

Existence of Properties

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1 Introduction

In this essay I will try to represent and explain Plato's argument for why properties exist, and Quines reasoning for why properties does not exist.

2 Main body

Properties as we will examine here today are attributes of objects, physical or abstract. A common example of properties is that the surface of an object is red. The redness of the object is self evident, but not so where this property comes from or how it relates to other objects with the same property. In philosophical literature the word "property" is often used synonymously with "universals". That is to contrast the universal properties with particular instances of the property, aptly called "particulars". In classical philosophy(see platon) the universals were the perfect Form of that property, and the particulars the imperfect physical instances (note the uppcase f that signifies that which is greater than spatio-temporal forms).

2.1 Plato

One-over-many was not a term Plato used, but it has become the term for his premise of form over objects. For Plato something that was greater was more true or more real; we can see this in Plato's The Republic where a person who has only known the dim light on a cave wall see the outside world, and because the light outside was more brilliant he concluded that the outside was the real world and he was a fool to think the shadows on the cave wall was reality. Things in the real world can never be as perfect as what one might imagine. Take for instance geometric shapes, they are impossible to recreate perfectly physically. Virtue and just in people pales in comparison to the idea of complete virtue and justice. The world is not black and white, but grey. But people still inhibit aspects of these Forms. And it is a clear Form, therefore it is one Form over many. Plato exemplifies this eloquently in Parmenides by comparing the Form to a sail that has many people under it, each person takes up a little of the sail,

and together they make up all that has has this property. The Form does not cover the person as a whole, but rather just a part.

One of the major arguments against one-over-many is Wittgenstein's discussion of family resemblances. He uses the example of "game" property. Many games has something in common, a set of features, but the features are not transitive. Some features overlap and crisscross with with other games, but there is no fundamental feature that is shared by all games. Extrapolating this to universals, we may have to concede that a game property can vary in degrees of "gameness". As in "what is red?" when there are many shades of red. But this seems even worse as there is no definitive greatest/most true game property. With family resemblance our whole ontology of properties might fall down like a jenga tower.

2.2 Quine

The curriculum does not state Quine's philosophical alignment, but in my book he is a proto-possible world theorist. In that he believes in unactualized possibilities. For everyday conversation holding this view is uncommon. Quine uses as an example conversing about Pegasus. Now you don't believe in Pegasus, even the idea of a Pegasus, and the other party claims they don't believe in it either. But you cannot reprimand them for referring to Pegasus, because by referring to Pegasus you would be confirming it's unactualized possibility. In your mind Pegasus equates a nonbeing, but you cannot refer to that entity without granting the possibility that it might exist, just not in your current spatio-temporal plane.

It is possible to get out of this ditch by leveraging Russell's singular descriptions. Removing all names and referring by description alone. We have to rephrase the sentence to remove naming. Ex. "Pegasus does not exist" → "There exist no horse with wings that came from Greek mythology". This workaround feels a bit messy, but it allows us to preserve our ontologies with no compromise.

Onto universals. Quine holds that attributes for an object can be true, but not that universals exists. For if something is "red" there is nothing such as "redness" that can explain this attribute, or "house" with "houseness" for that matter. Quine solves this by introducing bound variables. That is that there is something that can be related. A red house and a sunset has something in common. In the example "some dogs are white", you would assume that the sentence sneaks in "doghood" and "whiteness", but it's not, it's rather something that is bound to dog and white. For Quine ordinary sentences quantification of a set with certain attributes.

3 Conclusion

Both realist and nominalist approaches to solve universals are subpar. Realist are intuitive, but their arguments doesn't hold, while nominalist are unintuitive

with a unsatisfactory conclusion. The true approach in my opinion would have been a conceptionalist view. Everything we process comes from our mind, the world and our language.