The Sun Analogy (507-509)

Socrates claims that the most important subject to be learned is knowledge of the form of the Good (505a). This leads into a discussion about what the highest good is. Some say its pleasure, some say its knowledge. The Sun Analogy is Socrates’ attempt identify the form of the Good as the highest good.

In order for the eyes to see what is visible, there must be light. The Sun is what gives eyesight its power and enables visible things to be seen. The Sun is not identical with sight or with light. Rather, the Sun is the cause of sight and of light. Moreover, the Sun itself can be an object of sight. The Sun not only enables visible things to be seen, but it also causes them to be what they are and grow. Therefore, the Sun is not only the cause of sight and light, but also of the visible things themselves.

The Good is to the intelligible realm what the Sun is to the visible realm.

In order for the soul (the understanding) to know intelligible things, there must be the light of truth. The Good is what gives knowing its power and enables intelligible things to be known. The Good is not identical with knowledge or with truth. Rather, the Good is the cause of knowledge and of truth. Moreover, the Good itself can be an object of knowledge. The Good not only enables intelligible things to be known, but also causes them to be what they are. Therefore, the Good is not only the cause of knowledge and light, but also of the intelligible things themselves.