place where it all begins, where we start our journey to the top.

After giving his definition of justice Cephalus hands the discussion over to his son, Polemarchus. He agrees with his father's definition and so he is the natural person to take Cephalus' place. Socrates was very respectful of Cephalus and did not seem to be making fun of his understanding of justice. But Cephalus dropped the discussion so quickly that Socrates has no time to do more than offer a refutation of his definition. When Polemarchus takes over he and Socrates immediately try to get into the real problems that they find within the present definition of justice. They try to find out when justice is useful. They try to understand how justice can be returning what is owed when it seems that we should not give back what is owed, as in the case of the friend who, in a deranged state, wants a gun back that he or she had given to another friend for safekeeping. In the course of the discussion
Polemarchus develops a slightly different definition of justice than the one his father gave. He says "that justice is helping friends and harming enemies" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 334b). This is a second level definition because it is based on common experience. It is something that anyone might say about justice because they have seen what goes on around them in the world.

Throughout their discussion Socrates uses examples of common events and objects to illustrate his arguments. For example, he points to the fact that people make mistakes and consider one person to be a friend when actually he or she is not a friend. This mistake leads to people doing good to enemies and evil to friends when they meant to do the opposite. Polemarchus and Socrates seem to be moving from a first level understanding to a second level understanding of justice. Using belief in the things of the concrete world around them they struggle to understand justice. Unlike Cephalus they test their definition of justice against the things of this world rather than against myths.

Then Thrasydamus enters the discussion. He jumps into the discussion when Polemarchus and Socrates conclude that the definition Polemarchus gave was not the correct definition of justice. Thrasydamus says "the just is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 338c). Throughout the dialogue between Socrates and Thrasydamus, Thrasydamus is very
hostile and proud. He is also resentful of Socrates. The ways that Socrates goes about investigating Polemarchus' argument and Thrasy machus' argument don't seem to be much different, but Thrasy machus is a very different partner in the search for knowledge. Polemarchus and Thrasy machus both think that they know what justice is. And they both quickly realize that they didn't know it as well as they had thought. Another similarity between the two arguments is that Socrates uses similar examples to show them where the problem lies in each definition.

Both Polemarchus and Thrasy machus have developed their ideas of justice without really (perhaps we could say "scientifically") testing them. Each definition does fit certain aspects of justice. But more careful investigation shows that large parts of justice were left out. Perhaps Polemarchus and Thrasy machus lacked the time, care, or imagination to involve themselves on their own in the kind of careful investigation that is needed. Their understanding of justice is similar to having a "common sense" belief that house plants are healthier if you talk to them without taking the time to investigate this belief the way that a scientist would. If you talk to your plants and they flourish that is all the evidence you need. Maybe that is fine in the case of knowledge about plants, but it can cause some serious difficulties in the question of justice.
Eventually Thrasy machus gives up arguing with Socrates and just tells him what he wants to hear. Once it becomes clear to Thrasy machus that his definition of justice is not going to be accepted he refuses to really open his mind to any other possibility. I think the differences between Polemarchus and Thrasy machus point out a necessary characteristic of the person who is going to be able to advance to the next level of the divided line. Polemarchus is willing to change his definition of justice when he realizes that it is incorrect. He doesn't pout when he discovers that he was wrong. This willingness to change makes him capable of learning more about justice and contributing to the discussion. In fact, although he does it by whispering to Adeimantus instead of doing it directly, Polemarchus is the character who first suggests that Socrates needs to explain the part of the construction of the city that is concerned with the women and children (Plato, The Republic of Plato 449b).

For the most part, Polemarchus and Thrasy machus stay within the second level of belief or trust. However, at one point Thrasy machus uses the third level of knowledge. When he and Socrates are discussing whether the ruler, when he or she is making a mistake, is actually exercising the advantage of the stronger, Thrasy machus ends up giving the kind of definition of a ruler that we would expect to find in the third level. He explains that "the ruler, insofar as
he is a ruler, does not make mistakes; and not making mistakes, he sets down what is best for himself" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 340e-341a). Giving a precise definition of a term other than the major term being discussed seems to be a third level tactic. Doing so is the beginning of developing a more systematic approach to the topic being discussed. Although we might prefer a very clear distinction between the different levels of knowledge as we see them in the dialogues, it makes sense that some of the discussions will involve characters who are moving between levels. People don’t often fit neatly into the boxes that we call categories.

The next two characters to enter the discussion are Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus. They are both dissatisfied with Socrates‘ argument that it is better to be a just person than an unjust person. With the entrance of these two characters the dialogue takes on more of the characteristics of the third level of the divided line.

The first thing that they want to do is be sure that the argument for the greater happiness of the unjust person is as strong as possible. They want Socrates to show them that justice should be loved not only because of the benefits that one receives for being just, but also for itself, apart from the benefits. Glaucon and Adeimantus believe that justice is better than injustice, but they
aren't able to defend justice. They want to be able to base their belief on something more than belief or trust.

Socrates agrees to help them, but he shifts the focus of the discussion slightly. Before he can show that justice is better than injustice he needs to know what justice is. Socrates explains that it should be easier to see justice in a large subject, such as a city, than in a smaller subject. The listeners agree that the best course of action would be to discover what justice is in a city and then see if they can also find out what justice is in a person. This begins the task of the construction of Socrates' famous city.

In Socrates' discussion of the divided line he gives a couple of examples of how geometers or mathematicians go about analyzing things on the third level. They start out with hypotheses which they don't prove and "end consistently at the object toward which their investigation was directed" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 510d). He also says "Don't you also know that they use visible forms besides and make their arguments about them, not thinking about them but about those others that they are like? They make the arguments for the sake of the square itself and the diagonal itself, not for the sake of the diagonal they draw, and likewise with the rest" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 510d). Glauccon, Adeimantus, and Socrates want to know what justice is and why it is better than injustice. They all assume that there is such a thing as justice and that people can be
just or unjust in their actions. One thing that is
different from the preceding discussions about justice is
that Socrates is very careful to say that before he can
explain why justice is better he needs to know exactly what
it is. Another difference is that the participants begin to
set up a very elaborate "visible form" or example. Socrates
used examples of commonplace professions and things around
us in talking with Polemarchus and Thrasymachus, but here he
begins to set up a very complex city which they can use to
"see" justice or to lead them to justice. We can compare
the city to the diagrams that mathematicians and geometers
use.

It takes the group awhile, but eventually they have a
diagram that is clear enough that they can see justice and
describe what it is. In book four, after they have a rough
idea of what their model city looks like, they use the model
to discover what wisdom, courage, moderation and justice
are. Socrates explains "that justice is the minding of
one's own business and not being a busybody" (Plato, The
Republic of Plato 433a). Justice in the city is each person
doing their own job, the job that is most suited to him or
her. After finding justice in the city they test out this
definition by applying it to an individual. And it works
there too. They find that justice in an individual is
occurring when all the parts of the individual's soul are
doing their particular job.
The whole section where the characters are discussing the city and justice in the city has many of the characteristics of a scientific or mathematical discussion. They make some basic assumptions, such as the assumption that justice is a real thing that they can understand, and build on them to come to a conclusion as to what justice is and how it can be found. This is similar to the way a mathematician assumes that there are things called numbers, that we can use them in ways that make sense, and that those ways follow certain rules.

As they construct the city they talk about other things besides justice. They discuss what things they should include in the city and what sort of people should do each type of job that needs to be done to keep the city running. They discuss the education of the citizens and how their families will be set up. In book VI they discuss who should be the ruler of the city. Socrates says that the rulers should be philosophers. The philosophers are those people in the city who have excelled in every kind of study and gymnastic. They must also be of good character. They are the people who are ready to work towards what Socrates calls "the greatest and most fitting study" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 504d). This puzzles Adeimantus so he asks him, "there is something yet greater than justice and the other things we went through?" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 504d). Socrates answers him by telling him "the idea of the
good is the greatest study and that it's by availing oneself of it along with just things and the rest that they become useful and beneficial" (Plato, *The Republic of Plato* 505a).

Glauccon and Adeimantus want to know what the Good is. Glauccon says "It will satisfy us even if you go through the good just as you went through justice, moderation and the rest" (Plato, *The Republic of Plato* 506d). Socrates claims that he can only "tell what looks like a child of the good and [is] most similar to it" (Plato, *The Republic of Plato* 506e). Socrates then goes on to explain how the sun is like the Good. But he does not seem satisfied with this metaphor alone. The divided line is his next attempt to help Glauccon and Adeimantus understand the Good. The line shows them where the Good is in relationship to other objects of knowledge. The Good is a form, but it is apparently a special form because Socrates places it on the very top of the line, higher than the fourth level. Finally, he tells the myth of the cave which integrates the sun/Good metaphor and the different levels of knowledge.

This part of the dialogue seems strange. The characters follow the same general format of discussion throughout the dialogue, yet Socrates suddenly switches to telling myths and metaphors to explain the nature of the Good. Why would he return to what would seem to be a level one device to explain the Good? Why can't he explain the Good in the same manner that he explained justice? An
understanding of justice was reached by using a complicated diagram and paying careful attention to the way in which things worked in the diagram. Although it was not easy, the method seemed simple enough and justice was relatively easy to see in the model city that they made.

Wisdom, courage, moderation and justice can be explained at least in part with the use of a model that leads the searchers to the things themselves, but the Good cannot. It seems that Glaucon, Adeimantus and the others are intelligent, capable learners. Why doesn’t Socrates show them the Good in the same way that he showed them Justice? Aren’t they both Forms? I want to suggest that they have reached that mysterious fourth level of knowledge. Some Forms, such as Justice, may be accessible in a limited way by using the third level mode of knowledge, using visible models to lead to the things themselves. Socrates discovers a working definition of justice by using the city model. But he didn’t really get to the Form of Justice. He didn’t get beyond images or the assumptions that he made. Other Forms, such as the Good, present a bigger problem to Socrates and to us. Why is this? The Good informs our whole understanding of the world and all the levels of the line. Like the sun we need knowledge of it to “see” in any of the levels. Even a first level understanding involves the Good. How else could I say that this image is good, it is a good representation of what it is an image of, and this
one is bad? The epistemological priority of the Good makes it more difficult to put it into a diagram like the city.

The only way we can gain knowledge of these Forms is to explain them through images. Glauccon and Adeimantus manage to get something out of what Socrates tells them about the Good. The mythical mode of knowledge helps them locate the Good in the world. It helps them to see what kind of a role the Good plays in the world. It gives them "intellectual light" so that they can see the objects of knowledge in the world. This is as close to the Good as they will be able to come.

In his description of the fourth level of the line Socrates says that "by the other segment of the intelligible I mean that which argument itself grasps with the power of dialectic, making the hypotheses not beginnings but really hypotheses...in order to reach what is free from hypothesis at the beginning of the whole" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 511b). On the fourth level we make "no use of anything sensed in any way, but using forms themselves, going through forms to forms, it ends in forms too" (Plato, The Republic of Plato 511c). Using this description of the fourth level it seems almost impossible for us to reach this kind of knowledge. We must not use any images and we must use the Forms to get to the Forms. I think that our main task and Socrates' main task in the Republic is to learn as much as possible about the Forms using the third level mode of
understanding and using images to help us gain a small understanding of the Forms on the fourth level.

What other Forms can we gain some knowledge of? Are there other Forms like the Good which can be known only through images? In another dialogue, the Phaedrus, Socrates and Phaedrus discuss the love of the Form of Beauty. In the Phaedrus we will again look for a pattern that is similar to the divided line. And we will see what method Socrates and Phaedrus use to try to understand the Forms.

The Divided Line and the Phaedrus

In Plato’s dialogue the Phaedrus, the characters Phaedrus and Socrates decide to take a walk outside the city and discuss a speech by Lysias. As the dialogue progresses the two characters talk about a myth and give three speeches, one of which contains a myth. The characters move towards a better understanding of love and beauty as the dialogue goes on. The first three levels of the line can be found in the dialogue and as in the Republic there is a fourth level which contains a myth.

The myth that Phaedrus and Socrates discuss in the beginning of the Phaedrus concerns the abduction of the maiden Oreithyia by Boreas. As they are walking in the country Phaedrus points out a spot that is supposed to be the place where Oreithyia was abducted. He then asks
Socrates whether or not he thinks that the myth is true. Socrates says "The wise are doubtful, and if, like them, I also doubted, there would be nothing very strange in that." (Plato, *The Works of Plato* 229c). He goes on to offer the explanation that Oreithyia was out playing and had been picked up by the north wind and fell on the rocks. Because of this the myth was told about her being abducted by Boreas, the god of the north wind. Socrates goes on to say that he really doesn’t have time for creating clever explanations for myths like this because his true object of curiosity is himself.

If we look at this myth as an example of the kind of knowledge or understanding we can gain from the first level of the divided line we can see why Socrates does not spend much time on it. As a description of what may have happened to Oreithyia it is not very good. Socrates seems to think that it doesn’t represent the actual situation very well. The myth is only someone’s re-telling of what may have happened and it doesn’t interest him much because he wants to learn about himself.

The myth of Oreithyia fits the description of the first level of knowledge very well. The kind of understanding we can get from this reflection or image of what really happened to the maiden Oreithyia is very unclear. We have no definite knowledge about what happened to her and whether or not the myth fits the actual occurrence. So, we know it
only through imagining, the lowest and most uncertain mode of knowledge.

The first speech that is recited in the Phaedrus is the speech by Lysias. It is an argument to convince a young boy that a non-lover would be better for him than a lover. The first point that Lysias makes in his speech, which Phaedrus reads to Socrates, is that one of the reasons a non-lover is better for the youth than a lover is because "the kindnesses of lovers are afterwards regretted by them when their passion ceases, but non-lovers have no time of repentance, because they are free" (Plato, The Works of Plato 231a). Also, the lover is not in his right mind when he is in love, there are more non-lovers than lovers so the youth will have more to choose from, the lover is more concerned with appearances than the non-lover is, and the lover will want to keep the beloved weaker so that he will be able to control the beloved.

Lysias' speech uses a different mode of cognition than the myth of Oreithyia. Instead of using imagination Lysias relies on a kind of common-sense understanding of love that seems to belong to the class of knowledge that is listed in the second level of the divided line. Socrates implies that Lysias says things that anyone would say about love. He is just using ideas that are common knowledge. The important thing is to look at the way that the speech is used to gain understanding. Lysias doesn't define love in his speech or
systematically list a hypothesis or two and make conclusions from them. We would not call his method scientific. Like Polemarchus and Thrasymachus in the Republic, he does not back up his assumptions with any sort of evidence beyond common-sense.

In his speech Lysias often points to what is a common belief or a common experience in order to back up his argument. He says that the lover is not in his right mind when he is in love and that he is liable to fall in love with a youth because of his pleasing form before really knowing the youth. He also says that the lover wants the beloved all to himself and will not allow him to have companions. Lysias claims that these characteristics of the lover will lead to problems for the beloved. The heavy dependence on belief and experience as parts of the argument also puts Lysias' speech on the second level of the divided line.

The second speech is given by Socrates in response to Lysias' speech. After Phaedrus finished reading Lysias' speech to Socrates he says that Lysias "omitted nothing; this is the special merit of the speech, and I do not think that any one could have made a fuller or better" (Plato, The Works of Plato 235b). Socrates disagrees with Phaedrus saying that he is full of things that he heard from some sage or wise person that could be said about the subject of accepting the companionship of a lover or a non-lover. Upon
hearing Socrates make this claim Phaedrus encourages him "to make another and better oration of equal length on the same subject" (Plato, The Works of Plato 235d). After more encouragement Socrates agrees to give the speech.

One of the first things that Socrates does in his speech is to express the importance of "defining the nature and power of love" (Plato, The Works of Plato 237c). He claims that there are two principles that guide each of us. One is "the natural desire of pleasure" (Plato, The Works of Plato 237d). The other is "an acquired opinion which is in search of the best" (Plato, The Works of Plato 237d). The acquired opinion makes use of reason and guides us towards the good things. When this principle is ruling the actions of people their condition is called temperance. The natural desire does not use reason and it leads people to pleasure.

When natural desire rules a person the condition is called "hybris" which is translated as "excess". There are many species of excess and love is one of them. The different species are distinguished by the object desired. Socrates defines love as "the irrational desire which overcomes the tendency of opinion towards right, and is led away to the enjoyment of beauty" (Plato, The Works of Plato 238b-c).

Using this definition of love as an excess Socrates goes on to elaborate on the disadvantages of the lover as compared to the non-lover. Socrates explains that for the lover "who is not in his right senses that is agreeable
which is not opposed to him, but that which is equal or superior is hateful to him" (Plato, *The Works of Plato* 239a). The lover, because he is not in his right mind, will only love what is weaker than himself. A beloved who was smarter than the lover might disagree or have ideas of his own. He will not encourage the beloved to grow in knowledge, therefore the non-lover would be better for the beloved because he would not be threatened by his intelligence. Also, because the lover searches after pleasure he will not encourage the good of physical training for the beloved. Instead he will look for a beloved who is soft and weak. Neither will the lover bring good concerning the beloved’s possessions. He will be jealous of his family and his property because they "may be hinderers or reprovers of their sweet converse" (Plato, *The Works of Plato* 240a).

Because Socrates begins his discourse with a definition of love (an unquestioned assumption on which he will build the rest of his argument) it seems to belong to the third level of the divided line. He makes an assumption about what love is and then goes on to see how he can use the assumption as a building block to a conclusion. There are differences between Lysias’ speech and Socrates’ speech that should be noted. Two differences are that Socrates defines love before beginning to tell of the disadvantages of the lover and he is much more systematic in listing the disadvantages. Another difference between the two speeches
is that Socrates seems to try to change the focus of the argument slightly. Instead of focusing entirely on the disadvantages of the lover Socrates also tries to develop an understanding of love.

After giving his speech Socrates decides that it would be wise for him to give another speech as a recantation of his first one. He does not wish to encounter the wrath of the god of love who might take offense at his rough handling of the subject of love. The second speech given by Socrates contains a myth which tells of the nature of the soul and of the influence of the Form of Beauty on the soul. It also gives a different understanding of love and of the madness of the lover.

Socrates says that the soul is like "a pair of winged horses and a charioteer" (Plato, The Works of Plato 246a). One horse is a noble horse and pulls the chariot towards good. The other horse is ignoble and pulls toward evil. The souls that are with the gods in heaven follow Zeus and the rest of the gods to "the top of the dome of heaven" (Plato, The Works of Plato 247b). There, depending on the control that the charioteer has over the ignoble horse, the soul catches sight of the Forms. Some souls manage to see a little of the Forms while others can't get close enough or get their wings damaged by other souls. The souls that do see the Forms are nourished and are able to stay in heaven until the next climb to the top. The soul who does not see
the Forms "sinks beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice, and her feathers fall from her and she drops to earth" (Plato, *The Works of Plato* 245c). The souls who fall to earth receive a body which corresponds to the amount of sight each soul had of the Forms. The soul who has seen the most becomes "a philosopher, or artist, or musician, or lover" (Plato, *The Works of Plato* 246d).

Socrates says that the Form of Beauty is the easiest for the souls to see and that it is also the easiest for the soul who has been sent to earth to remember and recognize. Depending on the kind of vision of Beauty that the soul was able to have when traveling in heaven the soul will have different reactions to the beauty that it sees on earth. If the soul has just recently come from heaven it will reverence the beauty it sees in its beloved.

When a person who strongly remembers the Form of Beauty sees a beautiful youth the beauty begins to feed his soul and his wings start to grow. When the person is near his beloved the soul's wings grow, but when he is away from his beloved the soul receives no nourishment and the wings become very painful. For Socrates this explains the feeling of desire in the person who is in love and it also explains the fact that the lover will leave his family and friends to be near the beloved.

Socrates goes on to say that the three parts of the soul, the charioteer, the good horse and the bad horse, are
still active when the soul is on earth. He explains the feelings that a lover has upon seeing his beloved by showing how the charioteer deals with the two horses. The bad horse pulls towards the beloved and the good horse pulls away with a sense of shame and awe. Eventually, the lover shows his love for the beloved by serving him and giving him good things. The beloved becomes friends with the lover because of the goodwill that is shown to him by the lover. They develop a relationship in which they encourage each other to better things. The love that the lover feels is eventually felt by the beloved and so his wings begin to grow, too. When the lover and beloved die they receive a benefit for their effort “For those who have once begun the heavenward pilgrimage may not go down again to darkness and the journey beneath the earth, but they live in light always” (Plato, The Works of Plato 256d).

As in the discussion of the good in the Republic, this last speech is puzzling because Socrates uses a myth to explain his understanding of love and of the form Beauty. He quickly makes it clear in the beginning of the dialogue that he finds no value in discussing the myth of the abduction of Oreithyia. Why then would he use a myth in a serious discussion of the nature of love? How are the two myths different? One difference is that the myth of the soul depends on the definitions that were made in the level three speech. Socrates takes the two parts of the soul that
he described in his first speech and uses them as the two horses in the myth. The one horse is the noble part of the soul and it pulls the soul toward good. The other horse is the ignoble part of the soul and it pulls the soul toward evil. Besides the these two parts of the soul Socrates also includes something new that wasn’t part of the third level speech. This part of the soul is called the charioteer. The charioteer can control the pull of the two horses and lead them to wisdom and the Forms. The charioteer adds an element of rationality that is missing from the third level speech. Another difference is that the myth of the soul helps us to place the Form of Beauty in the world and to understand how it affects us. The previous speeches about love were very closely connected with reality and common experience. The evidence came from the things around us, not from myths. I think Socrates had gone as far as he could with common sense or scientific methods of investigation into the nature of love. He turned to myths at a similar point in the discussion of the Good.

Conclusion

What have we gained from investigating the levels of knowledge in the Republic and the Phaedrus? They give us two examples of Plato’s educational epistemology. I have shown that in both dialogues we see three stages of
understanding which correspond to the first three levels of knowledge in the divided line and then a strange mythical mode of knowledge where the fourth level should be. When Plato describes the divided line through Socrates he gives us a general idea of how we should be able to gain knowledge of the fourth level. We are told that the fourth level uses dialectic, hypotheses as "springboards" to get to "what is free from hypothesis", and the Forms (Plato, The Republic of Plato 511b). There is no use of images. However, in the two dialogues that we looked at Plato has his characters go about trying to understand the Forms in a very different way. They gain knowledge about some of the Forms through the third level. They also use mythical knowledge to gain an understanding of the Forms.

On the fourth level Forms can only be partially grasped by images that give the characters a small glimpse of them. This technique for understanding the Forms works well for Socrates. The myths give his listeners enough of an understanding of the Form of the Good or of Beauty to be able to grasp some of their key characteristics. And the myths use third level definitions as springboards to an understanding of the Forms on the fourth level. The mythical mode of knowledge gives Socrates' listeners a structure in which to place the Forms. This is important because even though we can't say what the Forms are in themselves, we can say what they are in relation to other
things. For example, the Good is the Form that gives us intellectual "light". We know this from the section in the Republic where Socrates compares the sun with the Good. Now we can look back to the dialogue in book VII and see that Socrates uses this understanding of the Good to show the characters more about education.

I have shown that the method for attaining fourth level knowledge of the Forms that Plato describes in the divided line is not the same as the method that he uses to help his characters attain knowledge of the Forms in the Republic and the Phaedrus. While the rest of the line becomes more analytical and scientific as we move up the levels, in the fourth level Plato acknowledges that the Forms are a kind of mystery that is best understood through myth. This gives rise to several questions. If myths help to explain Forms, then wouldn’t poetry or other art forms work as well? For example, a painting of the Holocaust gives me a different understanding of that event than a scientific study of it would. Since I did not personally experience the event and words cannot adequately explain it I need something else to help me understand what went on then. A painting of the Holocaust is not specifically made to be an image, just a copy of the real thing, it is made to touch me. It gives me a kind of understanding of the Holocaust that nothing else can.
If the arts can help us understand the Forms why does Socrates throw out different kinds of poetry in his discussion of the education of the guardians? And why is the description of the fourth level mode of knowledge so different from the way that the characters actually go about knowing the Forms? All we know is that Plato ends up being Socratic, realizing that he doesn’t know some things. So we are left with the mystery of the Forms.
Bibliography


