Part Two

Problems in Metaphysics

Introduction to Part Two

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Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that is broadly concerned with the question, "What is real?" Metaphysics studies the nature of being or reality, and so it confronts the most fundamental problems in philosophy (or any other discipline for that matter). There are many problems addressed under the rubric of metaphysics, but only four are included in this volume: the problem of universals, the mind-body problem, the problem of the compatibility (or not) of free will and determinism, and the question of the existence of God.

The Problem of Universals

The *problem of universals* is the problem of giving an account, among other things, of resemblance and predication. Things in the world resemble each other in various ways. For example, two dogs, say, Fido and Rover, might be similar in that they are both brown in color. But what accounts for the resemblance they have? *In virtue of what* are they similar? Also, take just one simple statement we might make about one of these dogs: "Fido is brown." This is a simple subject-predicate sentence, yet have you ever considered exactly what we are *doing* when we make such statements? The subject of the sentence refers to a particular thing, Fido, an individual dog in this case. But what does the predicate refer to?

According to the metaphysical theory known as *realism*, the answer to both questions is quite simple. What Fido and Rover share is the property of *brownness*. And what we are doing when we predicate "Fido is brown," is attributing to Fido the property of *brownness*. In other words, the realist believes that the "thing" the two dogs share, and the "thing" that is the

predicate in subject-predicate discourse is a *property*. And properties, for the realist, are real things—*universals*—that exist above and beyond the physical things that inhabit the natural world.

Nominalism is the view that denies the existence of universals. The nominalist attempts to account for resemblance and predication in ways that do not commit us to believing in universals. For the nominalist, only particulars—individual, concrete things—exist.

Chapter seven addresses the problem of universals beginning with Plato's theory of the Forms, probably the oldest and most well-known presentation of realism. For Plato there were two worlds or levels of reality. First, there is the imperfect, changing, and temporal world of particular things like dogs, cats, tables, rocks, human bodies, etc. Second, there is a non-physical or spiritual reality where things are perfect, immutable, and eternal. This spiritual world is the realm of the "Forms." A Form, for Plato, is roughly equivalent to what a contemporary philosopher would call a universal; they are eternal, immutable exemplars of the particular things in the physical world. For Plato, what makes Fido and Rover both brown is that they both share in or reflect the perfect Form of "Brown" that exists in the spiritual realm.

Plato's theory is introduced in a selection from *The Republic* which contains the famous "Allegory of the Cave" in which Socrates figuratively describes the process by which a person "trapped" in this physical world and knowing only its imperfect "shadows" can rise through an exercise of the intellect to a knowledge of the Forms. Also included is an excerpt from Plato's *Parmenides* in which he wrestles with several objections that had been made to his theory of the Forms, not least of which is the famous "Third Man" argument which attempts to show that the theory of the Forms leads to a vicious infinite regress.

The late Medieval philosopher, William of Ockham (c. 1287 – 1347), was an early proponent of nominalism. He insisted, as all nominalists do, that only particular things exist. In the selection, "On the Universal," from his massive work *Summa Logicae*, he presents several terse arguments many of which are designed to show that the concept of universals is incoherent. It is worth mentioning also that the principle of *Ockham's Razor*—all things being equal, the simplest explanation is preferred—which is mentioned more than once in this book is named after William of Ockham.

The Mind-Body Problem

The question asked in chapter eight is: what is this thing we call the *mind*? A related question is: what is the relation between the mind and the body? These questions form the basis for the *mind-body problem*—it's the problem of explaining the nature of the mind and it's relation to the body. There are three major positions on the mind-body problem:

- *Substance dualism*. This is the view that the mind and the body are distinct kinds of substances. The body is a physical or material substance with properties like size, weight, and spatial location. The mind, however, is an immaterial substance (a *soul*) that has very different, non-physical properties.
- *Physicalism* (or *materialism*). For the physicalist, the mind is just as material as the body. The mind and body are not two different kinds of things. Rather, the mind is either (1) nothing over and above the brain; it just *is* the brain (a view called *type-identity theory*); or (2) it is a function of the brain (a view called *functionalism*).

• *Property dualism* (or *epiphenomenalism*). The property dualist does not believe that the mind can be reduced to the brain or its functions, but they also deny that the mind is a distinct substance independent of the brain. Rather, the mind is a *property* of the brain that emerges from and is dependent on the brain (like the property *wetness* emerges when two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom combine to form water).

The historical roots of the mind-body problem are introduced in in chapter eight with Plato's *Phaedo*. In this dialogue, Socrates argues that the soul has certain characteristics that clearly distinguish it from the body: the soul is "divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable," while the body has the opposite characteristics. Moreover, Socrates attempts to refute the idea that the soul is like a musical "attunement" which, while not a musical instrument itself, is nonetheless a certain state or condition of a tuned instrument. What is most interesting about the arguments in the *Phaedo* is that Plato anticipates, and seeks to refute, both the type-identity and functionalist versions of physicalism.

Descartes's *Second Meditation* concludes the historical section of chapter eight. After raising the specter of external world skepticism in his first meditation by doubting everything that he can doubt (see chapter one), Descartes finally discovers one thing he cannot doubt: *his own existence*. This discovery begins an exploration into the question "What am I?" Descartes argues that the answer to the question is that he is essentially a "thing that thinks" and such a thing is necessarily distinct from anything material.

Free Will and Determinism

A philosophical problem as old as mankind is *the problem of reconciling (or at least understanding) the relationship between determinism and free will.* Human beings intuitively see themselves as making free choices. And yet we also tend to believe that things in the physical world are subject to deterministic physical laws. Why think that human behavior is not part of this causal nexus? Another way of approaching this topic is to ask: what is required for human beings to be morally responsible for their actions? Does it require that are choices are not part of the deterministic causal nexus of the physical world? Or can we be responsible even if our choices are determined? There have been two basic approaches to solving this problem:

- *Incompatibilism*, the view that free will and determinism are not compatible. According to incompatibilists, if our actions are determined by factors outside of our control, then we are not free and, therefore, not morally responsible. Incompatibilism comes in two versions.
 - Hard determinism. According to this view, determinism is actually *true*.
 Therefore, we do not have the free will required for moral responsibility, and therefore, we lack moral responsibility for our actions.
 - *Libertarianism.* This view agrees that free will is incompatible with determinism, but insists that determinism is *false*, and that we do have the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility.
- *Compatibilism*. As the name suggests, compatibilists believe that the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility is consistent with determinism. Even if our actions are determined in some way, we can still be morally responsible for them.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430), the great theologian and philosopher of the early Middle Ages, provides us with the first historical selection of chapter nine, *The Free Choice of the Will.* The primary aim of this book is to reconcile God's foreknowledge of the future with human free will. That, of course, is an extremely important topic in its own right. However, the excerpts included here focus on the narrower topic of the nature of free will itself. Though doing so in the context of certain ancillary theological questions (e.g., how is God not culpable for the first man's fall into sin?), Augustine argues that a free will is one that is not determined by external causes—essentially indorsing a libertarian conception of freedom.¹

The second historical selection is David Hume's essay, "Of Liberty and Necessity." In this work, Hume argues for a compatibilist view of freedom. He claims that the fact that we can and do give causal explanations for human behavior is evidence that human behavior is necessitated (i.e., determined). In this light, he defines liberty (free will) as the "power of acting or not acting according to the determinations of the will"—that is, the power to do what I will or want to do. This is a view of freedom that is consistent with determinism, and Hume argues that this is all the freedom needed to be morally accountable for our actions. Indeed, he contends that if our actions are *not* determined, then they are just the results of chance, and no one believes that chance events actually exist. Hume concludes his discussion by responding to objections that allege that his view has bad consequences for morality and religion.

The Existence of God

Most people in the world, both past and present, believe in the existence of a supreme deity, and most of those understand this deity in terms of the personal, all-powerful, all-knowing God of the

Judeo-Christian tradition. But why should we believe that such a deity exists? Is it simply a matter of faith? Or might there be evidence for God's existence?

Though they are not as widely accepted as they were before the Enlightenment, the history of philosophy testifies that, at least in past generations, belief in God has not generally been seen as a matter of blind faith. Philosophers of the past (and many today) have developed and defended numerous arguments for the existence of God. Such arguments (often called *theistic* arguments) included the *ontological argument* which claimed that the very idea of God proved God; various versions of the *cosmological argument* that began with the existence of the world (or some feature of it), and argued that the only way to explain why the world exists is because it was created by God; and the *teleological argument* that contends that a purposeful, intelligent being (God) best explains our observations of things in the natural world that appear purposeful or designed.

We explore the historical background of theistic arguments with the writings of two Medieval philosophers, Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033 – 1109) and Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274). In his *Proslogion*, Anselm presents the earliest version of the ontological argument. In contemporary jargon, he claims that everyone has an idea of the greatest conceivable being. But this being cannot be simply an idea in our minds but must exist in reality as well—because otherwise, the idea we have would not be of the *greatest* conceivable being! I'll leave it to the reader to explore the details of why Anselm thinks so.

Aquinas famously presents his "Five Ways" for proving God's existence in his magnum opus, *Summa Theologica*. The first three of these are clearly versions of the cosmological argument in which he argues, respectively, that things that are in motion (by which he means change), things that are being caused to be, and contingently existing things (i.e., things that

don't have to exist), must find their ultimate explanation in an Unmoved Mover, an Uncaused Cause, and a Necessary Being—all of which are understood to be God. Aquinas's fourth argument is hard to classify, but is probably best understood as a precursor to what we know today as the *moral argument* for God's existence. We recognize gradations or degrees of perfection in things. Degrees of perfection presuppose an ultimate standard of perfection, which Aquinas claims is God. Lastly, the fifth way is an early example of the teleological argument. Things in the natural world (i.e., non-intelligent physical things) act for ends (goals or purposes), but acting for ends presupposes intelligence. So, the only way that such physical things can act for ends is if they are directed by an intelligent being, namely God.

The chapter ends with excerpts from David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Primarily (but not exclusively) through the voice of the character Philo, Hume seeks to dismantle the cosmological and teleological arguments for God's existence. He raises several objections to both arguments which have become standard criticisms offered by skeptical philosophers since. He also raises the *problem of evil* which is the most common argument *against* the existence God. According to Hume, it is impossible to reconcile the existence of evil and suffering with the existence of a God who is all-powerful and all-loving.

NOTES

¹ *The Free Choice of the Will* is one of Augustine's earlier works. It does seem that here he embraces a libertarian view of free will. However, in his later life, after the bitter Pelagian controversy, he seems to have changed his view to one more aligned with compatibilism. (See his *The Predestination of the Saints.*)

Are There Universals?

The Forms*

Plato

(For a brief biographical note on Plato, see chapter 3)

Study Questions

- 1. How does Socrates characterize the idea of the good? How are knowledge and truth related to it?
- 2. What are the two "worlds" that Socrates distinguishes?
- 3. What are the four sections of Plato's figure of the divided line? What kinds of "things" (types of knowledge or opinion) belong in each section?
- 4. What is the Allegory of the Cave? What does the allegory represent?
- 5. What distinction does Socrates defend to Parmenides and Zeno? What is meant by "form"?
- 6. What problem does Parmenides have with the whole form existing in each particular thing? What's the problem with supposing that part of the form exists in each thing?
- 7. How does Parmenides argue that the existence of any form will imply an infinite regress of forms?

^{*} Reprinted from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1961) by permission of the publisher.

- 8. What objection does Parmenides raise to Socrates's suggestion that forms are patterns for things made in their likeness?
- 9. Why does Parmenides think that forms are unknowable? What similar problem does he raise regarding the gods?
- 10. What is the problem with denying the existence of forms?

The Republic

Book VI

... This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth in so far as known. Yet fair as they both are, knowledge and truth, in supposing it to be something fairer still than these you will think rightly of it. But as for knowledge and truth, even as in our illustration it is right to deem light and vision sunlike, but never to think that they are the sun, so here it is right to consider these two their counterparts, as being like the good or boniform, but to think that either of them is the good is not right. Still higher honor belongs to the possession and habit of the good.

An inconceivable beauty you speak of, he said, if it is the source of knowledge and truth, and yet itself surpasses them in beauty. For you surely cannot mean that it is pleasure.

Hush, said I, but examine the similitude of it still further in this way.

How?

The sun, I presume you will say, not only furnishes to visibles the power of visibility but it also provides for their generation and growth and nurture though it is not itself generation.

Of course not.

In like manner, then, you are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power.

And Glaucon very ludicrously said, Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go.

The fault is yours, I said, for compelling me to utter my thoughts about it.

And don't desist, he said, but at least expound the similitude of the sun, if there is anything that you are omitting.

Why, certainly, I said, I am omitting a great deal.

Well, don't omit the least bit, he said.

I fancy, I said, that I shall have to pass over much, but nevertheless so far as it is at present practicable I shall not willingly leave anything out.

Do not, he said.

Conceive then, said I, as we were saying, that there are these two entities, and that one of them is sovereign over the intelligible order and region and the other over the world of the eyeball, not to say the skyball, but let that pass. You surely apprehend the two types, the visible and the intelligible.

I do.

Represent them then, as it were, by a line divided into two unequal sections and cut each section again the same ratio—the section, that is, of the visible and that of the intelligible order—and then as an expression of the ratio of their comparative clearness and obscurity you will have, as one of the sections of the visible world, images. By images I mean, first, shadows, and then

reflections in water and on surfaces of dense, smooth, and bright texture, and everything of that kind, if you apprehend.

I do.

As the second section assume that of which this is a likeness or an image, that is, the animals about us and all plants and the whole class of objects made by man.

I so assume it, he said.

Would you be willing to say, said I, that the division in respect of reality and truth or the opposite is expressed by the proportion—as is the opinable to the knowable so is the likeness to that of which it is a likeness?

I certainly would.

Consider then again the way in which we are to make the division of the intelligible section. In what way?

By the distinction that there is one section of it which the soul is compelled to investigate by treating as images the things imitated in the former division, and by means of assumptions from which it proceeds not up to a first principle but down to a conclusion, while there is another section in which it advances from its assumption to a beginning or principle that transcends assumption, and in which it makes no use of the images employed by the other section, relying on ideas only and progressing systematically through ideas.

I don't fully understand what you mean by this, he said.

Well, I will try again, said I, for you will better understand after this preamble. For I think you are aware that students of geometry and reckoning and such subjects first postulate the odd and the even and the various figures and three kinds of angles and other things akin to these in each branch of science, regard them as known, and, treating them as absolute assumptions, do not deign to render any further account of them to themselves or others, taking it for granted that they are obvious to everybody. They take their start from these, and pursuing the inquiry from this point on consistently, conclude with that for the investigation of which they set out.

Certainly, he said, I know that.

And do you not also know that they further make use of the visible forms and talk about them, though they are not thinking of them but of those things of which they are a likeness, pursuing their inquiry for the sake of the square as such and the diagonal as such, and not for the sake of the image of it which they draw? And so in all cases. The very things which they mold and draw, which have shadows and images of themselves in water, these things they treat in their turn as only images, but what they really seek is to get sight of those realities which can be seen only by the mind.

True, he said.

This then is the class that I described as intelligible, it is true, but with the reservation first that the soul is compelled to employ assumptions in the investigation of it, not proceeding to a first principle because of its inability to extricate itself from and rise above its assumptions, and second, that it uses as images or likenesses the very objects that are themselves copied and adumbrated by the class below them, and that in comparison with these latter are esteemed as clear and held in honor.

I understand, said he, that you are speaking of what falls under geometry and the kindred arts.

Understand then, said I, that by the other section of the intelligible I mean that which the reason itself lays hold of by the power of dialectic, treating its assumptions not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypotheses, underpinnings, footings, and springboards so to speak, to

enable it to rise to that which requires no assumption and is the starting point of all, and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion, making no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas.

I understand, he said, not fully, for it is no slight task that you appear to have in mind, but I do understand that you mean to distinguish the aspect of reality and the intelligible, which is contemplated by the power of dialectic, as something truer and more exact than the object of the so-called arts and sciences whose assumptions are arbitrary starting points. And though it is true that those who contemplate them are compelled to use their understanding and not their senses, yet because they do not go back to the beginning in the study of them but start from assumptions you do not think they possess true intelligence about them although the things themselves are intelligibles when apprehended in conjunction with a first principle. And I think you call the mental habit of geometers and their like mind or understanding and not reason because you regard understanding as something intermediate between opinion and reason.

Your interpretation is quite sufficient, I said. And now, answering to these four sections, assume these four affections occurring in the soul—intellection or reason for the highest, understanding for the second, belief for the third, and for, the last, picture thinking or conjecture—an arrange them in a proportion, considering that they participate in clearness an precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality.

I understand, he said. I concur and arrange them as you bid.

Book VII

Next, said I, compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this. Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them as having their legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from turning their heads. Picture further the light from a fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them a road along which a low wall has been built, as the exhibitors of puppet shows have partitions before the men themselves, above which they show the puppets.

All that I see, he said.

See also, then, men carrying past the wall implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, and human images and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material, some of these bearers presumably speaking and others silent.

A strange image you speak of, he said, and strange prisoners.

Like to us, I said. For, to begin with, tell me do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?

How could they, he said, if they were compelled to hold their heads unmoved through life? And again, would not the same be true of the objects carried past them?

Surely.

If then they were able to talk to one another, do you not think that they would suppose that in naming the things that they saw they were naming the passing objects?

Necessarily.

And if their prison had an echo from the wall opposite them, when one of the passers-by uttered a sound, do you think that they would suppose anything else than the passing shadow to be the speaker?

By Zeus, I do not, said he.

Then in every way such prisoners would deem reality to be nothing else than the shadows of the artificial objects.

Quite inevitably, he said.

Consider, then, what would be the manner of the release and healing from these bonds and this folly if in the course of nature something of this sort should happen to them. When one was freed from his fetters and compelled to stand up suddenly and turn his head around and walk and to lift up his eyes to the light, and in doing all this felt pain and, because of the dazzle and glitter of the light, was unable to discern the objects whose shadows he formerly saw, what do you suppose would be his answer if someone told him that what he had seen before was all a cheat and an illusion, but that now, being nearer to reality and turned toward more real things, he saw more truly? And if also one should point out to him each of the passing objects and constrain him by questions to say what it is, do you not think that he would be at a loss and that he would regard what he formerly saw as more real than the things now pointed out to him?

Far more real, he said.

And if he were compelled to look at the light itself, would not that pain his eyes, and would he not turn away and flee to those things which he is able to discern and regard them as in very deed more clear and exact than the objects pointed out?

It is so, he said.

And if, said I, someone should drag him thence by force up the ascent which is rough and steep, and not let him go before he had drawn him out into the light of the sun, do you not think that he would find it painful to be so haled along, and would chafe at it, and when he came out into the light, that his eyes would be filled with its beams so that he would not be able to see even one of the things that we call real?

Why, no, not immediately, he said.

Then there would be need of habituation, I take it, to enable him to see the things higher up. And at first he would most easily discern the shadows and, after that, the likenesses or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves, and from these he would go on to contemplate the appearances in the heavens and heaven itself, more easily by night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon, than by day the sun and the sun's light.

Of course.

And so, finally, I suppose, he would be able to look upon the sun itself and see its true nature, not by reflections in water or phantasms of it in an alien setting, but in and by itself in its own place.

Necessarily, he said.

And at this point he would infer and conclude that this it is that provides the seasons and the courses of the year and presides over all things in the visible region, and is in some sort the cause of all these things that they had seen.

Obviously, he said, that would be the next step.

Well then, if he recalled to mind his first habitation and what passed for wisdom there, and his fellow bondsmen, do you not think that he would count himself happy in the change and pity them?

He would indeed.

And if there had been honors and commendations among them which they bestowed on one another and prizes for the man who is quickest to make out the shadows as they pass and best able to remember their customary precedences, sequences, and coexistences, and so most successful in guessing at what was to come, do you think he would be very keen about such rewards, and that he would envy and emulate those who were honored by these prisoners and lorded it among them, or that he would feel with Homer and greatly prefer while living on earth to be serf of another, a landless man, and endure anything rather than opine with them and live that life?

Yes, he said, I think that he would choose to endure anything rather than such a life.

And consider this also, said I. If such a one should go down again and take his old place would he not get his eyes full of darkness, thus suddenly coming out of the sunlight?

He would indeed.

Now if he should be required to contend with these perpetual prisoners in "evaluating" these shadows while his vision was still dim and before his eyes were accustomed to the dark—and this time required for habituation would not be very short—would he not provoke laughter, and would it not be said of him that he had returned from his journey aloft with his eyes ruined and that it was not worth while even to attempt the ascent? And if it were possible to lay hands on and to kill the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him?

They certainly would, he said.

This image then, dear Glaucon, we must apply as a whole to all that has been said, likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison, and the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun. And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things

above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. But Gods knows whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this. . .

Parmenides

While Socrates was speaking, Pythodorus said he was expecting every moment that Parmenides and Zeno would be annoyed, but they listened very attentively and kept on exchanging glances and smiles in admiration of Socrates. When he ended, Parmenides expressed this feeling.

Socrates, he said, your eagerness for discussion is admirable. And now tell me. Have you yourself drawn this distinction you speak of and separated apart on the one side forms themselves and on the other the things that share in them? Do you believe that there is such a thing as likeness itself apart from the likeness that we possess, and so on with unity and plurality and all the terms in Zeno's argument that you have just been listening to?

Certainly I do, said Socrates.

And also in cases like these, asked Parmenides, is there for example, a form of rightness or of beauty or of goodness, and of all such things?

Yes.

And again, a form of man, apart from ourselves and all other men like us—a form of man as something by itself? Or a form of fire or of water?

I have often been puzzled about those things, Parmenides, whether one should say that the same thing is true in their case or not.

Are you also puzzled, Socrates. about cases that might be thought absurd, such as hair or mud or dirt or any other trivial and undignified objects? Are you doubtful whether or not to assert that each of these has a separate form distinct from things like those we handle?

Not at all, said Socrates. In these cases, the things are just the things we see; it would surely be too absurd to suppose that they have a form. All the same, I have sometimes been troubled by a doubt whether what is true in one case may not be true in all. Then, when I have reached that point, I am driven to retreat, for fear of tumbling into a bottomless pit of nonsense. Anyhow, I get back to the thing which we were just now speaking of as having forms, and occupy time my with thinking about them.

That, replied Parmenides, is because you are still young, Socrates, and philosophy has not yet taken hold of you so firmly as I believe it will someday. You will not despise any of these objects then, but at present your youth makes you still pay attention to what the world will think. However that may be, tell me this. You say you hold that there exist certain forms, of which these other things come to partake and so to be called after their names; by coming to partake of likeness or largeness or beauty or justice, they become like or large or beautiful or just?

Certainly, said Socrates.

Then each thing that partakes receives as its share either the form as a whole or a part of it? Or can there be any other way of partaking besides this?

No, how could there be?

Do you hold, then, that the form as a whole, a single thing, is in each of the many, or how? Why should it not be in each, Parmenides?

If so, a form which is one and the same will be at the same time, as a whole, in a number of things which are separate, and consequently will be separate from itself.

No, it would not, replied Socrates, if it were like one and the same day, which is in many places at the same time and nevertheless is not separate from itself. Suppose any given form is in them all at the same time as one and the same thing in that way.

I like the way you make out that one and the same thing is in many places at once, Socrates. You might as well spread a sail over a number of people and then say that the one sail as a whole was over them all. Don't you think that is a fair analogy?

Perhaps it is.

Then would the sail as a whole be over each man, or only a part over one, another part over another?

Only a part.

In that case, Socrates, the forms themselves must be divisible into parts, and the things which have a share in them will have a part for their share. Only a part of any given form, and no longer the whole of it, will be in each thing.

Evidently, on that showing.

Are you, then, prepared to assert that we shall find the single form actually being divided? Will it still be one?

Certainly not.

No, for consider this. Suppose it is largeness itself that you are going to divide into parts, and that each of the many large things is to be large by virtue of a part of largeness which is smaller than largeness itself. Will not that seem unreasonable?

It will indeed.

And again, if it is equality that a thing receives some small part of, will that part, which is less than equality itself, make its possessor equal to something else?

No, that is impossible.

Well, take smallness. Is one of us to have a portion of smallness, and is smallness to be larger than that portion, which is a part of it? On this supposition again smallness itself will be larger, and anything to which the portion taken is added will be smaller, and not larger, than it was before.

That cannot be so.

Well then, Socrates, how are the other things going to partake of your forms, if they can partake of them neither in part or as wholes?

Really, said Socrates, it seems no easy matter to determine in any way.

Again, there is another question.

What is that?

How do you feel about this? I imagine your ground for believing in a single form in each case is this. When it seems to you that a number of things are large, there seems, I suppose, to be a certain single character which is the same when you look at them all; hence you think that largeness is a single thing.

True, he replied.

But now take largeness itself and the other things which are large. Suppose you look at all these in the same way in your mind's eye, will not yet another unity make its appearance—a largeness by virtue of which they all appear large?

So it would seem.

If so, a second form of largeness will present itself, over and above largeness itself and the things that share in it, and again, covering all these, yet another, which will make all of them large. So each of your forms will no longer be one, but an indefinite number.

But, Parmenides, said Socrates, may it not be that each of these forms is a thought, which cannot properly exist anywhere but in a mind. In that way each of them can be one and the statements that have just been made would no longer be true of it.

Then, is each form one of these thoughts and yet a thought of nothing?

No, that is impossible.

So it is a thought of something?

Yes.

Of something that is, or of something that is not?

Of something that is.

In fact, of some one thing which that thought observes to cover all the cases, as being a certain single character?

Yes.

Then will not this thing that is thought of as being one and always the same in all cases be a form?

That again seems to follow.

And besides, said Parmenides, according to the way in which you assert that the other things have a share in the forms, must you not hold either that each of those things consists of thoughts, so that all things think, or else that they are thoughts which nevertheless do not think?

That too is unreasonable, replied Socrates. But, Parmenides, the best I can make of the matter is this—that these forms are as it were patterns fixed in the nature of things. The other

things are made in their image and are likenesses, and this participation they come to have in the forms is nothing but their being made in their image.

Well, if a thing is made in the image of the form, can that form fail to be like the image of it, in so far as the image was made in its likeness? If a thing is like, must it not be like something that is like it?

It must.

And must not the thing which is like share with the thing that is like it in one and the same thing [character]?

Yes.

And will not that in which the like things share, so as to be alike, be just the form itself that you spoke of?

Certainly.

If so, nothing can be like the form, nor can the form be like anything. Otherwise a second form will always make its appearance over an above the first form, and if that second form is like anything, yet a third. And there will be no end to this emergence of fresh forms, if the form is to be like the thing that partakes of it.

Quite true.

It follows that the other things do not partake of forms by being like them; we must look for some other means by which they partake.

So it seems.

You see then, Socrates, said Parmenides, what great difficulties there are in asserting their existence as forms just by themselves?

I do indeed.

I assure you, then, you have as yet hardly a notion of how great they will be, if you are going to set up a single form for every distinction you make among things.

How so?

The worst difficulty will be this, though there are plenty more. Suppose someone should say that the forms, if they are such as we are saying they must be, cannot even be known. One could not convince him that he was mistaken in that objection, unless he chanced to be a man of wide experience and natural ability, and were willing to follow one through a long and remote train of argument. Otherwise there would be no way of convincing a man who maintained that the forms were unknowable.

Why so, Parmenides?

Because, Socrates, I imagine that you or anyone else who asserts that each of them has a real being 'just by itself,' would admit, to begin with, that no such real being exists in our world.

True, for how could it then be just by itself?

Very good, said Parmenides. And further, those forms which are what they are with reference to one another have their being in such references among themselves, not with reference to those likenesses, or whatever we are to call them, in our world, which we possess and so come to be called by their several names. And, on the other hand, these things in our world which bear the same names as the forms are related among themselves, not to the forms, and all the names of that sort that they bear have reference to one another, not to the forms.

How do you mean? asked Socrates.

Suppose, for instance, one of us is master or slave of another; he is not, of course, the slave of master itself, the essential master, nor, if he is a master, is he master of slave itself, the essential slave, but, being a man, is master or slave of another man, whereas mastership itself is

what it is [mastership] of slavery itself, and slavery itself is slavery to mastership itself. The significance of things in our world is not with reference to things in that other world, nor have these their significance with reference to us, but, as I say, the things in that world are what they are with reference to one another and toward one another, and so likewise are the things in our world. You see what I mean?

Certainly I do.

And similarly knowledge itself, the essence of knowledge, will be knowledge of that reality itself, the essentially real.

Certainly.

And again, any given branch of knowledge in itself will be knowledge of some department of real things as it is in itself, will it not?

Yes.

Whereas the knowledge in our world will be knowledge of the reality in our world, and it will follow again that each branch of knowledge in our world must be knowledge of some department of things that exist in our world.

Necessarily.

But, as you admit, we do not possess the forms themselves, nor can they exist in our world. No.

And presumably the forms, just as they are in themselves, are known by the form of knowledge itself?

Yes.

The form which we do not possess.

True.

Then, none of the forms is known by us, since we have no part in knowledge itself.

Apparently not.

So beauty itself or goodness itself and all the things we take as forms in themselves are unknowable to us.

I am afraid that is so.

Then here is a still more formidable consequence for you to consider.

What is that?

You will grant, I suppose, that if there is such a thing as a form, knowledge itself, it is much more perfect than the knowledge in our world, and so with beauty and all the rest.

Yes.

And if anything has part in this knowledge itself, you would agree that a god has a better title than anyone else to possess the most perfect knowledge?

Undoubtedly.

Then will the god, who possesses knowledge itself, be able to know the things in our world? Why not?

Because we have agreed that those forms have no significance with reference to things in our world, nor have things in our world any significance with reference to them. Each set has it only among themselves.

Yes, we did.

Then if this most perfect mastership and most perfect knowledge are in the god's world, the gods' mastership can never be exercised over us, nor their knowledge know us or anything in our world. Just as we do not rule over them by virtue of rule as it exists in our world and we know

nothing that is divine by our knowledge, so they, on the same principle, being gods, are not our masters nor do they know anything of human concerns.

But surely, said Socrates, an argument which would deprive the gods of knowledge would be too strange.

And yet, Socrates, Parmenides went on, these difficulties and more besides are inevitably involved in the forms, if these characters of things really exist and one is going to distinguish each form as a thing just by itself. The result is that the hearer is perplexed and inclined either to question their existence, or to contend that, if they do exist, they must certainly be unknowable by our human nature. Moreover, there seems to be some weight in these objections, and, as we were saying, it is extraordinarily difficult to convert the objector. Only a man of exceptional gifts will be able to see that a form, or essence just by itself, does exist in each case, and it will require someone still more remarkable to discover it and to instruct another who has thoroughly examined all these difficulties.

I admit that, Parmenides. I quite agree with what you are saying.

But on the other hand, Parmenides continued, if, in view of all these difficulties and others like them, a man refuses to admit that forms of things exist or to distinguish a definite form in every case, he will have nothing on which to fix his thought, so long as he will not allow that each thing has a character which is always the same, and in so doing he will completely destroy the significance of all discourse. But of that consequence I think you are only too well aware.

On the Universal^{*}

William of Ockham

William of Ockham (c. 1287 – 1347) was a 14th-century English philosopher. He is most known for the methodological principle called "Ockham's Razor," and for using that principle to defend nominalism. His most significant work was his *Summa Logicae*.

Study Questions

- 1. What are the two senses of the term "singular"? In which sense are universals singular and which not?
- 2. What is the only sense in which there are universals, according to Ockham? Understood this way, what are the two sorts of universal?
- 3. What arguments does Ockham advance to prove that universals are not things that exist outside the mind?
- 4. Given that universals are predicated of things, why does Ockham think that universals must be mental entities?
- 5. What is Scotus's view of universals? What is Ockham's main (i.e., first) argument against Scotus's view?
- 6. Ockham offers several more short arguments against Scotus's view. What is the main point of each of these arguments?

^{*} From *Philosophical Writings*, trans. P. Boehner, rev. S. F. Brown (Hackett Publishing, 1990). Reprinted with permission of Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved.

The Problem of Universals

A general knowledge of terms is not sufficient for the logician; he must also know terms more in detail. Therefore, having dealt with the general divisions of terms [in the previous chapters of the *Summa logicae*], we must turn to some of the things that come under members of this division.

First we have to treat terms of second intention; secondly, terms of first intention. It has been said that terms of second intention are those like 'universal', 'genus', 'species', etc. Hence we must say something about those which are set up as the five predicables. But first we must speak of the general term 'universal,' which is predicated of every universal, and of the term 'singular', which is opposed to it.

First we must realize that 'singular' is taken in two senses. In one sense the name 'singular' signifies whatever is one thing and not several. If it is so understood, then those who hold that a universal is a certain quality of the mind predicable of many things (but standing for these many things, not for itself) have to say that every universal is truly and really a singular. For just as every word, no matter how common it may be by convention, is truly and really singular and numerically one, since it is one thing and not many, so likewise the mental content that signifies several things outside is truly and really singular and numerically one, since it is one thing and not many, so likewise the mental content that signifies several things, though it signifies several things.

In another sense the name 'singular' is taken for that which is one and not several things and is not of such a nature as to be the sign of several things. If 'singular' is understood in this sense, then no universal is singular, since every universal is of such a nature as to be a sign of, and to be predicated of, several things. Hence, if a universal is that which is not numerically one—a meaning attributed by many to 'universal'—then I say that nothing is a universal, unless perhaps

you wish to abuse this word by saying that a population is a universal, since it is not one but many. But that would be childish.

Hence we have to say that every universal is one singular thing. Therefore nothing is universal except by signification, by being a sign of several things. This is what Avicenna says in the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*: 'One form in the intellect has reference to a multitude, and in this sense it is a universal, since the universal is a content in the intellect which is equally related to anything you take'. And later on: 'This form, though universal in reference to individuals, is nevertheless individual in reference to the particular mind in which it is impressed, for it is one of the forms in the intellect'. He wishes to say here that the universal is one particular content of the mind itself, of such a nature as to be predicated of several things; therefore, it is by the very fact that it is of such a nature as to be predicated of several things (standing not for itself, but for those many things), that it is called a 'universal'. By the fact, however, that it is one form really existing in the intellect, it is called a 'singular'. Hence 'singular' in the first sense is predicated of the universal, but not 'singular' in the second sense. In like manner, we say that the sun is a universal cause, and nevertheless it is in truth a particular and singular thing, and consequently a singular and particular cause. For the sun is called 'universal cause', because it is the cause of many things, namely of all that can be generated and corrupted here below. It is, on the other hand, called 'particular cause', because it is one cause and not several causes. Likewise the content of the soul is called 'universal', because it is a sign predicable of many; on the other hand, it is called 'singular', because it is one thing and not many things.

It must, however, be understood that there are two sorts of universal. There is one sort which is naturally universal; in other words, is a sign naturally predicable of many things, in much the same way as smoke naturally signifies fire, or a groan the pain of a sick man, or laughter an inner

joy. Such a universal is nothing other than a content of the mind; and therefore no substance outside the mind and no accident outside the mind is such a universal. It is only of such a universal that I shall speak in the chapters that follow.

The other sort of universal is so by convention. In this way, an uttered word, which is really a single quality, is universal; for it is a conventional sign meant to signify many things. Therefore, just as the word is said to be common, so it can be said to be universal. But it is not so by nature, only by convention.

A Universal Is Not a Thing Outside the Mind

Since it is not sufficient merely to assert this without proving it by manifest reasoning, I shall advance a few reasons for what has been said above and I shall confirm by arguments from authority.

That a universal is not a substance existing outside the mind can in the first place be evidently proved as follows: No universal is a substance that is single and numerically one. For if that were supposed, it would follow that Socrates is a universal, since there is no stronger reason for one singular substance to be a universal than for another; therefore no singular substance is a universal, but every substance is numerically one and singular. For everything is either one thing and not many, or it is many things. If it is one and not many, it is numerically one. If, however, a substance is many things, it is either many singular things or many universal things. On the first supposition it follows that a substance would be several singular substances; for the same reason, then, some substance would be several men; and thus, although a universal would be distinguished from one particular thing, it would yet not be distinguished from particular things. If, however, a substance were several universal things, let us take one of these universal things and ask 'Is this one thing and not many, or is it many things?' If the first alternative is granted, then it follows that it is singular; if the second is granted, we have to ask again 'Is it many singular or many universal things?' And thus either this will go on *in infinitum*, or we must take the stand that no substance is universal in such a way that it is not singular. Hence, the only remaining alternative is that no substance is universal.

Furthermore, if a universal were one substance existing in singular things and distinct from them, it would follow that it could exist apart from them; for every thing naturally prior to another thing can exist apart from it by the power of God. But this consequence is absurd.

Furthermore, if that opinion were true, no individual could be created, but something of the individual would pre-exist; for it would not get its entire being from nothing, if the universal in it has existed before in another individual. For the same reason it would follow that God could not annihilate one individual of a substance, if He did not destroy the other individuals. For if He annihilated one individual, He would destroy the whole of the essence of the individual, and consequently he would destroy that universal which is in it and in others; consequently, the other individuals do not remain, since they cannot remain without a part of themselves, such as the universal is held to be.

Furthermore, we could not assume such a universal to be something entirely extrinsic to the essence of an individual; therefore, it would be of the essence of the individual, and consequently the individual would be composed of universals; and thus the individual would not be more singular than universal.

Furthermore, it follows that something of the essence of Christ would be miserable and damned; since that_common nature which really exists in Christ, really exists in Judas also and is

damned. Therefore, something is both in Christ and in one who is damned, namely in Judas. That, however, is absurd.

Still other reasons could be advanced which I pass over for the sake of brevity.

The same conclusion I will now confirm by authorities....

From these and many other texts it is clear that a universal is a mental content of such nature as to be predicated of many things. This can also be confirmed by reason. All agree that every universal is predicable of things. But only a mental content or conventional sign, not a substance, is of such nature as to be predicated. Consequently, only a mental content or a conventional sign is a universal. However, at present I am not using 'universal' for a conventional sign, but for that which is naturally a universal. Moreover, it is clear that no substance is of such nature as to be predicated; for if that were true, it would follow that a proposition would be composed of particular substances, and consequently that the subject could be in Rome and the predicate in England. That is absurd.

Furthermore, a proposition is either in the mind or in spoken or written words. Consequently, its parts are either in the mind or in speech or in writing. Such things, however, are not particular substances. Therefore, it is established that no proposition can be composed of substances; but a proposition is composed of universals; hence universals are in no way substances.

Scotus's Opinion on Universals and Its Refutation

Although it is clear to many that a universal is not a substance existing outside the mind in individuals and really distinct from them, still some are of the opinion that a universal does in some manner exist outside the mind in individuals, although not really but only formally distinct

from them. Hence they say that in Socrates there is human nature, which is 'contracted to' Socrates by an individual difference which is not really but only formally distinct from this nature. Hence the nature and the individual difference are not two things, although the one is not formally the other.

However, this opinion appears to me wholly untenable. Proof: In creatures no extra-mental distinction of any kind is possible except where distinct things exist. If, therefore, some kind of distinction exists between this nature and this difference, it is necessary that they be really distinct things. I prove the minor premise in syllogistic form as follows: This nature is not formally distinct from itself; this individual difference is formally distinct from this nature; therefore this individual difference is not this nature.

Furthermore, the same thing is not common and proper; however, according to them, the individual is proper, but the universal is common; therefore the individual difference is not common; consequently no universal is the same thing as the individual difference.

Furthermore, opposites cannot belong to the same created thing; 'common' and 'proper' are opposites; therefore the same thing is not common and proper, as would follow if individual difference and common nature were the same thing.

Furthermore, if common nature were really the same as the individual difference, then there would be in reality as many common natures as there are individual differences, and hence none of them would be common, but each one would be proper to the difference with which it is really identical.

Furthermore, everything which is distinguished from something else is distinguished either of itself or by some thing intrinsic to itself; but the humanity of Plato is one thing and the

humanity of Socrates another; therefore they are distinguished of themselves; therefore *not* by having differences added to them.

Furthermore, according to Aristotle, things specifically different are also numerically different; but the nature of a man and the nature of a donkey are of themselves specifically different; therefore, of themselves, they are numerically different; consequently, each of these natures is on its own account numerically one.

Furthermore, what no power can cause to belong to several things no power can make predicable of several things; now no power can make such a nature, if it is really the same as the individual difference, belong to several things, because in no manner can [something really identified with one individual] belong to another individual; therefore, no power can make it predicable of several things, and consequently no power can make it universal.

Furthermore, I take this individual difference and the nature that it 'contracts' and ask 'Is the distinction greater or less than between two individuals?' It is not greater, since they do not differ really; whereas individuals do differ really. Nor is it less, for then the two things said to be distinct would fall under the same concept, just as two individuals fall under the same concept. Consequently, if the one is numerically one on its own account, the other will also be so on its own account.

Furthermore, I ask 'Is the nature the individual difference, or is it not?' If it is, then I shall argue in syllogistic form as follows: This individual difference is proper and not common, this individual difference is the nature; consequently the nature is proper and not common, which is what we intended to prove. Likewise I argue in syllogistic form as follows: This individual difference is not formally distinct from this individual difference; this individual difference is the nature; therefore, this nature is not formally distinct from the individual difference. If, however,

the other alternative is granted, namely 'This individual difference is not the nature', our thesis is admitted, since this therefore follows: The individual difference is not the nature, therefore the individual difference is not really the nature. For from the opposite of the consequent the opposite of the antecedent follows, by this argument: The individual difference is really the nature, therefore the individual difference is the nature. The inference is clear, since it is a valid inference to argue from a determinable as qualified by a determination which does not cancel or diminish it, to the determinable without the qualification. 'Really', however, is 'not a cancelling or diminishing determination, hence this follows: The individual difference is really the nature, therefore the individual difference is the nature.

Therefore it must be said that in creatures there is no such formal distinction; but whatever in creatures is distinct, is really distinct, and constitutes a distinct thing, if each of the two things distinguished is truly a thing. Just as in creatures we must never deny the validity of such modes of arguing as 'This is A, this is B, consequently a B is A', or 'This is not A, this is B, consequently a B is not A', so also as regards creatures whenever contradictory predicates are true of certain things, we must not deny that the things are distinct; unless of course some determination or some syncategorematic term should be what causes this to be true, as should not be assumed in our present case.

Therefore we must say with the Philosopher that in a particular substance nothing whatsoever is substantial except the particular form and the particular matter or a compound of matter and form. Hence we must not imagine that in Socrates we have human nature or humanity distinct in any way from Socrates, to which is added an individual difference that 'contracts' this nature. But any imaginable substantial reality that exists in Socrates is either the particular matter or the particular form or a compound of the two. Therefore every essence and quiddity and

everything substantial, if it really exists outside the mind, is either simply and absolutely matter or form, or a compound of them, or it is a separate immaterial substance, according to the teachings of the Peripatetics.

Questions for Reflection

- Plato's discussion of the Divided Line figure and the Allegory of the Cave implies that the realm of the forms is more real and more valuable than the visible world of physical things. Why does he think that? How plausible is this view? Why?
- 2. Perhaps Parmenides most serious objection to the theory of the forms is his argument that the theory would entail an infinite regress of forms (the so-called "Third-Man Argument"). How strong is this objection? Can you think of a way to respond to it?
- 3. Ockham argues that what we think of as universals are simply mental concepts (e.g., the property of dogness is simply the mental idea that people have of dogs). But does this mean that if there were no people with the concept of dogs, there would be no property of dogness? And if there were no property of dogness, would it follow that Fido (someone's pet dog) is not a dog? Why?