

Plato

Plato was born in Athens to an aristocratic family. He founded the Academy, which was the first University in Western Europe, which lasted for over 900 years.

Plato used a metaphor known as “The Divided Line” to teach his views on the 4 basic levels of existence, or the 4 stages of mental activity. These 4 stages are: Imagining, Believing, Thinking, and Perfect Intelligence.

Imaging can best be compared to hallucinating. In other words, when there is a sense of experiences in appearances, and a failure to distinguish the difference between the two. For example, when somebody hallucinates, they legitimately are receiving messages to their brain that tell them that they are really experiencing something, and it all seems real because these messages are the same kinds of signals as when they are real. These identical signals impair the person from distinguishing the hallucination from reality, and that is what Plato defines as imagining. Types of people who were classified in this stage were poets, artists, and lawyers.

Believing is defined as being the state of mind induced by perceiving physical objects, and compared to the old saying that “Seeing is Believing”. For example, if you are looking through a forest and can see several trees for as far as the eye can see, it would appear that the trees which are farthest away are smaller than those that are just a few steps in front of you. Plato recognizes this and says that seeing is believing, but seeing is not always knowing.

The third stage, thinking, is the closest stage before Plato’s “Perfect Intelligence” is reached. Thinking is when someone is engaged in abstract thinking. The definition of abstract is having an idea or thought without having physical or concrete existence. By this definition, the third stage of thinking completely contradicts the second stage of believing. Because by thinking, there are no physical objects needed. Mathematicians and philosophers were types of people who were classified in this stage.

The fourth and final stage in Plato’s stages of mental activity is perfect intelligence. Perfect Intelligence is intelligence where hypothesis is no longer needed because it comes with limitations. Perfect intelligence can best be compared with Plato’s theory of the forms.

The forms is what Plato described to be the place of changeless, eternal, and non-mortal essences. It is where the gods spent all of their time and it is the place where everyone goes and stays until the horse of desire takes over the horse of reason and they are taken to the “visible world”. The visible world is the world we live in, which Plato describes as a “poor copy” of the forms, meaning that any ideas or creations we have in the visible world are mere memories or “copies” of what we experienced in the forms. Using the example of a chair, a chair is just a creation of what we remember in the forms, it is not perfect. A new idea that we have did not originate in the visible world like we think, but rather a recollection of what we thought or saw while in the forms.

Plato believed in innate knowledge and that knowledge was acquired through our time spent in the forms. The longer we spent in the forms, the more knowledge we attained. And each time that we visit the forms, the longer we stay because This can somewhat explain why he believes that poets, artists, and lawyers are at the beginning stages of mental activity, and why philosophers and mathematicians are closer to perfect intelligence.