
Plato's Concept of Form and the Particular Importance of 'The Form of the Good'

Plato's Concept of the Forms stems from his dialogue 'The Republic', written in 380 BC. In this he discusses his use of 'a priori' knowledge - truth gained through logical and tangible thought. Instead of observing the world at face value, Plato was a rationalist and used his mind to deduce a more substantial concept, instead of using thoughts based solely upon his experience - a posteriori. Senses are far easier mistaken as they are relative to that person, whereas a logical thought progression can be easily followed by everyone, hence is certain.

Plato argued that the everyday, mundane world around us is deceiving our senses and is not the true reality. According to Plato, every single thing in our material world is a direct translation of a flawless, perfect version of it, in the world of the Forms. The World of the Forms takes the true essence of a substance its true nature. It is the gold standard of perfection, and the purest and most truthful thing imaginable. For example, the World of the Forms in comparison to the Material world is like comparing a four-poster bed and a pile of straw. It is a 'blueprint for perfection'.

Each person has an innate knowledge, not only of the Forms, but also of how we classify things. For example, any person would know that a chair is in fact a chair, regardless of variations in size and style. We innately know. Plato says that this is because we can recognise that translated essence of 'chairness', which has transcended from the forms. We recognise the paradigm in each different particular (the various different versions) and recognise the theme of the ideal (the Form) that runs through each. Because of this innate knowledge, we also use the forms to measure how 'good' something is, by having an innate knowledge of its flawless and perfect relation. This is also applicable to our morality. Plato would argue that since we innately know that certain concepts are unquestionably good, such as truth and justice, then it would seem absurd not to allow them to develop as much as possible in the Material World. This instinctive knowledge also means that there can be no 'opinion'. If we consider the 'squareness' of a cube, the form of this 'squareness' is not the idea held in one's mind, but instead is entirely independent and unchangeable. Everything remotely square in the world is simply attempting to emulate this superior 'squareness'. But Plato tells us that we must remember that these Forms are pure. To say that there is a perfect square would be wrong. There is merely a perfect 'squareness'. This is because the forms do not physically exist in time and space, and also because they are pure: whereas a cube may contain different qualities like 'squareness', depth and size, these are all independent of each other. A cube is a translation of these different forms amalgamated together, but the Form itself would be pure and

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perfect archetypal 'squareness'.

Whilst outside of time and space themselves, meaning that they never change and are absolutely permanent, the Forms are able to transcend into the material world. In this way, 'squareness' can be a theme running through millions of objects instantaneously. This also means that this 'squareness' will always exist; even if there were nothing square to emulate it on earth. Imagine a ray of sunshine trying to get through slatted blinds. Chunks of light are allowed through and enough for us to have a vague idea as to how sunny it is on the other side. As forms transcend into the material world, they retain only a part of themselves, yet enough to distinguish them. This translation means that the Forms are the direct cause for everything within our universe: namely, they are the source of all that we have in our world. Without these properties and universal building block, we would have nothing.

Furthermore, Plato believed in a hierarchy of good and the Form of Good. This establishes that certain forms, such as the purest truth or beauty are superior to the Form of a Table. Ultimately, this culminates in the Form of Good, the absolute perfection finer than any other form and the absolute measure of all perfection. So, logically, if the Material world is an image of the World of the Forms, and hence is less valuable, then it stands to reason that an image in the Material World is even less than a physical object. Simply a copy of a copy.

The forms also reflect onto our morals and onto our actions. By simply knowing what is 'good' and what is not, we are given an absolute basis for our moral judgments. An action or substance is simply similar to a Form or it is not. This absolutist view also means that we can order our lives far easier and decide what is right. In the same vein, it also means that we are shown how to live a happy and satisfied life whilst the world around us changes and decays and whilst everything slowly dies. By accepting that this is not reality, we are released from these anxieties.

However, the most crucial part of the Form of the Good is how it relates to us and to our lives. Plato taught that human minds are able to access the World of the Forms, through reason and intuition, with 'a priori' knowledge, and the hierarchy of good shows us how to achieve this. Not only does it show us that manner that the Forms and 'good' trickle down from the Form of the Good, but by starting with substances which are most inferior and by truly understanding them, it makes logical sense to be able to work our way up the Pyramid. Crucially, this pyramid is due to the specificity of the material world. By crossbreeding and corrupting the purity of the Forms, the Material world is incredibly interconnected, with different objects showing translations of many different forms. For example, the aforementioned cube and its 'squareness', depth and width. But if we continue to trace the forms further and further back, untangling their web, from more particular substances to the general Form of Good. It also travels from the more subjective views of the world, such as the material world at the lower end of the hierarchy, towards the

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more objective: the Form of Good again. The process to go about this is known as dialectic: piecing together subjective concepts in order to understand objective ones. In summary, material objects are more subjective as they are more concerned with intricacies, whereas the Forms reflect overarching themes and the essence of the qualities. They are more objective, because they are not specific at all, but simply pure.

To conclude: our universe is not reality. The material world is flawed and imperfect, not only in its qualities but in how its impermanence: constantly dying and changing. The true reality is the World of the Forms, from where the entirety of our material world is copied. It contains the archetypal building blocks of existence: the Forms. Like chemical elements, they are the most pure essence of themselves, whilst our material objects are like compounds, containing qualities of different elements in varying levels of imperfection. Our world can only exist because of these building blocks. Without them, there would be nothing to transcend to our world and nothing to exist. Without some form of perfection, we can have nothing to measure ourselves against. The entirety of our universe is like viewing reality through greaseproof paper. We can make out the vague themes, but we have to tear away the illusion in order to see it fully.

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