

Shona Epistemology and Plato's Divided Line

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I am the wisest man alive; for there is one thing that I know that is that I know nothing (Socrates, in The Republic).

Abstract

This paper compares and contrasts Plato's theory of knowledge as represented by the divided line with Shona conceptions of knowledge as found in Shona traditional utterances. The idea is to show the possible synergies and nuances between the two philosophically rich traditions. In order to show clarity and coherence in argumentation, we begin the treatise by defining knowledge in general and we move on to outline and discuss the levels of knowledge in Plato's divided line before we consider Shona conceptions of knowledge. Using Plato's divided line is just a matter of strategy; we do not consider Plato's theory of knowledge to be the most ideal theory to be used across cultures. Rather, we try to show that areas of commonality between Plato's divided line and Shona conceptions of knowledge are more revealing than areas of divergence.

Introduction

This paper estimates how Shona utterances or expressions approximate Plato's theory of the divided line in the definition and conceptualization of knowledge. To begin with, in his theory of the divided line, Plato identifies and analyses four levels of knowing starting from the lowest level which he calls *imagination* where the mind encounters shadows and take them as knowledge; to the highest level which he calls *perfect intelligence* where the mind perceives knowledge through *The Forms*. In between *imagination* and *perfect knowledge*, the mind also perceives knowledge through *belief* and *thinking*. In this article, we argue that there is a correlation between Plato's theory of the divided line and Shona conceptions of knowing which are found in Shona utterances and sculptures. For instance, at the level of *imagination*, Shona utterances such as: *Raviro anobatira zvinhu pamusoro, ha-ana cha-anonyanyoziva* (Raviro has a tendency to scratch things on the surface, she is not quite knowledgeable) approximates Plato's imagination in the divided line as shall be demonstrated later in this work.

Juxtaposing this proposition with Plato's divided line one can notice that 'scratching the surface' does not require much serious thought except some bit of *imagination* which Plato defines as the most superficial form of mental activity. At the level of *belief*, it will be argued that the Shona people use statements like: *Anovona asi ha-avonesesi* (he or she does not see properly) which means that a person has knowledge of some phenomena. At this level, the senses distort reality to the extent that a mountain would appear to be blue if viewed from afar, yet upon getting closer to it, one would see that it is not be blue. At the level of *thinking*, it will be demonstrated that the Shona saying *muninga dzepfungwa* (deep thoughts) has the equivalence of Plato's *dianoia* where Shona sages go beyond *imagination* and *belief* to be deeply engaged in deep thoughts about the cosmos and their everyday experiences in society. And finally at the level of perfect knowledge, the Shona utterance: *Vanhu vanepfungwa dzakajeka ndivo vano-ona zvakavanzika* (only the intellectually gifted have to transcendental knowledge or knowledge about the forms). This compares well with Plato's divided line where the mind perceives knowledge in terms of *The Forms* which surpass all forms of *imagination*, *belief* and *thinking*. Though areas of commonality between these two philosophically rich traditions are more revealing, we will argue that among the Shona; elders are the sources of knowledge which they re-collect through their past experiences where knowledge is a product of induction, while knowledge according to Plato is a function of the mind as it negotiates its way from *imagination* to *perfect knowledge*.

Epistemology

Epistemology is one of the four main branches of philosophy which include metaphysics, ethics and logic. While metaphysics deals with the nature of reality in terms of what there is (ontology) and what we say about what there is (predication), ethics deal with the nature of human relationships in terms of how we ought to live and logic deals with the principles of correct and incorrect reasoning.

Epistemology (theory of knowledge) deals with the meaning, source and nature of knowledge. In this paper we discuss this branch of philosophy from both a Western and African perspective; and in particular we look at how Shona epistemology approximates Plato's theory of knowledge as represented by his divided line. Please note that we do not envisage a perfect match in terms of similarities as this is highly inconceivable given that these two philosophical traditions are asymmetrical.

By Shona epistemology, we mean the concept of knowledge among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. There are various terms that are used as designations for knowledge in Shona society and these include but are not limited to *ruzivo*, *umbowo*, *njere* and *pfungwa*. In this article we endeavour to discuss these designations in order to show how they feed into or compare with Plato's designations of knowledge in the divided line. But for purposes of positioning our argument, it will be reasonable to begin this section by defining the designation 'Shona people.'

The 'Shona people' are the descendants of people who settled on the Zimbabwean plateau from about 900AD in the south and 1200 AD in the north. The history of the origins of the Shona people is largely oral and findings to date have been established by archeologists and linguists (<http://karaart.com/collections/shona/origins3.html>). What is clear is that the being the largest ethnic grouping, the Shona people are inhabitants of a country which is bordered by two big rivers; Zambezi to the north and Limpopo to the south. This country is known today as Zimbabwe. The Shona have six different languages namely; *Kalanga*, *Karanga*, *Korekore*, *Zezuru*, *Manyika* and *Ndau* (Mangena, 2008: 63).

The *Kalanga* occupy the area that is dominated by the Ndebele people in Western Zimbabwe, the *Karanga* occupy the southern part of the country, the *Korekore* are found in the north, while the *Zezuru* occupy the central region of Zimbabwe and the *Manyika* and *Ndau* people occupy the eastern region of Zimbabwe (Asante, 2000: 20). In their conceptualization of knowledge; philosophers have distinguished three different levels of knowing: (1) knowing that (or information); (2) Knowing how (or competence); Knowing by acquaintance (Hallen and Sodipo, 1997:46).

Knowing that is certainly the most common usage and may be implied by the other two (1997: 46). *Knowing that* is descriptive or informative as in Tokyo is the capital of Japan. As Hallen and Sodipo (1997:46) put it, *Knowing that* is, however, prior to *knowing by acquaintance*, that is to say, it is possible to have knowledge by acquaintance of something which one has *knowledge that* (I know that Tokyo is the capital of Japan. I visited the city in 1979). In this understanding, *knowing by acquaintance* has to do with familiarity, to know something is to be familiar with it in practical terms in Shona society, they say: *muzivi wenzira yeparuware ndiyemufambi wayo* (a person who knows the road that passes through the dwala is the one who has through it before). This expression means that one only need to experience something in order to know it better.

As this work will show, this experience is associated with age as the elderly are more knowledgeable than the youths. This point is well captured by the other Shona expression: *Mati maonei imi muchiri pwere dzinobuda mukaka mumhuno?* (What have you seen you children who are still breast-feeding?) So, as can be seen here, knowledge among the Shona is largely by acquaintance than it is by information or know-how. Note that *knowing by acquaintance* is different from having an idea of Tokyo by way of reading the world map, or hearing from those who have practical knowledge of the city.

Knowing how to do something is used to characterize a practical skill or proficiency, even when the possessor may not be said to have significant conceptual or cognitive knowledge relevant to understanding or explaining the skill (1997: 46). In short, *knowing how* is psychomotor-oriented, that is, it has more to do with the practical aspect of the skill or the knowledge one possesses. But perhaps after analyzing these three different varieties of knowing, it would be good to consider Plato's conceptualization of knowledge as represented by his divided line in order not to be diverted from our main argument.

The Divided Line

In his theory of the divided line, Plato divides the world into two; the visible world of sensation where imagination and belief are found and the intelligible world where knowledge and intelligence belong (Stumpf, 1983: 52). In Plato's reasoning, the visible world is prior to the intelligible world as a world of mere appearances. Plato argues that in the process of discovering knowledge, the mind moves through four stages of development (1983: 52). At each stage, there is a parallel between the kind of object presented to the mind and the kind of thought this object makes possible (1983: 52). These objects and their parallel modes of cognition can be diagrammed as follows:

Objects	Modes of Thought
The Good	Intelligence (<i>noesis</i>) or
Forms	(D) Knowledge (<i>episteme</i>)
Intelligible world	(C) Thinking (<i>dianoia</i>)
Mathematical objects	
Visible Things	(B) Belief (<i>pistis</i>)
Visible world	(A) Imagining (<i>eikasia</i>)
Images	

(Diagram by Stumpf, 1989: 90)

Plato's Explanation

The vertical line from bottom to top suggests that there is some degree of knowing at every point, but as the line passes through the lowest forms of reality to the highest, there is a parallel progression from the lowest degree of truth to the highest (1983: 52). The line is divided into two unequal parts. The upper and larger part represents the intelligible world and the smaller, lower part represents the visible world. This unequal division symbolizes the lower degree of reality and truth as found in the visible world as compared with the greater reality and truth in the intelligible world (1983:52).

As can be seen on the above diagram, the lowest form of cognition is imagination (*eikasia*) which is etymologically connected with *eikon* which means 'image,' 'likeness' – and with *eikos* which means 'likening' (comparison) or 'estimation of likelihood.' Perhaps 'imagining' is the least unsatisfactory rendering (Stumpf, 1989: 90). *Imagining* is the most superficial form of mental activity where the mind confronts images or the least amount of reality (1983: 53). *Imagining* could, of course, mean the activity beyond the mere appearances of things to their deeper reality (1983: 53). But here Plato means by *imagining* simply the sense experience of appearances wherein these appearances are taken as true reality.

The next stage after *imagining* is *belief* (*pistis*). This is the state of mind induced by seeing actual objects (1983: 54) For Plato, seeing only constitutes believing, because visible objects depend upon their context for many of their characteristics. There is, then, a degree of certainty that seeing gives us, but this is not absolute certainty (1983: 54). If a mountain range appears to be blue from a distance but turns out to be populated with green vegetation when looked at from close range, one's certainty about its colour becomes dubitable. Plato maintains that *believing*, even if based on seeing, is still in the stage of opinion (1983: 54). In the moral sphere, *pistis* would include 'correct beliefs without knowledge (Stumpf, 1989: 90).' Plato argues that higher education is to effect an escape from the prison of appearances by training the intellect, first in mathematics and then in moral philosophy (1989: 90).

As Plato maintains, the lower section of the intelligible world contains the subject matter of the mathematical sciences (1989: 90). Two characteristics of mathematical procedure are mentioned as: (a) The use of visible diagrams as imperfect illustrations of the objects and truth of pure thought. Here is a sort of bridge carrying the mind across from the visible thing to intelligible reality which it must learn to distinguish. (b) Each branch of mathematics starts from unquestioned assumptions (postulates, axioms, definitions) and reasons from them deductively (1989: 90). The state of mind is *dianoia*, that is, 'thought' or 'thinking,' implying a degree of understanding which falls short of perfect knowledge (1989: 90). *Dianoia* suggests thinking from premise to conclusion. This state of mind is characteristic of the scientist, for the scientist deals with visible things but not simply with his vision of them (1983: 54).

For Plato, visible things are symbols of a reality that can be thought but not seen. For instance, a mathematician engages in the act of ‘abstraction,’ of drawing out from the visible thing what that thing symbolizes (1983: 54). When he sees the diagram of a triangle, he thinks about triangularity (1983: 54). He distinguishes between the visible triangle and the intelligible one. Science forces one to think, because the scientist is always searching for laws or principles, it requires that we ‘let go’ our senses and rely instead on our intellects (1983: 55). Thinking is also characterized by reasoning from hypothesis, that is, it is characterized by truth which is taken as self-evident but which depends upon some higher truth (1983: 55). Thinking or reasoning from hypotheses does give us knowledge of the truth, but it does still bear this limitation, that it isolates some truths from others, thereby leaving the mind still to ask *why* a certain truth is true (1983: 55).

Perfect intelligence (noesis) represents the mind as completely released from sensible objects (1983: 55). At this level, the mind is dealing directly with *The Forms*. The Forms are those intelligible objects, such as triangle and man that have been abstracted from the actual objects (1983: 55). The mind is now dealing with these pure forms without interference from even the symbolic character of visible objects. The mind no longer uses hypothesis, because they represent limited and isolated truths (1983: 55). That said, we need now to consider how knowledge is appropriated in Shona society and how this compares with Plato’s divided line.

Shona Epistemology

Shona epistemology is expressed in the way in which the Shona people use their language to define knowledge. It belongs to the category of what Jacob Mapara (2009: 140) calls indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) that are unique to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. IKS are a body of knowledge of the indigenous people of particular geographical areas that survived for a very long time (2009: 140). IKS refer to local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society (<http://www.sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu>). In this treatise we do not intend to discuss the nature of IKS in Shona society as this is discussed elsewhere, instead we are interested in demonstrating how Shona epistemology – as an example of an indigenous knowledge category – fares against or compares with Plato’s theory of the divided line.

Using Plato’s theory is just a matter of strategy; this should not be interpreted to mean that African conceptions of knowledge are prior to or informed by Western forms of ideation or theorization. We are aware that Plato’s theory of the divided line cannot be applied across cultures – including the Shona culture – but we argue that certain similarities can be observed when we compare the two cultures in terms of their epistemological soundings. The following diagram – which is accompanied by a comparative explanation – is an estimation of how Shona utterances or expressions approximate Plato’s theory of the divided line:

Plato's Divided Line	Thought	Object	Shona Expressions	Thought	Object
	Intelligence	The Good Forms		<i>Pfungwa dzakajeka</i> (Clear Thoughts)	<i>Zvakavanzika</i> (The Forms/Wisdom)
	Thinking	Abstract concepts		<i>Muninga dzepfungwa</i> (Deep thoughts)	Inductive knowledge
	Belief	Visible things		<i>Ha-avonesesi</i> (Does not see properly)	<i>Mazerere</i> (Unclear objects)
	Imagination	Images		<i>Vusiku vutatu</i>	<i>Rima</i> (Images/shadows)

Comparative Explanation

At every stage of Plato's divided line, the Shona have certain expressions which they use to designate epistemological meaning. At this juncture, it will be reasonable to give a comparative explanation of some of these Shona expressions which we would call modes of thought and the objects they represent and how these approximate Plato's theory of the divided line:

At the level of imagination (*eikesia*): The Shona people use expressions like: *Raviro anobatira zvinhu pamusoro, ha-ana cha-anonyanyoziva* (Raviro has a tendency to scratch things on the surface, she is not quite knowledgeable). *Pamusoro* is a Shona word for scratching the surface. So, by way of analogy, if a person lacks knowledge of something, he or she scratches at the surface without necessarily digging deeper. Perhaps at this stage we can see that 'scratching the surface' does not require a serious form of cognition other than *imagination*, which is defined by Plato as the most superficial form of mental activity where the mind confronts the least amount of reality. *Zvinhu* is the widest generality denoting the object that is perceived by imagination which may perhaps represent shadows in Plato's intuition.

Another Shona proposition which is at the level of Plato's imagination is: *Munhu uyu vusiku vutatu hwakatsinhirana* (This person is like total darkness). In Shona, the word *vusiku* does not only mean *rima* (darkness); it also means being an ignoramus or lacking knowledge of something. Since at the level of imagination, no real objects can be perceived except shadows, *vusiku* (being totally ignorant) has the same meaning as seeing shadows. Another Shona word *mudzimu* (ancestral spirit) can also be used to express ignorance or lack of knowledge about some phenomena. Thus, the expression *munhu uyu mudzimu zvawo* (This person resembles an ancestral spirit) means that the person cannot conceptualize proper reality except *rima* (some hazy shades or images of it).

Related to the above proposition is: *Ukakwira mugomo uchida kuvona makudo unomavona* (If you climb a mountain expecting to see baboons, you will certainly see them). This expression means that many a time people build images of certain objects in their intuitions and pass them as real objects. It is one thing to imagine seeing a baboon and it is quite another to perceive the baboon in real terms. The baboon in this case remains in the realm of shadows. Among the Shona, for instance, misfortunes are sometimes objects of our imagination, that is to say, if you expect bad things to happen to you they will happen in the realm of imagination.

The proposition – *Apa hapana kufunga apa, kurota uku* (There is no reasoning here, this is dreaming) – means that dreaming does not lead to real knowledge since dreaming takes place when the mind is not active but at rest, the product of dreaming is an image that is not real and cannot be explained rationally. How different is this from shadows? It would be logical to conclude perhaps that where Plato talks of imagination and shadows, the Shona people talk of dreaming and shadows. For instance, when you see the image of your late father talking to you in a dream; you cannot say that you saw your father talking to you but that you saw his lasting image. The words *rima*, *kusavona* and *kurota* which represent the three Shona expressions above, denote images or shadows which are nowhere near what can be called real knowledge.

Another way of explaining how the Shona conceptualize knowledge is through sculpture. Shona sculptures are objects which, in Plato's divided line, can be regarded as 'shadows of real beings.' In Shona sculpture, the spiritual and immaterial realm is dramatized in terms of how it affects the material world and is usually represented in anthropomorphic terms (<http://karaart.com/collections/shona/origins3.html>) The idea is simply that *vanhu* (people) are at the centre of the creation and whatever images the sculptors try to dramatize they express how *vanhu* tame nature.

The presentation of subject is usually literal rather than fantastic or allegorical, as it is in Yao and Chewa sculpture. For example, in a Shona sculpture by Lazarus Takawira titled Spirit Hare, a hare will be represented as a hare with a spiritual attributes rather than a spirit with the attributes of a hare (<http://karaart.com/collections/shona/origins3.html>). Just like Plato, the Shona conceptualize knowledge both vertically and horizontally.

They conceptualize knowledge vertically by way of paying homage to *nyikadzimu* (the spiritual world) as the source of higher knowledge and horizontally by getting acquainted with what happens in the material world. Thus, the Spirit Hare typified in Takawira's sculpture shows the hare as having spiritual attributes rather than a spirit with attributes of a hare. In Shona culture, a hare is a symbol of knowledge and wisdom and thus by way of analogy it means that the spiritual entities such as ancestors are thought to be the source of vertical knowledge and wisdom while the hare represents horizontal knowledge and wisdom.

Like the sculpture of the Yao, the Chewa and the Mbunda, Shona sculpture is conceptual rather than perceptual, that is, to say the artists do not depict the subject as they literary see it, but as they imagine it to be. So, like Plato, the Shona regard imagination as a source of knowledge of the subject being represented through the sculpture. But this knowledge need not be regard as intelligible knowledge as the artist may misrepresent the subject depending on his or her knowledge of it. While in Plato's divided line, *imagination* is the beginning of knowledge acquisition, *imagination* as depicted by Shona sculpture is also the beginning of Shona epistemology.

The Shona's conceptualization of the subject is based on the power of imagination of the artist, possibly his personal association of the subject with its spiritual significance, his particular style and the shape, weight and hardness of the stone and the tools he uses. As the majority of the artists are Shona and, although urbanized, draw their subject matter from their traditional beliefs, it is necessary to have some knowledge of these beliefs in order to fully understand the meaning of Shona sculpture. So, like Plato, the Shona regard *belief* as a source of knowledge. In the next section I consider Shona utterances at the level of *belief*.

At the level of belief (*pistis*): The Shona people use propositions like; *Anovona asi ha-avonesesi* (he or she does not see properly). If we use the word *anovona* metaphorically to refer to the eye of the mind, then it means somebody has some hazy knowledge of something. Why is this so? If we go back to our earlier example of a mountain range that appears to be blue from a distance and yet at close range, it is actually green, then we can perhaps understand why belief can be equated to the Shona expression – *anovona asi ha-avonesesi kana kuti maziso ake ha-nakuvhurika* (he or she has some hazy knowledge or does not see properly). There is no denying the fact that our eyes can be deceptive as in the case of belief and that though we have some degree of knowledge, that knowledge remains at the level of opinion since we cannot really be certain that what we have seen really represent what is being depicted, thus – *maziso ake anovona mazerere* (his eyes see unclear objects).

Zvatinotenda ndizvo zvatinorarama (We live our beliefs). This proposition can be interpreted to mean that our beliefs define who we are. For instance, the Shona people believe in life after death that is why they enact the ritual of *kurova guva* (beating the grave) when a person has died. The idea is to re-unite the dead person's soul with the living, especially close relations through this ritual enactment. Now, this same practice is not applicable to the Indians or the whites of European decent. In Plato's intuition, believing, even when based on seeing, is still in the stage of opinion which Plato calls *doxa* (meaning mere opinion) as opposed to *Sophia* (wisdom) (Hountondji, 1983: 7).

The Shona also practice *gata* after the death of a relative. *Gata* is...a ceremony that is held to determine the cause of the death of a person (Masaka and Chingombe, 2009: 190). I call this ritual 'African postmortem' or 'African autopsy.' What is important especially for this work is that it is a traditional belief that attempts to show that death is not a natural phenomenon but is a result of...some evil acts of enemies or a curse from ancestors (2009: 190). Whether this is true is a matter of some dispute, depending largely on where one is coming from. Now, only belief can be true or false, knowledge can't.

At the level of thinking (*dianoia*): The Shona saying *muninga dzepfungwa* (deep thoughts) is equivalent to Plato's *dianoia*. This is the level at which most Shona sages are found and so when the Shona sages go beyond mere imagination and belief they are said to be seriously engaged in deep thoughts. *Muninga dzepfungwa* means the person is no longer constructing images of things or defining reality by relying on his or her senses but rather by relying on the intellect. When this happens we say: *ane pfungwa dzinehundzamu* (he or she is intelligent). The Shona proposition: *akazaruka pfungwa* (is open-minded) means that the person is no longer perceiving knowledge through shadows or that his or her sight is no longer blighted to the extent that he or she sees a blue mountain where there is no blue mountain. *Akazaruka pfungwa* means the person is able to conceptualize knowledge without relying on images. The person is able to distinguish visible from intelligible things.

Just as intelligence is a preserve of the few in Plato's divided line, it is also true of the Shona people as only the sages exhibit intelligence. The only difference between Plato's notion of *dianoia* and Shona epistemology is that in Shona society, intelligence is explained in terms of age and experience. Almost all Shona sages are elderly men and women. Among the Shona when they say: *vakuru vanoti* (the elders say), it means there is acknowledgement that wisdom and intelligence is a preserve of the elders.

As Jacob Mapara (2009:145) would reinforce this point, “The appeal to *vakuru* who may belong to the dead or are very much advanced in age also comes from the Shona proverb which states thusly, *nzira inobvunzwa vari mberi* (meaning you ask those who are ahead for directions to your destination, viz; You should ask the experienced for assistance”). But while this point is valid when reference is made to traditional Shona society, it should be observed that these elders owe it to the community in which they are found. This is to say that there are an asset to the Shona community as a whole, this is why there are always consulted when problems arise and when some phenomena need to be interpreted and explained.

As *dianoia* suggests thinking from premise to conclusion, the idea is simply that since the elders have re-collected knowledge through experience they may use their inductive abilities to explain certain phenomema, for instance, in Shona society; elders have a way of predicting whether there will be enough rains in the season through past experiences, thus: *Gore rinowanda ndowa, mvura hainaye* (in a year where there are so many caterpillars, there is usual drought). By virtue having seen this happening in the last say seven years, they then come to the conclusion that in 2010 there will not be enough rains because of the high number of caterpillars. It is crucial at this stage to note that while Plato’s *dianoia* is purely based on a rational interpretation of reality, the Shona people’s concept of *dianoia* is based on empirical evidence: *Zvii zvinoratidza kuti zvauri kutaura ndezve chokwadi?* (What evidence is there to authenticate your claims?)

At the level of perfect intelligence (*noesis*): The Shona saying, *njere ipfumo rinobaya* (intelligence is like a stabbing spear). *Kubaya* in Shona means to cause someone to endure physical pain which may result in death or acute suffering. So, it is this devastating physical impact which the stabbing spear causes to a person’s body which is reminiscent to the cognitive intelligence a person can have. The same meaning is depicted by the Shona saying: *uyu anepfungwa dzakajeka* (his or her thought are clear) something close to what Rene Descartes called ‘clear and distinct.’ Among the Shona, *pfungwa dzakajeka dzinokwanisa kusarudza chakanaka kubvamunechakaipa* (clear thoughts are able to separate the good from the bad). In Plato’s divided line it is only perfect intelligence which can lead to the discovery of the forms.

In Shona they say: *Vanhu vane pfungwa dzakajeka/dzama ndivo vano-ona zvakavanzika* (only the intellectually gifted people have access to knowledge of the immaterial world). Thus, parallels can be drawn between what Plato calls *The Forms* and what the Shona call *zvakavanzika*. While Plato’s forms provide the underlying reality of knowledge in its perfect, everlasting and permanent form, *zvakavanzika* represent the Shona spiritual cosmology also as perfect, everlasting and permanent. The Shona statement: *Anoona zviri kumberi* (his or her intellect go beyond seeing things immediately before his or her eyes or mere appearances).

Zvirikumberi means reality which is still to unfold. Using the power of the mind the person is able to predict events before they unfold. As intimated earlier, only the elders are able to predict what the future holds, hence the powerful saying; *miromo yevakuru haiwiri pasi* (the words of the elders always come to pass). By way of interpretation, only the elders are able to grasp *zvakanzika* (the spiritual realm of knowledge) which Plato calls *The Forms*. Sometimes they do it through a re-collection of the experiences of the past in order to explain the future, that is to say, by inductively reaching their conclusions. Sometimes, they get this knowledge through dreams.

Conclusion

Through the divided line, Plato identified and analyzed four levels of knowing which are *imagination* which explains knowledge through the perception of shadows, *belief* which explains knowledge through sensation, *thinking* and *perfect intelligence* which explain knowledge through abstraction. After carefully analyzing thought patterns in Plato's divided line, we noted that there were areas of convergence between Plato's divided line and Shona conceptions of knowing which are found in Shona utterances and sculptures. We noted, for instance, that at the level of *imagination*, the Shona had utterances like: *Raviro anobatira zvinhu pamusoro, ha-ana cha-anonyanyoziva* (Raviro has a tendency to scratch things on the surface, she is not quite knowledgeable).

By comparing these utterances with Plato's divided line, we discovered that 'scratching the surface' did not require much serious thought except some bit of *imagination* which Plato defined as the most superficial form of mental activity. We concluded that although areas of convergence between Plato's divided line and the Shona conceptions of knowing were more revealing, and that differences were just a matter of nuances. For instance, we observed that among the Shona; elders were the fountains of knowledge which they had re-collected from their past experiences and that knowledge was a product of induction while knowledge according to Plato was a function of the mind as it negotiated its way from *imagination* right through to *perfect knowledge*.

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