

The "One and the Many" Question - Do You Fancy You Have Found Treasure of Wisdom In This? Do You Puzzle Your Friends And Even Your Dog About It? What In the World Is Socrates Talking About?

Post by "Cassius" of October 24, 2021 at 1:09 PM

We are essentially going to have to fill out what is unstated at that Wikipedia page: What was Epicurus' position?

Plato [edit]

Plato believed that there was a sharp distinction between the world of perceivable objects and the world of universals or *forms*: one can only have mere opinions about the former, but one can have *knowledge* about the latter. For Plato it was not possible to have knowledge of anything that could change or was particular, since knowledge had to be forever unchanging and general.^[8] For that reason, the world of the forms is the real world, like *sunlight*, while the sensible world is only imperfectly or partially real, like *shadows*. This *Platonic realism*, however, in denying that the *eternal Forms* are mental artifacts, differs sharply with modern forms of idealism.

One of the first nominalist critiques of Plato's realism was that of *Diogenes of Sinope*, who said "I've seen Plato's cups and table, but not his cupness and tableness."^[9]

Aristotle [edit]

Main article: Aristotle's theory of universals

Plato's student Aristotle disagreed with his tutor. Aristotle transformed Plato's forms into "*formal causes*", the blueprints or *essences* of individual things. Whereas Plato idealized *geometry*, Aristotle emphasized *nature* and related disciplines and therefore much of his thinking concerns living beings and their properties. The nature of universals in Aristotle's philosophy therefore hinges on his view of *natural kinds*. Instead of categorizing *being* according to the structure of thought, he proposed that the categorical analysis be directed upon the structure of the natural world.^[10] He used the principle of *predication* in *Categories*, where he established that universal terms are involved in a relation of predication if some facts expressed by ordinary sentences hold.^[11]

In his work *On Interpretation*, he maintained that the concept of "universal" is apt to be predicated of many and that singular is not.^[12] For instance, *man* is a universal while *Callias* is a singular. The philosopher distinguished highest genera like animal and species like man but he maintained that both are predicated of individual men.^[13] This was considered part of an approach to the principle of things, which adheres to the criterion that what is most universal is also most real.^[13] Consider for example a particular *oak* tree. This is a member of a species and it has much in common with other oak trees, past, present and future. Its universal, its oakness, is a part of it. A biologist can study oak trees and learn about oakness and more generally the intelligible order within the sensible world. Accordingly, Aristotle was more confident than Plato about coming to know the sensible world; he was a prototypical *empiricist* and a founder of *induction*. Aristotle was a new, *moderate* sort of realist about universals.

While I definitely don't think Epicurus agreed with Plato on this, I don't think he agreed with Aristotle either, and I think we're going to rotate back to that section on the origins of Epicurean empiricism from DeLacy:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?attachment/2283-pasted-from-clipboard-png/>

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2237-the-one-and-the-many-question-do-you-fancy-you-have-found-treasure-of-wisdom-in/?postID=14402#post14402>