

# Universals

## (In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)

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## 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

- Unity, truth and goodness are abstracted, but are not *just* concepts.
- (*But beauty is more like a judgement from the union of concepts.*)
- Agreement on what is beautiful is seldom universal.
- (*But agreement on unity, ((less so truth) and less so goodness) more readily found.*)

## The one and the many

*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'.*

Edward Feser

# A grounding problem

There's marriage



... and then there's marriage



Does the universal 'marriage', for example, exist independently of finite minds?

## Realism

Realism affirms that universals — ‘triangularity’, ‘catness’, etc., — are irreducible to their particular instances and exist in a way that is in some sense independent of the human mind.

## Nominalism

Nominalism denies that there are any true universals and insists that only particulars are real — there is this triangle and that one, this cat and that one, but no such thing as ‘triangularity’ or ‘catness’ over and above them.

## Conceptualism

Conceptualism holds that universals exist, but only in the mind — ‘triangularity’, ‘catness’, etc., are the products of abstraction, and correspond to nothing in the world of external objects, all of which are particular.

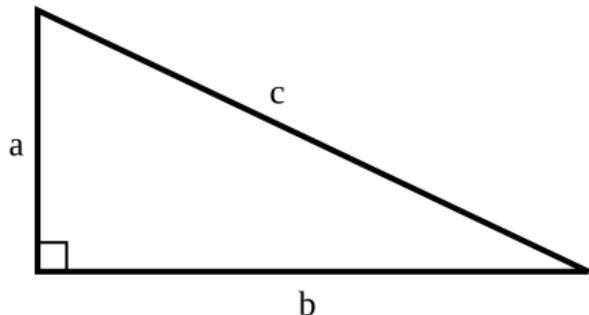
*Knowledge argument, Jackson 1986*



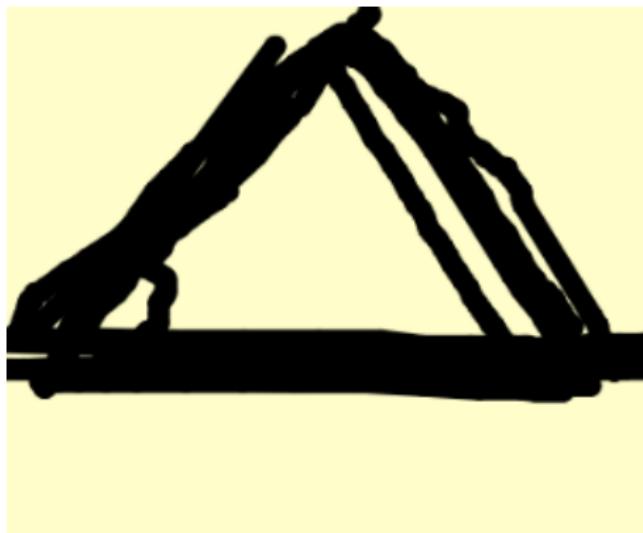
Upon seeing a red apple, does she know something new?

# The abstract and the particular

*That which is triangular*



An imperfect instance



I recognise something to be triangular, despite its imperfections.

# 614-609mn monochromatic light

A red thing



Another red thing



Not singular in spectrum, but still conceptually singular

# Distant cousins

Non-rational



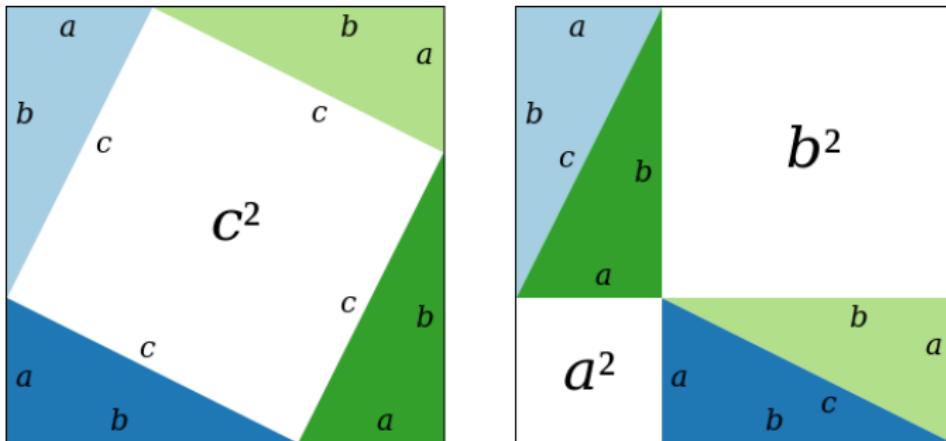
Rational



An individual animal is either rational or non-rational, 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.

## Platonic Realism

Universals exist in a ‘third realm’ distinct from the world of particular things and distinct from the human mind.

## *The Road to Reality*, Penrose 2004



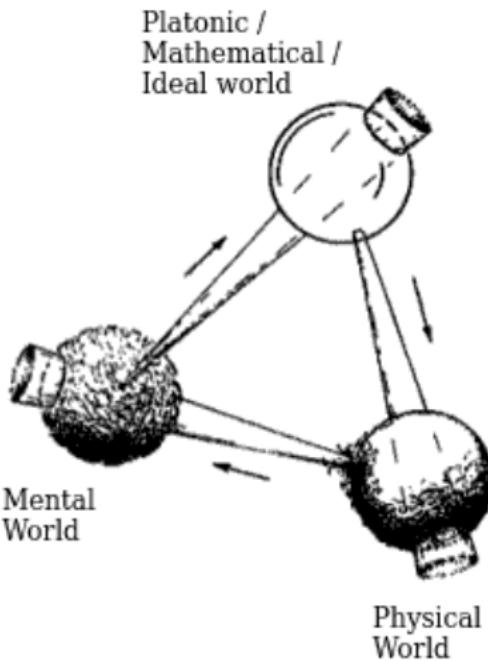
### Mysteries of the Third Realm

- 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?

# *The Road to Reality*, Penrose 2004

## Clockwise — ‘mysteries’

- 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 — ‘prejudices’

- 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

## Aristotelian Realism

Universals exist only in the particular things that instantiate them and in the intellect that abstracts them from the particulars.

## From apples to the concept of 'apple'



Whatever is in the intellect is first in the senses.

## Scholastic Realism

Universals do not depend entirely on particulars or on finite intellects for their being insofar as they exist eternally in the infinite divine intellect, as the archetypes according to which God creates the world.

# So long as someone understands

## BEOWULF

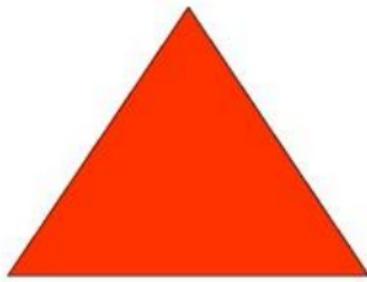
93

æfter Herebealde      heortan sorge  
weallinde wæg;      wihte ne meahte  
2465 on ðām feorhþonan      fæghðe gebētan;  
nō ðy ēr hē þone heaðorinc      hatian ne meahte  
lāðum dǣdum,      þeah him lēof ne wæs.  
Hē ðā mid þære sorhge,      þē him tō, sār belamp,  
gumdrēam ofgeaf,      Godes lēoht gecēas;  
2470 eaferum lǣfde,      swā dēð ēadig mon,  
lond ond lēodbyrig,      þā hē of līfe gewāt.  
  
Þā wæs synn ond sacu      Swēona ond Gēata  
ofer wid wæter      wrōht gemæne,  
herenīð hearda,      syððan Hrēðel swealt,  
2475 oððe him Ongenðeowes      eaferan wāran,  
fōme fyrdhwate,      frēode ne woldon  
ofer heafo healdan,      ac ymb Hrēosnābeorh

*Mourning for Heribald,  
old Hrēðel died (Beowulf  
is still speaking)*

From squiggles to symbols

## Derived aptness of symbols



triangle

三角形

(sānjiǎoxíng)

Both convey the universal, but the shape more aptly does so.

## Considerations

- ‘Real’ has at least two senses — out there, and in the mind.
- ‘Real’ in the infinite mind is the primary sense, out there and then in my mind is the secondary sense (Scholastic realism).
- Unity, truth and goodness are, at least in some sense, changeless. No obvious correlate for beauty can be found.

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