Plato on Knowledge and Ideas

The Good
Theory of Knowledge
Plato's Ontology

I. Socrates explains "The Good."
   A. The virtues of the state and person are all many forms of goodness.
      1. Where Many things are covered by the same term, they have One thing in common.
      2. Many good things are visible, but the One thing they have in common, Goodness, is invisible.
   B. The Good is like the sun in the visible world.
      1. The sun generates and sustains visible things, and eyes, and makes vision possible.
      2. The Good generates and sustains things known, as well souls that know them, and makes knowledge possible.

II. Plato sees several stages on the path from ignorance to knowledge.
   A. The stages are:
      1. Ignorance: not only a lack of knowledge, not even an opinon.
      2. Two forms of Belief:
         a. Opinion: more than ignorance, it at least aims at truth, knowledge.
         b. True Opinion: falls short of knowledge; someone with true opinion cannot explain its truth.
      3. Two forms of Knowledge:
         a. Understanding (science): he who understands can explain why what he knows is true.
         b. Rational Intuition (philosophy) is the highest knowledge, can explain explanation and knowledge itself.
   B. Plato presents a diagram of a "Divided Line," relating faculties the mind to knowledge:
      1. Intellect
         a. Reason
         b. Understanding
      2. Sensation
         a. Perception
         b. Imagination

III. Plato's Ontology, or Theory of Reality, is a form of Idealism.
   A. Idealism in metaphysics or ontology is the belief that only ideas and minds are real.
   B. Idealism follows from Plato's theory of knowledge.
      1. The object known must be true, or real.
      2. What is known cannot change, is eternal.
   C. The stages of knowledge each have a different type of object:
      1. The Unreal:
         a. Opinion (imagination): illusion, shadow, copy;
         b. True Opinion (perception): individual things around us;
      2. The Real:
         a. Scientific understanding: generalities, principles;
         b. Rational intuition: highest, most general principles or ideas.
   D. Plato's synthesis of Parmenides and Heraclitus:
      1. Reality is unchanging, eternal (Parmenides).
      2. The shadow world of sensation is always changing (Heraclitus).