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Mathematics as Epistemology. The Justification of the Doctrine of Ideas at the Outset of the 7th Book of the Republic and its Relation to the 'communis mathematica scientia'.

Abstract:

At the outset of the 7th Book of the *Republic* (521c1-524d1), Plato unfolds a distinction between a 'confused' (*synkechymenoos*) and a 'distinct' (*kechorismenoos*) mode of cognition and assigns the confused mode of cognition to perception and the distinct one to thought (*Logismos* and *Noesis*). At the end of this section (524c6-d1), he then explicitly points out that the distinction between the perceptible and the thinkable has been developed by him out of this distinction. This passage (521c1-524d1) is one of the few passages in Plato's dialogues, in which he himself refers to the justification for presupposing the existence of Ideas. In the presentation, I will analyze this justification and show how Plato, through an epistemological reflection upon the distinctiveness of cognition, develops a 'universal mathematics' in which the criteria of distinctive cognition, i.e., of discrimination, are to be investigated purely for themselves.

Since Descartes, at the beginning of modern philosophy, derives his new approach from the distinction between confused and distinct cognition and, moreover, for his part, also identifies this distinction with the distinction between perception and reason, at the end of the presentation, the commonalities and differences between both positions will be outlined in order to present a new perspective on the relation of modern and ancient epistemology.