

The Problem of Universals

Nominalism, Realism, and Conceptualism

Dominic Jones

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“Form is that by which a particular thing actually exists.”

A.

“Nothing abstract exists without abstraction. And abstraction is an intellectual process by which we recognise what is literally shared by a multiplicity of particular things.”

D.S.O.

“It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that virtually every major religious, moral, and political controversy of the last several centuries in some way rests on a disagreement, even implicit and unnoticed, over the ‘problem of universals’.”

E.F.

Putting things in context

Three questions

Mind - body problem

It is conceivable that the mind is not the brain?

One over many problem

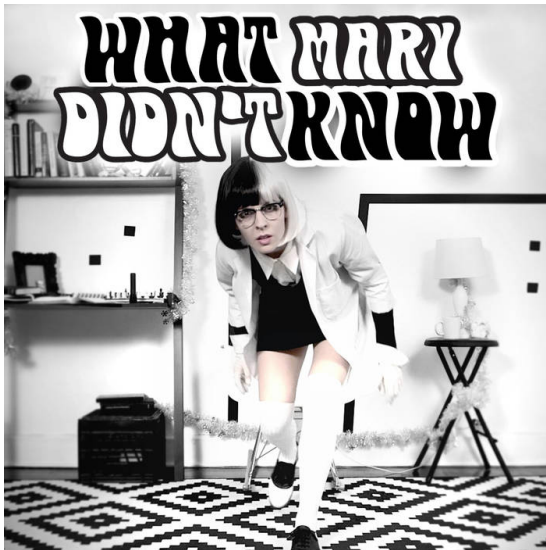
Is there such a thing as 'dog'?

Existence of God

Can the existence of God be known by the natural light of reason?

The notion of immaterial

Knowledge argument, Jackson 1986



Upon seeing a red apple, does she know something new?

What is it like to be a Bat? Nagel 1974



"I mean, I've got the costume, I've got the gadgets... but I just can't shake the feeling that I'll never know what it's like to be a bat."

Is there something that it is like to be a particular, conscious thing?

Zombies, Kirk 2006



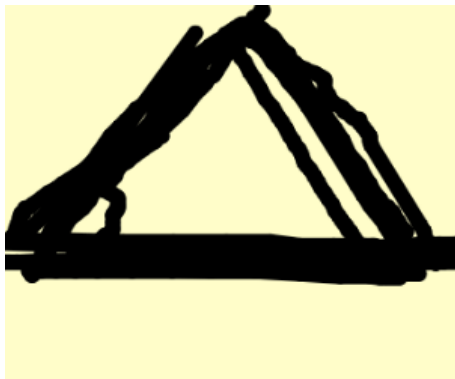
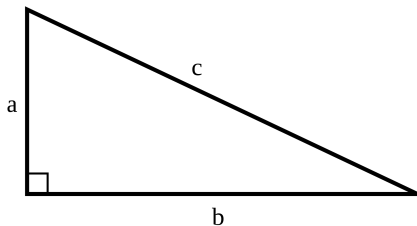
"Ouch!", but *feels* no pain

Independent of both matter and contingent mind

The abstract and the particular

An imperfect instance

That which is triangular



I recognise something to be triangular, despite its imperfections

614-609nm monochromatic light

A red thing



A no entry sign with a red background



Not singular in spectrum, but still conceptually singular

Distant cousins

Nonrational



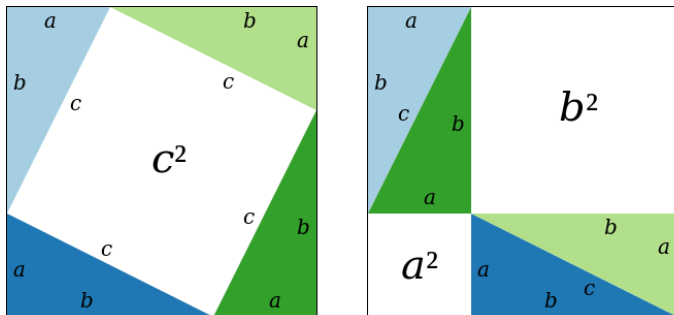
Irrational



An individual animal is either rational or nonrational, but *animality* entails neither

It couldn't be otherwise

It is *this concept* which is commonly known



$$c^2 = a^2 + b^2$$

True prior to Pythagoras, and prior to matter

Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus

Are we talking about the same thing?

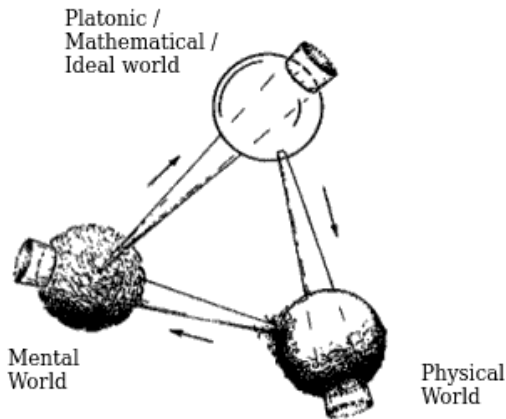
"You're words are mere *flatus vocis*!"



If we are, where is that *same thing*?

Platonic Realism

The Road to Reality, Penrose 2004



Clockwise: mysteries, **Counter-clockwise:** prejudices

adaequatio rei ad intellectum

The Road to Reality, Penrose 2004

Clockwise

Part of the ideal is relevant to the physical

Part of the physical induces the mental

Part of the mental is concerned with the ideal

Counter-clockwise

Possibility of mathematical truths inaccessible to reason

Possibility of mentality not rooted in physical structures

Possibility of physical action beyond the scope of mathematical control

The Road to Reality, Penrose 2004

Mysteries of the Third Realm

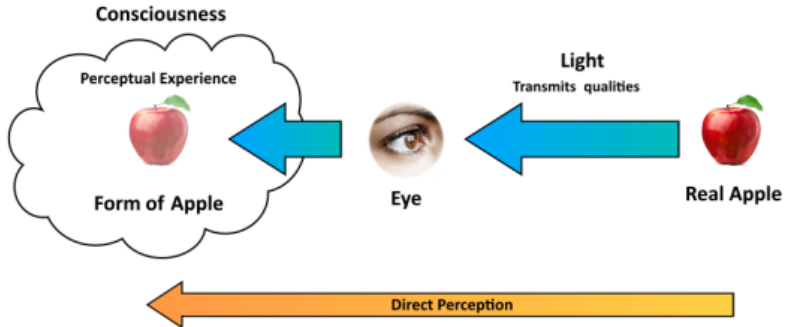
Why do mathematical laws apply to the physical world with such precision?

How can some physical materials like human brains conjure up consciousness?

How is it that we can perceive mathematical truth?

Aristotelian Realism

Act of abstraction to produce concepts



adaequatio intellectus ad rem

Scholastic Realism

Act of Being



adaequatio rei ad intellectum: Things are by participation of being
adaequatio intellectus ad rem: I have perfectable knowledge of things

Nominalism

Just a particular act, nothing more



Why should mercy be shown him?

Well, it wouldn't be mercy otherwise

Conceptualism

“Because I say it’s art”



Fountain, Duchamp 1917

Footnotes

Act of the intellect

Simple Apprehension

Intention: *Essences or Natures*

Product: *Concept*

Characteristics: *Clear or Unclear*

Question: *What?*

Judgement

Intention: *Acts of Existence*

Product: *Proposition*

Characteristic: *True or False*

Question: *Whether?*

Reasoning

Intention: *Causes or Reasons*

Product: *Argument*

Characteristics: *Valid or Invalid*

Question: *Why?*