

The Platonic Corpus

“Early”

Apology
Charmides
Crito
Euthyphro
Gorgias
Hippias Minor
Ion
Laches
Protagoras
Republic I

Thought to represent Socrates reasonably accurately.

“Transitional”

Euthydemus
Lysis
Menexenus
Meno

Has elements of both the “early” and “middle” periods.

“Middle”

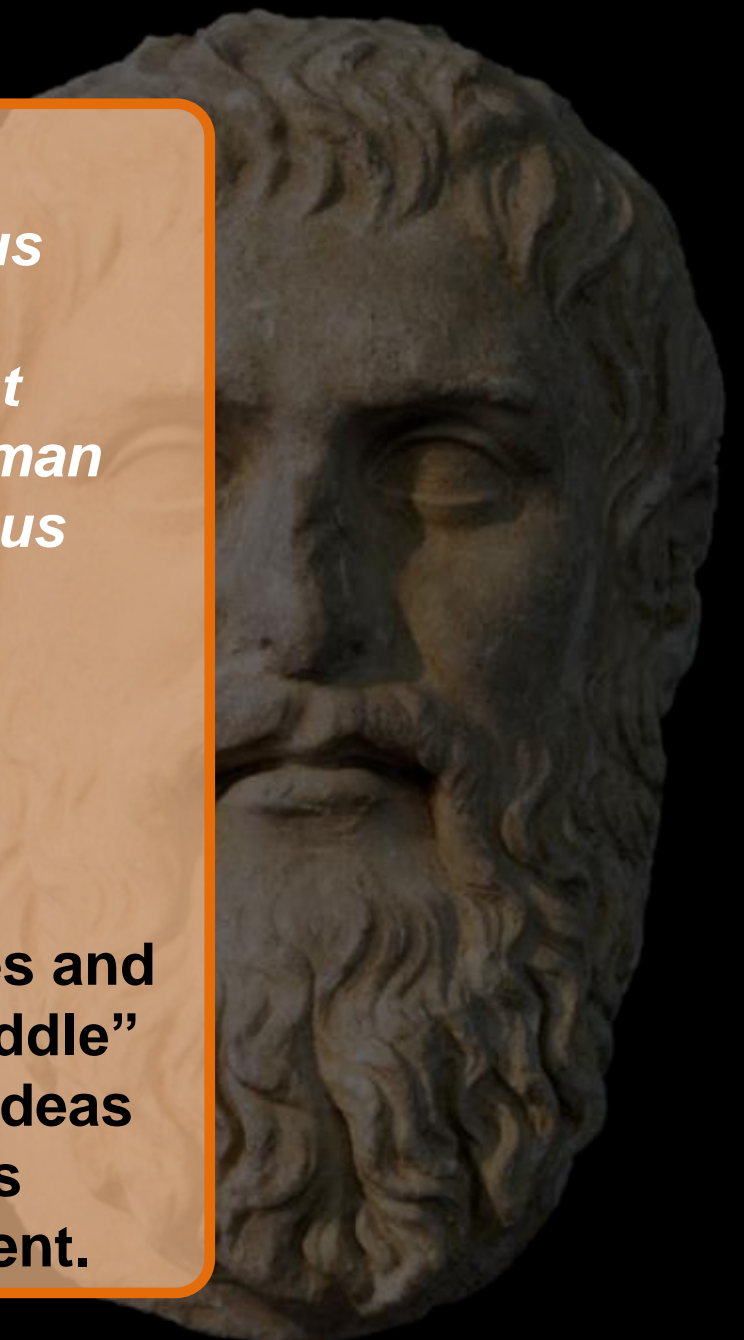
Cratylus
Phaedo
Symposium
Republic II-X
Phaedrus
Parmenides
Theaetetus

Socrates espouses ideas that are original to Plato.

Late

Timaeus
Critias
Sophist
Statesman
Philebus
Laws

Socrates and the “middle” period ideas are less prominent.



Plato and Aristotle

Gregory Salmieri

Course Content: The minimum exposure to Plato and Aristotle that an undergraduate philosophy major needs to have a first-hand understanding of their ideas and their significance.

Objectives for the Course

- Read some of the works in which Plato and Aristotle advanced some of the most influential ideas in history.
- Think critically about these ideas and the arguments offered for them.
- Develop the skills to engage with difficult texts.

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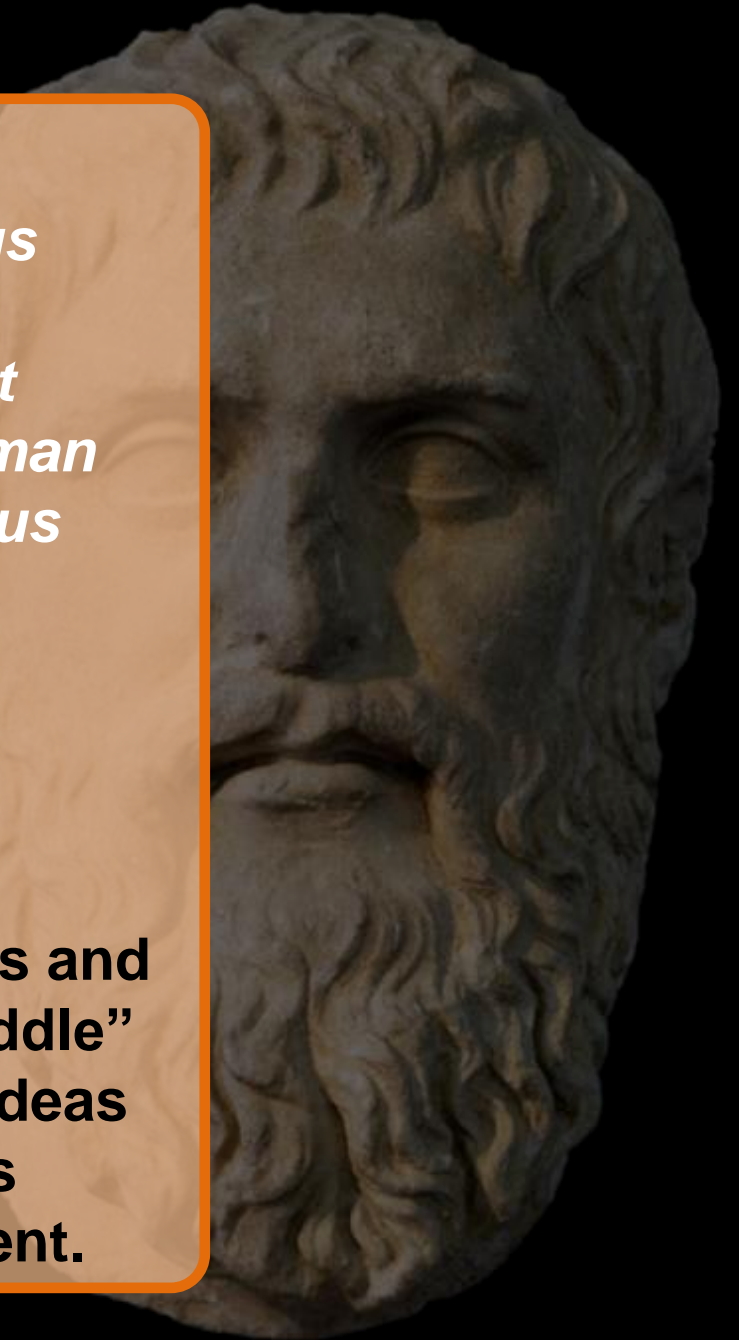
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The Meno

1. Elenchus of Meno (70a-79e)

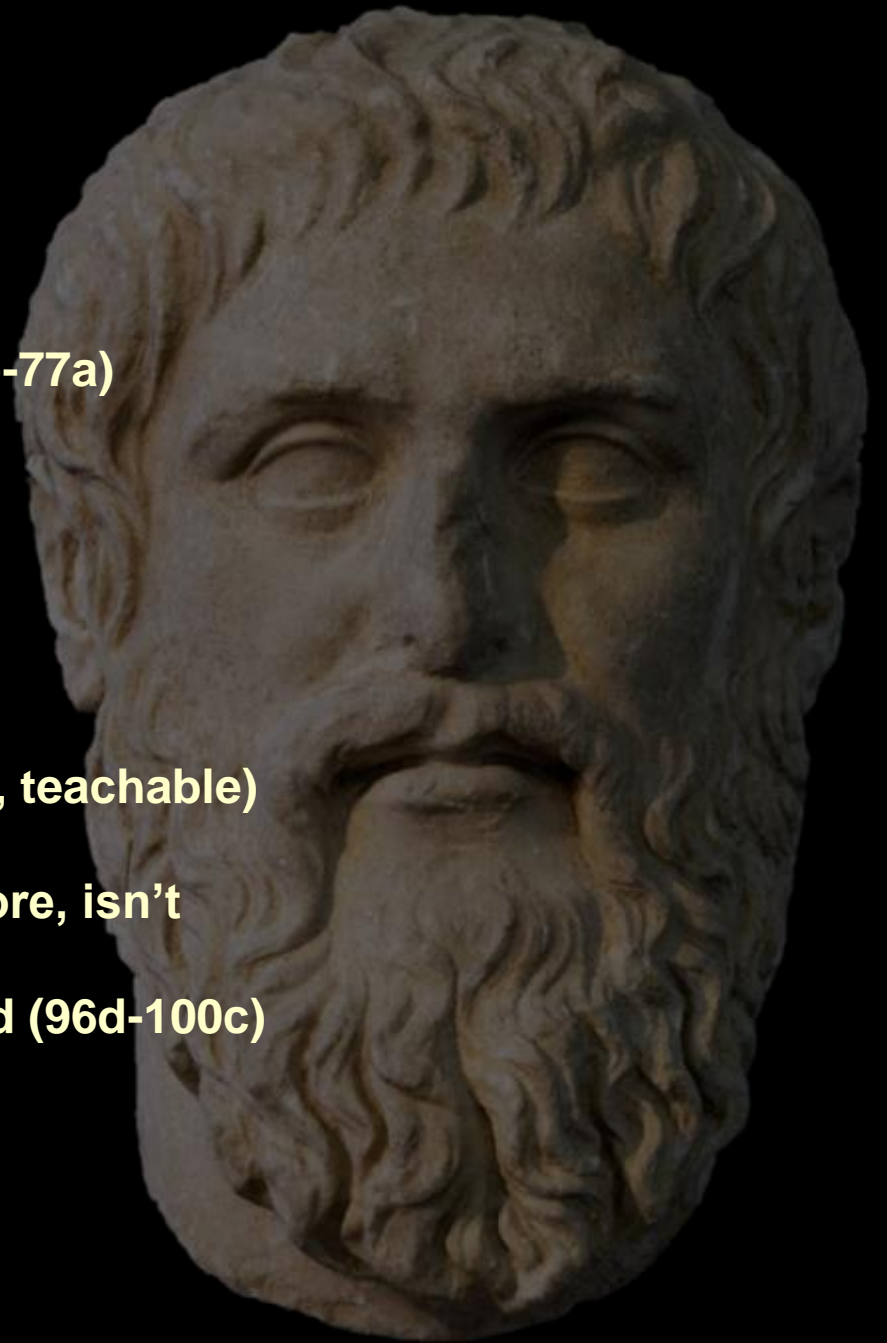
- a. Meno's question and Socrates' (70a-71d)
- b. Meno's initial accounts of virtue (71e-74b)
- c. Socrates' model accounts of shape and color (74b-77a)
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2. Epistemological interlude (80a-86c)

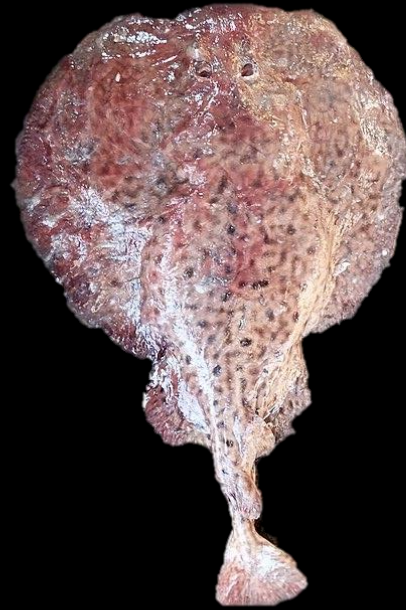
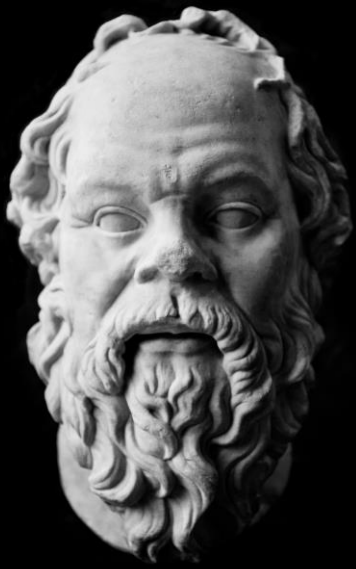
- a. The "Meno Problem" (80a-81a)
- b. The Theory of Recollection (81a-86c)

3. Inquiry into whether virtue can be taught. (86c-100c)

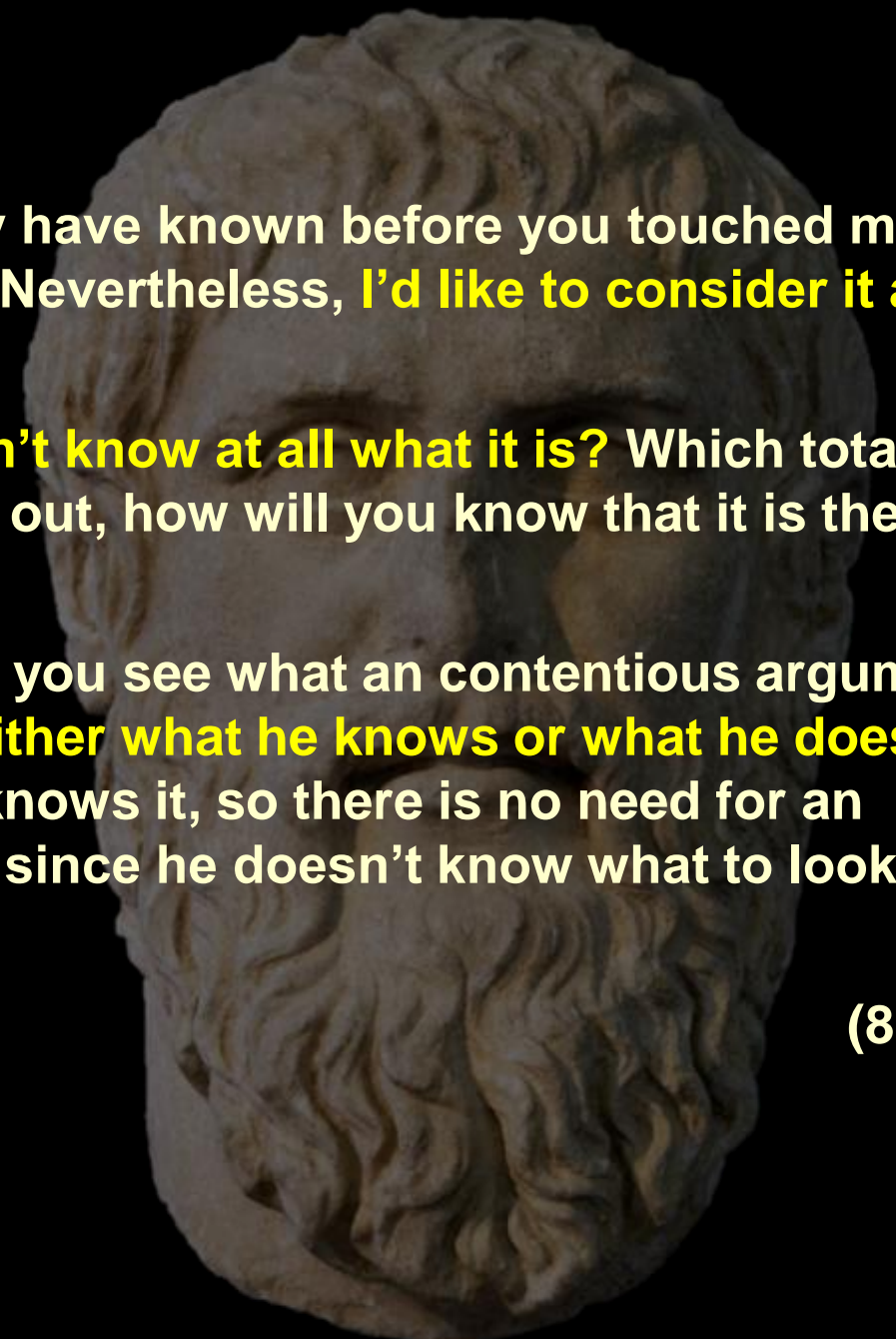
- a. Introduction of the hypothetical method (86c-87d)
- b. Argument that virtue is knowledge (and, therefore, teachable) (87d-89d)
- c. Argument that virtue is not teachable (and, therefore, isn't knowledge) (89d-96c)
- d. An account of what virtue is and how it is acquired (96d-100c)



“Before I met you, Socrates, I used to be told that you were always doubting yourself and making others doubt. And now I think that you are bewitching me with your spells and incantations, which have reduced me to utter perplexity. And, if I may make a joke, you seem in appearance and in every other way just like the flat **torpedo fish**; for it numbs anyone who approaches and touches it, and you seem to have done something like this to me now. Indeed, my soul and my tongue are numb, and I do not know how to answer you. Yet I’ve made a great many speeches about virtue thousands of times before large audiences—and I thought they were very good speeches—but now I can’t even say what it is.” (*Meno* 80ab)



The *Meno* Problem:



Socrates: I don't know what virtue is; and, though you may have known before you touched me, now you too are certainly like someone who doesn't know. Nevertheless, **I'd like to consider it and to inquire with you into what it is.**

Meno: **And how, Socrates, will you look for it, when you don't know at all what it is?** Which totally unknown thing will you inquire into? And even if you find it out, how will you know that it is the thing you didn't know?

Socrates: I understand what you mean to say Meno. But do you see what an contentious argument you're introducing? **You say that man cannot inquire into either what he knows or what he does not know:** he cannot inquire into what he knows, since he knows it, so there is no need for an inquiry; and he cannot inquire into what he does not know, since he doesn't know what to look for.

(80de)

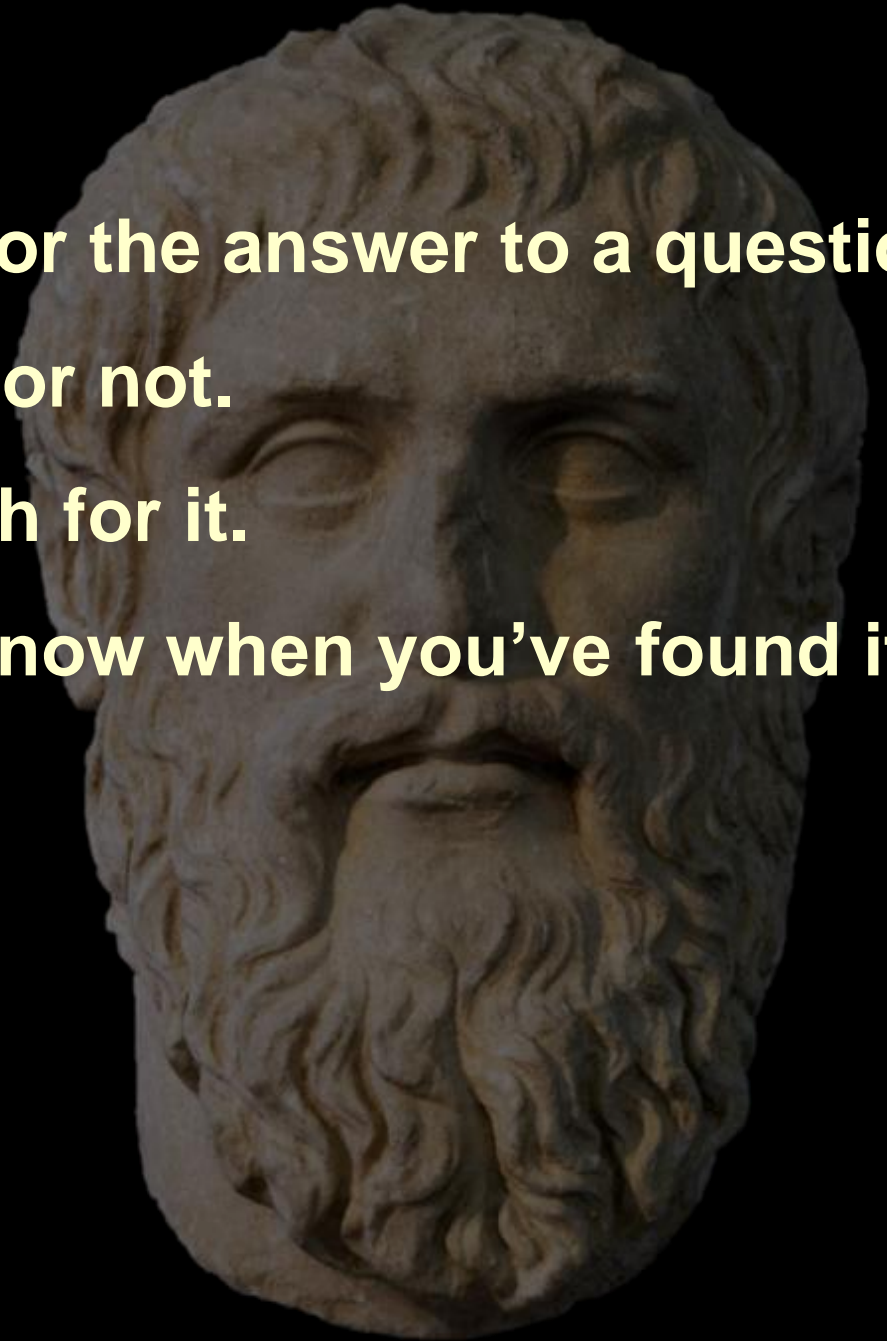
The *Meno* Problem:

It is impossible to successfully search for the answer to a question.

Either you know the answer in advance or not.

If you know it already, you cannot search for it.

If you don't know it already, you won't know when you've found it.



The *Meno* Problem:

Socrates' Reasons for asking "What is it?"

Protagoras (312b): We need to know what a sophist is to know whether sophists are good or bad.

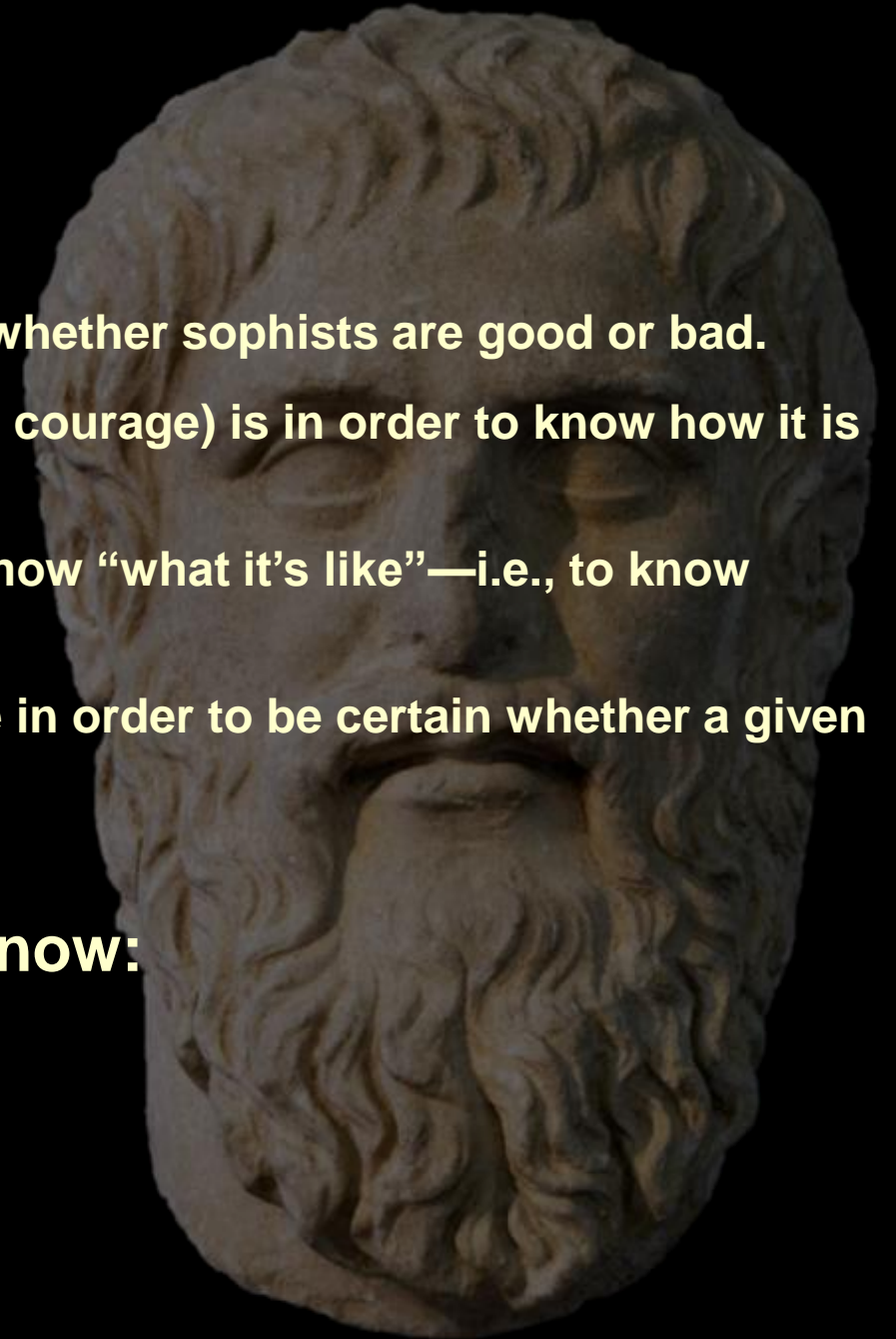
Laches (190d-e): We need to know what virtue (and in particular courage) is in order to know how it is acquired.

Meno (71a-d): We need to know what something is in order to know "what it's like"—i.e., to know anything else about it.

Euthyphro (4d, 5e): We need to know what piety and impiety are in order to be certain whether a given action is pious or impious.

We need to know what _____ is in order to know:

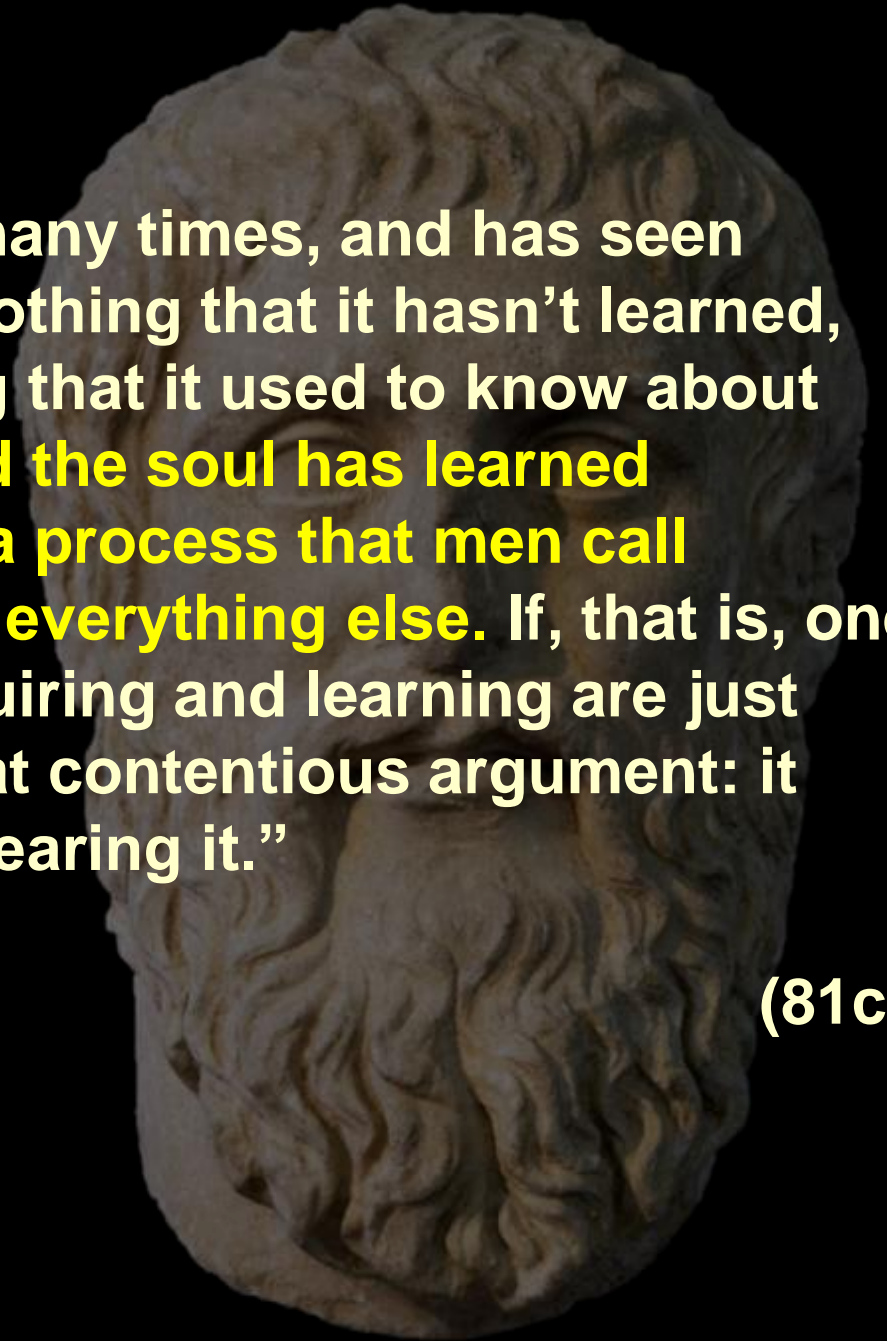
- (1) other things about _____.
- (2) whether a given thing is _____.

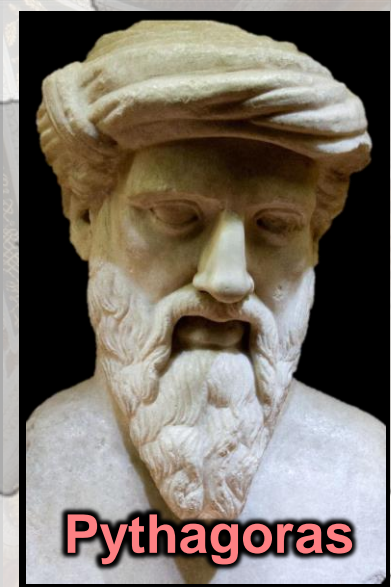


Theory of recollection:

“Since **the soul is immortal**, and has been born many times, and has seen everything here and in the underworld, there is nothing that it hasn’t learned, and it’s no wonder that it can recollect everything that it used to know about virtue and other things. **Everything is related, and the soul has learned everything, so after it has recollected one thing (a process that men call “learning”), nothing prevents it from recollecting everything else.** If, that is, one is brave and does not give up the inquiry, for inquiring and learning are just recollection. So we must not give credence to that contentious argument: it would make us lazy and only wimpy men enjoy hearing it.”

(81cd)





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Thales

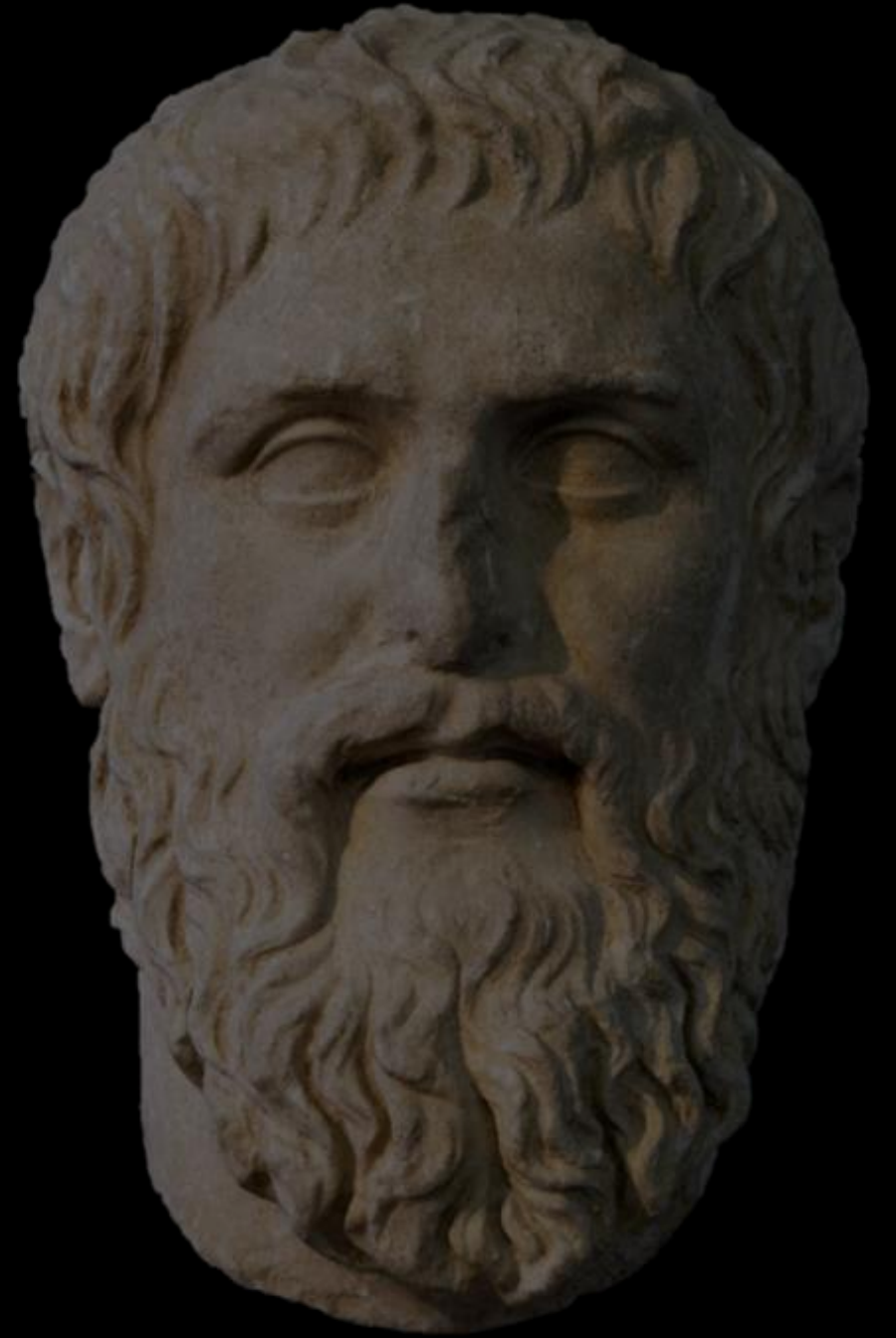
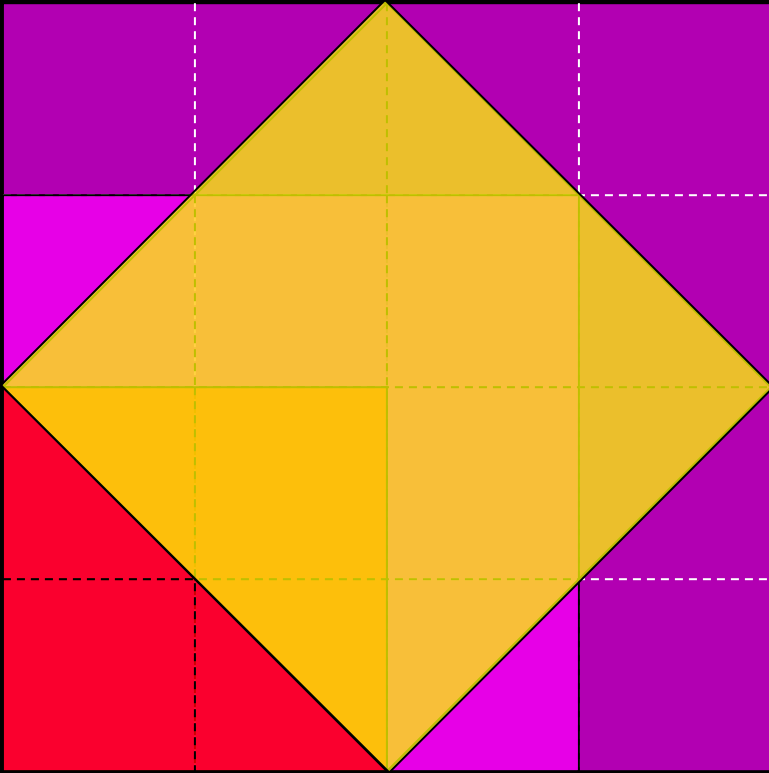
Socrates

Plato

Hippasus

Pythagoras

Aristotle



Thinking through the slave-boy case:

“Has [the slave boy] in his answers expressed any belief that was not his own?” (85b)

“And yet... a short time ago, he did not know?” (85c)

“So these beliefs were in him, were they not?” (85c)

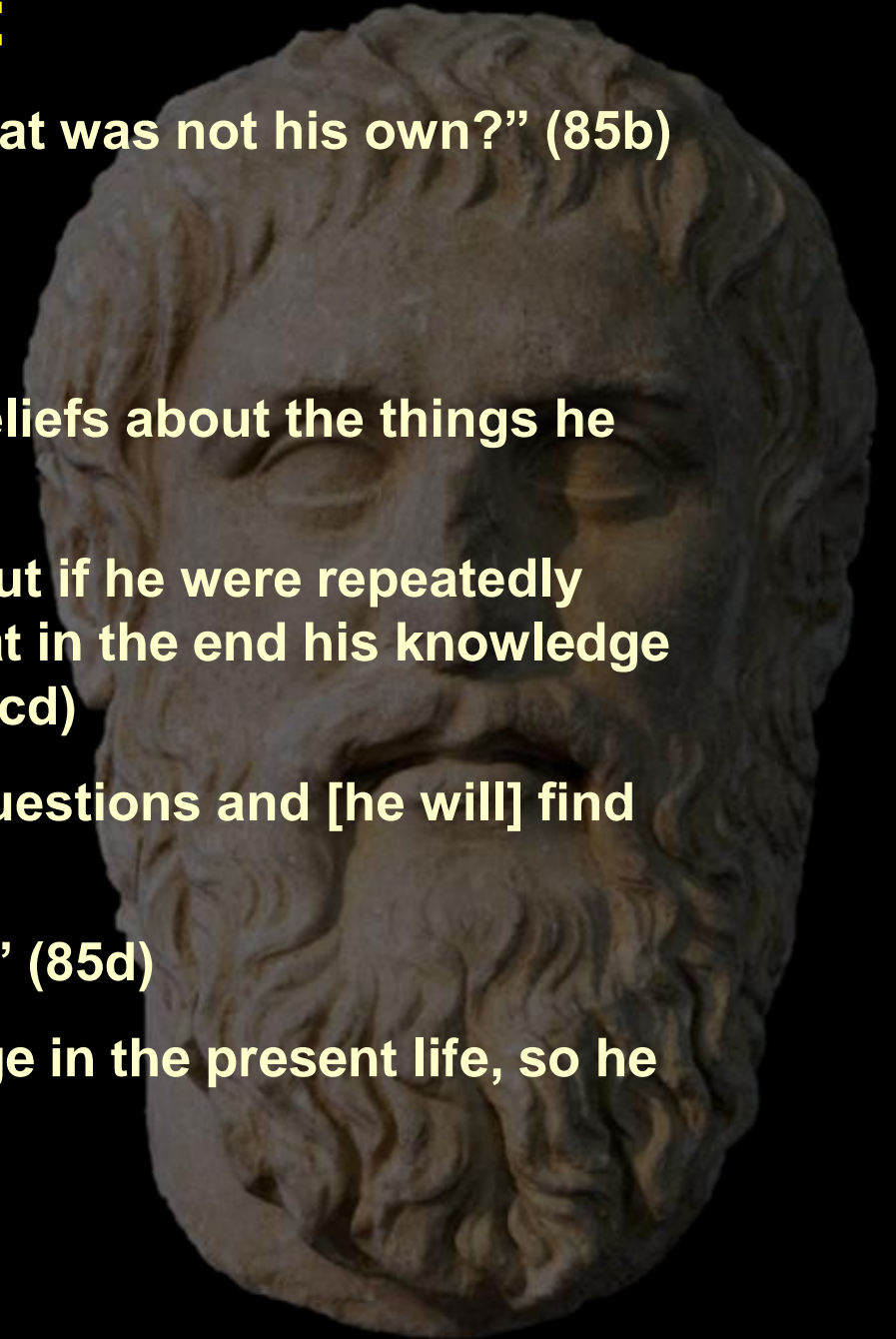
“So the man who does not know, has within himself true beliefs about the things he does not know?” (85c)

“These beliefs have not just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone’s?” (85cd)

“And he will know it without having been taught but only questions and [he will] find the knowledge within himself?” (85d)

“And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection?” (85d)

The slave boy could not have gained the relevant knowledge in the present life, so he must have lived before and acquired the knowledge then.



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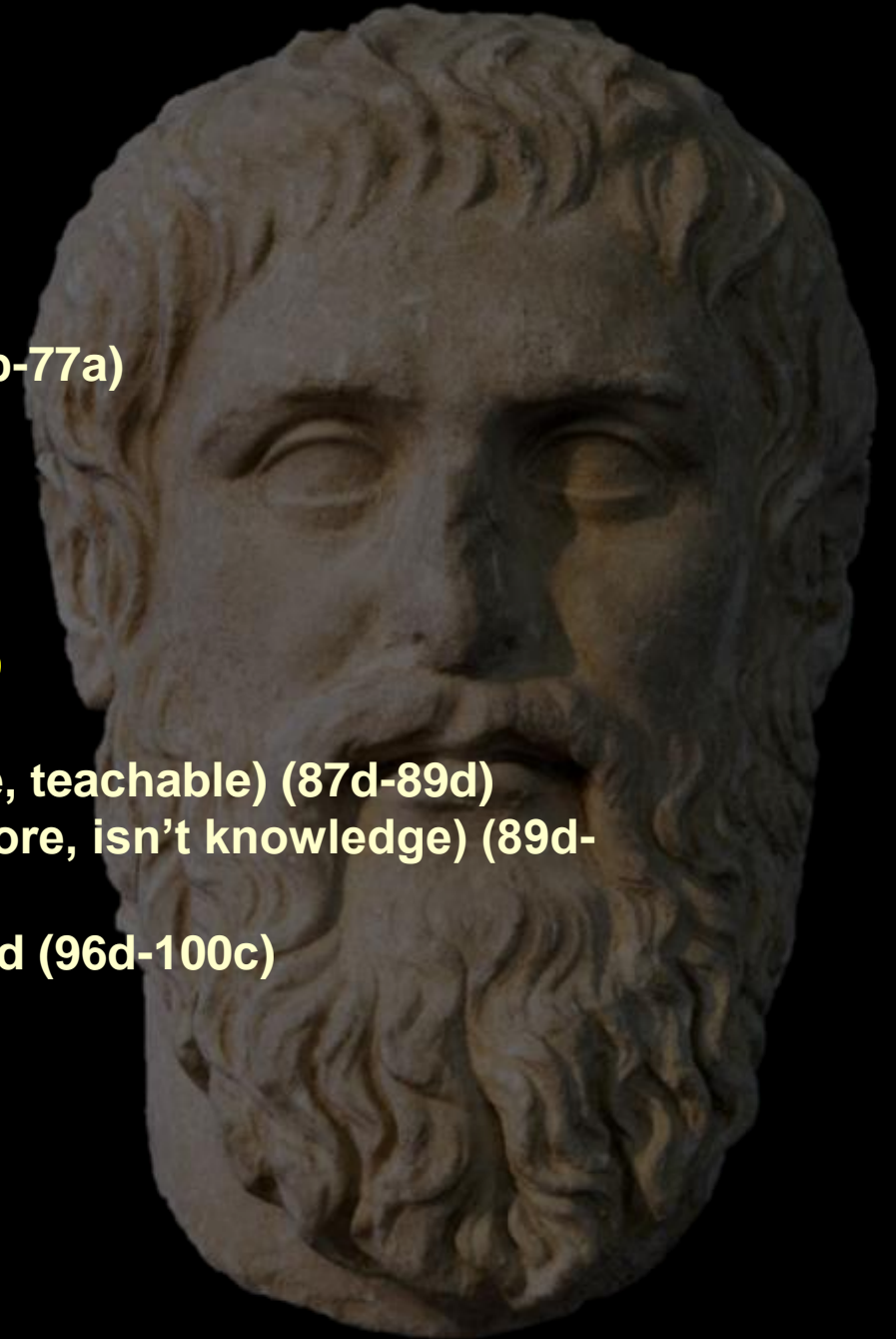
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Hypothetical Method:

“It seems, then, that we must consider what something’s like without yet knowing what it is. Will you at least loosen your reigns a little and allow whether it comes about by teaching or in some other way to be considered **from a hypothesis**. By ‘from a hypothesis’, I mean they **geometers** often consider whatever anyone asks them anything.”

“For example, when asked **whether a certain area can be inscribed as a triangle in a given circle**, they reply ‘I don’t yet know whether this is so, but I do think I have a hypothesis, as it were, that’s relevant to the issue: **If this area is such that when applied to the given line of the circle it falls short by a space similar to that which has been applied**, then it seems to me that there’s one conclusion, and there’s another if it’s impossible for this to happen. So **I’d like to tell you my conclusion about inscribing this thing in the circle hypothetically.**” (86d-87b)



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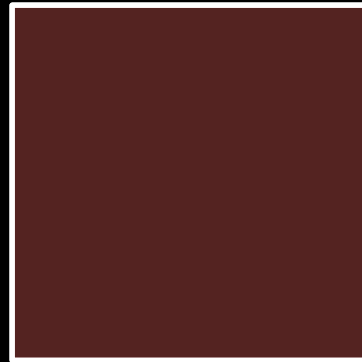
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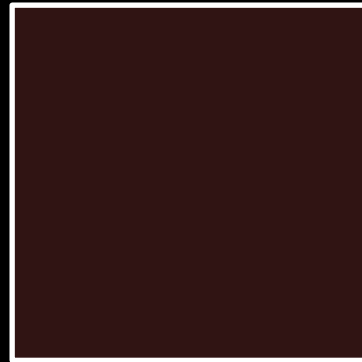
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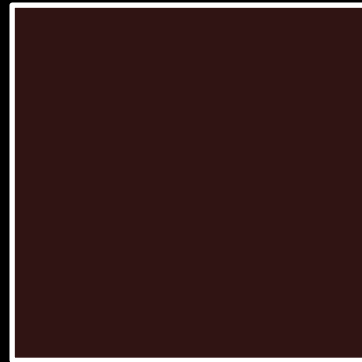
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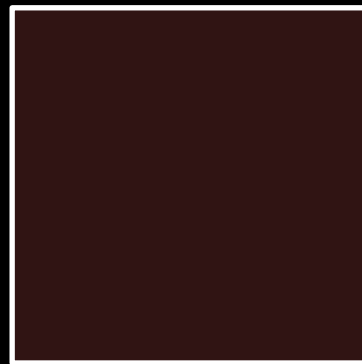
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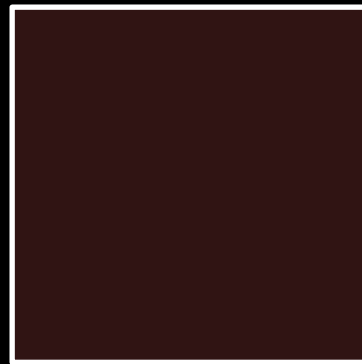
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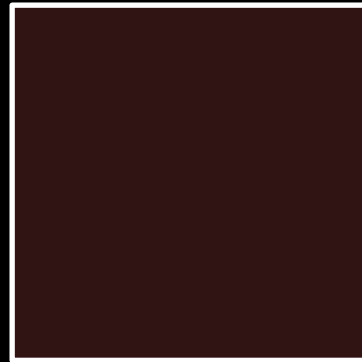
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Geometry

earth

measuring



Euclid, *Elements*, **Theorem 1.26**: "If two triangles have two angles equal to two angles respectively, and one side equal to one side, namely, either the side adjoining the equal angles, or that opposite one of the equal angles, then the remaining sides equal the remaining sides and the remaining angle equals the remaining angle, are equal in all other respects."



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Thales

Theaetetus

Socrates

Eudoxus

Theodorus

Plato

Pythagoras

Hippasus

Euclid

Oenopides of Chios

Hippocrates of Chios

Aristotle

Rome

Euclid's Elements

[Hypertext version prepared by David Joyce](#)

Book 1 of 13

Athens

Alexandria



Definition 1: A **point** is that which has no part.

Definition 2: A **line** is breadthless length.

Definition 3: The ends of a line are points.

Definition 4: A **straight line** is a line which lies evenly with the points on itself.

[...]

Definition 23: **Parallel straight lines** are straight lines which, being in the same plane and being produced indefinitely in both directions, do not meet one another in either direction.

Postulate 1: To draw a straight line from any point to any point.

Postulate 2: To produce a finite straight line continuously in a straight line.

Postulate 3: To describe a circle with any center and radius.

Postulate 4: That all right angles equal one another.

Postulate 5: That, if a straight line falling on two straight lines makes the interior angles on the same side less than two right angles, the two straight lines, if produced indefinitely, meet on that side on which are the angles less than the two right angles.

Common notion 1: Things which equal the same thing also equal one another.

Common notion 2: If equals are added to equals, then the wholes are equal.

Common notion 3: If equals are subtracted from equals, then the remainders are equal.

Common notion 4: Things which coincide with one another equal one another.

Common notion 5: The whole is greater than the part.

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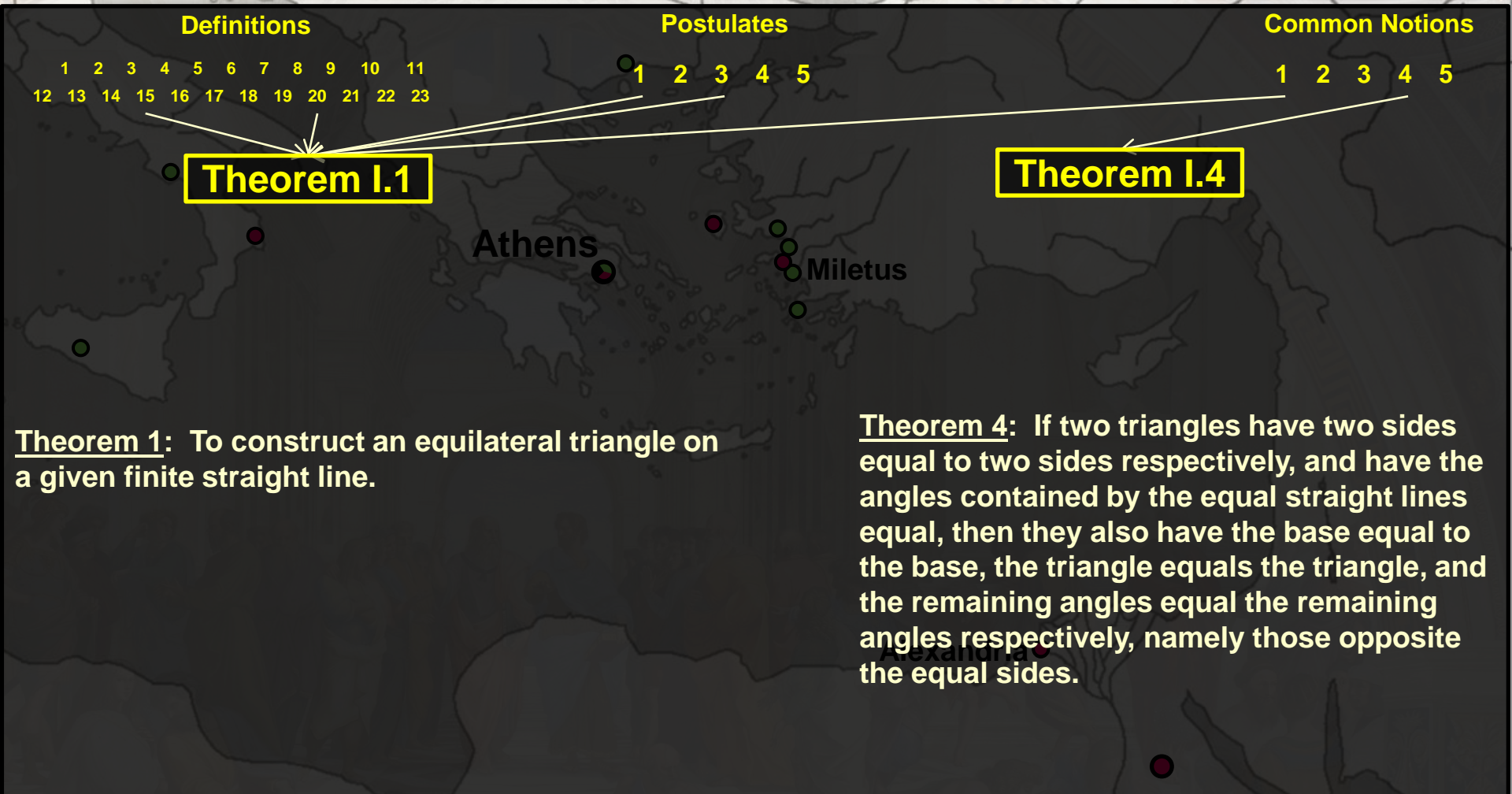
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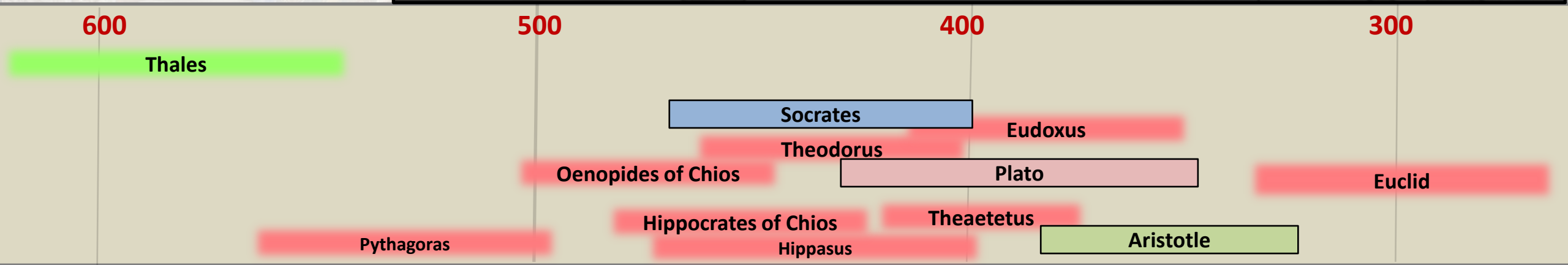


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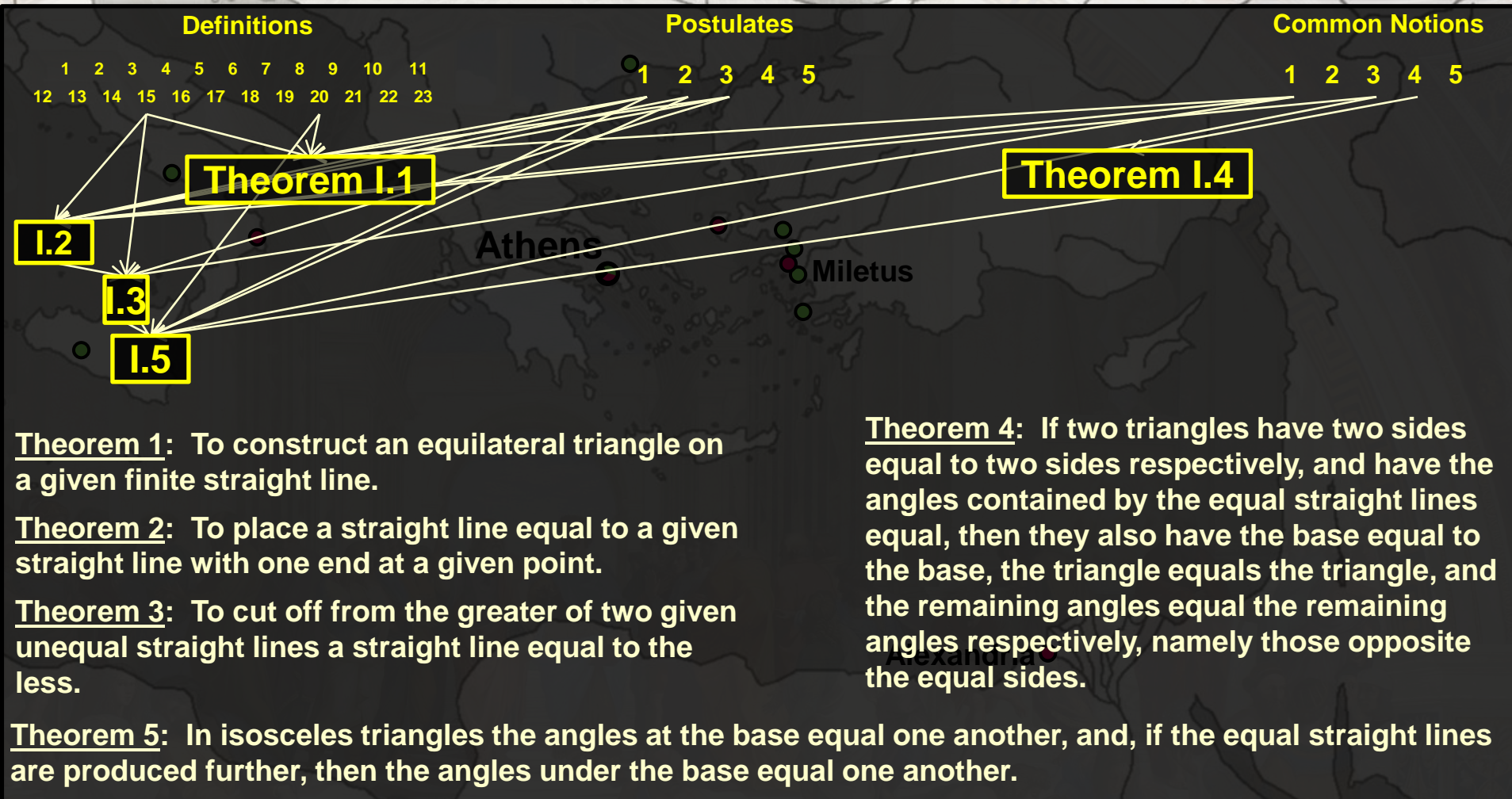
Theorem 1: To construct an equilateral triangle on a given finite straight line.

Theorem 4: If two triangles have two sides equal to two sides respectively, and have the angles contained by the equal straight lines equal, then they also have the base equal to the base, the triangle equals the triangle, and the remaining angles equal the remaining angles respectively, namely those opposite the equal sides.





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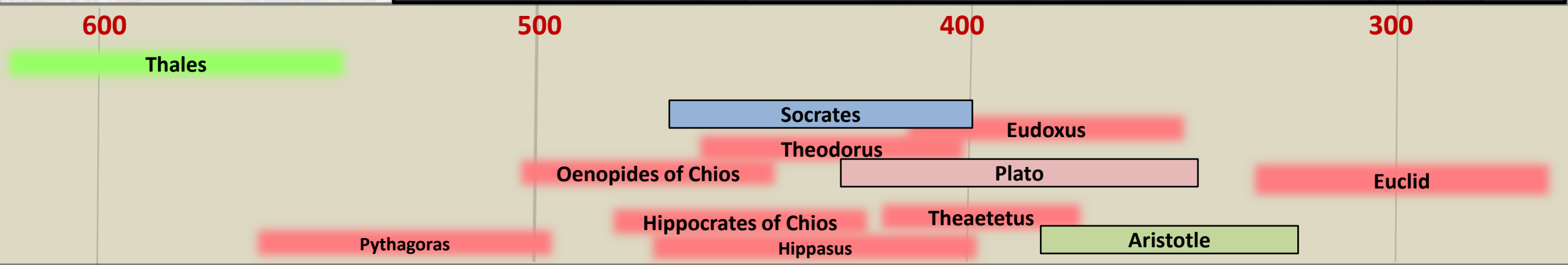
Theorem 1: To construct an equilateral triangle on a given finite straight line.

Theorem 2: To place a straight line equal to a given straight line with one end at a given point.

Theorem 3: To cut off from the greater of two given unequal straight lines a straight line equal to the less.

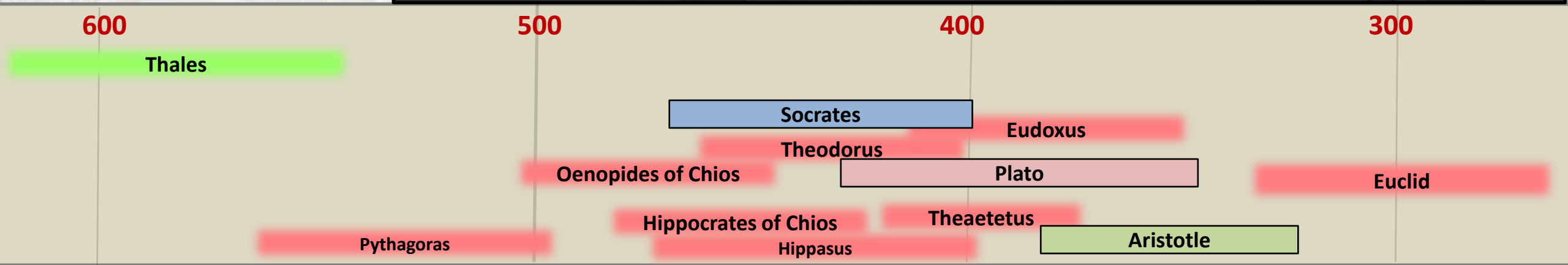
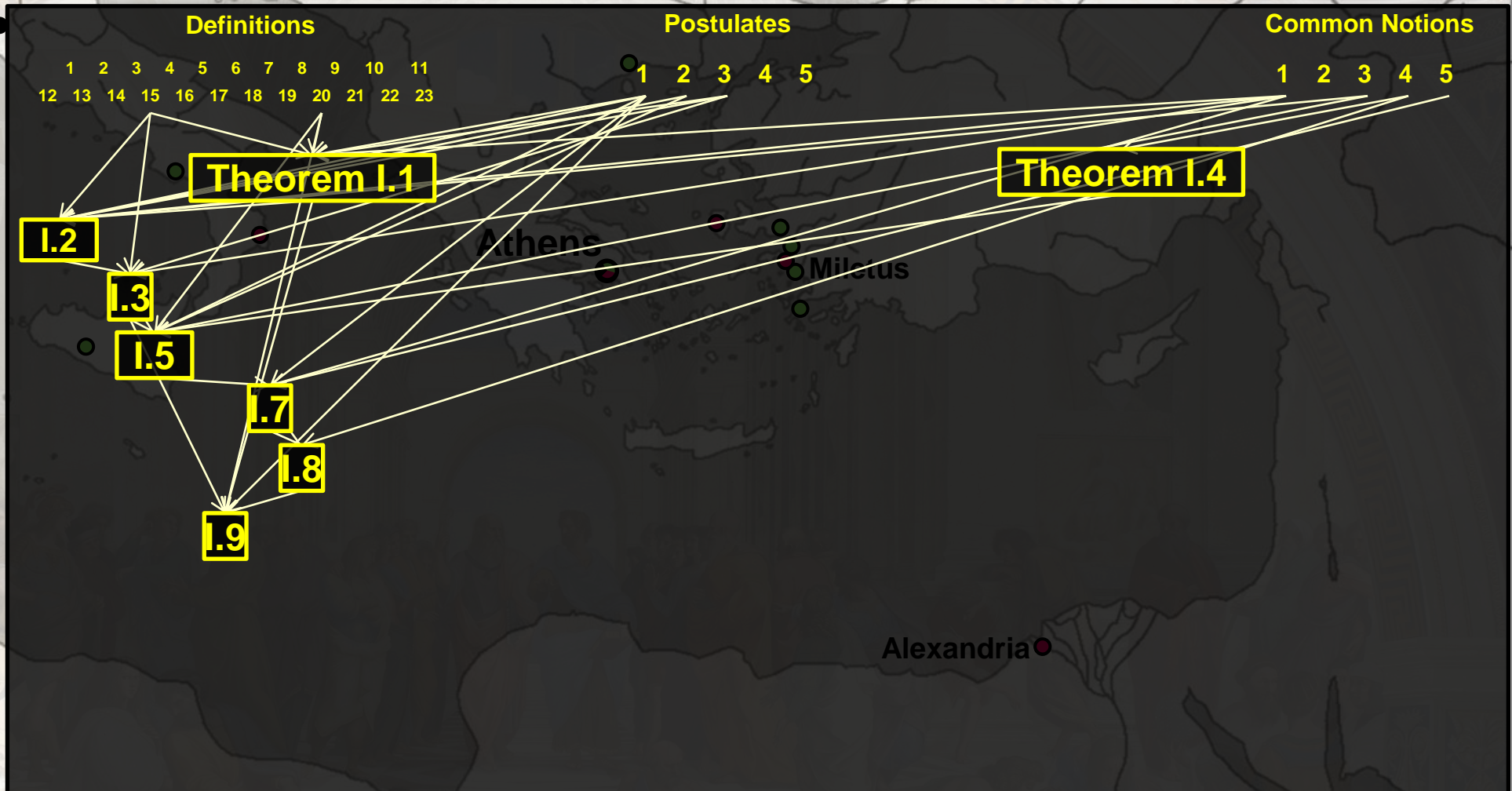
Theorem 5: In isosceles triangles the angles at the base equal one another, and, if the equal straight lines are produced further, then the angles under the base equal one another.

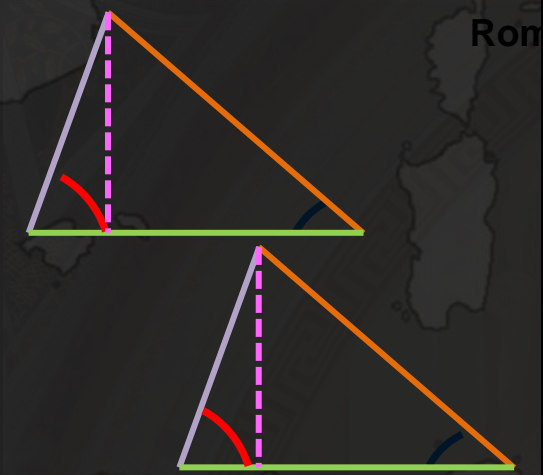
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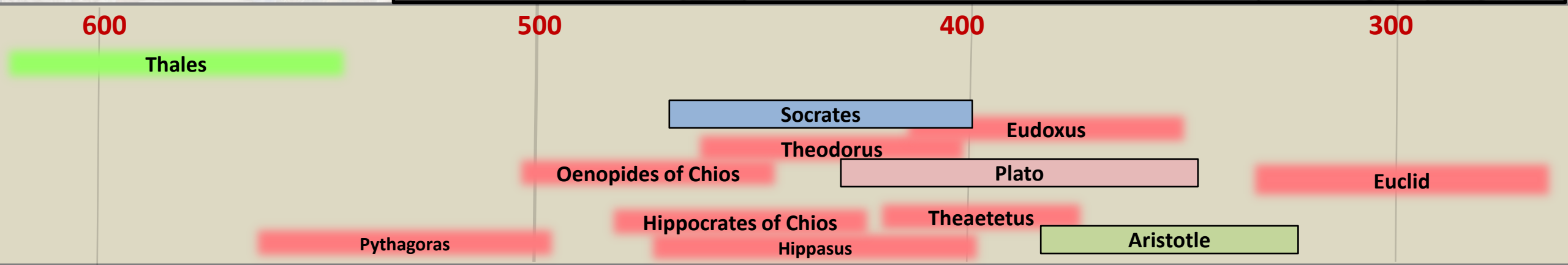
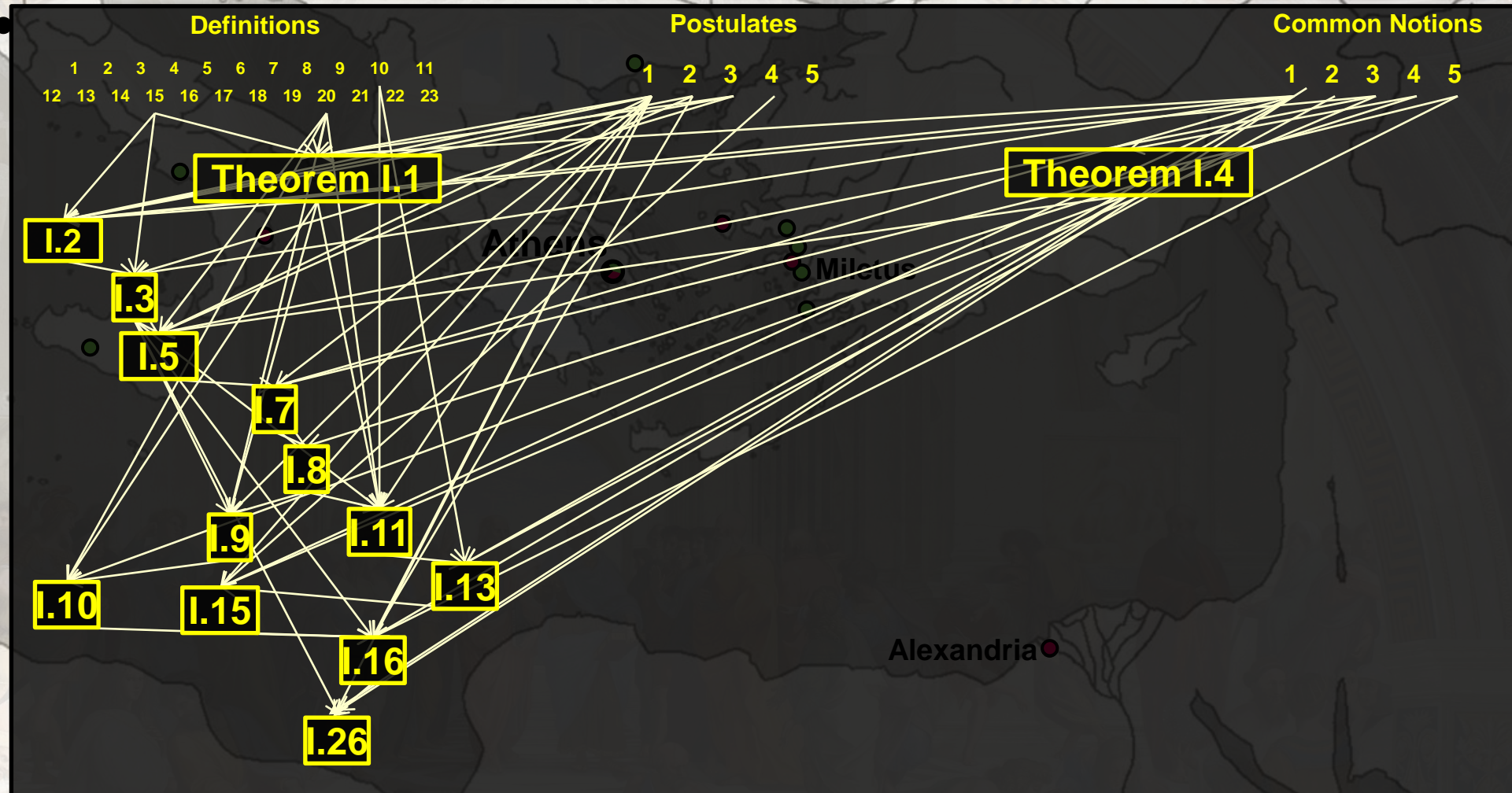


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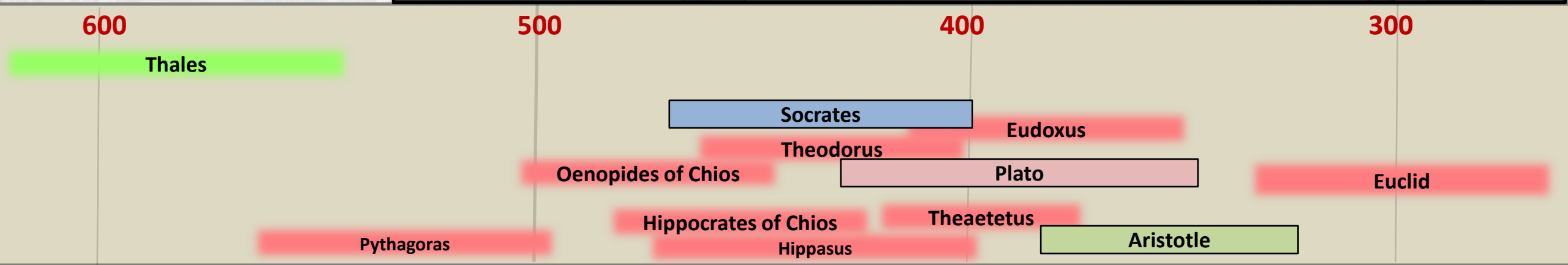
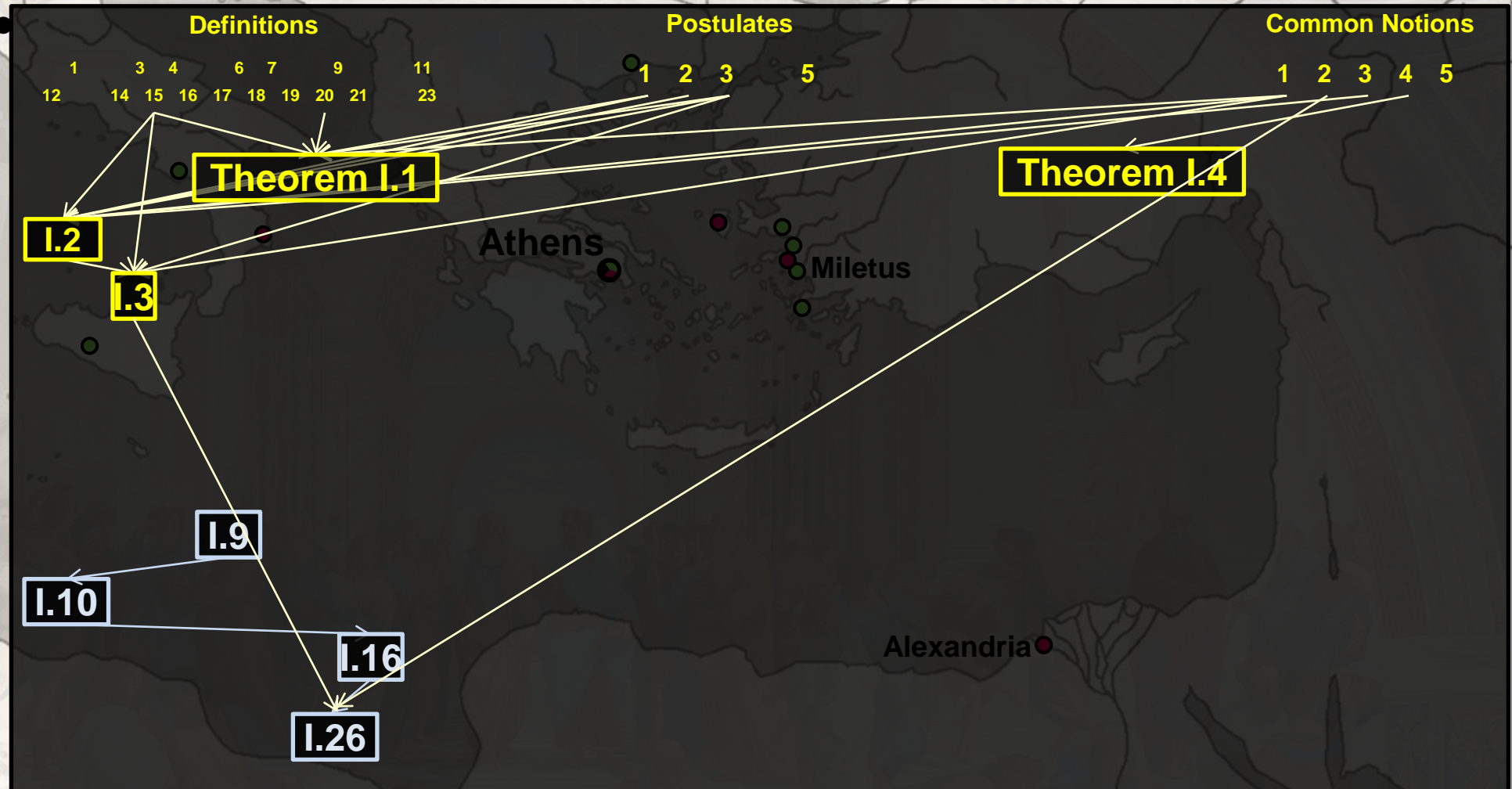


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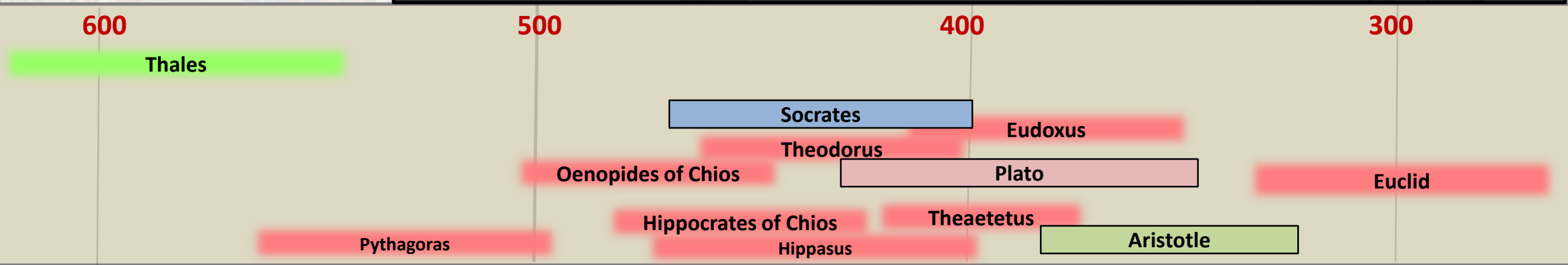
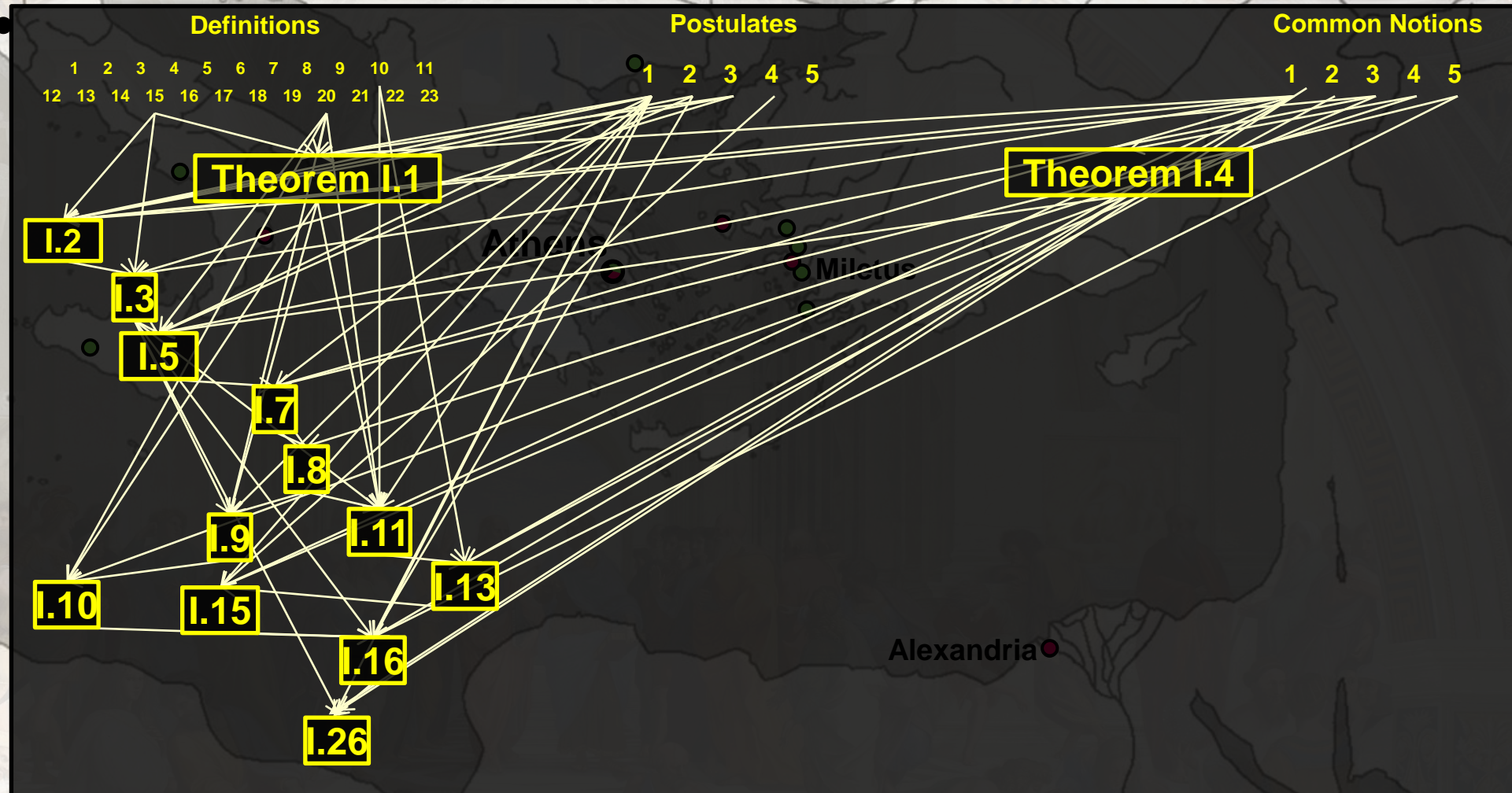


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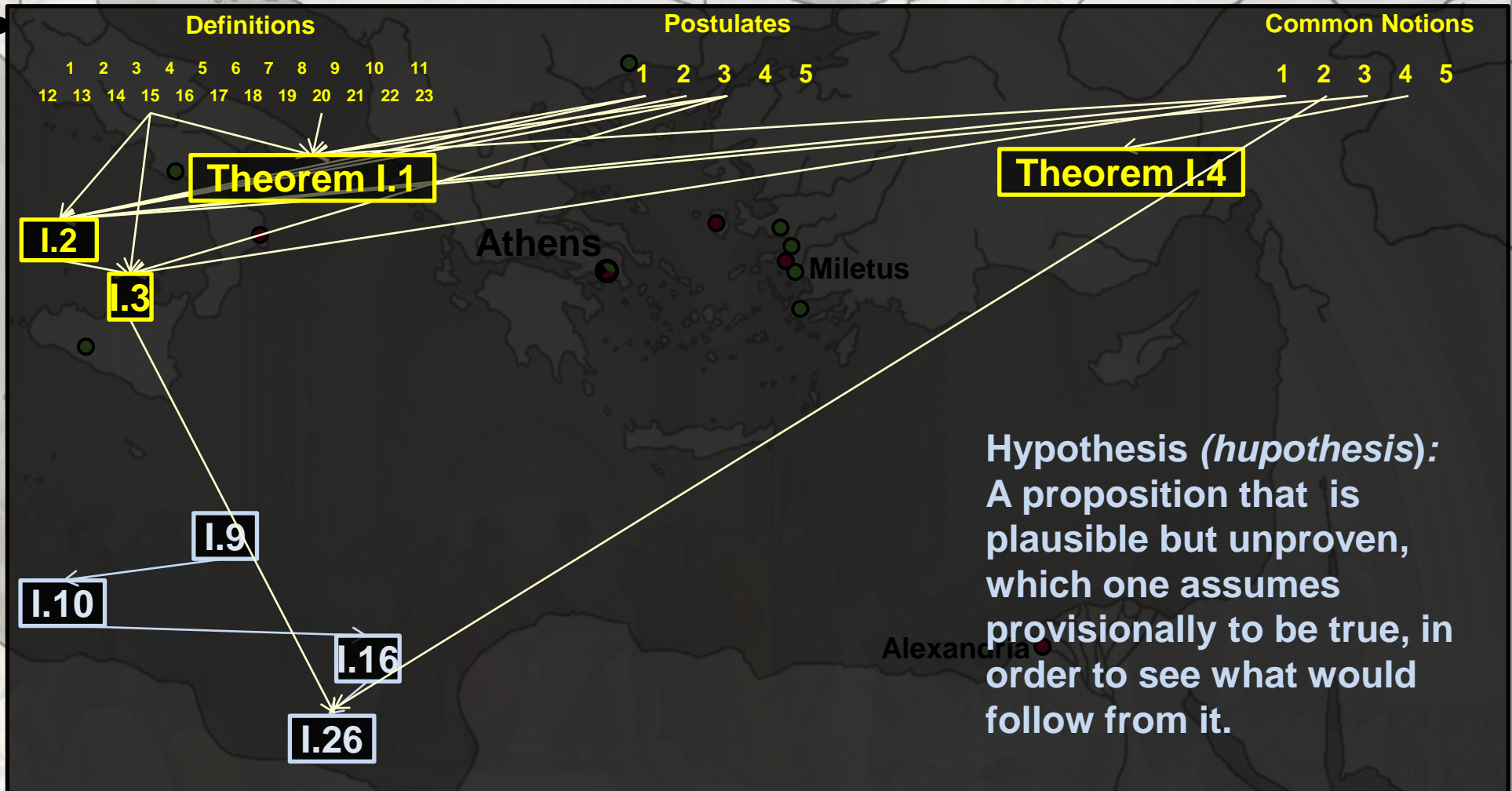


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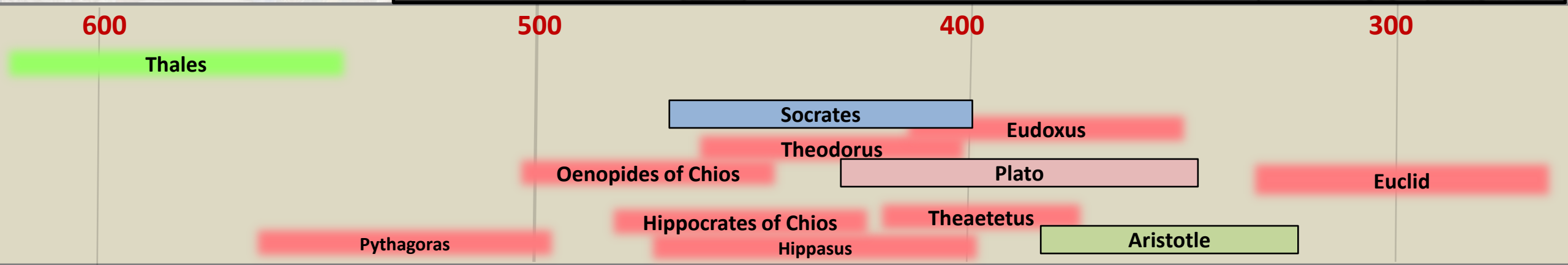




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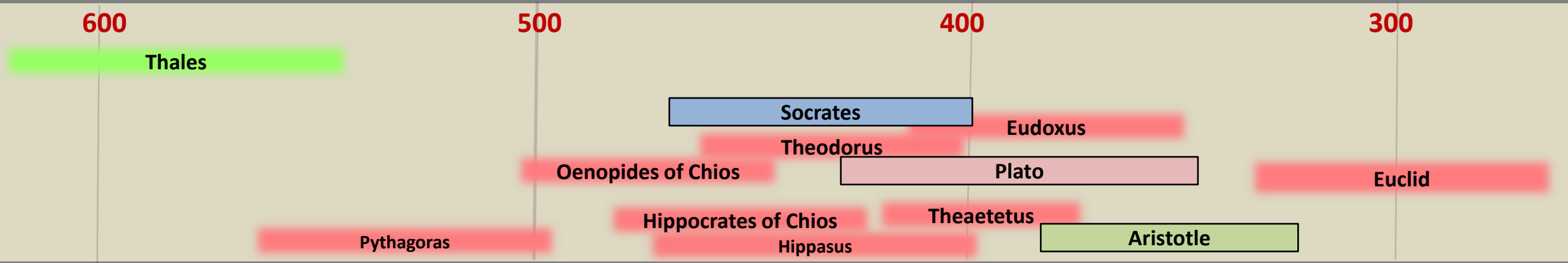


Hypothesis (*hupothesis*):
 A proposition that is plausible but unproven, which one assumes provisionally to be true, in order to see what would follow from it.





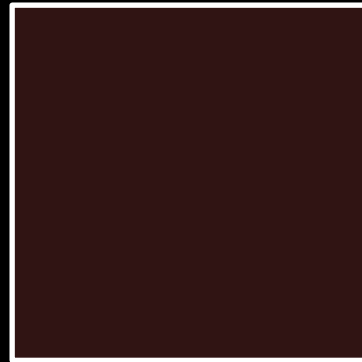
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Hypothetical Method:

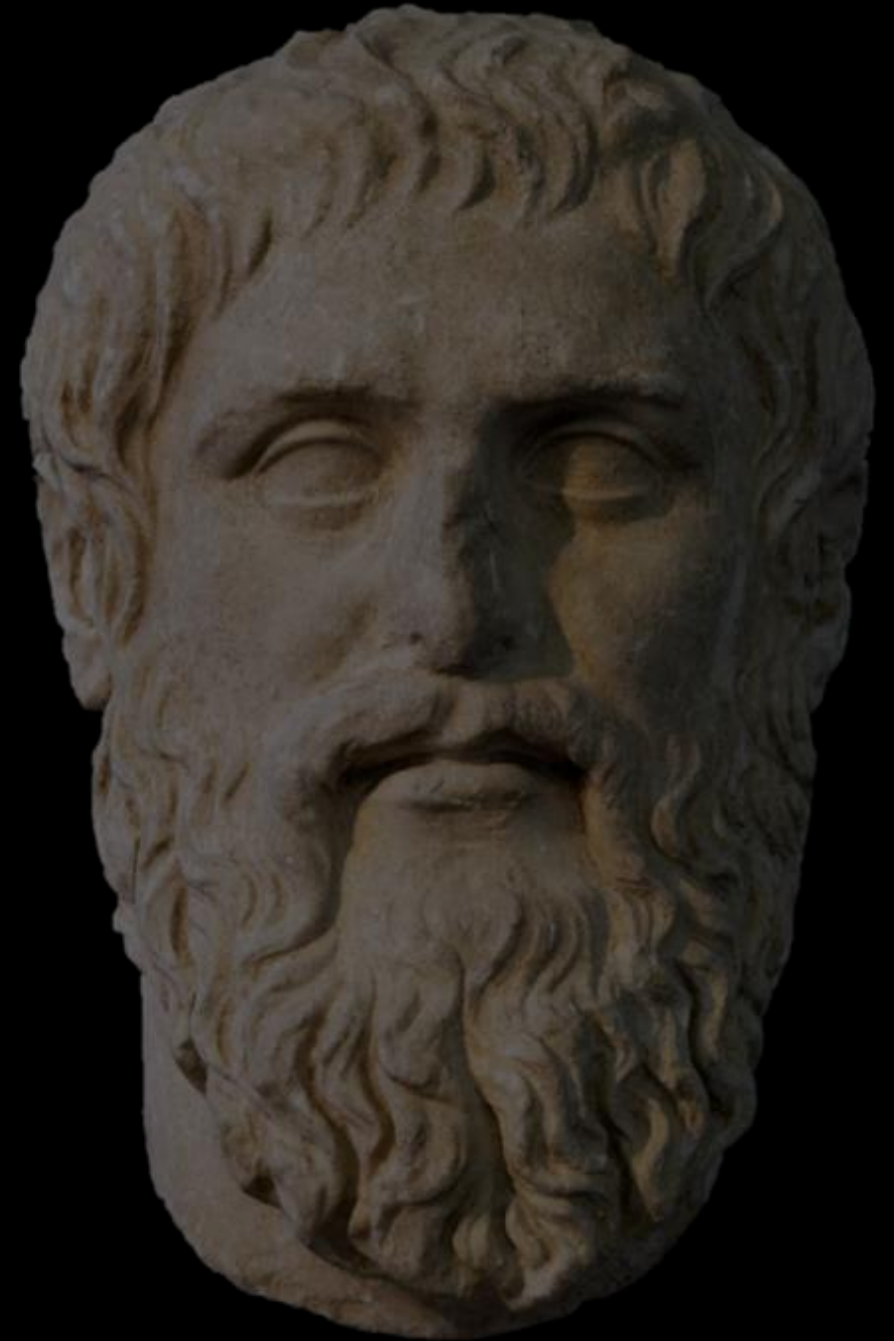
“It seems, then, that we must consider what something’s like without yet knowing what it is. Will you at least loosen your reigns a little and allow whether it comes about by teaching or in some other way to be considered **from a hypothesis**. By ‘from a hypothesis’, I mean they **geometers** often consider whatever anyone asks them anything.”

“For example, when asked **whether a certain area can be inscribed as a triangle in a given circle**, they reply ‘I don’t yet know whether this is so, but I do think I have a hypothesis, as it were, that’s relevant to the issue: **If this area is such that when applied to the given line of the circle it falls short by a space similar to that which has been applied**, then it seems to me that there’s one conclusion, and there’s another if it’s impossible for this to happen. So **I’d like to tell you my conclusion about inscribing this thing in the circle hypothetically.**” (86d-87b)



Hypothetical Method:

Hypothesis: **Virtue is knowledge**
If so, it's teachable.
Otherwise, it's not teachable.



Hypothetical Method:

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Argument that Virtue is Knowledge (87d-89d)

“Virtue is beneficial” (because we're good through virtue and whatever is good is beneficial). (87e)

The other things we call “beneficial” (health, wealth, strength, etc.) are only sometimes beneficial and other times harmful. (88a)

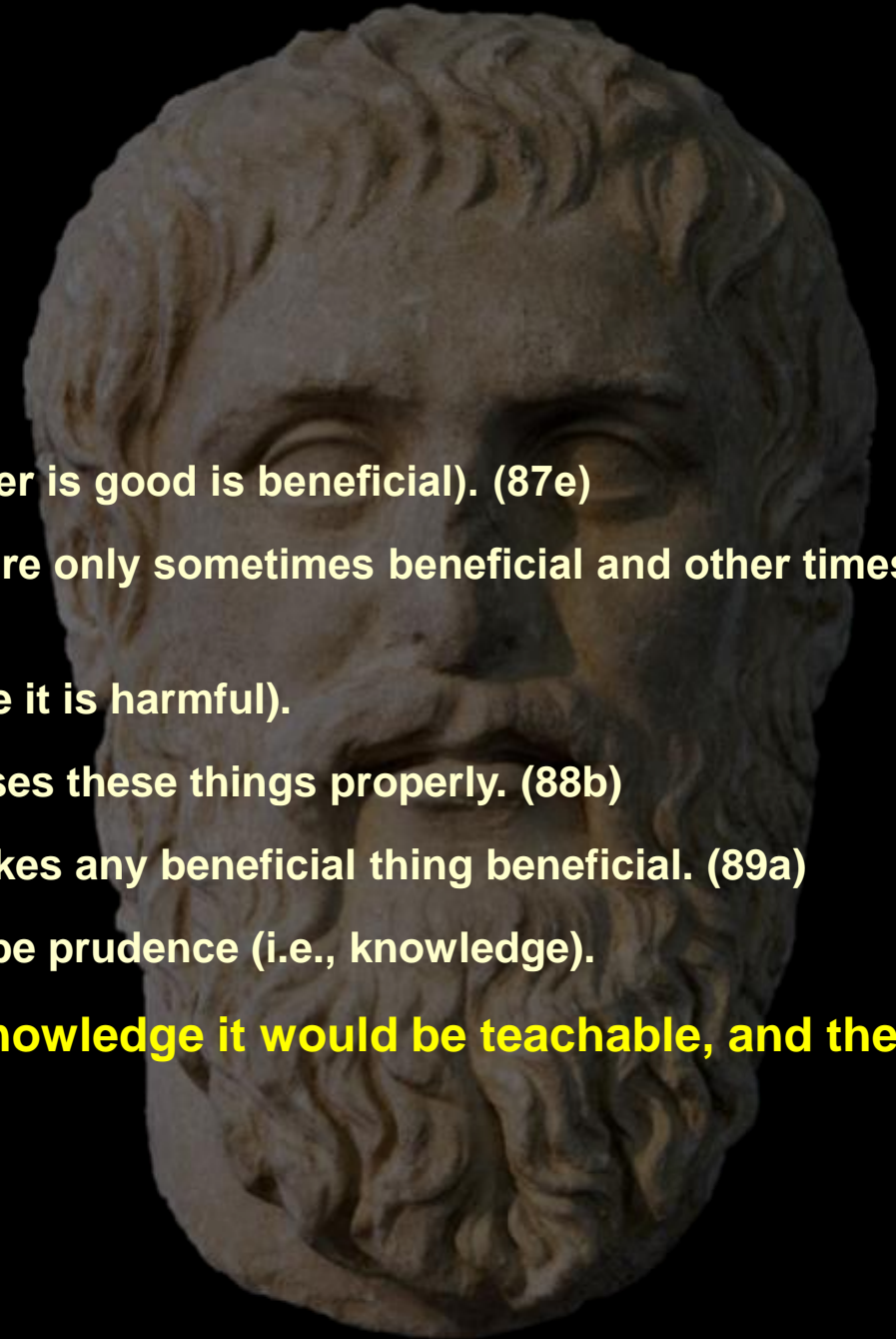
Each of these things is beneficial when it is used properly (otherwise it is harmful).

It is only when directed by “**prudence**” or **knowledge** that the soul uses these things properly. (88b)

“**The beneficial is prudence**”—it is prudence (or knowledge) that makes any beneficial thing beneficial. (89a)

Therefore, since the virtues are beneficial in themselves, they must be prudence (i.e., knowledge).

But something must be wrong with this, because if virtue were knowledge it would be teachable, and there would have to be teachers of it, but there aren't so it isn't.



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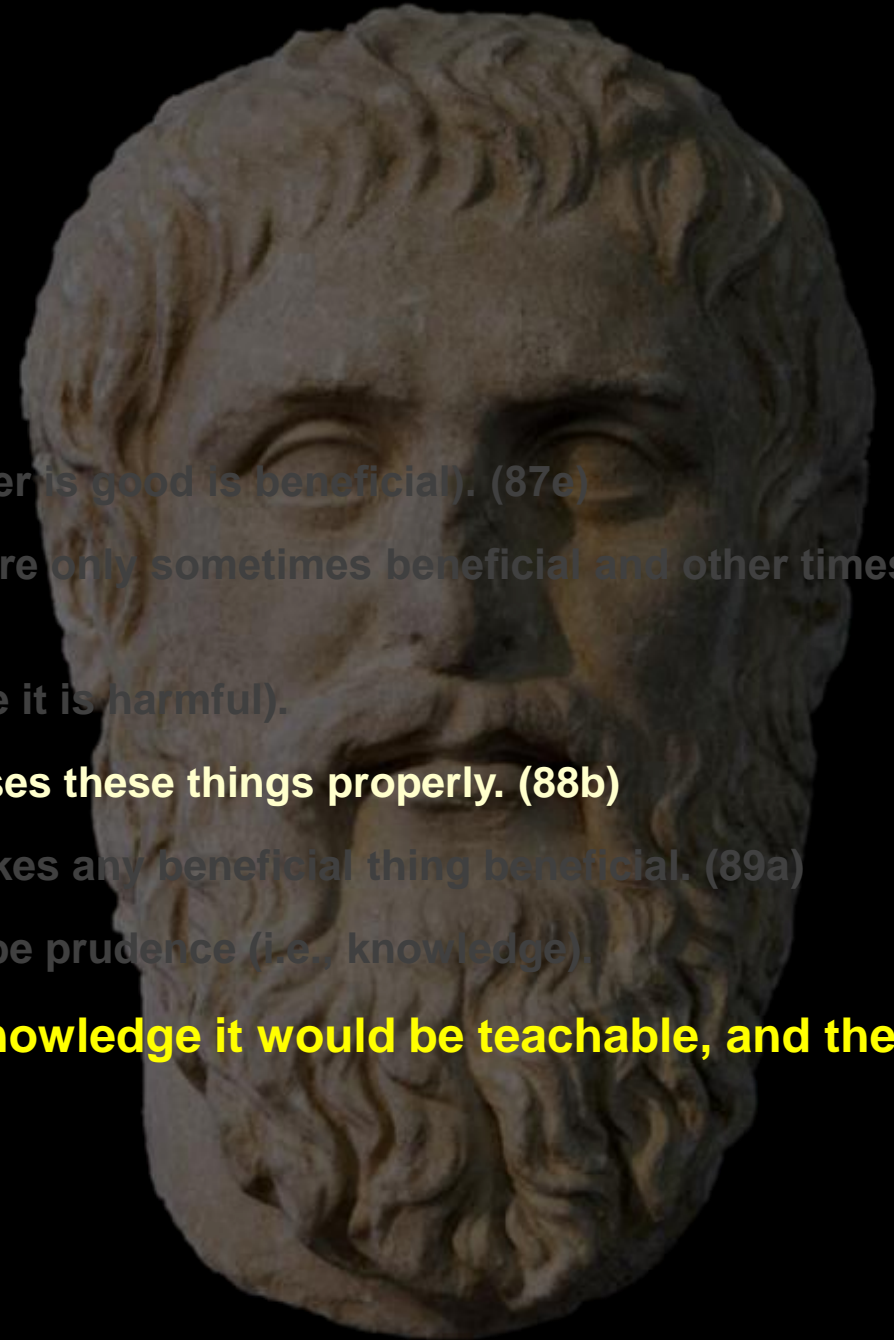
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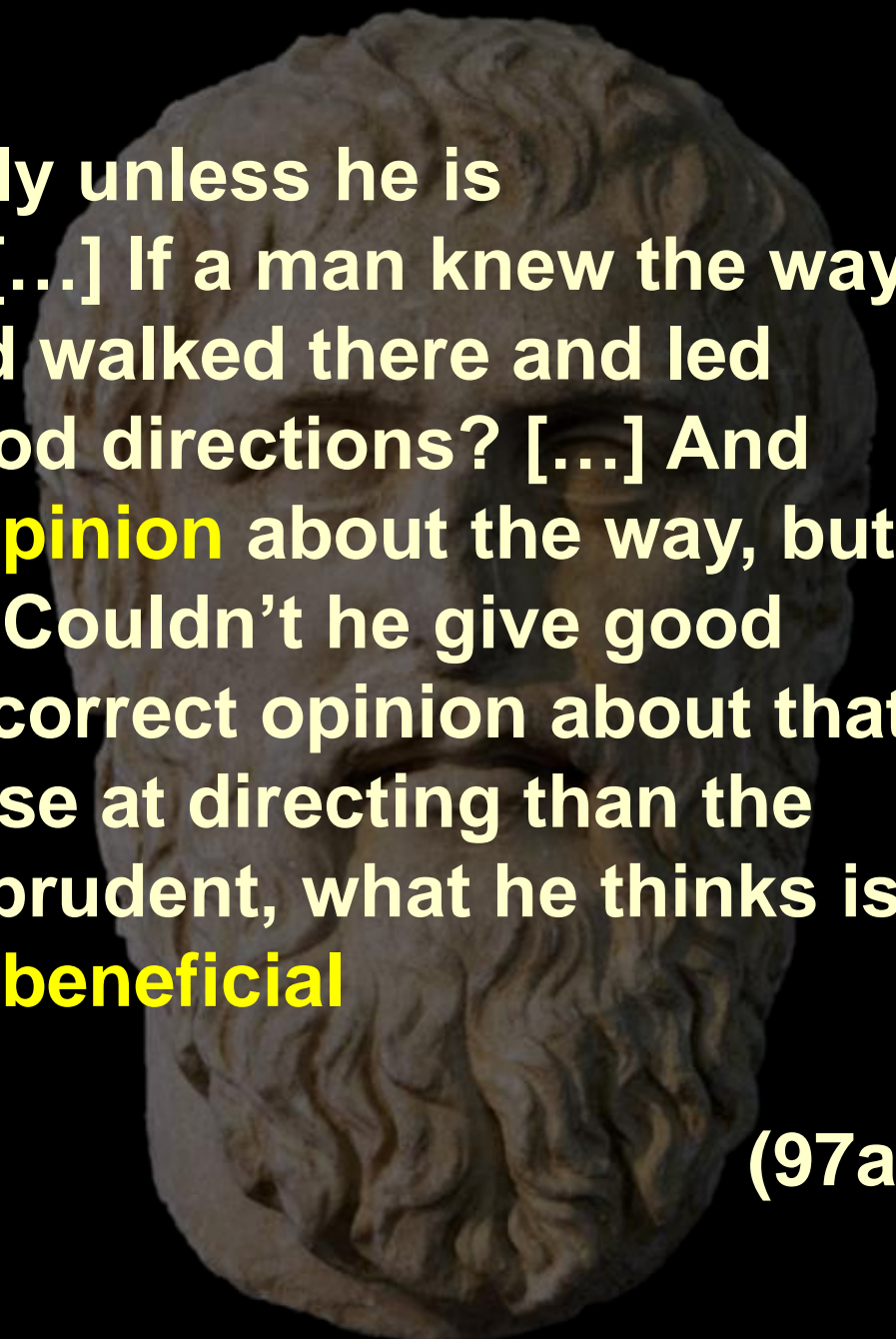
But something must be wrong with this, because if virtue were knowledge it would be teachable, and there would have to be teachers of it, but there aren't so it isn't.



Knowledge vs. Correct Opinion

“[W]e said that one cannot direct correctly unless he is prudent. This looks very like a mistake. [...] If a man knew the way to Larisa, or any other place you like, and walked there and led others, would he not give correct and good directions? [...] And what about a person who had a **correct opinion** about the way, but had never been there and did not know? Couldn't he give good directions too? [...] And while he has a correct opinion about that which the other knows, he will be no worse at directing than the prudent person—since, though he's not prudent, what he thinks is true. [...] **Then correct opinion is no less beneficial than knowledge?**”

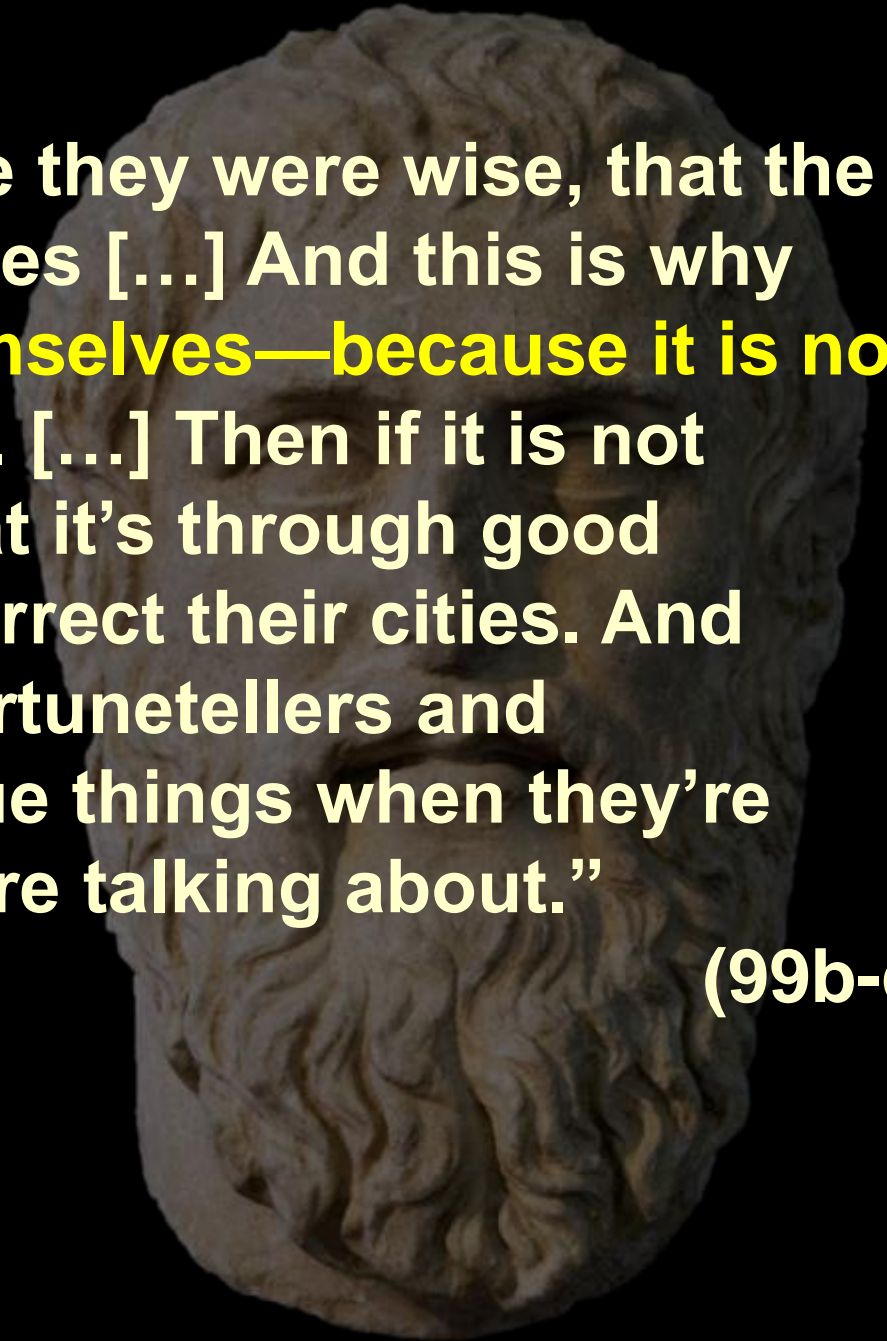
(97a-c)



Knowledge vs. Correct Opinion

“...it was not by any wisdom, nor because they were wise, that the sort of men we spoke of directed their cities [...] And this is why **they were unable to make others like themselves—because it is not through knowledge that they are this way.** [...] Then if it is not through knowledge, what’s remains is that it’s through good opinion. This is what statesmen use to correct their cities. And they’re as far from having prudence as fortunetellers and prophets; for these people utter many true things when they’re inspired, but they do not know what they’re talking about.”

(99b-c)



“Now, if we enquired and spoke well through this whole discussion, **virtue neither comes about by nature nor is taught, but is imparted without understanding to those of us who receive it as a divine lot.” (99e)**

“Then the result of our reasoning, Meno, is appears to be that it is by divine lot that virtue comes about for those who from whom it comes about.” (100b-c)

“Unless, that is, there is someone among the statesmen who is able to make someone else into a statesman. And if there is anyone, he could be said to be among the living what Homer says Teiresias was in Hades: ‘He alone kept his wits; the rest are flitting shadows.’ Likewise, here, relative to virtue, **such a man would be a true object among shadows.” (100a)**

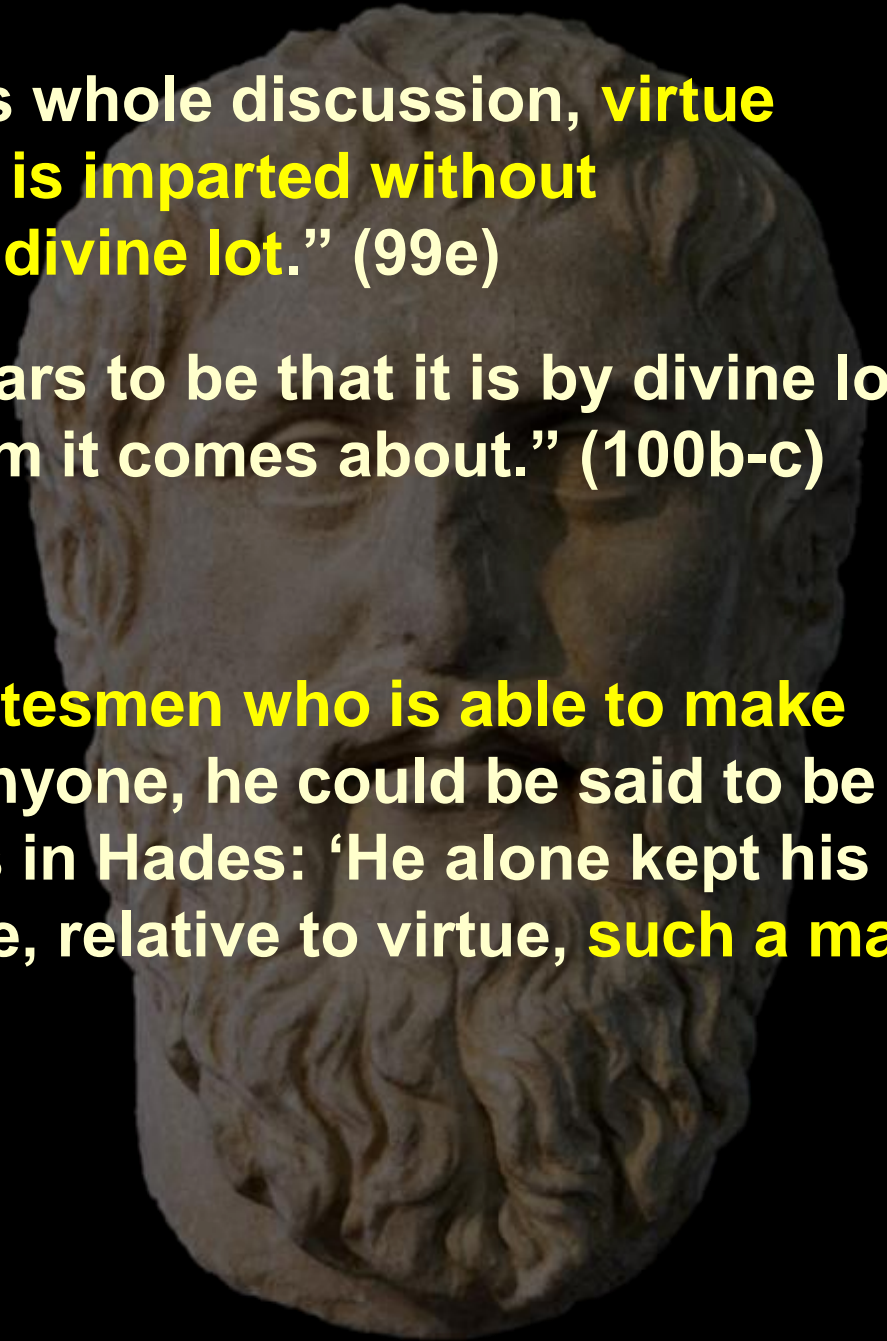


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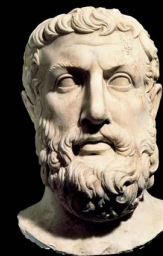
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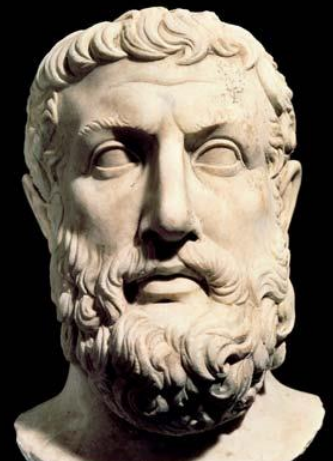
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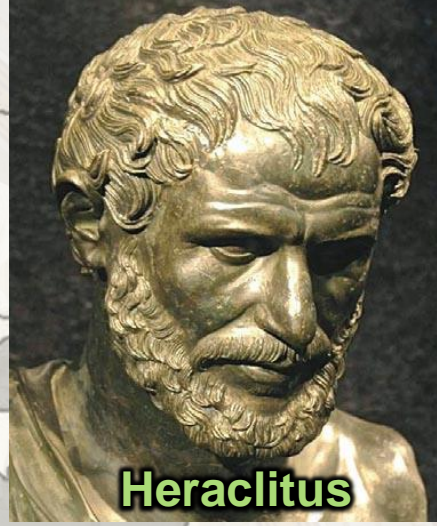
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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pythagoras_in_the_Roman_Forum,_Colosseum.jpg



Parmenides



Heraclitus



Athens

Miletus

600 **500** **400** **300**

Thales

Anaximander

Anaximenes

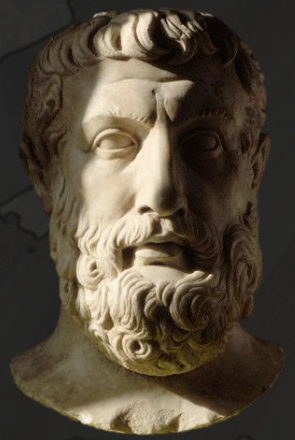
Socrates

Plato

Heraclitus

Parmenides

Aristotle



THE WAY OF TRUTH

“The tremorless heart of well-rounded truth.”

What is:

- ...must be.
- ...is eternal.
- ...is changeless.
- ...is uniform.
- ...is one.
- ...is knowable.

What is not:

- ...cannot be.
- ...cannot be thought.

THE WAY OF OPINION

“...on which mortals, knowing nothing two-headed wander.”

“For helplessness in their breasts guides their wandering mind. But they are carried on equally deaf and blind, amazed, hordes without judgment, for whom **both to be and not to be are judged the same and not the same**, and the path of all is backward-turning.”

Athens

Miletus

Alexandria

600 500 400 300

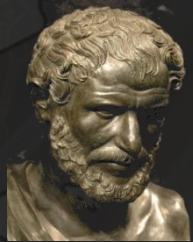
Thales
Anaximander
Anaximenes

Heraclitus
Parmenides

Socrates

Plato

Aristotle



Change and the unity of opposites

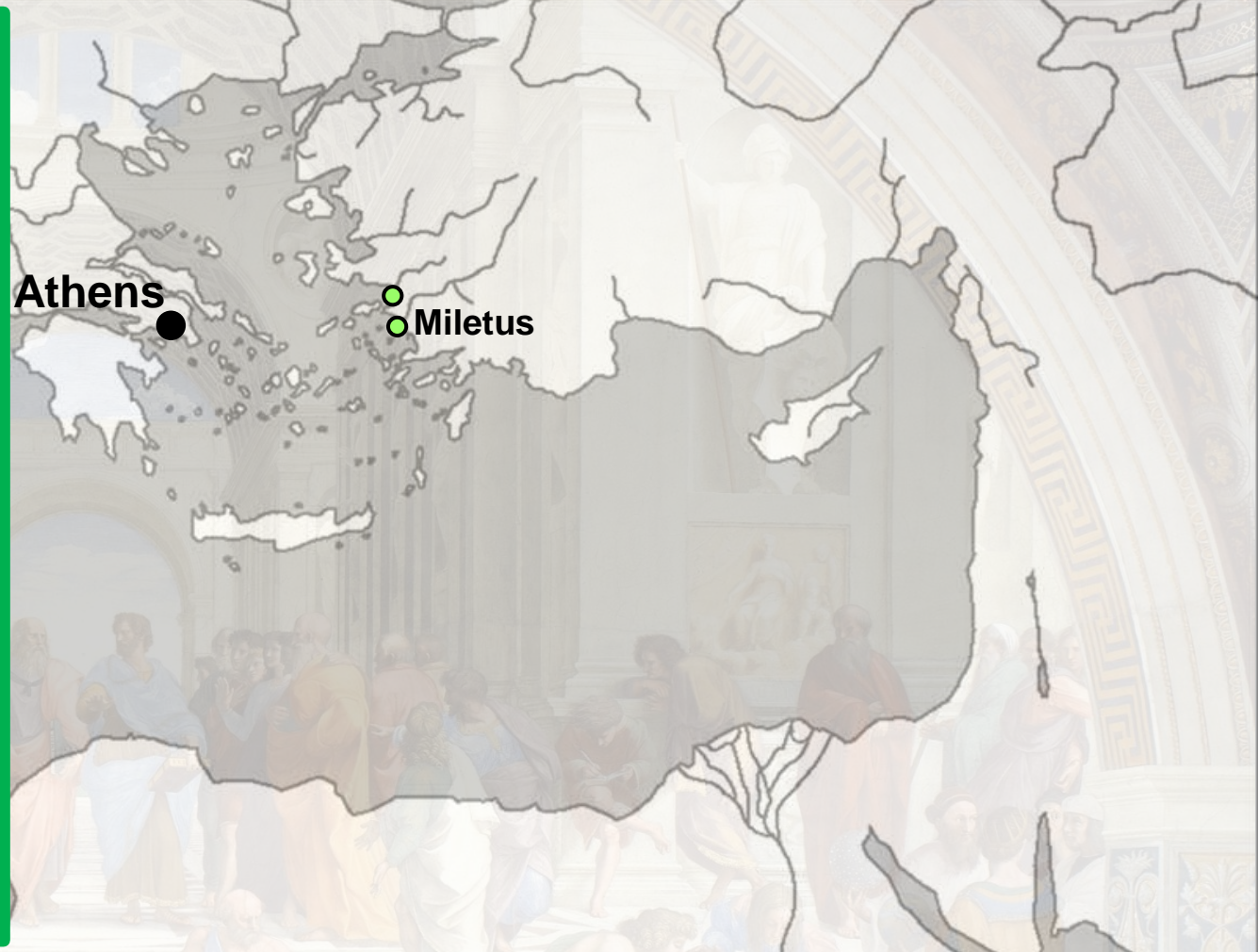
“The cold warms up, the warm cools off, the moist parches, the dry dampens.”

“The same thing is both living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old; for these things transformed are those and those transformed back again are these.”

“The road up and the road back are the same.”

“The track of the carding wheel is straight and crooked.”

“The sea is purest and foulest water; for fish drinkable and healthy; for men undrinkable and deadly.”



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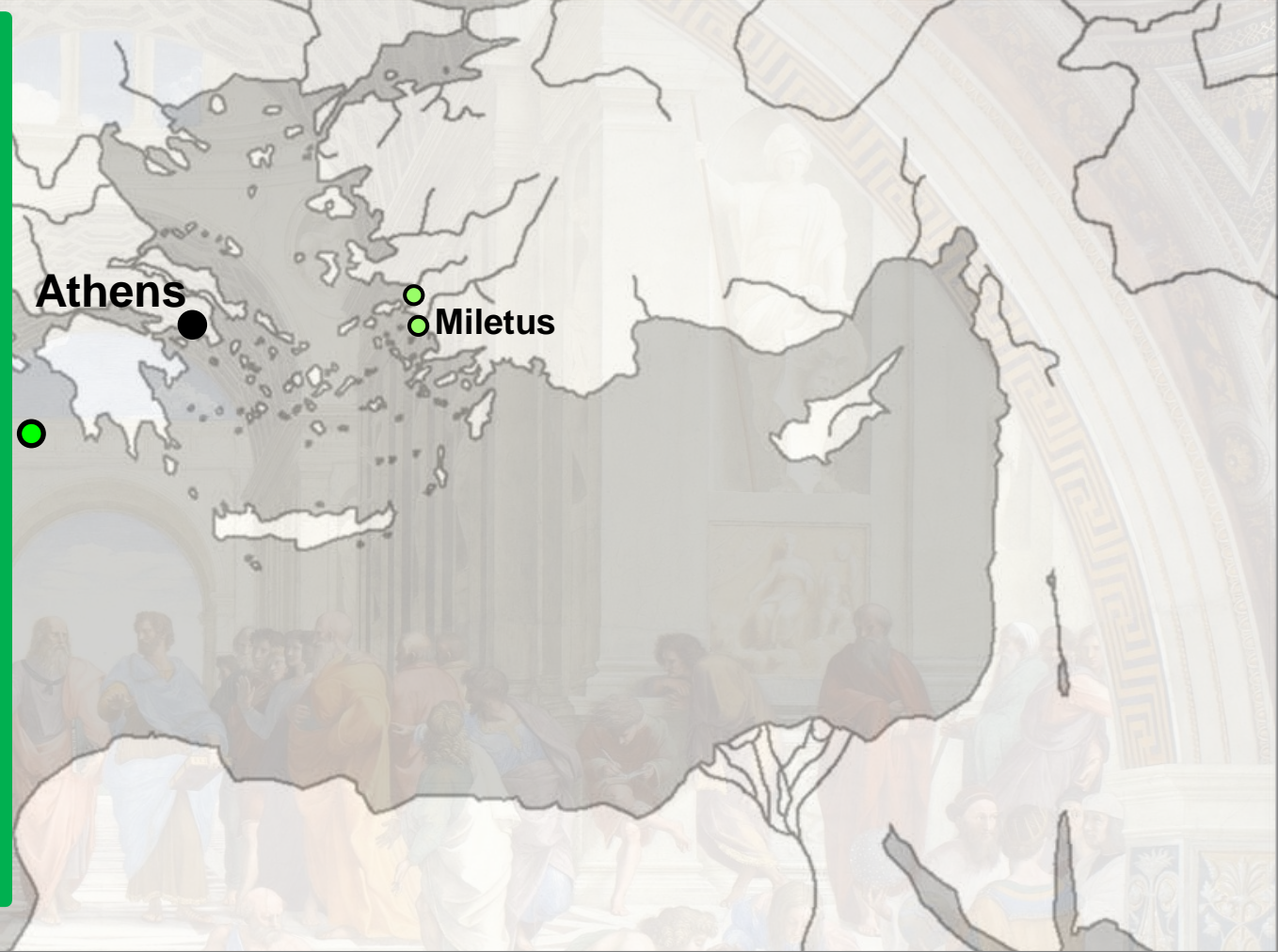


Heraclitean Flux

“On those who step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow.”

“One cannot step into the same river twice, nor can one grasp any mortal being in a stable condition, but it scatters again and gathers; it forms and dissolves and approaches and departs.”

“We step into and we do not step into the same rivers; we are and we are not.”



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Thales

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Heraclitus

Parmenides

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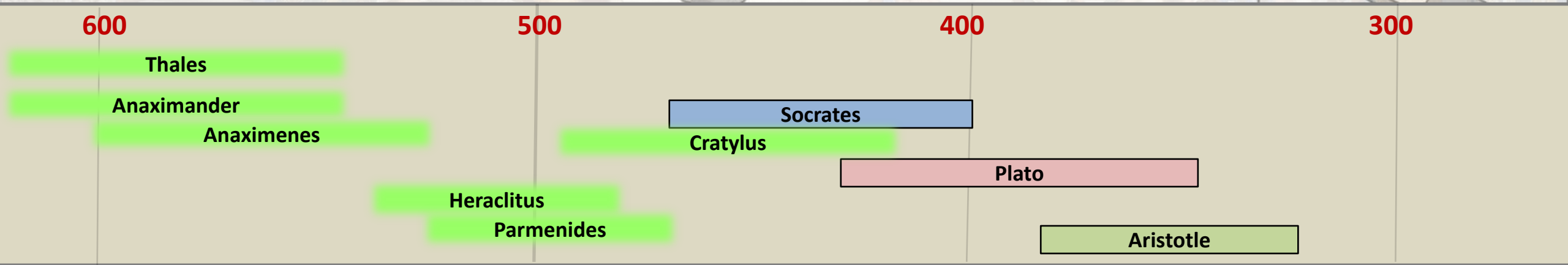
Aristotle's Account (from *Metaphysics A.6*) of Plato's development:

“In his youth Plato first become familiar with **Cratylus** and with the Heraclitean beliefs that all sensible things are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them; he held these views even in later years.

“**Socrates**, on the other hand, was concerned with ethics and not at all with nature as a whole; he was seeking the universal in ethics and was the first to turn his thought to **definitions**.

“Plato agreed with Socrates, but because of his Heraclitean views, he held that these **definitions apply not to perceptible things but to other things** for he thought that the common account could not be apply to any perceptible thing, since perceptible things were always changing. Things of this other sort, then, he called **forms**, and he said that the perceptible things are apart from these things and are named after them, since **the things with the same names as the forms are what they are by participation in the forms**.

“In calling it ‘participation’, he only changed the name, since the **Pythagoreans** said that things exist by imitating numbers, and Plato says they exist by participation, changing the name.”



Plato's *Cratylus*

“If [something] is always passing away, can we correctly say first that it is this, and then that it is that? Or won't it necessarily, in the very instant while we are speaking, become something else and pass away and no longer be what it is? How, then, can something that is never in the same state be anything?”

“No, nor can [such a thing] be known by anyone. For at the moment when the would-be knower approaches it, it becomes some other and different thing, so that its quality and state can no longer be known. Surely no kind of knowledge is knowledge about that which is in no state.”

“In fact we cannot even say that there is such a thing as knowledge, if all things are changing and nothing remains fixed. For if knowledge itself does not change and cease to be knowledge, then knowledge would remain, and there would be knowledge; but if the very form of knowledge changes, at the moment of the change to another form there would be no knowledge, and if it is always changing, there will always be no knowledge. So, on this account, there will be neither anyone to know nor anything to be known.”

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Thales

Anaximander

Anaximenes

Socrates

Cratylus

Plato

Heraclitus

Parmenides

Aristotle

Plato's Cratylus

“Let’s not investigate whether a particular face, or something of that sort, is beautiful, or whether all such things seem to flow. Rather, let’s investigate this: Should we say that **the beautiful itself** is always such as it is?”

If the everything changes, “there will be neither anyone to know nor anything to be known.”

“However, if there is always that which knows and that which is known—if there are such things as **the beautiful, the good**, and likewise for **the other things that are**—then it doesn’t appear to me that *these* things can be anything like flowings or motions.”

“Whether I’m right about the nature of things, or whether the doctrine of Heraclitus and many others is true, is a difficult question. But surely no sensible man can... condemn himself and all things and say that they are unsound like leaky pots, or believe that all things are just like people afflicted with runny noses, or that all things are afflicted with colds, always dripping.”

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Thales

Anaximander

Anaximenes

Socrates

Cratylus

Plato

Heraclitus

Parmenides

Aristotle

Understanding Socrates' "What is it?" Question

“What something is” is its form or substance.

idea (ἰδέα) *ousia* (οὐσία)
eidos (εἶδος)

Many different things are _____.

There must be something *the same* about them, which makes them all _____.

This *same thing* is what Socrates calls “the form of the _____” or “the substance of _____” or “the _____ itself.”

This is what Socrates is looking for when he asks “What is _____?”

Someone who knows the form of _____ will be able to “use it as a model” to determine which things are _____.

And unless you know the form of _____, you can not know anything else about _____.

An account of something's form (or substance) is what we call a definition.

Plato's Theory of Forms:

- **Reality vs. Appearance:** each form is one thing, but **appears** to be many.

“Since the beautiful is the opposite of the ugly, they are two things.”

“And since they are two things each of them is also one?”

“And the same argument applies, then, to just and unjust, good and bad, and all the forms: each of them is itself one thing, but because they appear all over the place in partnership with actions and bodies, and with one another, each of them appears to be many things.” (475d-76a)

(Republic V, 475d-76a)

Plato's Theory of Forms:

- **Reality vs. Appearance:** each form is **one** thing, but **appears** to be **many**.
- The many things are not really the form, but **likenesses** (or copies or imitations) of it.

“What about someone who believes in **beautiful things** but does not believe in **the beautiful itself**... do you think he is living in a **dream**, or is he awake? Just consider. Isn't it dreaming to think—whether asleep or awake—that a **likeness** is not a likeness but rather the thing that it is like?”

(Republic V, 476c)

Plato's Theory of Forms:

- **Reality vs. Appearance:** each form is one thing, but appears to be many.
- The many things are not really the form, but **likenesses** (or copies or imitations) of it.
- Each form remains **always the same in every respect** (whereas the many likenesses do not.)
- The **forms never seem to be their opposites**, whereas each likeness of a form seems just as much to be the opposite form.

“The beautiful itself” the “form of beauty that remains always the same in all respects.”

“Of all the many beautiful things, is there one that won't also seem ugly? Or any just one that won't seem unjust? Or a pious one that won't seem impious? ... What about the many things that are doubles? Do they seem to be any the less halves than doubles? ... And again, will the things that we say are big, small, light, or heavy be any more what we say they are than they will be the opposite? ... Then is each of the many things any more what one says it is than it is not what one says it is?”

(Republic V, 4783-79c)

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- The **forms are objects of knowledge**, whereas the likenesses of a form **do not fully exist** and are objects of **belief** (or **opinion**).

“So, we have now discovered, it seems, that that the majority of people’s many conventional views about beauty and the rest are somehow **rolling around between what is not and what purely is.**”

“And we agreed earlier that if anything turned out to be of that sort, it would be an **object of belief**, not an object of knowledge...”

(Republic V, 479d)

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Intelligible Things (the Forms)	Visible Things (the many particulars)	Metaphysics	
fully-real	not-fully-real		Epistemology
never changing	always changing		
consistent	contradictory		
knowable	unknowable		
known by reason	percieved by senses		
objects of knowledge	objects of opinion (<i>doxa</i>)		