

THE PROBLEM OF ONE-MANY RELATIONSHIP: PLATO, PARMENIDES, AND ARISTOTLE

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THE PROBLEM of the One-Many relationship is a sensational metaphysical problem in ancient Greek philosophy and raises the question of whether reality is ultimately united or pluralist. Greek philosophy purports to give a rational account of nature, society, and human existence. The One-Many problem exists in various relationships. In Plato's philosophy, the One-Many problem is epitomized in the doctrine of the form. The doctrine of form is the crown jewel of Platonic philosophy, but also the *bona fide* object of criticism from other Greek philosophers.

Plato's doctrine of the form, which is about the relationship between the form as the One and concrete, visible objects of a kind as the Many, was seriously and passionately challenged by Parmenides to the extent that even Socrates felt overwhelmed. The doctrine was heavily criticized by Aristotle too. While Parmenides's challenges raised mainly questions of how did the One relate to the Many, Aristotle's criticism raised also questions of whether the One was the essence of something, the substance of something or both. To spell it out differently, the One can be the essence of something (e.g., whiteness), but can also be what Aristotle would dub as "the secondary substance" of something (e.g., horse).

Notwithstanding, a revisit to the Grecian debate on the One-Many problem is of great theoretical value. Reviewing the origin of the problem rekindles our understanding of its nature, scope, and limit. It also enriches our understanding of the relationship between the universal and the particular in metaphysics. In turn, a better understanding of the relationship between the universal and the particular helps us with appropriating present debates over universal truth, universal justice, universal rights, and universal human reason. Meanwhile, Albert Einstein famously claimed: We cannot solve problems with the same level of thinking that created them. Reviewing the Greek debate should inspire us to ascend to a new level of thinking of the problem.

I. Plato's Doctrine of Form

From the very beginning, Plato's doctrine of the form is intended first to account for a being as it is. Doing so, Plato's concern focused on the essence of a being, which he believed to be the basis for us to categorize multiple beings into a same category or kind of being, e.g., multiple acts as acts of justice or multiple acts as acts of courage. Doing so, Plato also operated with two assumptions: (1) multiple beings can be

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divided into kinds in terms of a common property or condition; and (2) the reality and truth of a being lied not in the visible, but in the formal that transcended above the visible. He took for granted that reality was ultimate a unity, not a plurality. Plato thus started his inquiry by examining multiple ethical acts and ideas.

The doctrine of the form started in the dialogue *Euthyphro*. In the dialogue, which was a dialogue before *the Socrates Trial*, Socrates asked Euthyphro what was piety when Socrates was informed by Euthyphro that he was going to prosecute his own father for the offence of impiety. The question was also asked with an underlying question of whether Euthyphro knew what he was doing. So questioning Euthyphro, Socrates intended to locate the One property or the One constitution of piety that defines and explains multiple acts or beings as “pious”. Thus, he insisted that three conditions must be met if an answer is satisfactory. The three conditions which Socrates dictated are as follows: A satisfactory answer must pick up (1) the One Piety that is the same in all pious acts; (2) The One piety that is not shared by any impious action; and (3) The One piety that makes an action pious; it is a defining one (*Euthyphro*, 5d2—5). Evidentially, the One piety which Socrates asked about was the essential, universal and defining property or constitution of piety. Socrates explicitly talked about the form of piety or piety in itself in his conversation with Euthyphro.

Instead of tracking the essential, universal, and defining One piety in itself which Socrates asked about, Euthyphro started to give a shopping list of examples of what were normally counted as pious actions in Grecian society of their time. Thus, Socrates complained that he asked Euthyphro about the One, but Euthyphro gave him the Many. Euthyphro’s response was rejected outright by Socrates. To spell it out differently, Socrates asked Euthyphro about what defined his act, as well as some other acts, as an act of piety. Euthyphro answered that piety was just as his act or other acts that were defined as “pious”. Socrates asked Euthyphro about the defining One, but Euthyphro gave him a list of the defined instances. Euthyphro certainly did not intend to give an existentialist answer to Socrates’s question. He did not claim, nor intended to claim, that existence define essence. Instead, he did simply realize that every X was defined by its essential property or constitution. Thus, Socrates asked Euthyphro about the One that defined, and Euthyphro answered with the many that were defined. Socrates asked Euthyphro the One in terms of which various acts were defined as “pious”, but Euthyphro gave Socrates a list of those acts that were defined as pious. It was akin to that Socrates asked Euthyphro who was the mother of those three siblings, and Euthyphro answered that the three siblings were siblings. Thus, the problem was not that Euthyphro used examples and listed the many. The problem was that he was asked about the defining One but failed to locate the defining one. It was that he conflated the One that defines the many as so and so with the many that were defined as so and so with

Notwithstanding Socrates exclaimed that “I did not bid you tell me one or two of many pious actions but *that form itself* that makes all pious actions pious through one form.” (Ibid, 6d8—10) In the statement, the term “*form (Eide)*” was explicitly mentioned. Also, in Socrates’s vista, the form of piety was the One that defined multiple acts as “pious” and excluded other acts from the category of piety. In Socrates’s view, until Euthyphro knew the form of piety, he did not know what piety

was and therefore did not know what he was doing in prosecuting his father. Searching for the form of piety, Socrates looked for the essence of piety, the One defining, universal property or constitution of piety as indicated in the list of conditions which Socrates dictated for a satisfactory answer. To spell it out differently, the form of piety universally defines piety as such and is thus the essential, universal, and defining One. Moreover, the form of piety which Socrates asked about in *Euthyphro* was viewed by Socrates to be an external, independent, and substantial entity, not merely a mental entity. To emphasize the form as the defining One, Socrates pressed Euthyphro with the question of whether gods loved piety because it was pious, or piety was pious because gods loved it. Insisting that gods love piety because it is pious, not that piety is pious because gods love it, Socrates unmistakably claimed that the form of piety is an objective entity.

In *Phaedo* and *Symposium*, the question of the form became central again. In *Phaedo*, Socrates claimed that the soul and forms have a natural, *a priori* relationship; knowledge of forms are inherent in every human soul. In *Symposium*, the form of beauty was both the object of knowledge of beauty and the object of love. In these dialogues, Socrates made no bone his intention of searching for the one that is defining, universal, and essential of a being and thus the object of knowledge of the being. But then, what is the relationship between the One and many? It was in *the Republic* that Plato answered the question and spelled out explicitly the relationship between the form, *the One*, and its embodiments, *the many*. Plato characterized as separable the relationship between the One and the Many.

Noteworthy here, in Plato's philosophy, the question of the One arose in the context of discussion of how best to define qualities such as piety, beauty, good, justice and so on. Thus, the One which Socrates talked about in *Euthyphro*, *Phaedo*, and *Symposium* was more about the universal essences of those qualities, not so much about how best to categorize a set of visible entities into the same category of entities—that is, substances. Thus, when Parmenides pressed Socrates with questions of whether beings such as human beings, fire, water and so on have forms, Socrates claimed that he is in doubt about the ideas of forms of the human being, fire, and water (*Parmenides*, 130c1-d9). There can be two reading of this Socrates's ambivalence. One is that Socrates did not conceive forms as what Aristotle would dub as the secondary substance. This reading faces the challenge that Aristotle's criticism of Plato's doctrine of the form includes the criticism that Plato's forms can refer to substances, essence, or other qualities. Another reading is simply that Socrates did not think that certain kinds of beings have forms. But this reading contradicts what the doctrine of the form is intended: it is intended to account for what makes multiple beings be a kind of beings.

In *the Republic*, the concept of the form is extended to cover a wide range of beings and can refer either to substance or essence of a visible object, and thus, the meaning of the concept of the One *in itself* is broader. Given that essence and substance are not the same, and accordingly, the form of a visible being, say, X, cannot both be the essence of X and the substance of X, the development of the theory of form in the *Republic* opens the door for Aristotle's various criticism. In

Book VI of *the Republic*, Socrates divided the world into two parts and four levels with corresponding levels of understanding as follows:

The intelligent world:

- (1) high form, e.g., mathematical forms
- (2) lower forms, e.g., the form of a chair, the of justice, the form of beauty, the form of piety

The sensible world:

- (3) real objects, things, e.g., a physical chair, a pious act, a piece of just law, etc.
- (4) shadows, images, etc.

In Plato's vision above, forms (*eides*) are the Ones, and concrete objects and their duplications (e.g., shadows, images) are the many. The form is the universal, essential, and defining One of a kind of entities or qualities. Concrete, visible objects, qualities or activities are the Many that are defined by forms. The many here are not confined to qualities only, but include various beings such as entities, and activities. For example, the form of piety is that One that defines multiple acts as pious acts, and the form of beauty is the One that defines a category of objects as beautiful. In forms lie the essences and realities of visible things. The forms of visible things also exist separately from visible things. For example, the form of beauty is the essence of beautiful objects and exists *separately* in itself. Socrates thus called the form of beauty as "beauty in itself."

In Plato's vision above, so far as the order of existence is concerned, high forms exist first. Then come low forms embodying high forms. After that, concrete objects come into existence by participating their forms. And finally, images and shadows exist by copying those concrete objects. By this token, forms are the original beings, while visible things and their duplications are all duplications. The One is the original One, and the many are its copies. The relationship between forms and multiple, visible objects are a relationship between the original beings and their copies. So, Socrates claimed that multiple visible things share, partake of, or participate in forms. So far as reality and truths are concerned, they lie only in forms, not in multiple, visible objects or their copies. He claimed that multiple, visible things are between beings and non-beings; the Many—that is, multiple, visible things—are as they are by sharing or participating in the One; they acquire their existences by participating in their forms and thus do not have truths and reality in their own. Since the many visible objects are copies of forms, Socrates thus characterize them as between beings and non-beings. Shadows and images are copies of visible objects, and they are further away from realities and truths. Thus, Socrates claimed that artist works are three levels away from truths.

Equally crucial, in the above-described division of the world, the relationship between the One and the Many (the visible objects) is a relationship between the reality of a being and its multiple appearances. The relationship between the One and the many in Plato is not the same as it is in neo-Confucianism, most strikingly epitomized in the neo-Confucian maxim: the principle is one and its embodiments are many. Is the form of a visible being the principle of the visible being in Plato, as it is in neo-Confucianism? Plato did not say so, at least not explicitly. Plato did claim that forms are ideas and indicates and they were formal structures or patterns or archetypes of visible things. And the neo-Confucian concept of principle (理 *li*) also connotes the idea of pattern and formal structure of thing. Notwithstanding, the idea that visible objects—that is, concrete, particular, visible beings, or things—come into their existence by participations in their forms certainly shares some common points with the neo-Confucian idea that concrete, particular beings come into existence by embodying those principles which make them so and so—the idea that the principle is one, but its embodiments are multiple.

In the division of the world above, forms in the intelligible world are permanent, unchanging, and invariant and thus objects of knowledge and can be grasped only by reason, not by senses. They are real, and the only ones that are real. In comparison, what are in the sensible world do not have realities. What are in the sensible worlds, e.g., visible things and their copies, are impermanent, variant, and changing. Their existences are not enduring. Not only those shadows, duplications, and images of concrete visible things or objects (say, a chair or a desk) are not enduring and do not have realities in their own, but also those concrete visible things or objects such as the desk on which I am writing now or the physical university where I am teaching are not enduring and do not have realities in their own. Therefore, concrete, visible objects and their copies (e.g., shadows and images, etc.) can only be objects of opinions, not objects of knowledge. That is to say, the One that is defining, universal and essential is the *One* that has reality and that is the object of knowledge, while the many that participate in the *One* do not have reality in their own and are only objects of opinions.

About Plato's view on forms and concretes, visible objects and things, Aristotle famously commented:

Things of this other sort, then, he called Ideas, and sensible things, he said, were all named after these, and in virtue of a relation to these; for many existed by participation in the Ideas that have the same name as they. Only the name "participation" was new; the Pythagoreans say that things exist by "imitating" of numbers, and Plato says they exist in participation, changing the name. But what participation or the imitation of the Forms could be they left an open question (Aristotle, *Metaphysics I*, 987 a9-14; Cf. Cruz 2018, p.268)

As we will discuss below, Parmenides would press Socrates hard on the point of participation, challenging him to expound what did he mean by the term "participation". Suffice it here that in Plato's view, concrete and sensible things existed by participating their forms, while forms existed in themselves. As Aristotle

put it, in Plato's view, "participation in the One, come the number." (*Metaphysics I*, 20a3-4)

Corresponding to the above, in Plato's vista, what are in the intelligible world—that is to say, those forms—are naturally given. They existed *prior to* those concrete objects or things and thus independent of them. Some concrete objects in the sensible world such as mountains or rivers may be naturally given, but they become so by participating their forms. Their images—for examples, their images in painting, in literature—are culturally produced. Some concrete objects are man-made, e.g., a bed, a building, or a bridge. In short, in Plato's view, the One exists independently of the many and is separable from the many. Thus, Socrates would dub *the One* as "in itself", e.g., piety in itself, virtue in itself, beauty in itself, justice in itself, courage in itself, and so on. As Cruz notes, to expound the relationship between forms and sensible, concrete objects, "Plato employs two groups of terms, used metaphorically: on the one hand, participations (*methexis*) of the thing in the Idea, presence (*parousia*) of the Idea in the thing, community (*koinonia*) between; on the other hand, imitation (*mimesis*) of the Idea by thing, likeness (*homoiosis*) and other similar terms (Cruz 2018, p.274).

Moreover, in Plato's view, forms are *eternal, identical, permanent, unchangeable, and unchanged*. For this reason, they are objects of knowledge. They are the real, original beings, which Socrates elsewhere (e.g., in the dialogue of *Parmenides*) characterized as archetypes of beings and have realities and truths. They are thus objects of knowledge. In comparison, concrete, visible objects, as well as their images and shadows, are changeable and in constant changes, and thus they cannot be objects of knowledge and only objects of opinions. To spell it out differently, the One is eternal, permanent, unchangeable, and unchanged and this is why it is the object of knowledge. The many are various, changeable and in constant changes and this is why they are objects of opinions. Thus, for example, piety in itself, beauty in itself, justice in itself, and courage in itself are eternal, timeless, permanent, unchangeable, and unchanged, but pious acts, beautiful objects, just persons and institutions, and courageous deeds are variant, changeable, and in constant change.

Furthermore, forms are intelligible, but not sensible. Concrete, visible objects and things, as well as their images and shadows, are sensible but not intelligible. Thus, for example, Socrates claimed that "the many beautiful things and the rest are visible but not intelligible, while the forms are intelligible but not visible." (*The Republic*, Book IV, 507b9-10) That is to say, the One is intelligible but not sensible, while the many are sensible but not intelligible. Thus, the One is the object of knowledge, and the many are only objects of opinions, not objects of knowledge. By this token, the relationship between the One and Many is a relationship between the intelligible and the sensible.

Finally, in Plato's view, the relationship between the form and concrete, visible objects and things is a relationship between the universal and the particular. The form is the universal and the one in which participate. It is thus unique and singular, while particulars are many. And, the universal was associated with the essence, not with the Aristotelian secondary substance. For example, the form of horse is what Socrates would dub as "horseness", not what Aristotle would call "horse" as a secondary

substance. Thus, in Plato's view, the relationship between the One and many is the relationship between an essential property or constitution and those beings that share this property or constitution, not a relationship between what Aristotle would call "the secondary substance" and "the primary substance". The many, some of which Aristotle would call "the primary substances", do not have reality in their own and thus are not primary substances in Aristotelian sense.

In short, while conceiving the relationship between the One and the Many as the relationship between forms and concrete, visible objects or things as well as their images and duplications in *the republic*, Plato conceived the relationship between the One and the Many as a relationship between the real and the multiple appearances of the real, between the independent being in itself and the dependent beings that participate in the independent being in itself, between the intelligible and the sensible, between the universal and the particular, between the defining and the defined, and between the object of knowledge and the object of opinion or imagination. He conceived the relationship between the universal and the particular to be both separable on the one hand and being capable of becoming a community on the other hand.

Doing so, Plato made several important metaphysical claims: (1) the essential constitution of a visible object, not the visible entity of the object, is what makes a visible entity *as it is*, and the essential constitution that defines a visible object as it is is separable from the visible object; (2) the reality of a being lies in the universal in which it participates, not in the particular entity of a visible object; the universal is the real and the real is universal; (3) the essential and the universal of a being is thus the object of knowledge. Doing so, unlike Aristotle, Plato did not conceive the existence of what Aristotle would call "the secondary substance" as a defining determinant of what a being is as it is. Unlike Aristotle who conceived the particular to be the primary substance that had the totality of truth and reality, Plato conceived only the universal to have reality and truth and thus to be the object of knowledge.

In summary, in Plato's philosophy, the One-Many problem arises in the context of Plato's searching for an answer to the question of what makes a being as a kind of beings, e.g., what makes certain acts as acts of piety, and certain things as things of beauty. It arises in the context of Plato's searching for the One that defines the multiple many as so and so and brings reality to the multiple many. Socrates and Plato set their eyes on the essential property or constitution of a being, and identified the One as the essential, universal, and identical property or constitution, and the many as those that exist only by participating in the One. He also conceived the One to be independent of and separable from the many, claiming the universal to be separable and separated from the particular.

II. Parmenides's Criticisms

In the dialogue *Parmenides*, Socrates's doctrine of the form was seriously challenged by Parmenides, and so was his doctrine of the One-Many relationship. The core of the problem is the relationship between "Forms and Particulars" (Cruz 2018, p.276) The difficulty of solving the One-Many problem was increased by Socrates' claim that

forms exist independently of visible, concrete objects, and visible objects exist only by participation in their forms; that forms are patterns and models for concrete, visible objects. The difficulty is how to understand phrases such as “exist independently”, “in itself”, and “participation”. The disposing question here is how can the One—that is, the Form—spatially both “in” and “out” of concrete, sensible things. How can the One spatially both be the One *in itself* and the One in many?

Thus, in the dialogue of *Parmenides*, Parmenides pressed Socrates hard on the question of how the form relates to visible objects. Parmenides’s challenge was how best to understand that spatially the One Form is both *in itself* and simultaneously totally or partially in many (visible) objects. In Parmenides’s view, how can it be that spatially the One Form is *in itself* and simultaneously totally or partially in many (visible) objects? How can we consistently say both that the One is spatially in itself and simultaneously in many (visible objects), as well as being the One simultaneously, spatially in many that are separate beings in their own?

To Plato’s defense, Copleston (1993) insisted that we should not read those Plato’s phrases as spatial terms because forms are “incorporeal essences” and incorporeal essences cannot be in a place (Copleston 1993, p.168). And Parmenides’s challenge is precisely that understanding Plato’s doctrine in terms of its spatial connotation, how best ought we to make sense the One-Many relationship; if not understanding Plato’s doctrine in terms of its spatial connotation, how ought we to understand it? Parmenides reads:

[Parmenides asked] “Have you yourself distinguished as separate, in the way you mention, certain forms themselves, and as separate the things that partake of them? And do you think that likeness itself is something, separate from the likeness we have? And one and many and all things you heard Zeno read about a while ago?”

“I do indeed,” Socrates answered.

“And what about these?” Asked Parmenides. “Is there a form, itself by itself, of just, and beautiful, and good, and everything of that sort?”

“Yes.” (Plato, *Parmenides*, 130b2-10)

In the questioning and answering, Socrates claimed that forms exist in themselves separately and by themselves, independent of concrete, visible things; forms are “separate” beings to concrete, visible things, and *vice versa*. As discussed above, this is also what Socrates/Plato claimed in the Republic. This claim produces difficulty for us to understand the relationship between forms and concrete, visible things. It produces the challenge to understand that forms are both in themselves separately and simultaneously in many visible entities spatially. Noteworthy, spatially, if forms are *in themselves*, they cannot be in many visible things simultaneously. If forms exist *in themselves*, they exist *as entities, not merely as constitutions, qualities, quantities, or features*. That is the problem!

As Cruz notes, now, in *Phaedo, Symposium, The Republic, and Parmenides*, four conceptions of the relationship between separate Forms and separate particulars were proposed: “(1) Forms as one in many; “Forms as one over many; and (3) Forms as

thoughts; and (Forms as paradigms.” (Cruz 2018, p.276) But all of them were rejected as “inconsistent” (Ibid).

II-A: Form as One *in* Many

This is the most proposed conception. Socrates/Plato used such vocabularies as “participation” and “partake” of things in forms to describe how concrete, visible things are related to forms. But as Cruz notes, “participation faces a dilemma.” (Ibid) The problem is as follows: “the thing cannot participate neither in the whole form, nor in part of it, because, in the first case, the Form would be in itself and all of it in each thing, being, therefore, separated from itself; but in the second case, a part of the Form would be in each thing.” (Ibid)

To start with, we cannot consistently claim both that the form is the One as whole in many and that the One in many is still the separate One in itself. Spatially, if the One as a whole is in many, the one is no longer a separate One in itself. Reversely, spatially, if the One is still in itself, it is not in the many. As an entity that has its independent existence, the One cannot simultaneously be in two different spaces—that is, in the space where it is in itself and in the space wherein it is in many; one entity cannot be simultaneously in two different separate spaces. Moreover, those multiple visible beings are separate entities in themselves, to claim that the same form as an entity is simultaneously in them is to claim that the same form is simultaneously in multiple, separate spaces.

When Socrates claimed that multiple visible things come into existence by participating in their form (e.g., multiple chairs come into existence by participation in the form of chair), he claimed that the form of a visible thing is simultaneously in multiple separate spaces. The claim would not be problematic if the form was not a being in itself, which in turn confines a form to be an entity-like being. Parmenides’s challenge was that spatially, the form of visible things, whether in entirety or in part, could not simultaneously be both in itself—that is, in the space wherein it is in itself—and in many things—that is, in the spaces wherein many visible things are. Thus, about the conception of *one in many* as one as a whole in many, *Parmenides* reads:

[Parmenides asked] “Do you think, then, that the form as a whole—one thing—is in each of the many? Or what do you think?”

“What’s to prevent its being one, Parmenides?” Said Socrates.

“So, being one and the same, it will be at the same time, as a whole, in things that are many and separate, and it thus would be separate from itself.” (Plato, *Parmenides*, 131a9-14)

But a form is supposed to be spatially *in itself* and *by itself* and thus not spatially separated from itself. To spell it out differently, how can it be conceptually the case that the form of X is spatially both *a being in itself* and a being as a whole in another entity or many other entities at the same time? If the form of X is spatially *in itself* as a whole, it *as a whole* cannot be spatially in another entity or other entities. And *vice*

versa. Or how can the same form be simultaneously in two or more separate spaces? If the form is in the separate space wherein it is *in itself*, it cannot be in other separate spaces simultaneously.

Extending Parmenides's opposition, given the form is a kind of entity-like being, if a form *as a whole* is in one visible thing, say, A, it *as a whole* cannot simultaneously be physically in other things because each thing is supposed to be separated from others. Thus, the difficulty here is how best to understand that the form *as a whole* is both physically separated in different entities and physically the same entity, e.g., how best to understand that whiteness as a whole is *both* physically separated in a white human being and a white horse and physically whiteness in a human being and a white horse the same whiteness as a whole. Parmenides was not unreasonable to press Socrates with such questions so hard that led Socrates to assume that if both were possible, forms must be non-physical beings, and merely thoughts or ideas.

But conceptualizing the One as a part in the many or the many share a part of the One does not fare better either. Some difficulties rise here. On the one hand, if the many can participate in different parts of the one, then the one must be divisible. Then, being divided into different parts, is the divided One still the One in itself? On the other hand, how can being a part of the one still be the One as a whole in itself? Cruz points out that "In the *Phaedo* (100d), 'presence' (*parousia*) is introduced as a way of explaining participation. In *Parmenides*, on the other hand, Plato shows the difficulties of considering participation as a presence of the Form in the particulars, because the Form is not in a sensible thing, it is not inherent to it. In this way, participation understood as presence entails the multiplication or fragmentation of the form." (Cruz 2018, p.277)

Thus, if the form were only parts in multiple visible things, "it would be fragmented and it would no longer be one and simple." (Ibid) But in Socrates's vista, the form is the One and the simple that is not divisible. For example, in *Euthyphro*, as discussed above, Socrates suggested that (1) the form of piety is the same in all pious acts; (2) the form of piety is not shared by any impious action; and (3) the form of piety make a class of actions pious (*Euthyphro*, 5d2—5). Thus, if a form were parts in multiple things, it would no longer occupy a single, united space, but would be fragmented to occupy multiple spaces, which in turn would make it become multiple entities, not a united entity. A united, single entity occupies a single, unified space, not multiple spaces.

In short, in Parmenides's view, it is conceptually inconsistent to claim that a form can simultaneously be in itself and be in many, considering "itself" and many are separated and separable beings. Thus, reading "in itself" and "in many" with their spatial connotations, a form cannot be both in itself separately and in many simultaneously. As an entity-like being, a form cannot be simultaneously in more than one separate spaces. If a being is in space X, it cannot simultaneously in other separate spaces, say, P, Q, O, W Y Z, etc. Noteworthy here, if we do not understand the form as an entity-like being, then the form cannot exist in itself. But Socrates/Plato insisted that forms exist in themselves. What demarcates forms from visible things is that

forms exist, and can exist, independently in themselves, and visible things exist only by partaking of forms.

Suppose that we follow Copleston's suggestion not to understand that we should not read those Plato's phrases such as "in", "participation", or "share" in spatial terms, does it solve those problems arising above, and answer Parmenides's challenge. We will not fare better by tending to Copleston's suggestion. If we do not understand those Plato's spatial phrase as spatial phrases, what kind of phrases are they? Copleston's mystical argument that Plato was forced to talk about things in human language but did not mean to use those phrases in spatial sense is nothing more than a pale excuse, not a plausible explanation or argument. Also, the concept of universality implies being in and to all spaces and times. The universal one would be a meaningful being if and only if it is shared by and in the many particulars.

It may be interesting to mention that the neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi was pressed with question of how best to make sense the idea of One-in-Many and he came up with the answer of One Moon with Many Moonlights. *The Recorded Words of Zhu Xi* reads:

Questions: [You said,] "The principle is a single, concrete entity, and the myriad things partake it as their substance. Hence each of the myriad things possesses in it a Great Ultimate." According to this theory, does the Great Ultimate not split into parts?

Answer: Fundamentally there is only one Great Ultimate, yet each of the myriad things has been endowed with it and each possesses the Great Ultimate in its entirety. This is like the fact that there is only one moon in the sky, but its light is scattered upon rivers and lakes, it can be seen everywhere. It cannot be said that the moon has been split (Chan 1963, p.638).

Zhu Xi's Moon-Moonlight argument is also applicable to the relationship between the principle (*li*) and its multiple embodiments (multiple, visible things). The relationship between the principle and its multiple embodiments (multiple entities that embody it) is similar or the same to the relationship between the form and the multiple, visible things that participate in it or partake of it.

The Moon-Moonlight metaphor can be helpful with conceptualizing the relationship between a form and multiple, visible objects partaking of it, considering the relationship between a form and the multiple, visible things partaking of it is a relationship between reality and appearances—for example, reality in appearances, as it is in the division of the two worlds in *the Republic*. However, using the Moon-Moonlight metaphor to depict the relationship between a form and multiple, visible objects partaking of it encounters one serious problem: the moon and moonlight are not separated and separable, but a form and multiple entities partaking of it are supposed to be separated and separable in Plato's view.

All the same, if we understand those terms "in itself", "participation", "separate" and the like in terms of their spatial connotation, as Parmenides insisted, how can we consistently say that the One is spatially both in itself and in the many? How can we consistently claim *both* that the Many are spatially separated from the One in itself

and that the Many spatially participate in the One at the same time? How can we make sense that the One, when it is spatially in the Many, does not turn itself into many? Copleston may have a point that we should not read Plato literally in spatial sense, amid Plato himself did use spatial terms. The question is also that if we do not understand “in” and “out” spatially because the form is incorporeal being, how best ought we to understand these terms. Moreover, if we should not understand Plato’s phrases in spatial sense, then in what sense should we understand those phrases?

II-B. The Form as the One *over* Many

Conceptualizing a form as the One *over* many does not fare well either. Replacing the word “in” by the word “over” does not solve the conceptual issue that was raised above, but only adding new difficulties to those issues. Conceptualizing the One-Many relationship as the relationship of the One over the Many, there is a new twofold issue here. On the one hand, so conceptualizing, “each form in itself will no longer be a unity but an unlimited plurality.” (Cruz 2018, p.277) When the form of multiple visible things is over and covers all those multiple visible things, it is in all of them, which in turn means that spatially it turns itself into multiple forms. On the other hand, we must conceptualize that a form is divisible. If a same form covers multiple visible beings, it spatially occupies all separate spaces of all those multiple visible things, which means that only part of itself occupies each one of separate spaces of all multiple visible things the One form covers. Neither can be plausible.

Given the One is an entity-like being in itself, how can it be that spatially the One is not divided into an unlimited plurality when the One is *over* many and how is a form not divisible when a form as the One is *over* many? The key is how to understand the word “over” here. If being “over many” did not connote being “in many” in any sense, then it would follow that when a form would not be in visible objects when visible objects participate in their form. That would be absurd. If being “over many” connotes being “in many” in a sense, we then would have problems which are discussed above. Moreover, when the One is spatially over unlimited Many, either the form is divided into an unlimited plurality, or it turns itself into an unlimited plurality. Thus, to repudiate Socrates, Parmenides made two normative arguments: the division argument and *the Third Man Argument* in particular.

Parmenides insisted that idea of the form as *One over many* is both conceptually self-defeating and normatively undesirable *Parmenides* reads:

[Parmenides asked] “In that case would the sail be, as a whole, over each person, or would a part of it be over one person and another part of it over another?”

“A part.”

“So forms themselves are divisible, Socrates,” he said, “and things that partake of them would be partake of a part, no longer would be a whole form, but only a part of it, be in each thing.”

“It does appear that way.”

“Then are you willing to say, Socrates, that our one form is really divided? Will it still be one?”

“Not at all,” he replied.

“No,” said Parmenides. “For suppose you are going to divide largeness itself. If each of the many large things is to be a large by a part of largeness itself smaller than largeness itself, won’t that appear unreasonable?” (Ibid, 131c2-d2)

Parmenides’s counterargument above is that conceptually, the concept of the One over the Many implies that the One is the Many and thus self-defeating; normatively, when we conceptualize the form as the One over the many, we inevitably conclude that the form is divided and divisible. Since the idea that the form is divided and divisible is not plausible, therefore it is implausible to conceive the form as the One over many. The argument here can be called the division argument.

In the division argument, to conceptualize the form as the One over many inevitably results in the conclusion that the form is divided and divisible. This conclusion is undesirable in a twofold sense. On the one hand, when the form is divided into different separate parts (as separately over separate visible things), whether the form is still a whole is doubtful. On the other hand, when multiple visible things exist by embodying different parts of the form, each part of the form is a form, which in turn means that the form is turned into multiple forms. Moreover, the idea that the form is divisible is not desirable either. Meanwhile, considering that the form is a spatially separate being from concrete, visible things. If different things participate different parts of the one form, it would follow that the one form and its parts are separable and separated. This naturally begs the question of how can a form as a whole be spatially separable from its parts? The trouble continues.

In addition to the division argument that to conceptualize the form as the One over many will inevitably lead to the conclusion that the form is divisible, Parmenides also added another normative argument: *The Third Man Argument* (Greek: *τρίτος ἀνθρώπος*) too (CF. Cruz 2018, p.277). Parmenides suggested that Socrates’s argument inevitably lead to *the Third Man Argument* that always results in an infinite regression. As *Parmenides* insisted, taking largeness as an example, *the Third Man Argument* goes as follows,

1. There are A, B, C ...Y large things (as we see them).
2. Claiming they are large things, we claim that there is the Form of Largeness (FL) in virtue of which A, B, C ...Y large things are large; thus, we have {A, B, C...Y} + FL.
3. Claiming {A, B, C...Y} and FL to be homogeneous, we also claim the existence of FL1, a third Largeness; thus, we have {A, B, C...Y} + FL + FL1.
4. The process can be infinitely extended, and thus we have an infinite regression and can never justify fully what we claim.

The problem of *the Third Man Argument* is akin to the foundationalist argument. It leads to an infinite regression. The Third Man Argument is also a kind of normative argument.

Thus, for the conception of the form as the One over man, the challenge to Socrates was a twofold one there. On the one hand, Socrates would fall into an infinite regression in argument of justification. On the other hand, the One will be turned into many. It goes something as follow:

1. There are A, B, C ...Y large things (as we see them), and each of them partakes of a form and thus, there are forms Fa, Fb, Fc ... Fy.
, and each is a separate form
2. Claiming A, B, C ...Y large things, we claim that there is the Form of Largeness (FL) in virtue of which A, B, C ...Y large things are large; thus, we have {A, B, C...Y} + FL; accordingly, we have {Fa, Fb, Fc ... Fy} +FLI; each form is separate.
3. Claiming {A, b, C...Y} and FL to be homogeneous, we also claim the existence of FL1, a third Largeness; thus, we have {A, b, C...Y} + FL + FL1; correspondingly, we have {Fa, Fb, Fc ... Fy} +FL1I.
- 4.The process can be infinitely extended, and we inevitably will have an infinite number of separate forms.
- 5.Therefore One becomes many or One is turned into many, which would be absurd.

Other challenges also exist. But the above two-fold challenge is sufficient to indicate that the conception of the form as *the One over many* is normatively problematic.

Conceptually, there is also a problem between the concept of “in itself” and the concept of “over many”, considering the “itself” and many are separate beings. At least, reading “in itself” and “over many” with their spatial connotation, a being cannot be both in itself separately and in many simultaneously. A being cannot be simultaneously in more than one separate spaces. If a being is in space X, it cannot simultaneously be in other sperate spaces, say, P, Q, O, W Y Z, etc. On the other hand, if we do not read “in itself” and “over man” with their spatial connotation, then in what sense should we read these phrases?

II-C . Forms as Thoughts

Facing Parmenides’s challenge, Socrates than proposed to conceptualize the form as a thought and thus to conceptualize it as “a unity that occurs only in the mind and is different from all the particulars.” (Ibid) Socrates’s proposal is that we conceptualize forms as merely ideas or thoughts in mind. The proposal is consistent with Socrates’s conception of the form in *Euthyphro*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *the Republic* wherein Socrates did conceive the form to be a mental entity without an external or substantial being. The strength of the proposal is that conceptualizing forms as thoughts, we conceptualize forms as incorporeal beings. Accordingly, we can avoid a spatial reading of such terms as “in itself”, “participation”, “One in many” or “One over many” and the like. But this is also the Achille’s heel of the proposal: conceiving the form to be a mental entity without external, substantial being, the proposal also undermined the form in doing what it was supposed to do. In Parmenides’s view, so conceptualizing the form resulted in multiple undesirable ramifications.

Notwithstanding, for Parmenides, the problem was that if forms were thoughts, and things were as they were by partaking of their forms, then either all things were composed of thoughts and thus all things would think or being thoughts, things do not think. Either conclusion would be absurd. The claim that all visible things think obviously contradicts our daily experiences and common sense. It does not take much

for us to point out that a desk does not think, a tree does not think, an apple does not think, or a tomato does not think. But the claim that a visible thing consisting of thought does not think is equally implausible either.

Notwithstanding, Parmenides rejected Socrates's proposal immediately. He did not fail to show Socrates the above-mentioned problems of Socrates's proposal. *Parmenides* reads:

“Parmenides may be each of these forms is a thought (*νόημα*),” Socrates said, “probably occurs only in minds. In this way each of them might be one and no longer face the difficulties mentioned just now.”
 “What do you mean?” He asked. “Is each of the thoughts one, but a thought of nothing?”
 “No, that’s impossible,” he said.
 “Of something, rather?”
 “Yes.”
 “Of something that is, or of something that is not?”
 “Of something that is.”
 “Isn’t it of some one thing, which that thought thinks is over all things the instances, being some one character?”
 “Yes.”
 “Then won’t this thing that is thought to be one, being always the same over all the instances, be a form?”
 “That too, appears necessary.”
 “What about this?” Said Parmenides. “Given your claim that other things partake of forms, won’t you necessarily think either that each thing is composed of thoughts and all things think, or that, although they are thoughts, they are not thinking?”
 “That isn’t reasonable either, Parmenides,” he said. (Plato, *Parmenides*, 132b3-c13)

In the above, the Greek word “*νόημα*” can “have an active sense and a passive sense.” (Assaturian 2020, p.355) “In the active sense, it refers to an act of thought. In the passive sense, it refers to the content of an act of thinking.” (Ibid)

In the dialogue, Parmenides's objection is as follows: “A thought is always a thought of *something* and of something that is, and that thing is a Form, and that leads to an absurd consequence; either each thing is composed of thoughts and all things think, or being thoughts, they do not think.” (Cruz 2018, p.277) If a form were a thought, then a visible thing participating in a form would consist of thought. If a visible thing consisted of thought, then it would think. Given that all visible things participate in their forms and thus would consist of thoughts, all visible things would think. But this claim is absurd, contradicting our common sense and daily experiences. Alternatively, if we claim that things consisting of thoughts do not think, our claim is absurd too. Admittedly, in both ancient Greek and ancient Indian philosophies, some ancient philosophers entertained the doctrine of animism. Animism is the doctrine that everything in the cosmos has a soul akin to human soul. A challenge to animism is precisely the challenge that if animism were right, then all things have souls akin to human souls and thus all things would think. It cannot be that all things think.

Another part of the objection is that if the form were thought, then thought must have its object which must be real; what is real must be the form; thus, the same form

would simultaneously be both thought and the content or object of thought. There would be an act-object distinction problem here. Certainly, a mental entity can be the object of its own act. But a ramification would be that if a form were a thought whose very object or content were the form itself that was thought, multiple visible things participating in the form all would both think and be thought by them. This would be absurd.

One may argue that we should just conceptualize forms as incorporeal beings, not necessarily as thoughts. Then, the question is that if forms, as incorporeal beings, were not thoughts, what kind of incorporeal beings would they be. Adding to the challenge is also the fact that Socrates/Plato indeed called forms “the ideas”. The term “an idea”, however we read the term, does connote thought or a mental being. All the same, in Parmenides’s view, a conceptualist concept of the form does not work. It is normatively unjustified and perhaps, absurd.

II-D. Forms as Patterns

In a retreat from Parmenides’s attack, Socrates then claimed that forms are patterns, “models, paradigms fixed in the nature of things and the things that participate in Forms are their copies or likeness.” (Cruz 2018) But Socrates’s retreat did not go well. Parmenides also rejected his claim as implausible. Making the form as the original model or pattern of multiple visible things, Socrates took for granted that it was a one-way street—that is, visible things liked the form. But Socrates’ presumption is flawed.

For Parmenides, the street was a two-way one. While visible things liked the form, the form also liked them, which in turn made visible things be forms for the form. This will lead us to absurdity. *Parmenides* reads:

[Socrates proposed:] “What appears most likely to me is this: these forms are like patterns in nature, and other things resemble them, and are likeness, and this partaking of the forms is, for the other things, simply being modeled on them.”

“If something resembles the form,” he said, “can that form not be like what has been modeled on it, to the extent that the thing has been made like it? Or is there any way for something like to be what is not like it?”

“There is not.”

“And isn’t there a compelling necessity for that which is like to partake of the same one Form as what is like it?”

“There is.”

“But if like things are like by partaking of something, won’t that be the form itself?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Therefore, nothing can be like the form, nor can the form be like anything else. Otherwise, alongside the form another form will always make its appearance, and if that form is like anything, yet another; and if the form proves to be like what partake of it, a fresh form will never cease emerging.”

“That’s very true.” (Plato, *Parmenides*, 132d1-133a4).

If multiple visible things liked the form which they partook of, the form also liked the multiple visible things, which would make them the forms for the form—that is, the many become forms for the One. This evidentially would make the One be many, and many are the One. But the One and Many are not identical.

In addition, Parmenides's objection again "takes the form of The Third Man Argument (Greek: *τρίτος άνθρωπος*)." (Cruz 2018, p.277) *The Third Man Argument* in the conception of forms as patterns, models, and paradigms is as follows:

If the thing resembles the Form, this should, in turn, resemble the thing and, consequently, there must be a character in virtue of which they are alike, and that character is the Form itself. This leads, again, to an infinite regression because a new Form will always be needed in virtue of which the things, the first, the second, the third forms, etc., will resemble to each other (Ibid)

Given that forms are independent, separate beings in themselves, the conception of forms as patterns, models, and paradigms faces a challenge not to reduce the One into the many.

In summary, in the above, Parmenides challenged Socrates to define the relationship between the One and the many, claiming that conceptualizing it as the One in many or as the One over many is implausible. If we conceptualized the relationship as *the One in many*, we could not consistently claim both that the One in X is the same as the One in Y and that the form that both X and Y embody is a separate being in itself. Nor we can be justified to claim either the One that is in many is the One as a whole or the One as a part. On the one hand, one entity cannot be simultaneously in two or more separate spaces. On the other hand, we will inevitably run into *the Third Man Argument* too. We cannot conceptualize forms as thoughts or patterns either. If we conceptualized forms as thoughts, we would claim that either all things think or some things that are thoughts do not think. Both claims are absurd. If we conceptualized forms as patterns, we would inevitably run into *the Third Man Argument* too.

Parmenides's challenge is about several Socrates's core tenets of his doctrine of the form: (1) the relationship between a form and multiple concrete, visible objects, or entities that the form defines as a same kind of beings; (2) the concept that forms are independent, separate beings in themselves; (3) the idea that multiple, visible things come into existence and have reality by partaking of their forms. In essence, Parmenides's challenge is also about how to define the relationship between the universal and particulars and how to make sense of the relationship between the universal and particulars.

As discussed early, developing his doctrine of forms, Plato purported to locate the objects of knowledge, claiming that the objects of knowledge are those forms that concrete, visible things participate in, not those concrete, visible things themselves; concrete, visible things can only be objects of opinions. Doing so, Plato claimed that the object of knowledge is the universal, not the particular. This claim will be criticized and challenged by Aristotle.

III. Aristotle's Criticism

Aristotle also lunched a strong, challenging, passionate, and penetrating criticism of Plato's doctrine of the form. Plato developed the doctrine of the form to account for the essences of things, and to locate the objects of knowledge. In Aristotle's view, Plato's doctrine of the form has accomplished none of these tasks. Instead, from the points of view of metaphysics and epistemology, to which the doctrine of the form is intended to provide the foundation, the doctrine of form is a failure. In addition, in Aristotle's view, Plato's doctrine of the form is also an impossible doctrine. For example, "the Forms contain the essence and inner reality of sensible objects, but how can objects which exist apart from sensibles contain the essence of those sensibles?" (Copleston 1993, p. 294)

Aristotle's criticism also reveals some differences between Plato and Aristotle in metaphysics too. In metaphysics, Plato associated reality and truth only with the universal, while in Aristotle's vista, reality and truth were associated with both the universal and the particular. Answering the question of what made $X_1, X_2 \dots X_n$ as X , Plato pointed to forms that can be both the (secondary) substance and the essence of X , while Aristotle distinguished between the (secondary) substance and the essence of X . In Plato's view, an individual, visible entity does not have reality in its own, while in Aristotle's view, an individual entity is a primary substance. In epistemology, in Plato's view, the objects of knowledge can only be the permanent and universal, while in Aristotle's view, they include both the permanent and the changeable, as well as the universal and the particular.

III-A. Metaphysical Implausibility of the Doctrine of Forms

In Aristotle's view, metaphysically, Plato's doctrine of the form is not plausible. The doctrine is both conceptually and normatively problematic. The doctrine is intended to account for the reality, essence, substance, causality, and existence of things, but it can do none of the intended jobs for it. Anything else, for Aristotle, how can the form of X that is not inherent of X and separable from X be, and account for, the substance or essence of X ? The form of X is intended to explain everything of X , but ends up explaining very little of X .

In Aristotle's view, the flaw of Plato's doctrine of the form can be seen at least as follows. First, in the doctrine of Forms, the form or the One has a separate subsistence apart from individual, visible things. But "of the ways in which we prove the Forms exist, none is convincing, for from some no inference necessarily follows, and from some it follows that there are Forms of which we think there are no Forms." (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 990b9-12) Thus, for example, if we conceptualized forms as patterns, "again, the Forms are patterns not only of sensible things, but of Forms themselves also, i.e., the genus, as genus of various species, will be so; therefore, the same thing will be pattern and copy." (Ibid, 991a29-32) Also for example, if we conceptualized forms as substance, "again, it would be impossible that the substance and that of which it is the substance should exist apart; how, therefore, could the Ideas, being the substances of things exist apart?" (Ibid, 991b1-3) Moreover, if we conceive the form

of the visible entity X as the essence of X, how can the essence of X be separated and sparable from X?

Second, the doctrine of forms is not sufficient in accounting for the reality of things either. About reality, the doctrine recognizes only that the universal is real. It does not recognize that the particular is real too. A visible thing exists by participating in the form, the universal. Only the form which multiple visible things participate in is real and thus Socrates characteristically claimed that concrete, sensible things are between beings and non-beings, or between real beings and non-real beings, e.g., merely appearances.

Moreover, since forms are separate beings in their own, following the doctrine of forms to explain the realities of things, we inevitably run into *the Third Man Argument*. *The Third Man Argument* can only lead to the conclusion of impossibility of knowledge and impossibility of justification of X as accountable.

The Third Man Argument here is that if multiple visible things become real by participating in the forms, they must share the same forms; but we cannot know they share the same forms unless there is the third set of forms that account for the sharing, and we thus run into an infinite regression that must infinitely invent infinite sets of forms. Thus, *Metaphysics* reads:

If the Ideas and the particulars that share in them have the same form, there will be something common to these; for why should "2" be one and the same in perishable 2's or those which are many but eternal, and not the same in the '2 in itself' as in the particular 2? But if they have not the same form, they must have only the name in common, and it is as if one were to call both Callias and a wood image a 'man' without observing any community between them (Ibid, 991a2-9).

Thus, in Aristotle's view, like in Parmenides's view, given that forms or ideas and visible things are separate entities, if they share something in common, then there must be a common reference (*the third man*) that is not either of them. But to account for the commonality of the ideas, visible things, and *the third man*, we need a further common reference (*the fourth man*). At the end of the day, we have an infinite regression.

Aristotle differed from Plato in metaphysics here. In Aristotle's view, not only the universal has reality, but also the particular has reality in its own. To spell it out differently, in Aristotle's view, reality is not only in the universal, the permanent, and the unchangeable only; instead, reality is also in the particular. Thus, the assumption that the reality of a visible thing is embodied only in the universal, the permanent, and the unchangeable itself is wrong. Taking the reality of Socrates as an example. In Aristotle's view, Socrates is real not only in terms of what is universal of Socrates, but also in term of the particular of Socrates. Socrates is not only universally a human being, but also particularly an individual person. Moreover, for Aristotle, individual entity is the primary substance, while species or genus is the secondary substance, and a primary substance has the full reality in its own. In Aristotle's view, understanding Plato's forms as the secondary substances, e.g., species, they are not the only ones

that have reality. By this token, the One is not the only being that has reality in its own. The many have full reality in their own too.

Furthermore, to account for the reality of X and what makes X as X, we must understand not only what substance X is, but also X's essence and other defining properties and conditions or what Aristotle called "predicates". While Plato's form conflates substance, and essence (predicate), it ends up accounting for none of them. Which of defining moments of X the form of X accounts for, substance, essence, or other necessary predicates? Thus, in Plato's doctrine of forms, "there will be Forms not only of substances but also of many other things." (Ibid, 990b24-26) But conceptually, a substance is not a property or condition. Thus, a same form cannot be both a substance and a property or condition at the same time. This is true also of a secondary substance. When a secondary substance is a predicate of a primary substance, it is a secondary substance, not a property or condition.

Aristotle rightly claimed: "species and genus do not merely indicate quality, like the term 'white'; 'white' indicates quality and nothing further, but species and genus determine the quality with reference to a substance: they signify substance qualitatively differentiated." (*Categories*, 3b19-22) To say that Sophie Marceau is a human being is one thing, and to say that Sophie Marceau is beautiful is quite another. Accordingly, the form of Sophie Marceau cannot both be humanity and beauty, or if it is both humanity and beauty, it is not the One, but the Many.

Third, the doctrine of forms cannot account for the causality of things. And the causality of things is an important object of knowledge. Thus, *Metaphysics* reads:

In the *Phaedo* the case is stated in this way—that the Forms are causes both of being and of becoming; yet when the Forms exist, still the things that share in them do not come into being, unless there is something to originate in them do not come into being, unless there is something to originate the movement; and many other things come into being (e.g., a house or a ring) of which we say that there are no forms. Clearly, therefore, even the other things can both be and come into being owing to such causes as produce the things just mentioned (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 991b310).

The doctrine of forms cannot consistently account for the causality of things. It goes something like this. Cause and effect co-exist and cannot be separated. If forms are causes of concrete, visible things, then where forms exist, concrete, visible things also exist. But in the doctrine of forms, forms exist in themselves, and independently and *prior to* existences of concrete, sensible things. They existed but did not cause concrete, sensible things to exist, which in turn meant that they were not sufficient causes for concrete, visible objects. By this token, Socrates/Plato's claim that forms are both necessary and sufficient causes for concrete, visible objects is wrong. Noteworthy also, in Aristotle's own doctrine, the existence of everything has four causes: the material, the formal, the direct, and the final cause.

Fourth, correspondingly, "all other things cannot come from the Forms in any of the usual senses of 'from'. And to say that they are patterns and the other things share in them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors." (Ibid, 991a19-22) If by "X is

from Y” is understood that Y is the cause of X, then we cannot see that forms are causes of visible objects, at least not the only causes and therefore visible objects are not from forms in the sense that forms are their causes. If by “X is from Y” is understood as Y is the pattern of X, then visible objects are not from forms in the sense that forms are their patterns; or a same being will be both a pattern and its copy (Ibid,991 a31-32). Evidentially, multiple visible objects differ from one another, amid they may share common features. We can neither take for granted that what is common of them is their form, e.g., redness is not the form of both a red horse and a red cat, nor can we claim that the cause of multiple visible objects sharing a common feature is this common feature, e.g., we cannot say that the causes of the existence of a red house and the existence of a red cat is redness.

In summary, in Aristotle’s view, the doctrine of the form is metaphysically implausible. Metaphysically, “the Forms are only a purposeless doubling of visible things. They are supposed to explain why the multitude of things in the world exist. But it does not help simply to suppose the existence of another multitude of things.” (Copleston 1993, p.292) In Aristotle’s view, inventing the doctrine of forms, “Plato is alike a man who, unable to count with a small number, thinks that he will find it easier to do so if he doubles the number.” (Ibid)

Aristotle’s arguments against Plato’s doctrine are normative arguments. They proceed as follows: if Plato’s doctrine of the form is correct, specific conclusions will inevitably follow; but those inevitable conclusions are implausible, therefore, Plato’s doctrine cannot be correct. But like Parmenides’s arguments, Aristotle’s arguments also contain elements of conceptual argument, e.g., how can it be conceptually possible and consistent that the substance of X or the essence of X is separated and separable from X? How can what is not inherent of X be the substance or essence of X?

III-B. Epistemological Implausibility of Forms

In Aristotle’s view, epistemologically, the fate of the doctrine of forms does not fare better either. “The Forms are useless for our knowledge of things.” (Copleston 1993, p.292) “They help in no wise either towards the knowledge of the other things.” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 991a11-12; cf Copleston 1993, p.292) The doctrine is intended to locate the objects of knowledge, setting up the foundation of knowledge and demarcating knowledge from other kinds of beliefs. But the doctrine can do none of those intended jobs for it.

First, forms are not proper objects of knowledge and therefore, the doctrine of forms is not helpful in identifying the objects of knowledge. Plato developed the doctrine of forms to distinguish between the objects of knowledge and the objects of opinions—that is, forms are objects of knowledge while concrete, visible things are objects of opinion. But forms cannot be the objects of knowledge. As separate beings in themselves and separate beings from those concrete, visible beings, they cannot be their substances or essences. If they are not the substances or essences of visible things, they cannot be the objects of knowledge.

Forms are not the substances of visible things, or “they would have been in them”, not existing as separate beings (Ibid, 991a12-13). The same can be said that forms are not the essences of visible things, or they would have been in them. Therefore, forms do not help in any ways toward knowledge of the substance of a visible thing. They are not main objects of knowledge because substances are among main objects of knowledge. Forms are not helpful to our knowledge of the existence of sensible things either because “they are not in the particulars which share in them.” (Ibid, 991a14). The difference between Plato and Aristotle here is this:

Whereas Plato was not really concerned with the things of this world for their own sake, but as stepping-stones to the Forms; though, by getting to know the Types, at which phenomena are, as it were, aiming or which they are trying to realize, we can, inasmuch as we are efficient causes, contribute to this approximate realization (Copleston 1993, p.292)

In Plato’s view, visible things themselves are not objects of knowledge, but objects of opinions. For Aristotle, knowledge is first knowledge of those visible things of this world for their own sakes.

Second, the doctrine of forms is not helpful in identifying objects of knowledge also because it excludes a category of legitimate objects of knowledge at the outset. In the doctrine of forms, only the universals are legitimate objects of knowledge, and the particulars are objects only of opinion. In the doctrine of forms, only the permanent, unchanging, and unchangeable are legitimate objects of knowledge, and the impermanent, unchanging, and changeable are objects of opinions. Only the transcendentals are legitimate objects of knowledge, and the contextually are objects of opinions. In Aristotle’s view, the particulars, the impermanents, and the contextually are also important objects of knowledge.

Third, forms help in no way towards knowledge of movements of those visible things. Movements of visible things are parts of their realities and existence. Knowledge of movements of visible things are at the core of knowledge of visible things. In Aristotle’s view, as Copleston notes, “even if things exist in virtue of the forms, how do the latter account for the movements of things and for their coming-to-be and passing-away?” (Ibid, pp.292-293) Noteworthy here, forms were motionless, and visible things, if they were copies of forms, would be motionless. Thus, forms “cause neither movement nor any changes in them.” (*Metaphysics*, 991a10-11)¹ Equally crucial, in Plato’s view, an important reason that visible objects are not objects of knowledge is that they are in motion and changeable. Plato rejected motion as an object of knowledge at the outset.

¹ Aristotle here might have done injustice to Plato to some extent. In Aristotle’s view, the movement of something has four causes: the material, the formal, the direct and the final cause. Plato’s form can at least be the former cause. Thus, it would be more correct for Aristotle to say that the form is only one of the four causes of the movement of a visible thing, not that the form is not a cause.

Fourth, in Aristotle's view, forms are not identical to principles, *logos*, or *nous*, which are legitimate, important objects of knowledge, and thus cannot account for those important objects of knowledge. For example, causality is a principle of *logos*, but the doctrine of form cannot account for causality, as discussed above. They are thus not helpful to knowledge, least they set up the foundations for knowledge. Socrates/Plato did claim that the Form of Good is the cause of all truths, realities, and values of all beings and suggested that forms are causes of concrete, visible things and thus talked about causality. But Aristotle denied that forms were causes of movements of visible things and forms could account for causality.

In short, in Aristotle's view, while in Plato's doctrine of forms, forms are supposed to be true objects of knowledge, they belong to none of those important objects of knowledge, e.g., the substances of visible beings, the essences of visible beings, the movements of visible beings, and the principles, *logos*, and *nous* of visible beings in the visional world. While Plato's doctrine of forms is supposed to account for the causality and movement of visible things, it does not do its job, and cannot do its job. While knowledge is also about the particular, the doctrine of forms excludes the particulars as objects of knowledge at the outset.

In summary, like Parmenides. Aristotle also criticized passionately and penetratingly Plato's doctrine of form. While Parmenides's criticism focused on challenging the conceptual consistency and normative justifiability of the doctrine of forms, Aristotle's criticism focused on exploration of the metaphysical and epistemological undesirability of the doctrine of forms. Aristotle's criticism focused on pointing out the total failure of the doctrine of forms in metaphysics and epistemology.

IV. Conclusion

In ancient Greek philosophy, claiming the existence of the universal in the particulars as the One in the Many or the One over the Many, Plato developed the doctrine of forms or the doctrine of ideas to give a unified explanation of the multiplicity of concrete, visible things. In Plato's doctrine, forms or ideas are supposed to be the essences of multiple, many visible things but exist separately from, and independently of, concrete, visible things that participate in them, while concrete, visible things can participate in forms and therefore have their existences through such participations. The doctrine thus invited both Parmenides's challenges and Aristotle's criticism, both conceptually and normatively. In turn, Parmenides's and Aristotle's challenges and criticism raise both conceptual and normative questions of the relationship between the One and Many. Conceptually, they are questions of whether the One and the Many are separable and of how best to understand the One (e.g., essence or substance). Normatively, they involve questions of how best to understand that the One and Many are separable or inseparable.

Philosophically, the ancient Greek debates remind us again of the challenge that we should not so take for granted the relationship between the universal and the particular, as well as between what Aristotle would call "the primary substance" and "the secondary substance", to be self-evident. Whether we conceptualize them to be

separable or inseparable from one another, there will be both conceptual and normative questions that must be answered. Plato's phrases of describing the relationship between the One and the Many such as "participation" and "partake of" faced conceptual and normative challenges, so will phrases such as "embody", "dwell in", "transcend" and "be immanent in" do. If the concept of the universal has stock values, it must be related to the particulars in a way that it can account meaningfully for the particulars. If the universal is related to the particulars, it must be in the particulars somehow. The question is how it is that the universal is spatially and timely in or over the particulars.

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