





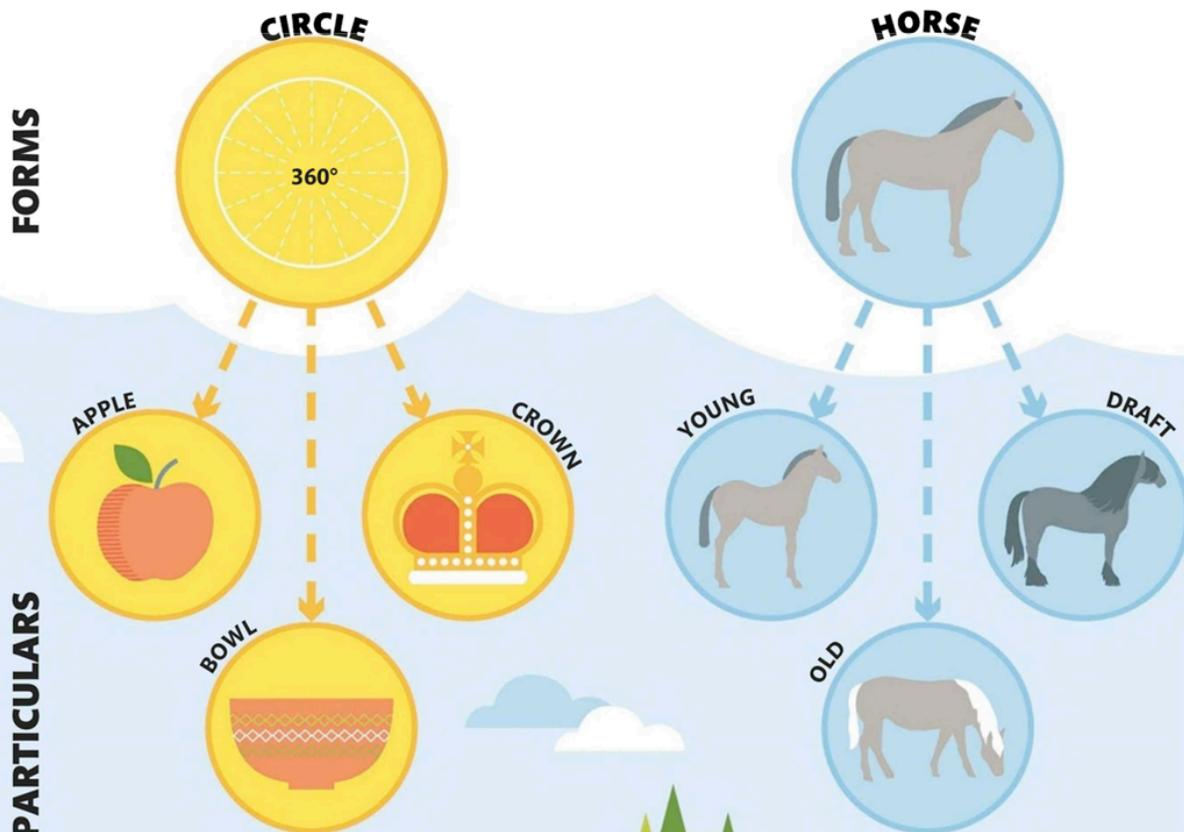
# Platonic realms

At the heart of Plato's philosophy is the notion that the world we live in is deceptive and that our senses cannot be trusted. Indeed, for Plato, our world is merely a shadow cast by a higher realm of the Forms.

## A world of Forms

Plato, like many philosophers before and since, was an accomplished mathematician and was fascinated by geometry. He observed that there are many instances of things that are, for example, circular in the world around us, and that we recognize them as instances

of a circle. We can do this, he argued, because we have an idea in our minds of what a circle is—what he called the “Idea” or “Form” of a circle—and unlike the particular instances of circular things, this Form is an ideal circle, with no imperfections. Indeed, everything we experience—from horses to acts



## Forms and particulars

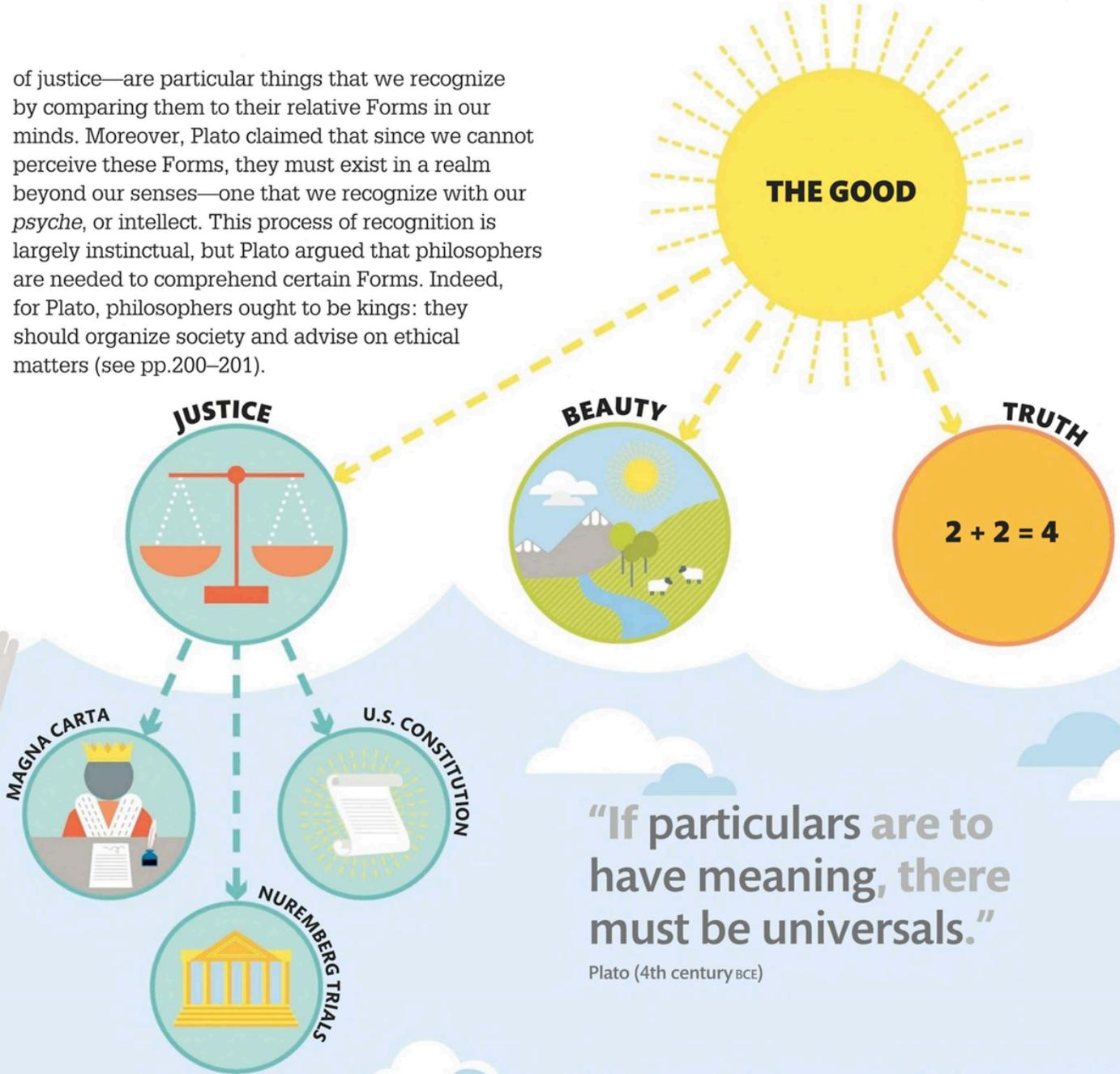
According to Plato, only imperfect, particular things exist in our world. The ideal circle, for example, exists only in the world of the Forms. The Forms are like blueprints from which particular things are made.

## Material objects

There are many kinds of horses, but all are recognizably horses because they conform to the ideal Form of a horse. All our ideas of “horsiness” are derived from the ideal Form.



of justice—are particular things that we recognize by comparing them to their relative Forms in our minds. Moreover, Plato claimed that since we cannot perceive these Forms, they must exist in a realm beyond our senses—one that we recognize with our *psyche*, or intellect. This process of recognition is largely instinctual, but Plato argued that philosophers are needed to comprehend certain Forms. Indeed, for Plato, philosophers ought to be kings: they should organize society and advise on ethical matters (see pp.200–201).



“If particulars are to have meaning, there must be universals.”

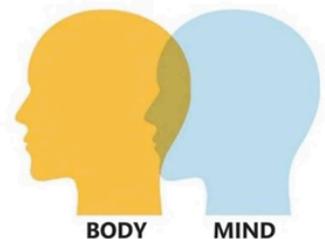
Plato (4th century BCE)

**Abstract concepts**

There are also Forms of abstract concepts, such as truth, beauty, and virtue. Instances of justice in the earthly realm, for example, are reflections of the ideal Form of the concept of justice.

**DUALISM**

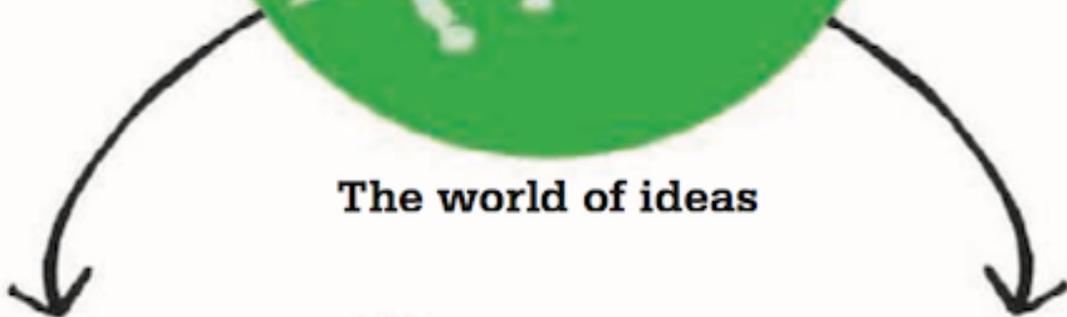
In Plato’s dualistic universe, the two worlds he describes are perceived in different ways. The earthly realm is experienced by our bodily senses; the ideal realm is understood by the *psyche*—our mind or intellect.



**According to Plato's theory of Forms**, every horse that we encounter in the world around us is a lesser version of an "ideal", or perfect, horse that exists in a world of Forms or Ideas—a realm that humans can only access through their ability to reason.



**The world of ideas**



**The world of the senses**