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Hello, and welcome to this tutorial on applying Plato's metaphysics. Today, we'll review both the central epistemological and metaphysical tenets of Plato's Doctrine of the Forms and consider these ideas in context. So let's start by reviewing Plato's Doctrine of the Forms.

Central to all of Plato's philosophy is his Doctrine of the Forms, capital F, or sometimes Ideas, capital I. The Forms are the basis of both his metaphysics and his epistemology, as they are the grounds for all truth.

Recall that metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that seeks to uncover and describe the ultimate nature of reality, and epistemology is the branch of philosophy that analyzes and defends concepts of knowledge and the methodologies that attain them. The Platonic concepts of Forms help in both.

Recall that Plato was deeply interested in concepts, not as mere facts of language, but as facts of metaphysics and how they genuinely exist in reality as essences. As we will see in this tutorial, Plato's notion of essences is deeply connected with his epistemology, as forms are what make knowledge possible. Recall that for Plato, knowledge is a justified true belief. And at least as an approximation, that definition still holds today.

So let's talk about how Plato's forms serve as the grounds for knowledge. Start by asking how we might go about justifying a belief. Take some examples of justification.

How would you justify your belief that the sun will rise tomorrow, that your car will start when you go to work, and that the capital of California is Sacramento? Of course you can defend these beliefs, but notice how you defend them.

What all the defenses have in common in broad brush strokes is that your beliefs are somehow grounded in the world. Your justification is tied with seeing the world as it is, or improperly relating a belief to the world as it exists.

When you properly connect a belief to the world as it is, that belief is justified. Hence, in order to justify a belief, one must access the world as it really is. For Plato, this means to know the essence of things. If I am justified in saying I know Jen is a human, I must know what a human truly is, what makes a human a human, that is, its essence.

This is true of essences generally, but Plato has a nuanced and influential view on essences in his Doctrine of the Forms. For Plato, essences are real entities. There is a real genuine thing that is the essence of goodness, call it The Form of Goodness, that exists. The same goes for Justice, Humanity, and many other important essences. The essences of these things exist not in the world but in an intellectual realm, sometimes called Platonic Heaven, as it in many ways is analogous to a standard Christian notion of the afterlife, no extension or location.

Everything that is good is good because it has some relation to this essence, the form of goodness.

At first this may strike you as bizarre that there is a form of goodness that is everywhere, nowhere, floating around in Platonic Heaven. But let's think about something that might strike you as more familiar.

Do you believe that there is a law of gravity? If not, feel free to levitate now. No? So there is a real thing that is the law of gravity. But where is it? Everywhere, nowhere, Platonic Heaven? All I know is that when I drop a ball, gravity acts upon it. These are part of your standard everyday beliefs. But if you replace law of gravity with form of goodness, you are in the right ballpark.

Just as there is something that makes the ball fall, there is something that makes good acts good, and this is the Platonic form. Notice that if there are such entities, they will play a vital role in our theory of knowledge. Go back to the law of gravity analogy.

If we can accurately describe the law of gravity, then we can also know the way an object behaves when I drop it. If I know the law of gravity, then I am justified in my belief about what will happen when I drop the ball.

But similarly, if I can accurately describe the form of justice, then I can likewise be justified in my belief that a particular act, policy, or government is just or unjust. If I know the form of humanity, then I could be justified in my belief about whether someone is or is not human, and also what makes a good human. More on that later.

More generally, then, since Platonic forms are the metaphysical groundings of reality, knowledge of reality is grounded in knowledge of the forms. They are the entities through which all knowledge comes. If I can access them and accurately describe their true nature, then I could be justified in any belief about which they apply. That's how the forms ground knowledge.

Now let's turn to see how they ground the world itself. If you may recall, a helpful way of thinking about the forms and of Platonic Heaven is to think of mathematical entities in the realm of mathematics, real perfect objects that somehow exist in an intellectual realm. But why think that such entities exist?

Plato proposes that such things must exist in order for knowledge to be possible at all. Plato, in an important sense, agrees with Heraclitus that everything we encounter in the world is flux. But if this were the whole story, then knowledge simply would not be possible. If every human is always changing, and more, humanity itself was changing, then how could there be true to claims like Bob is human, or Bruiser is not human, or even dogs are not human? But since we can have knowledge and we can say that these claims are true, this implies that not everything is in flux. But since the world of the senses is obviously in flux, as described, it follows that what is not in flux cannot be of this world, but instead must belong to a metaphysical world, a world behind the world, a Platonic

Heaven of essences.

In this way, Plato adopts Heraclitean flux, but only as far as the world of the senses. Platonic Heaven, like the world posited by Parmenides, is eternal and unchanging.

As we've discussed so far, forms in general are essences that exist as individual entities in an intellectual realm. But what are forms like? What kinds of things are they?

Think of them as perfect, idealized, paradigmatic objects. Here, the analogy between mathematical objects is once more helpful in understanding.

Consider a circle. In all the world, is there a perfect circle? No.

First, any examination with a sufficiently powerful microscope will reveal that the curve is not perfectly smooth. And further, we know that space itself curves ever so slightly, and therefore, no Euclidean shape exists in the world. Hence in the world, there are no perfect circles. But perfection does exist in Platonic Heaven. The form of circle is essentially perfectly circular, serving as an exemplar for all worldly circles.

What then is the relation between the form of circle and worldly imperfect circles? Plato's answer is participation. Worldly circles participate in the form of circle, just as humans participate in the form of human. But what is this notion of participation? It gets complicated. But first and foremost, it is a grounding of truth.

The statement, Bob is human, is true because Bob participates in the form of human. This way, Plato's forms are similar to other philosophical accounts of essences. Plato however, seems to go beyond this in also assigning a cause and effect relationship. That is, the form of human is the cause of Bob as a human, in that Bob only exists as a human because of the Platonic form.

Third, Plato also conceives this relation is one of imitation. The worldly human imitates the more genuine, more real form of human. And if that seems strange, again, think of a worldly circle as imitating a perfect circle.

As you have probably noticed, all of this gets complex and more than a little tricky. As such, and unsurprisingly, there are many interpretive challenges and scholars' disputes regarding the Doctrine of the Forms and participation. For instance, Plato certainly insists that there are mathematical forms, ethical forms, such as the form of justice and the form of goodness, and logical and metaphysical forms, such as the form of being, and the form of equality. However, in some of Plato's works, he seems to indicate that there is a form anytime there is a universal, such as a form of wheel, or a form of taco, which would have some undesirable consequences.

There are also some logical issues, such as forms participating in other forms. This isn't to say that Plato's system

is somehow indefensible or broken, just that we cannot get into all of the details in an introductory level and must be satisfied with the general notion.

Once we have this general notion, we start to think of how it might help further our thinking. Think about the main metaphysical and epistemological tenets presented in Plato's Doctrine of the Forms. How can we apply these to real world examples? In other words, for Plato, what makes it true that a tree is a tree?

For Plato, what makes it true that knowledge is possible. According to Plato, what makes you a human and not something else. Think about how answering questions like what makes gold gold, or what makes a tree a tree, can enhance science. But also consider how questions like what makes a human a human can advance ethics. What makes a just act just can enhance political science, et cetera. Turning to essences as the grounding of reality allows us to treat topics in virtually all disciplines at a much deeper level.

All right, so let's recap. In this tutorial, we learned that Plato's Doctrine of the Forms is central to his epistemology and metaphysics, as they ground both knowledge and being. They serve as both the cause and exemplars of the worldly particulars that participate in the forms. Thank you for watching, and we'll see you next time.