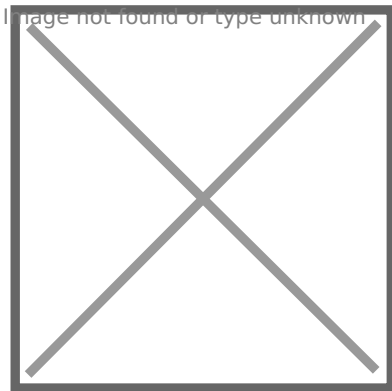


# David Sedley on Plato's Forms / Universals / "One Over Many" Principle

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2022 at 8:22 AM

[This should prove to be a useful introduction to the issues involved in Plato's forms, from someone whose judgment is at least usually trustworthy and friendly toward Epicurus.](#)



[Plato and the one-over-many principle](#)  
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Plato and the One-over-Many Principle

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*Forms and universals*

Plato's most celebrated doctrine is that of separated or transcendent Forms. Are these Platonic Forms universal? The question might be interpreted in at least three ways. If we start by assuming a very rough ontological distinction between

- A) token items, e.g. Socrates, Mount Everest, India,
- B) shared predicates - e.g. wise, large, country - common to many token items,

we may proceed to ask:

- 1) Do Forms belong to class B?
- 2) Are Forms, taken as an ontological class, identical with class B?
- 3) Were Forms postulated by Plato as universals, i.e. (very approximately) as his ontological characterization of class B?

I assume the answer to question (1) to be 'yes'. A Form is a one-over-many, a single kind or character, capable of being multiply instantiated. Forms are not, as Plato's critics have sometimes insinuated, they are special paradigmatic individuals. But it is no part of my purpose to argue that point here.

Question (2) is a bit harder to answer. In his late work, starting from the *Parmenides*, Plato seems to have favoured a broadening of the range of Forms. Even if we assume, as some evidence suggests, that he continued to exclude from them certain kinds of negatively defined attributes, such as 'beast' (= non-human animal), he may well be judged