Ancient Greek Metaphysics: Plato
Particulars

Particulars: can’t have multiple instances
Dan Bonevac, Gavrilo Princip
Empire State Building, Perry-Castañeda Library, that beach ball,
this grain of sand
Austin, Texas, Sarajevo
November 11, 1918
The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand
Universals

• Universals: can have multiple instances
  • Properties: red, triangular, large
  • Relations: between, on, love, friendship
  • Kinds: tiger, building, pencil, shortstop
  • Books: the Bible; Edwin Mullhouse
  • Musical works: Luckenbach, Texas; Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D Minor
Are Universals Real?

- Realism: yes, and mind-independent
- Conceptualism: yes, but mind-dependent
- Nominalism: no—everything is particular

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<tr>
<th>Mind-dependent</th>
<th>Mind-independent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Real</td>
<td>Conceptualism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unreal</td>
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Why think forms exist at all?

• Necessary for knowledge
• Without forms, we couldn’t
  • Understand why things happen
  • Know any universal or necessary generalizations, as in science, mathematics, or philosophy
• There must be something all Fs have in common, by virtue of which they are Fs
Contrary Qualities

• Substances admit contrary qualities

• How is that possible?
Parmenides

Solid

Not Solid
Parmenides

- Principle: Nothing can have contrary qualities
- Change: Fa $\rightarrow$ not Fa
- But a can’t be F and not F
- So, change is unreal:
- Fa $\rightarrow$ Fa
Parmenides

Solid

WTF?

Not Solid
Heraclitus

Solid

Not Solid
Heraclitus

• Principle: Nothing can have contrary qualities
• Change: Fa —> not Fa
• But a can’t be F and not F
• So, it’s not the same object:
• Fa —> not Fb
Heraclitus

Not the same wax!

Solid

Not Solid
Plato’s enemies: Sophists

- The Sophists are relativists
- “Man is the measure of all things”
- What’s true for me might not be true for you
- Meaning might be relative too
- So, maybe you don’t mean by your words what I mean
- Maybe my meaning changes over time
Plato’s enemies: Skeptics

- The Skeptics deny the possibility of knowledge
- There is such a thing as truth
- We just can’t get access to it
- How is it possible for us to communicate? I can’t know what you mean (or even what I meant)
Skeptics

Wax

???

Wax
Common Sense

• Principle: Nothing can have contrary qualities

• Change: Fa —> not Fa

• Not the same quality:

• a is F-at-t and not F-at-t’
Aristotle

• Principle: Substances can have contrary qualities
• Change: Fa $\rightarrow$ not Fa
• F is accidental to a
• Why is it the same object? Same essence (A):
• Aa and Fa $\rightarrow$ Aa and not Fa
Locke

- Principle: Substances can have contrary qualities
- Change: Fa $\rightarrow$ not Fa
- Why is it the same object? Continuity of stages:
- Ea and Fa $\rightarrow$ Ea and not Fa $\rightarrow$ not Fa and Ga $\rightarrow$ Ga and Ha $\rightarrow$ ....
Forms explain how we can

• Think general thoughts
• Account for regularities
• Account for change
• Think the same thought at different times
• Think the same thought as each other
• Think veridical thoughts
Parmenides

Form of Wax

Solid

Wax

Not Solid

Sunday, October 9, 2016
Heraclitus

Solid

Not Solid

Form of Wax

Not the same wax!
Plato’s Divided Line

- “You have to imagine, then, that there are two ruling powers, and that one of them is set over the intellectual world, the other over the visible. . . . Now take a line which has been cut into two unequal parts, and divide each of them again in the same proportion, and suppose the two main divisions to answer, one to the visible and the other to the intelligible,”
Plato’s Divided Line

•“and then compare the subdivisions in respect of their clearness and want of clearness, and you will find that the first section in the sphere of the visible consists of images. And by images I mean, in the first place, shadows, and in the second place, reflections in water and in solid, smooth and polished bodies and the like...”
Plato’s Divided Line

•“Imagine, now, the other section, of which this is only the resemblance, to include the animals which we see, and everything that grows or is made.”
Visible World

• Shadows, Objects
• reflections of perception, Mathematical forms
• Perceptions of Opinion, Understanding
• shadows, etc.

Intellectual World

• Abstract forms
• Visible world is like a reflection of the intellectual world
Homer in the Third Dimension
The Cave Allegory

“And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: -- Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.”
The Cave Allegory

• “And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.
• You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.
• Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?
The Cave Allegory

• True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?
• And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?
• Yes, he said.”
The Cave Allegory

• “And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?
• Very true.
• And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?
• No question, he replied.
• To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.”
The Cave Allegory

• Philosophy tries to turn people away from shadows. It tries to make people see the true nature of the world-- to get beyond appearances to realities
• The prisoner released from the cave will be able to see reflections, then objects, then the moon and stars, and finally, the sun
• The progression: the divided line— from reflections to objects to mathematical forms that reflect the most abstract forms; finally to abstract forms themselves
Philosopher in Meditation

[Image of a painting showing a philosopher in a room with stairs and a window, illuminated by light from the window.]
Meaning of the Allegory

“This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed—whether rightly or wrongly God knows.”
The Good

“But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.”
The Platonic Tradition

- Judgment of perception: ‘This is a triangle’
- Mind is turned toward object perceived
- But also to the form of a triangle
- We perceive the thing as a triangle because we apprehend the form
Plato’s Philosophy of Mind

Form

This is a triangle

Object
Objects and Abstract Forms

• “You are aware that students of geometry, arithmetic, and the kindred sciences assume the odd and the even and the figures and three kinds of angles and the like in their several branches of science; these are their hypotheses, which they and everybody are supposed to know, and therefore they do not deign to give any account of them either to themselves or others; but they begin with them, and go on until they arrive at last, and in a consistent manner, at their conclusion?”
Objects and Abstract Forms

“And do you not know also that although they make use of the visible forms and reason about them, they are thinking not of these, but of the ideals which they resemble; not of the figures which they draw, but of the absolute square and the absolute diameter, and so on -- the forms which they draw or make, and which have shadows and reflections in water of their own, are converted by them into images, but they are really seeking to behold the things themselves, which can only be seen with the eye of the mind?”
Plato’s Philosophy of Mind

Form

Participation

This is a triangle

Perception

Object

This is a triangle

Form

Questions

Object
Platonism’s problem

• We don’t perceive the forms
• How do we know anything about them?
• Aristotle’s answer: abstraction
• Plato’s answers:
  • Recollection
  • The Form of the Good
Plato’s Philosophy of Mind

Form

Recollection

Participation

The Good

This is a triangle

Perception

Object
Plato’s Beard

• How can we,
• Limited to the realm of the senses,
• Have access to a realm beyond the senses?

• Dilemma:
  • Reject possibility of knowing abstract truths, or
  • Postulate some special faculty of knowledge
Plato’s Beard

• Our theory of meaning (semantics) makes us postulate objects (metaphysics) that we can’t know anything about (epistemology).

• How do we bring these together?