**Theory of forms**

**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory\_of\_forms**

The **theory of Forms** or **theory of Ideas**[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-1)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-3) is a [philosophical theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_theory), concept, or world-view, attributed to [Plato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato), that the physical world is not as real or true as timeless, absolute, unchangeable [ideas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idea).[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-4) According to this theory, ideas in this sense, often capitalized and translated as "Ideas" or "Forms",[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-5) are the non-physical [essences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ousia) of all things, of which objects and matter in the physical world are merely imitations. Plato speaks of these entities only through the characters (primarily [Socrates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates)) of his [dialogues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato%27s_dialogues) who sometimes suggests that these Forms are the only objects of study that can provide [knowledge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-6) The theory itself is contested from within Plato's dialogues, and it is a general point of controversy in philosophy.

The early Greek concept of form precedes attested philosophical usage and is represented by a number of words mainly having to do with vision, sight, and appearance. Plato uses these aspects of sight and appearance from the early Greek concept of the form in his dialogues to explain the Forms and [the Good](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Form_of_the_Good).

**Forms**

The original meaning of the term εἶδος (*eidos*), "visible form", and related terms μορφή (*morphē*), "shape",[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-8) and φαινόμενα (*phainomena*), "appearances", from φαίνω (*phainō*), "shine", [Indo-European](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-European_language) [*\*bʰeh₂-*](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Reconstruction%3AProto-Indo-European/b%CA%B0eh%E2%82%82-) or *\*bhā-*[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-9) remained stable over the centuries until the beginning of Western philosophy, when they became equivocal, acquiring additional specialized philosophic meanings. Plato used the terms *eidos* and *idea* (ἰδέα) interchangeably.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-10)

The [pre-Socratic philosophers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-Socratic_philosophy), starting with [Thales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thales), noted that appearances change, and began to ask what the thing that changes "really" is. The answer was [substance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Substance_theory), which stands under the changes and is the actually existing thing being seen. The status of appearances now came into question. What is the form really and how is that related to substance?

The Forms are expounded upon in Plato's dialogues and general speech, in that every object or quality in reality has a form: dogs, human beings, mountains, colors, courage, love, and goodness.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-:0-11) Form answers the question, "What is that?" Plato was going a step further and asking what Form itself is. He supposed that the object was essentially or "really" the Form and that the phenomena were mere shadows mimicking the Form; that is, momentary portrayals of the Form under different circumstances(…) For Plato, forms, such as beauty, are more real than any objects that imitate them. Though the forms are timeless and unchanging, physical things are in a constant change of existence. Where forms are unqualified perfection, physical things are qualified and conditioned.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-13)

These Forms are the essences of various objects: they are that without which a thing would not be the kind of thing it is. For example, there are countless tables in the world but the Form of table-ness is at the core; it is the essence of all of them.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-14) Plato's Socrates held that the world of Forms is transcendent to our own world (the world of substances) and also is the essential basis of reality. Super-ordinate to matter, Forms are the most pure of all things. Furthermore, he believed that true knowledge/intelligence is the ability to grasp the world of Forms with one's mind.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-15)

A Form is *a-spatial* (transcendent to space) and *a-temporal* (transcendent to time).[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-:1-16) In the world of Plato, atemporal means that it does not exist within any time period, rather it provides the formal basis for time.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-:1-16) It therefore formally grounds beginning, persisting and ending. It is neither eternal in the sense of existing forever, nor mortal, of limited duration. It exists transcendent to time altogether.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-17) Forms are aspatial in that they have no spatial dimensions, and thus no orientation in space, nor do they even (like the point) have a location.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-18) They are non-physical, but they are not in the mind. Forms are extra-mental (i.e. real in the strictest sense of the word).[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-19)

A Form is an objective "blueprint" of perfection.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms#cite_note-20) The Forms are perfect and unchanging representations of objects and qualities. For example, the Form of beauty or the Form of a triangle. For the form of a triangle say there is a triangle drawn on a blackboard. A triangle is a polygon with 3 sides. The triangle as it is on the blackboard is far from perfect. However, it is only the intelligibility of the Form "triangle" that allows us to know the drawing on the chalkboard is a triangle, and the Form "triangle" is perfect and unchanging. It is exactly the same whenever anyone chooses to consider it; however, time only affects the observer and not the triangle. It follows that the same attributes would exist for the Form of beauty and for all Forms.

Plato explains how we are always many steps away from the idea or Form. The idea of a perfect circle can have us defining, speaking, writing, and drawing about particular circles that are always steps away from the actual being. The perfect circle, partly represented by a curved line, and a precise definition, cannot be drawn. Even the ratio of pi is an irrational number, that only partly helps to fully describe the perfect circle. The idea of the perfect circle is discovered, not invented.

**Intelligible realm and separation of the Forms**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Theory_of_forms&action=edit&section=2" \o "Edit section: Intelligible realm and separation of the Forms)]

Plato often invokes, particularly in his dialogues *[Phaedo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phaedo%22%20%5Co%20%22Phaedo)*,  *Republic* and [*Phaedrus*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phaedrus_%28dialogue%29), poetic language to illustrate the mode in which the Forms are said to exist. Near the end of the *Phaedo*, for example, Plato describes the world of Forms as a pristine region of the physical universe located above the surface of the Earth (*Phd.* 109a–111c). In the *Phaedrus* the Forms are in a "place beyond heaven" (*huperouranios topos*) (*Phdr.* 247c ff); and in the *Republic* the sensible world is contrasted with the intelligible realm (*noēton topon*) in the famous **Allegory of the Cave.**