

SIMILE OF THE DIVIDED LINE

Context: Socrates has just explained the *Simile of the Sun*, in which the sun stands for the Form of the Good. The Form of the Good gives both truth and knowledge, reality and intelligibility.

Content: The Simile of the Divided Line is used to explain two realms – the realm of *intelligible* things and the realm of *visible* things.

Socrates asks his companion, Glaucon, to imagine a single line divided and the new divisions similarly divided.

Key ideas:

- There is a radical divide between the world of true knowledge and of visible things.
- At the bottom of the line are shadows and reflections of visible things; these are 'least real'
- Next up the line are things in the world as we see it.
- Across the divide, we come to mathematical objects (mathematical ideas, hypotheses and theorems). These are objects of the mind rather than of the senses, but they are not yet the Forms. They are like 'shadows' to the Forms.
- Above and highest, are the Forms themselves, to which the soul (mind) attains by the 'power of dialectic' and soaring to the 'first principle of the whole'.
- Once the soul has made this ascent, it can realise how everything connects with this, relying on ideas rather than on the senses.

Connections with modern experience:

- In these and other images (the Allegory of the Cave follows after), Plato is laying the foundation for the approach to metaphysics and epistemology that will come to called **rationalism**.

