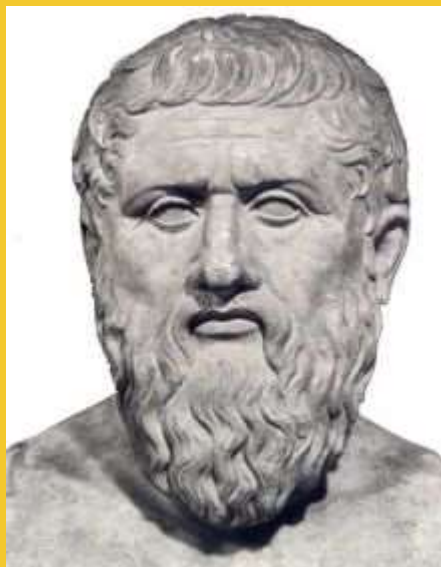


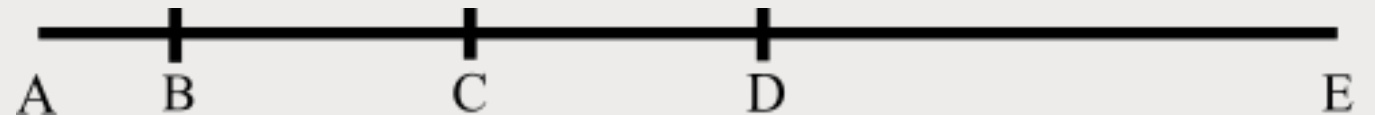
# Philosophy for beginners



**Week 5. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018: Plato's Politics**

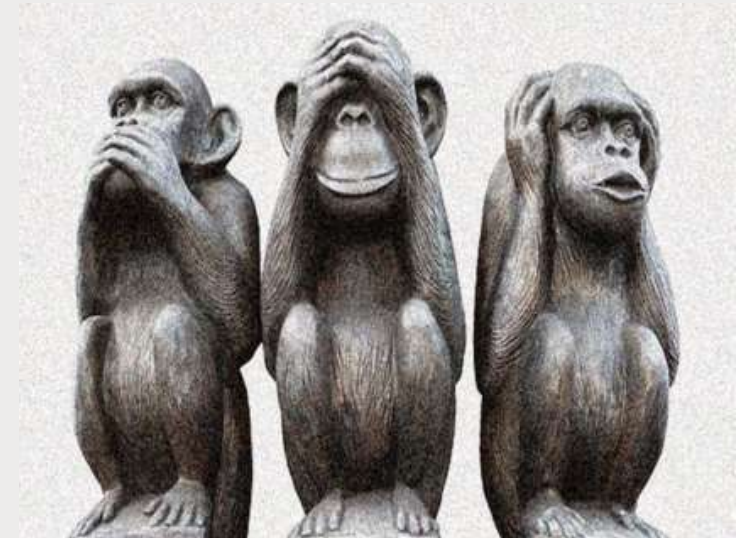
# Recap

- The Divided Line...
- What makes many dogs Dog-like?
- Beauty and the Good
- Theory of the Forms



# Class aims

- Discuss the nature of justice, using the Ring of Gyges allegory
- Understand Plato's critique of democracy
- Explore and evaluate Plato's ideal state
- Question whether philosophers should rule the world
- Explain what the Myth of Er tells us about Plato's philosophy



# *Republic* – what is justice?

It begins with the question of what is the nature of justice

- Cephalus defines justice as giving what is owed
- Polemarchus: helping friends and avenging enemies
- Thrasymachus: whatever is the advantage of the stronger

*How might the Socratic method unpick these claims?*

*How would you define justice in response? Groups of 3...*

# What is justice?

- There are exceptions: it would be unjust to return weapons to a mad friend.
- We may not know who our friends and enemies are, but justice involves not treating anyone badly.
- With the stronger, is justice in what they think is beneficial to them, or what actually benefits them? Rulers may create laws that disadvantage them and make mistakes. Justice shouldn't set out to benefit the practitioner, but the subject.
- Instead justice is a good in itself, and for its consequences.
- The just life results in happiness and harmony, and reflects a skill or virtue in living excellently, fulfilling one's social obligations.



# Ring of Gyges

- But what if you could do whatever you liked without getting caught?
- Read the Ring of Gyges myth, and in your groups discuss
  - what you would do and why
  - what is at stake here



‘No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a God among men. Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point.

And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever any one thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust. For all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to the individual than justice, and he who argues as I have been supposing, will say that they are right.

If you could imagine any one obtaining this power of becoming invisible, and never doing any wrong or touching what was another's, he would be thought by the lookers-on to be a most wretched idiot, although they would praise him to one another's faces, and keep up appearances with one another from a fear that they too might suffer injustice.’



# Is it better to be just?



- To explore this, Socrates sets out to define a model city in which it is better to be just than unjust
- Through this, he will have an analogy to compare with the human soul
- This leads him to ask: what is the best form of government?



# The ideal state

- *What would be the features or requirements of an ideal state?  
In groups of three again, discuss some ideas*
- For Plato, the ideal state is one that is wise, courageous, moderate and just.
- This is made possible through a special class of guardians trained to govern the city, who act in the common interest
- How these guardians are educated is of utmost importance.
- Justice also involves the right 'balance' in a society. Some forms of government are more balanced and virtuous than others.

# Educating the guardians

- To encourage the virtue or skill of the guardians, certain things must be censored or claimed falsely to be true
- Poetry and myth must be censored, presenting the gods as good, never dishonest or deceptive, and unchanging in form
- It should promote courage, self-discipline and obedience, truth-telling (but also when to lie to protect the city), and discourage greed and fearing death
- They would also share their property, wives and family in common
- *What use does poetry and art have for Plato?  
Who else disliked poets?*

# The Noble Lie



- The ideal state is one where each fulfils their virtue or skill, which best occurs through concentrating on one thing a person might be good at
- This results in a hierarchy where everyone knows their place, which Plato supports
- The citizens of the state should be educated to believe that each has a precious metal in them determining their status: bronze for workers and farmers, silver for guardians, gold for rulers
- This ‘noble lie’ will ensure the social harmony of the state

*What problems do you find with Plato's argument?*

# The problem with democracy...

The *Republic* is known for its strident criticism of (Athenian) democracy (Book VIII)

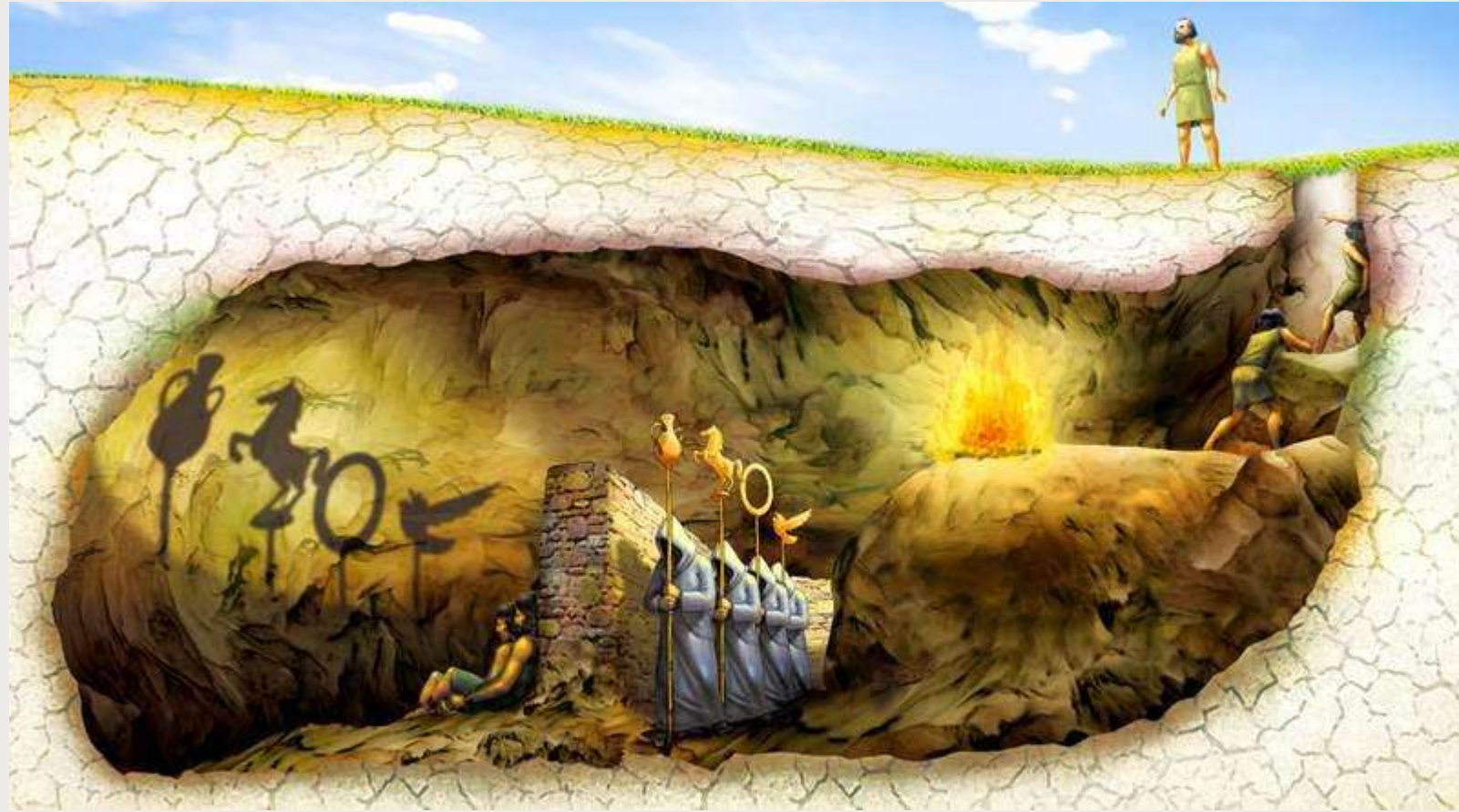
- *In small groups, try to come up with as many criticisms of democracy as you can*
- *If time, list some advantages to democracy too...*

# Summary of Plato's criticisms of democracy

- It leads to what is popular rather than what is right
- People come to hold power without the necessary knowledge
- Emphasises crowd-pleasing, persuasion and rhetoric rather than expert knowledge
- Depends upon opinion and impulsive appetite rather than knowledge
- Leads to tyranny, as the tyrant will present themselves as a champion of the people and go round killing or imprisoning the wealthy, political rivals and critics to preserve power



# The Cave

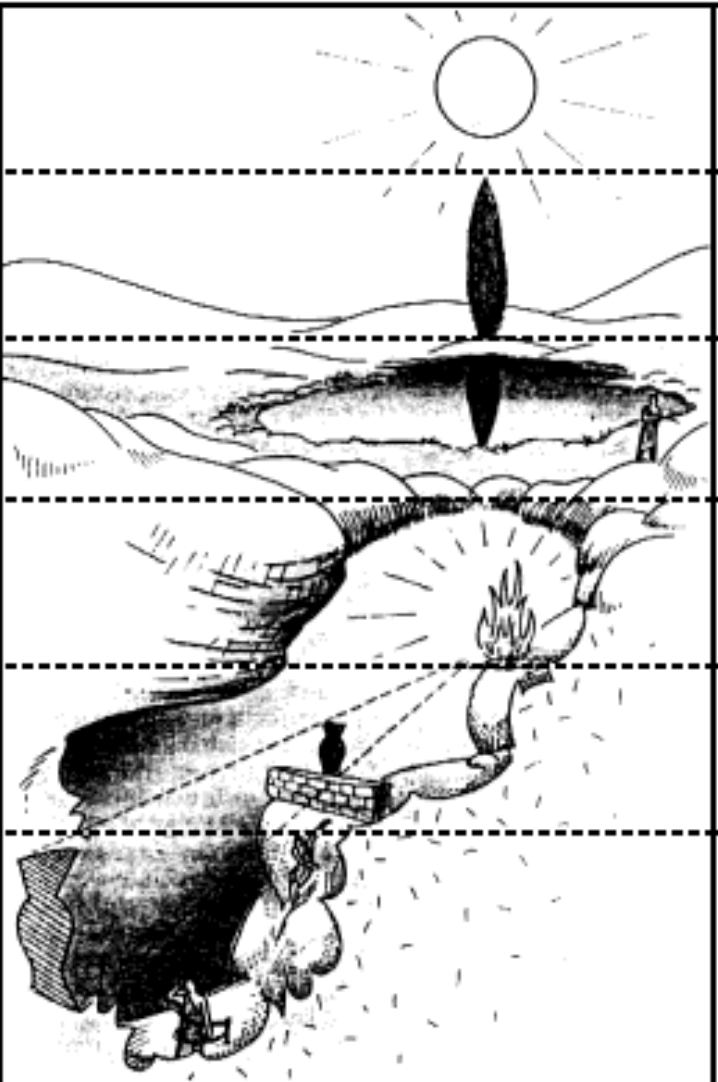





Read through the extract and discuss in your groups:

- what is Plato attempting to explain here?
- How do the different positions of the prisoners in the cave correspond to the different sections of the divided line?

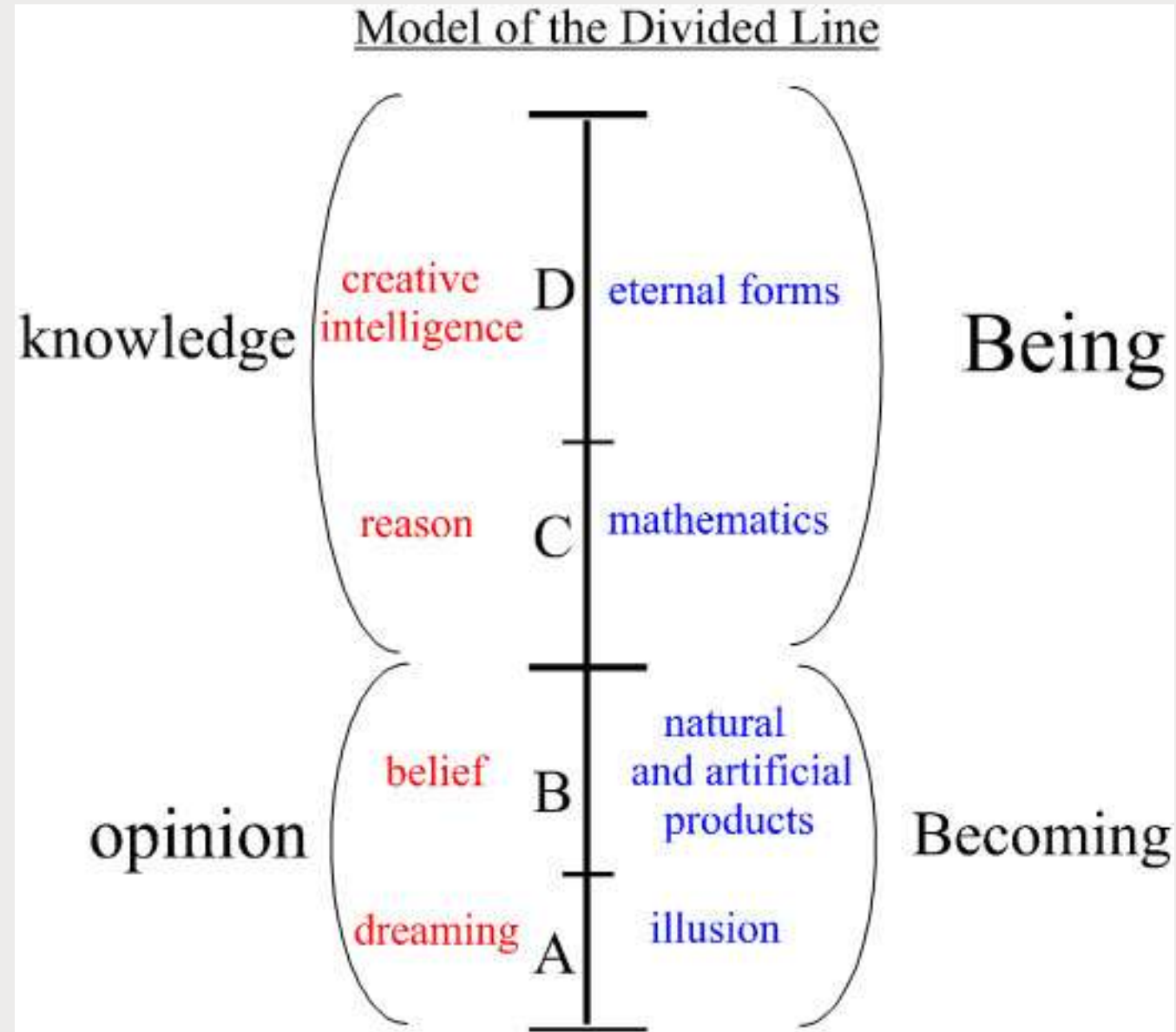
# The Cave

- The prisoners are shackled to the world of the senses and illusion
- The prisoner journeys from the sensible to the intelligible, from the senses to the rational
- The journey is painful at first, but the light of the Sun is ultimately superior, being the Idea of the Good, illuminating all else
- The prisoner will then want to return to help their fellows escape
- But seeing the escapee struggle to see in the dark, the other prisoners might think escape is dangerous, and prefer their ignorance, even killing the escapee.

Sun		Idea of the Good
Natural things		Ideas
Shadows of natural things		Mathematic Objects $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ 
Fire		Sun
Artificial things		 Living and dead things
Shadows of artificial things		 Symbols
Level of analogy		Sun and lines analogy

# Politics becomes epistemology

- We rely on experts for injuries and illness, why not for government?
- An expert is someone with knowledge – but what is knowledge?
- Last week we looked at the Forms and Divided Line...
- Following the Cave, true knowledge will be of the Forms



# Philosopher Kings

- Who is capable of recognising these higher Forms, for knowledge?
- The shadow-loving, senses-enslaved ordinary people or...
- The Philosophers!

‘There will be no end to the troubles of states, or of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands.’ - The *Republic*

# Are philosophers fit to rule?

Yes, argues Plato...

- They love and pursue the truth
- They are wisest and have practical knowledge
- They are moderate and courageous
- They are quick learners and have a good memory
- They like proportion and balance
- They have a pleasant nature!

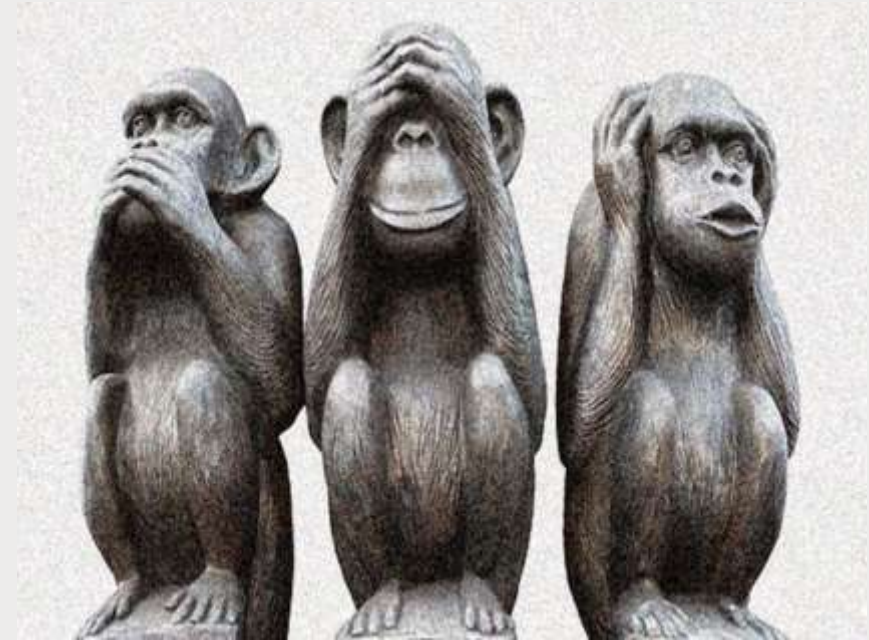
No...

- *What obvious problems do you see with this view?*
- Actual philosophers are either useless or bad, says Adeimantus
- Mixed evidence of impact: Aristotle and Alexander the Great, Plato and Dionysius
- What else?



# Plato's *Republic*, round-up

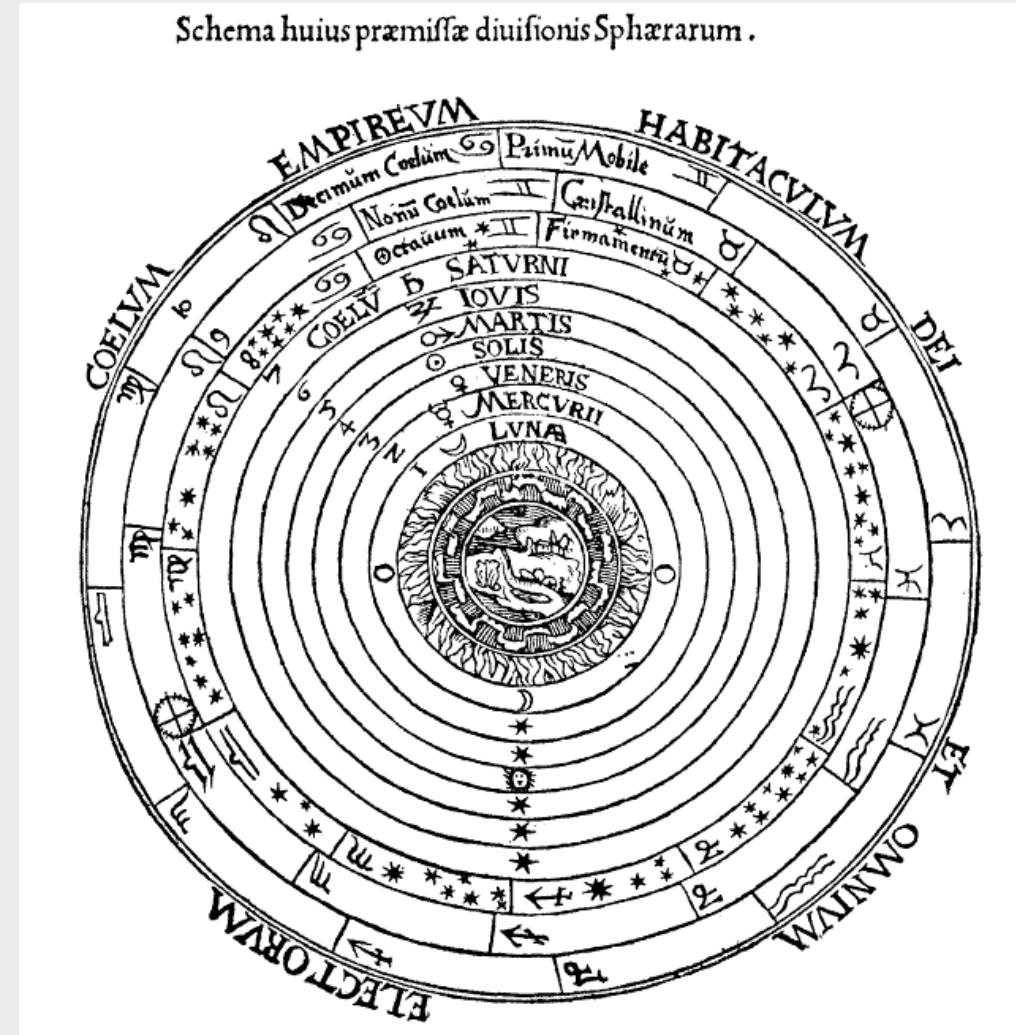
- Anti-democratic and hierarchical
- Noble lie
- Censorship of poetry and the arts
- Restrictive education of the guardians
- Philosopher-rulers



*Does such a city offer a model of justice?*

# Myth of Er

- Er gives an account of the soul's reincarnation
- Moral people are rewarded and immoral people are punished after death
- But those who act morally dishonestly or out of conformity will repeat the cycle
- Philosophy offers a break out of the cycle
- Knowledge is a feature of the good life and virtue, alongside self-control, courage and justice
- Its goal is *eudaimonia*: flourishing or happiness



# Class recap

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