

Transcendentals

(In the 21st Century)

Dominic Jones

University of Buckingham

August 2019

General argument

- I argue that unity, truth, and goodness are transcendental properties of being, whereas beauty is a *derived* property from these three.
- It is when *we* see those three properties shining together in something, we call it *beautiful*.
- But to have some idea about transcendentals, first some ideas about *particulars*, *concepts* and *universals* are would be helpful.

This talk

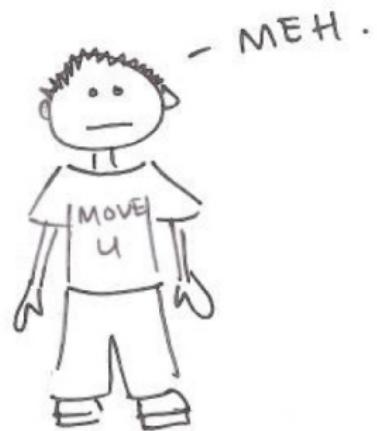
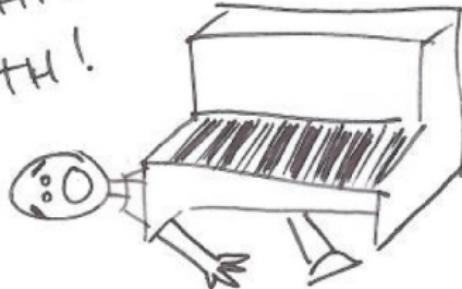
- There is a philosophical proof for the existence of pure being.
- Unity is a negation of division; opposed by disintegration.
- (*The greatest unity belongs to the most simple being, that without parts.*)
- Every being can be known insofar as it is in act; the more actual, the more knowable.
- (*Beings have act, not by themselves, but by participation in pure act.*)
- The good is what all things desire; to the extent things tend to their perfection they are good.
- (*Goodness is the perfection of being. Pure act is perfect being.*)



Abandoning Aristotelianism, as the founders of modern philosophy did, was the single greatest mistake ever made in the entire history of Western thought.

Edward Feser

AAUGH! THIS PIANO
IS CRUSHING ME
TO DEATH!



THE UNMOVED MOVER

Premise 1: At least something changes

From becoming cold or fat...

Qualitative change



© Steve Atkins Photography

Quantitative change



or to dropping and dying. . .

Change of location



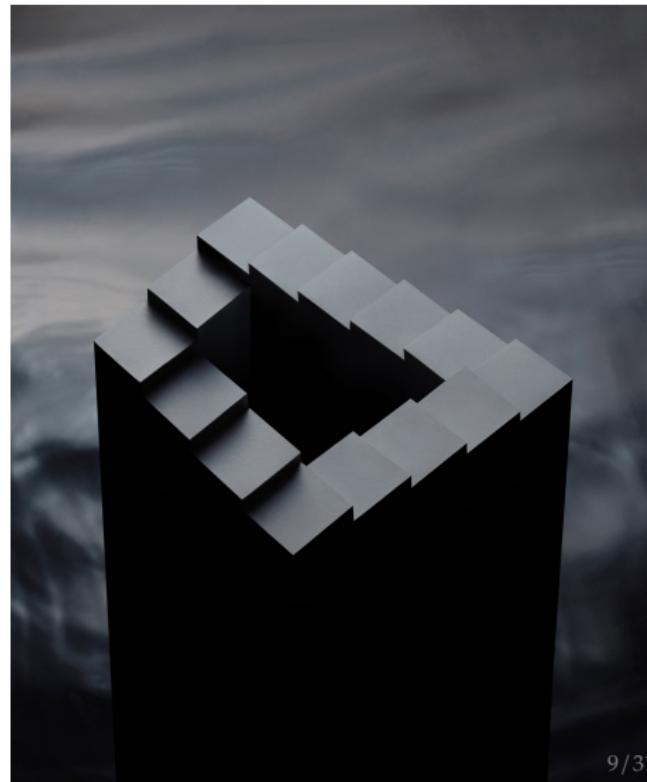
Substantial change



or going from ignorance to knowledge

Casting doubt

Change of mind



Change

- There is at least some change in something.
- To undergo some change, the actual thing being changed must in some way be in potential the thing it becomes.
- Things that may change are at once actually something but also potentially something else.
- A thing that changes cannot change exclusively by itself.

Premise 2: A change needs a changer

through an agent of change

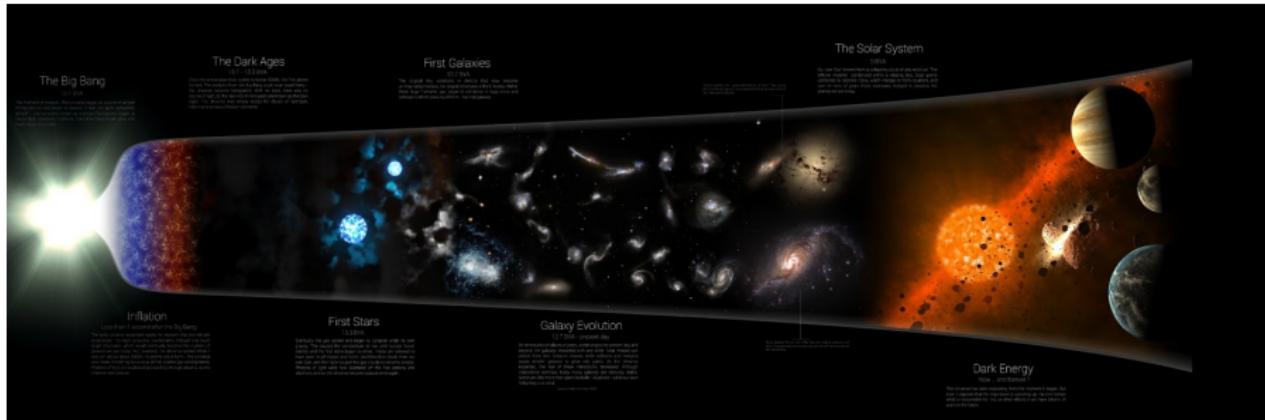
This can be many things...



Agent

- Potential ‘David’ cannot make itself, therefore an agent of change is required.
- That agent must be actual to bring about the change, therefore what is actual is *prior* to what is potential.
- This kind of *linear* change could go on forever...

... or could go back forever



- Changes in time could *metaphysically* have no starting point (no first member).
- A linear series of changes is not *at once* hierarchically dependent.

Step 1: hierarchical change

Hierarchy of the actual

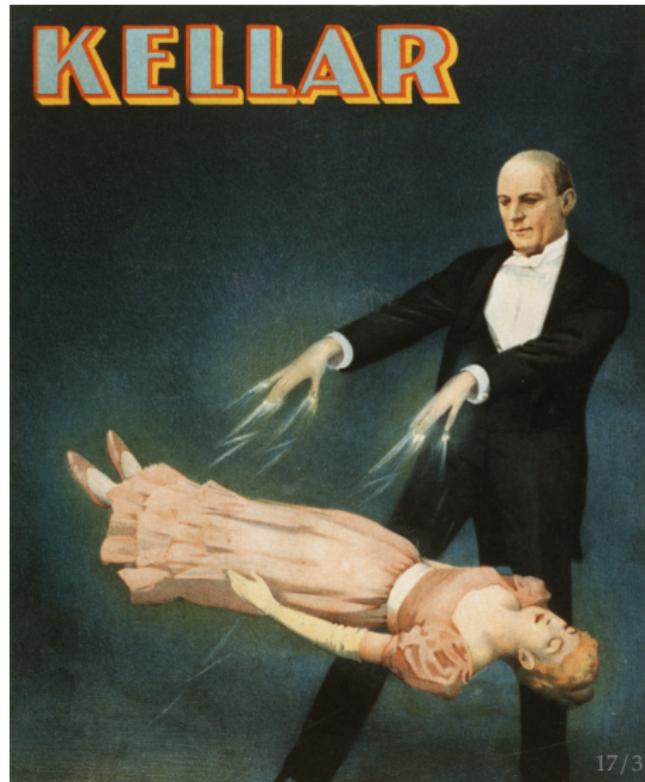
- Things that change are described as having potency and act.
- But something that can change, and is the way it is *here and now*, is also the actualisation of a potential.
- This kind of change is hierarchical: if there is no inherent power to be the way it is, this power must be derived.

An instrument of real power

Impossible!



An everyday occurrence



First in line

- She cannot hold herself in the air by herself.
- The power to do so is imparted through the great ‘Kellar’, despite being *merely* an instrument.
- She is *potentially* flat on the ground but for the *act* of the intermediary.
- But not ‘and so on forever’: something *actual* must terminate this imparted power.

Step 2: Something that changes must first exist

(But not everything can change)

Object of thought (abstract)

2

Object of some people's thought



Hierarchy of being

- Change can happen only if the thing exists.
- But what keeps the thing in existence *here and now*?
- How something *came to be* or how it might *cease to exist* would not answer the question.

Only 'To Be' imparts being

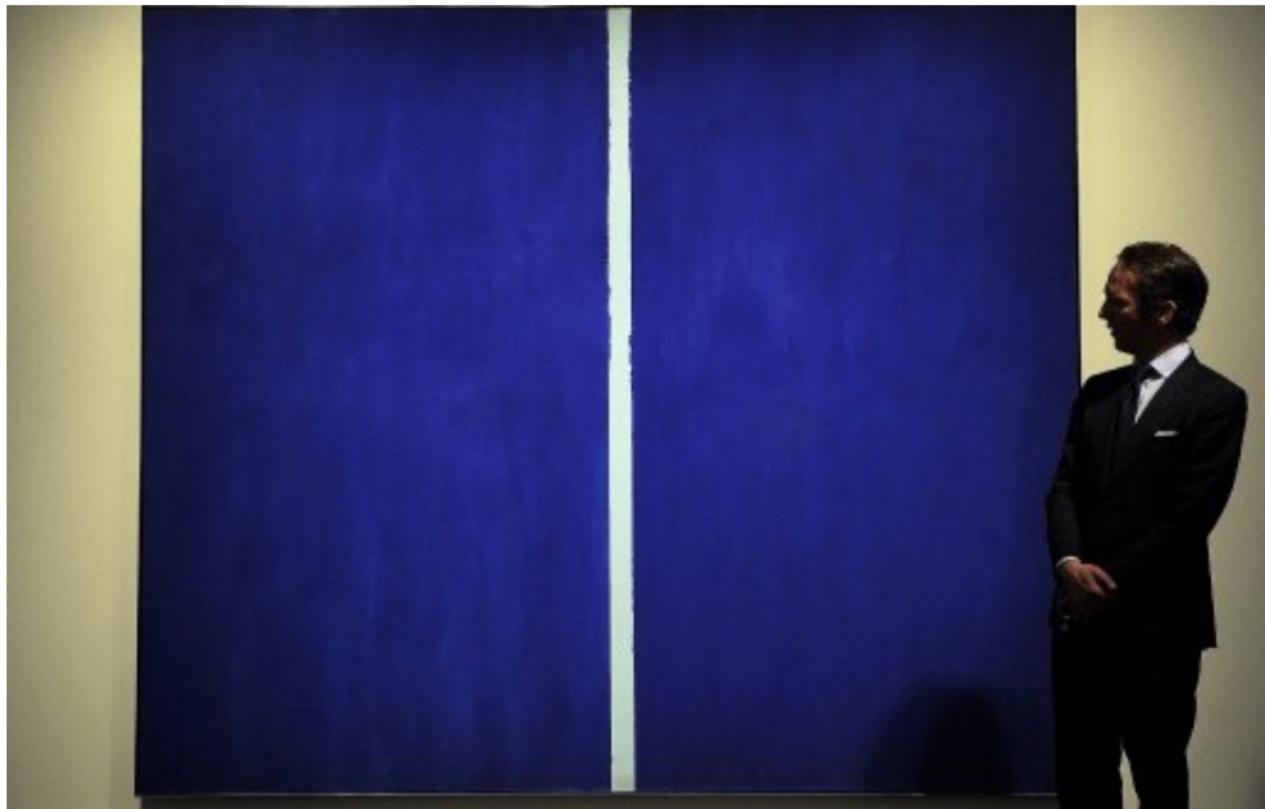


The Unactualised Actualiser

- The first cause of existence must have no potential for existence.
- Pure actuality, then, could not have a cause of its own nor can it change.
- Time is a measure of change — therefore not in time.
- To be material entails being changeable — therefore not material.
- ... and other attributes, such as...

Step 3: Intelligent, of the omniscient kind

There's more to this. . .



Before it was painted, it was thought

- Intelligence entails at least knowing the *form* of things, i.e. what things are essentially.
- Whatever is in an effect, must in some way be in the totality of its cause.
- The cause of a thing's existence must also be the cause of the form of its existence.
- And so too for all that is.

Step 4: Less than good entails a privation

But, not all goods are competitive



The good moves towards greater act

- For something to be less than fully good is for it to have a privation; ‘evil’ is the absence of an expected good.
- A purely actual actualiser, being purely actual, can have no such privation.

Considerations

- The Aristotelian argument for the ‘Unmoved Mover’ grounds the transcendentals as realities.
- There is no obvious way in which beauty classifies as a property of the transcendentals, unlike unity, truth and goodness.
- Rather, it is the intelligence that recognises the *harmony* among parts — a unity among diversity; *completeness* — missing parts are perceived making a thing ugly; *brightness* of intelligibility — fittingness to the knowing faculty.

Transcendentals

(In the 21st Century)

Dominic Jones

University of Buckingham

August 2019