OCR Philosophy of Religion

Ancient Greek Influences on Philosophy of Religion

Name: _________________________________________

Group: ________________________________________
Plato: An Introduction

Plato was an Ancient Greek philosopher who lived from 427 – 347 BCE, and a former student of the great philosopher Socrates. Plato is perhaps one of the most influential and well-known philosophers in history. His work influenced the development of philosophy throughout the Western world. His early works are about Socrates' philosophy and most of Plato's books feature Socrates as the leading character.

In his later works, Plato wrote about many issues; including the existence of the soul, the nature of beauty and theories of governance. Plato founded his own school of philosophy called the Academia (from which we get the word 'academy' in English).

Theory of Forms

In your head, imagine a cat. It might be white, black, ginger, tabby...the list goes on. Was your idea of a cat exactly the same as your neighbour? Probably not, but there are a set of characteristics that you will both have imagined: a tail, whiskers, four legs, paws. These characteristics resemble the idea of what a cat is. You would both be able to recognise a cat if one walked past you, even if it didn’t look exactly the same as the cat you imagined.

Plato saw a very important distinction here: the world of appearances and the real world. He proposed that the world we live in is a world of appearances, but the real world is the world of Forms. Forms are the idea of what a thing is, like the idea of a cat. All cats that exist in our world, the material world, conform to the idea, or the Form, of a cat. A Form does not change, it is a concept that is everlasting. Plato argued that the true Form of everything (including cats!) must exist somewhere, in a different reality; he called this the world of Forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The world of the Forms (the Real World)</th>
<th>The world of Particulars (our world/the cave)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each Form is One (there is only one idea of beauty)</td>
<td>Particulars are many (there are many beautiful things)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligible = only known through our intellect/reason</td>
<td>Sensible = only known through our empirical senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eternal</td>
<td>Always coming in and out of existence (birth and death, or made and destroyed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unchanging</td>
<td>Always changing into something else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-physical</td>
<td>Material objects</td>
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<td>Perfect</td>
<td>Imperfect</td>
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great philosopher, Plato wasn’t all that interested in discussing the Form of a cat. He focused more on concepts like beauty, truth and justice. He saw that concepts like beauty can be applied to all sorts of different things. Both a person and a piece of music can be beautiful, and so reveal some characteristic of beauty. But neither clearly define beauty, because they are different, and other different things can be beautiful too (like a painting or a landscape). This led Plato to suggest that there was a Form of beauty, to which all these things correspond to some extent.

In our world, there are only the shadows and images of the Forms. Material things in our world imitate a form. As our understanding is limited to the objects that exist in our material word, the Forms go beyond human comprehension. So how do we recognise the Form of beauty in a beautiful person?

Plato argued that the reason we recognise the Forms is because when we are born we have a dim recollection of them. He said that there is an inner part of us, that most people call the soul, which is immortal and unchanging. Before the soul became tied down to the body, it was connected to the real world of Forms. The reason that we can all recognise beautiful things or kind acts is because we have all seen the Forms before. Plato’s evidence for this claim was the fact that a person can instinctively know that something is beautiful, even if we haven’t been taught it.

Therefore, Plato concluded, it must be true that we have an immortal soul which was once part of the world of the Forms.

Thought Point

The Philosopher: Plato said that the philosopher is someone who tries to escape the world of appearances and with their mind see the Forms that lie behind appearances. As a true philosopher has knowledge of the Forms, he argued that they are the most suitable people to rule society.

Do you agree?

The Form of the Good

Plato believed that some things do not conform to a Form, like number and evil. He also thought that some Forms were greater than others; universal qualities like justice, truth and beauty. These ideal Forms all have something in common – they all have the presence of Good in them. Therefore, Plato said that Good is the most important Form. It is ‘the Form of the Forms’ (or ideal of the ideal Forms).

Plato argued that once you can understand Good, then you can understand all other Forms because they are all aspects of goodness. The Good is like the Sun: it illuminates everything else, and the further away you get, the paler things become. In his analogy of the Sun, Plato
says that the Form of the Good makes things knowable, and that it is the source of the other Forms. Therefore, knowledge of the Good is the highest knowledge a human is capable of. An ordinary person struggles to see past the illusion of this material world because they are ruled by their senses. Only the person who questions and investigates can learn the truth behind the illusion. Who is that person? The philosopher, of course!

Plato’s Analogy to Sight:
Sight requires both light and the eye to see clearly. Light symbolises the Form of the Good. Plato’s implication is that without the knowledge of the Form of Good one does not see clearly; the same as trying to see in complete darkness.

Activity
1. Write a definition of the Forms.
2. Explain why Plato says the world we live in is not the real world.
3. How do you explain the fact that everyone is able to identify something like kindness?
4. What would you say to challenge the idea that the recognition of Form proves we have an eternal soul?

What are the strengths and weaknesses?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tr>
<td>The theory of Forms explains why we can all recognise the same essential elements in something. The fact that we can all recognise beauty, without being taught about it, must mean we have some collective experience of beauty. Plato’s thoughts on the eternal unchanging soul and the world of Forms explains this.</td>
<td>Nobody can prove Plato’s world of Forms exists. It is an alternate reality, another universe, it is not within human knowledge or experience. Therefore, there is no real empirical evidence for its existence.</td>
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<td>Plato’s theory helps us to understand why there are imperfections in the world. It doesn’t rely on us accepting the presence of an all-present higher being who creates imperfections for reasons we can’t understand. Imperfections are merely a result of the fact we live in the material world, and material objects are merely shadows of Forms.</td>
<td>If you have a Form of a Form, or an ideal Form of Forms (like the Form of the Good), then what’s stopping you from having an idea Form of that ideal Form? And an ideal Form of the ideal Form of that ideal Form? This argument is called infinite regression – it goes on forever backwards.</td>
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<td>It encourages us to question things in order to learn, rather than accepting things at face value.</td>
<td>What about opinion? Some people argue there is no such absolute value as 'Good' as it is subjective; people have their own opinion as to what is good. Therefore, it is unlikely that two people will always come to the same conclusion about what is good.</td>
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<td>It is unlikely that everything in existence has an ideal form. Is there an ideal slug or type of cancer?</td>
<td>Plato is not clear how the world of Forms relates directly to our world. Do the Forms have to relate to a specific variety of material object? For example, does the Form of a cat have to relate to a specific breed of cat? Is there a particular Form for each breed?</td>
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<td>Plato says that the senses are inferior, and that we should not rely on them. Yet people have been relying on their senses for survival for thousands of years.</td>
<td>It is not very logical at first instance to say there is a world we cannot see. Therefore, the theory may not be an obvious conclusion of logical reasoning.</td>
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The Analogy of the Cave is one of the most famous passages from Plato’s *Republic*. Plato uses this analogy, and two others, to illustrate his theory of Forms. The Cave is often said to be allegorical, which means that different elements of the story are symbolic of the situation in which people find themselves.

Imagine people sitting on chairs in a cave. They are all facing the wall of the cave. They are chained to chairs. The only light in the cave comes from a fire. There is a wall behind the prisoners and there is a fire located behind the wall. Behind this wall, other people are walking up and down and carrying statues on their heads. What the prisoners chained to the chairs see is the shadows cast by the statues on the wall in front of them.

The prisoners believe that the shadows are reality because that is all they see. If they hear people behind the wall speaking they assume that these voices come from the shadows.

Imagine if one of the prisoners is freed. At first when he is turned around, he is confused. He doesn’t understand what he sees. Slowly, his eyes become accustomed to the firelight and he can see the statues. He is confused still – he believes the shadows are reality.

Then, the released prisoner is dragged up a long ramp at the back of the cave, and emerges into sunlight. The sunlight is blinding, and so he tries to flee back into the cave. Imagine that...
someone prevents him from fleeing, and slowly his eyes adjust. He is able to see the world around him. Finally, he looks up and realises the importance of the sun. He sees that it supports life and the seasons. Now, he doesn’t want to go back underground.

However, he might remember his friends in the cave, and want to go back and teach them about reality. When he gets back in the cave, his eyes cannot adjust to the darkness and he cannot see clearly. When he tells the other prisoners his story, and they see he cannot see in the darkness, they decide it is better not to go above ground and wish to put to death anyone who tries to free another prisoner.

Plato’s analogy of the Cave demonstrates the importance of questioning everything in order to distinguish between the material world and the real world. In the analogy, the prisoner who is freed is representative of a philosopher. He breaks away and makes the journey out of the cave to find out what is really going on. In the outside world he discovers the sun and realises it gives life to everything.

Using the table below, identify what the other features of the analogy represent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Point</th>
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<td>In Republic, Plato states that the statues carried along the wall are made of wood and stone. Why do you think this is important?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cave</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Shadows</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Prisoners</td>
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In the analogy of the Cave, the prisoner returns to those still inside the cave. This journey is representative of a philosopher educating others about the real world. Once they have learned the truth, they have a duty to return to the Cave and challenge the ideas of reality. However, upon his return the other prisoners want to kill him. This can be seen as representing society’s unwillingness to question what they are told, something that Socrates did. Plato undoubtedly had in mind the fate of Socrates, who challenges the ideas of his day and was condemned to death.

But what is real? Everyone in the analogy is convinced that what they are looking at is real. The prisoners’ knowledge is based entirely on their sense of sight and sound, and they accept this as reality. Plato is showing us that empirical knowledge (gained from the senses) cannot be accepted as fact; it does not show reality. Contrast this to the idea of the freed prisoner. After emerging into the real world, he uses his power of reasoning to reach a philosophical understanding of the truth. This knowledge of reality based entirely on reasoning is called a priori – gained wholly from logical reasoning and independent of sensory experience.

Plato’s argument is absolutist; it is fixed. He believed his argument to be true for all people in all places at all times. It is universal.
Arguments in Support of Plato:

- Plato makes a good point that empirical knowledge can be flawed (as was shown by the prisoners thinking the shadows to be real), this is because we live in an imperfect world of appearances and imitation of the Forms. The better type of knowledge is logical reasoning (a priori) as it is based on philosophical reason not our suspect senses.
- Plato gives a reason for the imperfections of the world which we see all around us, admits the world is imperfect copies of the world.
- We recognise these imperfect copies of the Forms as we lived there before.

Criticisms of Plato’s Argument:

- There is an unclear link between the World of Appearances and the Forms. The cave analogy doesn’t tell us how they are connected. E.g. movement from imitations -> Forms...is there anything in the middle??
- How does one actually realise the truth and the reality of the Forms in order to become enlightened? Plato mentions that the hard journey out of the cave is analogous to the soul leaving this world. That may mean a person must die in order to realise the Forms. So how can a person come back and tell the people inside the cave if he is dead? Or does it mean we can realise the truth while being here, but how does one do that?
- But Plato’s argument is Absolutist (i.e. it is fixed and universal truth for all in all time). But not everyone may accept this, certainly Aristotle didn’t. Aristotle was critical of Plato’s argument because he could not agree that the form of something has a separate existence over and above the particular.
- No concrete proof that world in cave or outside is real. How can you prove the prisoners and philosopher is right or wrong?
- Just because someone is philosophically enlightened and intelligent, does that necessarily make them perfect for leadership? For example, there is a common stereotype that really clever people have low common-sense and empathy for less-intelligent people, but a leader needs to know his/her people to be a good leader.

Review

1. Explain the link between Plato’s forms and the Cave analogy.
2. ‘If the cave dwellers are happy in their ignorance, it is better to leave them to it’. Do you agree?
3. Make a list of the pros and cons of having philosophers as the leaders of society.
Aristotle: An Introduction

Aristotle was born in Macedonia in 384 BCE. Aged 17 he moved to Athens where he joined Plato’s Academy. He studied there for twenty years and was recognised as a brilliant student. In 347 BCE he moved to Turkey due to growing political tensions between Athens and Macedonia. He spent his time there investigating science, in particular biology. He moved back to Macedonia in 341 to become Alexander the Great’s tutor. Once Alexander became King, Aristotle moved back to Athens and founded his own school: the Lyceum.

Aristotle and Plato

Aristotle was taught by Plato, and many areas of study that interested him were first worked on by Plato. However, Aristotle approached topics of study in a very different way to Plato, which leads to some of his philosophy being very different from Plato’s.

The two are often thought to represent two different approaches to philosophy:

- Plato: Emphasising the world of ideas and reason as the source of knowledge.
- Aristotle: Emphasising the physical world and experience as the basis of knowledge.

Aristotle’s philosophy is different from Plato’s in a number of important ways:

1. Aristotle emphasises the value of studying the physical world. His approach is empirical, and he is not as concerned with the world of the Forms.
2. Aristotle rejected Plato’s theory of Forms, partly because the relationship between Forms and objects in the material world was never explained.

Thought Point

Potentiality: When something contains the ingredients, or potential, to become something else.

Actuality: When an object fulfils its potential and becomes something else.

How does this distinction apply to:

A cow? An embryo? A computer? A Prime Minister?
The painting above is Raphael’s ‘The School of Athens’. The painting, from 1514, is obviously an imaginary view of life at the Academy. The figures in the middle are Plato and Aristotle. Complete the observations below.

Plato is pointing upwards in the painting. This links to the theory of Forms because
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Aristotle’s hand and his book on ‘Ethics’ are parallel to the ground. This shows that
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

The Four Causes

Aristotle was interested in why things exist in the way they do. He rejected the idea that things which exist imitate an ideal Form, and instead turned to the world around him in order to reason why anything exists at all.

For example, a car is made of matter, but all the bits of matter have a particular structure and arrangement as part of the car. They have a particular ‘form’ (NOT a copy of an ideal
‘Form’ of car, like Plato said). Aristotle identified four causes that explain why a thing or object exists as it does. These are known as ‘the Four Causes’.

1. **The Material Cause.** The first cause refers to the matter or substance that something is made of – e.g. a book is made of paper. Aristotle said that materials always have the potential for change. Just imagine you left a table outside for years in all types of weather. When you came back to it, the material of the table would have changed. The materials represent the impermanence of our world.
   *An important question for this cause: What is it made of?*

2. **The Efficient Cause.** This cause refers to the cause of an object existing. A table exists because someone chose to make it, similarly a book exists because someone wrote it. However, the Efficient Cause does not necessarily have to be a person. A gust of wind might be the Efficient Cause of a tree falling over. An object might even have more than one efficient cause – for example, a cake’s efficient cause is not only the baker, but the mixing and cooking process too.
   *An important question for this cause: How does it happen?*

3. **The Formal Cause.** This refers to what gives the matter its form or structure. A table is not just random pieces of wood, but wood cut and arranged in a certain way. We can recognise a table because it has four legs, a flat surface and belongs to a group we know as ‘furniture’. What we are doing is mentally fitting the object into a category we already know.
   *An important question for this cause: What are its characteristics?*

4. **The Final Cause.** The final cause is concerned with the reason why something is the way it is. It is concerned with the function of any thing or object. The Final Cause is teleological – it is to do with the function of an object or the reason an action is done. This cause examines the purpose of the object; the reason it exists at all.
   *An important question for this cause: What’s it for?*

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**Activity**

Take five contrasting objects (for example a pencil case, a sunflower, a horse, the sun...) and apply Aristotle’s Four Causes to each one. If Aristotle is correct then it is possible to arrive at an answer to every question for everything in existence.

*Stretch and Challenge: Why do you think Aristotle is interested in the question of what causes something to exist?*
The Prime Mover

Aristotle recognised that everything in life is changing, and that everything that exists is in a permanent state of ‘movement’ or ‘motion’. By motion, we don’t mean moving around, we mean a state of change (motion comes from the Greek *motus* – which refers to change).

Aristotle observed four things:

1. The physical world was constantly in a state of motion and change.
2. The planets seemed to be moving eternally.
3. Change or motion is always caused by something.
4. Objects in the physical world were in a state of actuality and potentiality.

From these four things, Aristotle concluded that something must exist which causes the motion and change, without being moved and that is eternal. He called this being the **Prime Mover**

Using his argument about Causes, Aristotle reasoned that everything must have a Final Cause, or a purpose. Nothing comes from nothing, so it follows that when there is a chain of events, there must be an ultimate cause. The Prime Mover is the Final Cause.

So what is the Prime Mover like? Aristotle’s Prime Mover has to be outside the universe and outside time; otherwise we could just ask the questions “What caused the Prime Mover?” and “What happened before it existed?” – this ends up as infinite regression. Therefore the Prime Mover has to be eternal and really exist, but not in a bodily form like us. If it had a bodily form like us then it would be subject to change just like we are.

Sound familiar?

In his book Metaphysics Aristotle also links the Prime Mover with God, and concludes that God is ‘a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God’ (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*).

For Aristotle, something which is eternal must necessarily be good; things which change are bad. Change means impermanence, which is bad because there is always room for improvement. Although the Prime Mover cannot move, thing are attracted to it. Humans move towards the Prime Mover, like moths to a flame, because that is all we can do.

And because Aristotle’s God is perfection, it is unable to think about anything other than itself. If God thought about the universe, his knowledge would constantly be changing as the universe does, so therefore his thoughts would be imperfect. Therefore, Aristotle’s God is totally outside our world in terms of time and space. It knows nothing about it, has no plan and never intervenes in it.

Aristotle suggested that God relates to the universe in two ways:

1. As a leader
2. In the order of the universe
He argues that the first is more important than the second as the universe depends on the Prime Mover for its existence. However, he also points out that all things in the universe are ordered to a Final Cause, and ultimately the Prime Mover. This fits in with the importance he places on the last of his Four Causes.

### Review

1. **Think of the domino effect.** At the very beginning, someone has to push the first domino over then stand back and let things happen. This is an example of an efficient cause, not a final cause. Explain why, and how, this analogy could be misleading when considering Aristotle’s Prime Mover.

2. Evaluate Aristotle’s ideas on Causes. Present your ideas in two columns – strengths and weaknesses.

3. Evaluate Aristotle’s ideas on the Prime Mover. Present your ideas in two columns – strengths and weaknesses.

4. “Aristotle’s Prime Mover is completely different to the Christian concept of God”. Do you agree?

5. Is Aristotle’s God one you can pray to? **

** Stretch and Challenge

### Weaknesses

- The relationship between the Prime Mover and the universe is unclear. While Aristotle does link the Prime Mover with God, his Prime Mover is transcendent and cannot interact with the universe in the way religious believers talk about God.
  - This also raises an issue with people who claim to have had a religious experience. How can you interact with, or have experience of, something which exists entirely outside of time and space?

- Aristotle’s God is perfect, so it can only think of itself. The Prime Mover can only know itself and can’t know or have a part in our lives. This Prime Mover seems to be unloving as it plays no part in our lives, would the cause of the universe be like that?

- Is there really a final cause or purpose to the universe? Does there have to be a cause of the universe, can’t it just be there? (Bertrand Russell – “The universe it just there, that’s all”).

### Assess the ideas of Aristotle; do you think they work?

*Key points to talk about: Four Causes, Prime Mover, transcendence, knowledge, perfection.*