

Reality, Being and Existence

Prof Whiston

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Assignment II

### An Enriching Experience

When it comes to metaphysics, we can safely say that the endeavor to understand reality is a never-ending journey. I embarked on this quest when I was 14 years old and now 20 years later, have reached this interesting pitstop in the form of “Reality, Being and Existence.” The course helped me get answers to many questions that kept me awake at night. On the other hand, my stance on few topics changed quite a bit and gave rise to new dilemmas. With the help of this essay, I want to summarize my new found understanding on topics like Forms, The nature of Reality and Free will. The essay will explain my stance on topics like Universals and Particulars and Realism. In addition, it will also give some insight into my indecisiveness in choosing between determinism and free will.

My re-education in metaphysics started with the very first chapter of the course explaining the difference between metaphysics and epistemology. Even though I have been reading philosophy and texts pertaining to metaphysical and epistemological arguments from many years, I never truly grasped the difference between the two. The course impelled me to do more reading to understand the difference and the overlap between the two areas. An interesting discussion on how we obtain knowledge of the world around us in the *Metaphysics and epistemology* forum was an eye-opener (Sher, “Limits of Knowledge as a Level of Consciousness”). The conclusion that beings on a lower level on evolutionary ladder, can have a

better access to understand certain things about reality than humans, led me to question the sensory dependency of our own existence. The metaphysical stance arising from the epistemological belief informed a lot of my reading later in the course (Pigliucci). Overall, the distinction between metaphysics and epistemology really provided clarity on approaching certain topics and make informed opinions instead of getting lost into tangential discussions.

Conceptually, I was aware of certain philosophical positions pertaining to things and the properties they possess, but formally learning about universals and particulars made me question my own understanding in a more logical manner. Starting with the concepts of *Forms* and the problem of *One over many*, I began developing a structured approach in understanding the distinction between objects and the properties. Also, it provided me the opportunity to understand how the concept of "[Forms] is one of those areas where epistemology and metaphysics overlap" (Reality, Being and Existence, ch. 3.4 [Book](#)). Though, I was familiar with allegory of cave (Cohen [Ref 3](#)), chapter 3 helped tie it with the concept of *Forms*. The idea of Forms being something outside space and time seemed ingenious but at the same time I found myself questioning the necessity of such a conception and I found myself disagreeing with the Plato's view.

Rejecting Plato's view does not mean that I implicitly agreed with Aristotle's idea on Forms. Reading D.M. Armstrong's work on universals really helped in providing a shape to all my muddled thoughts on the topic. Pondering over uninstantiated universals was the mental exercise that finally provided some direction in understanding the concept. My personal take on the overall topic took a coherent form with the help of the *Function of Form* discussion thread in *One over many* forum where we discussed that Forms seem like an artificial attempt to simplify our understanding of the world and make sense of it. "We categorize things, not

because these categories themselves necessarily exist but because it helps us navigate the world" (Damian, "Function of form" [Book 2](#)). I am committed towards reading more philosophical arguments pertaining to universals and particulars, but for the time being, I do not see myself as a believer of Plato's heaven.

Chapter 5 was a big turning point in the course for me as it re-introduced the topic of realism to me. D.M. Armstrong's essay propelled me to read about Transcendent Realism and Immanent Realism and examine my own ideas on realism and idealism in a new light ([Gracia, 60-67](#)). When I started reading philosophy, I was very much influenced by the philosophy behind the movie Matrix and the brain in the vat argument (Marshall, Hickey [Phil Matrix and Brain Vat](#)). Both Matrix and the Brain in the vat support the view of the reality being mind dependent. Bolstering the view is the Copenhagen interpretation of Quantum Mechanics which talks about an observer dependent conception of reality (Faye). It won't be incorrect to say that I was an idealist during my early years into philosophy. However, there was always an unease in accepting certain views associated with idealism like panpsychism and the non-existence of things when unobserved. I knew of the successes of physical theories in describing the material world and an outright rejection of realism and physicalism seemed illogical to me as the time passed by. I was in search of a viewpoint that can take the learnings from both idealism and realism and present a more unified picture. This is where my newfound understating of realism came into play.

Chapter 5 and 6 really helped me understand how I can be a realist and still understand concepts not definable in a realist sense. In other words, "the fact that you are non-realist about moral values does not mean, however, that you must be a non-realist about (say) the existence of tables and chairs!" (Reality, Being and Existence, ch. 5.2 [Book 3](#)). While thinking about

the primary and secondary properties and their interpretation in a realist sense, I came across, what I believe, the most philosophically satisfying discussion of the entire course. The idea that the rose has a “potential” of being red in the darkness is probably the view I have been searching for from many years ([Damian, “Potentially red?” Book 4](#)). It is not that the rose possesses redness or the redness is created by the observer’s mind but a third view of the “potential” that appealed to me immensely. It also aligned with my own views on how I see the universe as an interplay of probability and possibilities, which I discussed in another discussion thread ([Sher, “Probability as the basic law of nature”](#)). My personal quest after this course is to apply the learnings from the discussions and the course material to understand reality beyond a simple realist or idealist explanations.

The biggest change in my viewpoint came from the chapters on free will and determinism. I was somebody who believed in compatibilism to a large extent before the beginning of the course (McKenna [Comp](#)). I had an intrinsic belief that there is a possibility to accommodate free will even in a deterministic world. But the discussions and readings made me reconsider my stance on the topic (reflected in Free will: Poll 2). Van Inwagen’s brilliant argument on the incompatibility between free will and determinism shook my core beliefs and forced me to look for a new approach to understand this puzzle. Eventually, I came up with my own take on the compatibility of free will and determinism in the *Free will* forum ([Sher, “Determinism and Probability” Book 6](#)) and this is probably my biggest take away from the course. I am going to do more research on my idea that free will exists only in the future and looking in the past we can only see deterministic outcomes. Though I can no longer say that I am a compatibilist anymore, but will remain eternally hopeful to find a new way to look at the puzzle of free will and determinism.

It is probably very difficult for me to truly explain the impact this course had on me in 1500 words but hopefully the essay can convey the important points succinctly. Whether it is my new found understanding of metaphysics, epistemology, forms, realism and idealism or the radical change in my viewpoint regarding free-will and determinism, the course and its teachings have played an important role in my philosophical quest to find an answer to everything.

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