

Is Taemin's song *Idea* truly Platonic?

Although it has been mentioned repeatedly, both by Taemin's fandom on networks such as X and Reddit and by the media¹, that his song *Idea* was inspired by Plato, how is this inspiration actually manifested?

Firstly, the title itself is a direct reference to Plato. *Idea* (ἰδέα) is the Greek term used by Plato to define ideas, the other occurrence of which is *eidos* (εἶδος), which literally translates as form². But before getting to the theory of forms, if we first examine the lyrics themselves, the references, although subtle, can be developed.

The reference to "beautiful silhouettes" in the second verse—and repeated later—may be a direct reference to the shadows cast in the passage from the allegory of the Cave in *Republic* VII. It should be noted that the image of the Cave comes after the passage on the Line in *Republic* VI, where Plato focuses on theorizing forms: the two are therefore not completely separate. But while the Line operates statistically, the Cave deals essentially with passages: moments, transitions³. It should be emphasized that the Cave is a part that concerns education, since Plato's *Republic* is a political work—and its title is an indication of this. In doing so, the Cave consists of describing the effects of education on nature, positing this same nature as the limit of all education and subordinating it to the possibility of a conversion of the gaze⁴. Finally, still with this political purpose in mind, the allegory of the Cave provides the reason for establishing philosophers as rulers, as they alone are capable of attaining true realities, in other words, *ideas*—also called *eidos*, depending on whether we are talking about ideas or forms. So, thank you to Taemin sings about the need for philosophers to govern the world: emotion is great.

The "beautiful silhouettes" are a direct reference to the shadows that the prisoners in the Cave perceive, which come from figurines used to keep them in their illusion.

¹ Song, Danielle, "Taemin Breaks Down The Inspiration Behind His Solo Album 'Never Gonna Dance Again: Act 2,'" *Koreaboo*, 2020. [Online]

² The distinction between the two, although not explained here, is widely debated and commented on by Plato scholars.

³ Dicksaut, Monique, *Le Naturel philosophie. Essay on Plato's Dialogues*, Paris, Vrin, 2016, p. 457.

⁴ *Ibid.*

It is interesting to note that the name given to these figures in the original Greek text, which is the term used to refer to images and illusions, is none other than *eidôla*. *Eidôlon* in Greek, reused by Plato in his theory of forms and images, is none other than the term for idol. While the term idol deserves an article of its own, it is still significant to note that what Plato criticizes in the allegory of the cave and in his theory of forms is none other than the idol—*eidôlon*—that is, the image, the fantasy, the illusion that distances us from the truth and that is to be proscribed, and which is the very term used to refer to K-pop singers, in short.

"Beautiful silhouettes" are therefore not the real object but the appearance, and education must not only compel the prisoner to see real objects and not just shadows, but also, in order to avoid falling into aporia, ask him to define what he does not know—the figurines, idols (*eidôla*) are not yet true realities but simply a higher degree of ontology than shadows—the prisoner must be forced to leave the Cave in order to access a higher degree of truth. But only those who are capable of leaving can be forced to do so—hence the intention of political governance by philosophers. The exit is the "ascent of the soul to the intelligible realm" (VII 517-b).

This exit towards the exit of the Cave, which must be forced, is difficult and tedious, and is sung by Taemin in the chorus. When he sings that his vision is blurred, that he can't hold on to anything, but at the same time, he has just been reborn and is breathing, it is precisely his opinions (*doxa*) that are collapsing; the realities he took to be true—in the Platonic reading—are in fact only appearances of what is. Leaving the Cave is not a linear process either; it does not immediately lead to liberation. At first, the prisoner only sees an inverted image of the intelligible. This inverted image is not of the same nature in the intelligible and in the visible. In the visible world, it is the criterion of reality that is inverted (we believe in the reality of shadows, of "beautiful silhouettes") as well as the assignment of causality: that is, we take effects for causes⁵. In the intelligible world, grasping the shadows first means inverting a direction of thought: "instead of using hypotheses to go back to the principle, we will use them to go down to the consequences"⁶. Finally, only those who have succeeded in seeing the sun are happy; Taemin "breathes" because he has reached the end of this long dialectical path. And only true dialectics, the knowledge of truth through reason, can be

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

⁶ *Ibid.*

source of happiness. This attack is illustrated at the end of the clip when he climbs the images to ascend toward the sky, that is, toward ideas.

He sings that he is "Beyond the border of reality" because he has managed to find the "shadow" and thus encountered the "invisible world" and "lost himself in the ideal imagination." This passage sung by Taemin must be understood, with the idea of the Cave explained above, in light of the theory of forms. To summarize it in a very prosaic and crude way, the Line in *Republic*, VI, which therefore comes before the allegory of the Cave, is the construction of the theory of forms. According to Plato—and in a very abbreviated and schematic way—we must imagine the world divided into two parts: the first is the visible, sensible part, the part in which we find ourselves. The second is the intelligible part where ideas—*idea, eidos*—are located, that is, true realities, the true. This part is not immediately accessible and, above all, is not accessible to everyone. At the intersection between the two parts lies mathematics, which allows us – only in part – to access certain truths, but in a fragmented way. These segments should be viewed on a vertical line: 1) ideas, with *the idea* of good being more important than the others, 2) mathematics. 3) The visible and lowest ontological degree, that is, the greatest degradation of what is, are images (for example, a drawing of an apple).

Thus, by managing to find the "shadow," that is, the image, the illusion, the copy of the real, he managed to see what visible objects were, then his understanding of these visible objects and the illusion they project allowed him access to the intelligible, which is "beyond the boundaries of reality," to finally encounter the world of ideas, the "invisible world," because truths cannot be seen by the senses, and he lost himself—as a good philosopher should—in *the idea*.

If we were to illustrate this with images from the video, which are directly imbued with the allegory of the Cave and the Line:



The beginning opens with a dim light, the interior of the Cave where the images are inverted: Taemin's two counterparts are the illustration of shadows and figurines. We take shadows for reality.



Here, awakening begins, not without pain (hence the passages of frantic running and fire), the light is more intense than in the foreground because reality is revealed (and truth is symbolized in Plato by the Sun in the passage from the Cave). Taemin, who is beginning his dianoetic journey, is illuminated more brightly with warmer colors whose tones are closer to the natural and true light of the sun, *in contrast* to the others.

prisoners, all in a similar posture that connotes passivity and apathy, all lit in cold, bluish colors that convey a sense of death rather than life.



Then comes the chorus, where Taemin sings the idea. The transition from the visible to the intelligible takes place here. He has emerged from the images, shadows, and illusions, and now leaves the visible to enter the intelligible. This transition is particularly well represented by the dance, with a notable movement in which the hand traces a horizontal line. It was mentioned above that mathematics is the section that allows the shift (among other things) between the sensible and the intelligible. This part of the choreography with the hand is an excellent representation (intentional or not) of this shift between the visible and the intelligible.



Access to intelligible forms, ideas, and the truth of things.

Taemin, in images and words, reproduces the difficult dialectical path of any philosopher who, through rigorous education on the reality of things and a love of truth, manages to free themselves—not without difficulty—from images, appearances, and representations in order to attain knowledge. Thank you to Taemin for performing a song in praise of philosophers. However, it should be noted that, ultimately, the search for truth, especially in Plato's work, is driven by a desire for political reform and, above all, education. Philosophers must attain truths in order to help others escape from illusion. Paradoxically, Taemin, through images and poetry (the two things Plato hated most because they were a source of corruption in society), sings that we must escape from the very images he produces. To add to the paradox, this praise of philosophy comes from an artist whose title—idol—in Greek

is the very illusion that philosophy warns against for a good society. So, watch the video, yes, listen to Taemin's music, yes (you'll never get tired of it), but reading Plato is what is most recommended.