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# Plato's Theory of Participation: Platonic Forms and the Making of Sense Objects

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Platonic Forms and the Making of Sense Objects  
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Sir David Ross remarks that "anyone who writes about the theory of Ideas is bound to state as precisely as he can what Plato's conception of the relation of Ideas to particulars really was" (Plato's Theory of Ideas, 226). He then discusses the topic of "transcendence vs. immanence", without, however, asking how transcendent Forms (or immanent Forms) might be participated in by sensibles. Ross thus addresses a crucial preliminary issue, but leaves off where some might think the problem of explaining participation begins. For the moment I will assume that Forms are "transcendent," or "separate" from sensibles. (By 'separate' I will mean that Forms are not only distinct from sensibles and not spatially present to them, but also that they do not in any way depend for their being on their worldly participants. Some justification for this assumption will be offered later on.) The problem I wish to discuss is that of how participation in a separate Form of F is responsible for a sensible F's being F, as Socrates claims it is at Phaedo 100c:

If anything else is beautiful besides Beauty itself (auto to kalon), it is beautiful for no other reason than that it participates in that Beauty (dioti metechei ekeinou tou kalou); and likewise in all cases. Do you agree that it is for this reason (tēi toiautēi aitiāi).

Socrates does not here ascribe efficient causality to the Forms, or to anything else. Nor does he appear to have in view a dependence on Forms as that to which some craftsman looks in creating sensibles. (This is a second important way in which sensibles depend on Forms. There the Form is akin to a final aitia of its participants.) Rather, Socrates seems to claim for Forms a role as "formal" aitia of sensibles, saying in effect simply that where 'F' stands for a Form, any particular F is F because there is some eidos F in which it participates. This claim is certainly not trivial, since it implies that there are Forms, and that it is by participation in Forms that particular F's are F. Given that there are Forms, however--and all parties to the discussion in the Phaedo emphatically agree that there are--the statement becomes considerably less controversial. So Socrates refers to participation in the Form of F as his "simple" but "safe" aitia of sensible F's being F.

The problem is that although separating Forms (in the strong sense described above) does not jeopardize their role as the craftsman's intelligible model, it seems to undercut their role as (formal) aitia. Separate Forms can serve neither as particular property instances present in sensibles, nor as Aristotelian forms informing matter (however Aristotelian forms are interpreted) nor as the repeatable universals of Aquinas and many others (including, perhaps, Aristotle) which exist in indifferently many individuals, nor as Anaxagorean "bits." The issue is stated succinctly by a recent critic:

The greatest difficulty of extreme realism is to explain how essences, entities independent of the actual world, can ever enter the actual world as characters of things. (A. Shimoney, "The Status and Nature of Essences," R of M 1, 1948, p.48).

But is not the proper response to this criticism already familiar? After all, interpreters as disparate as Cherniss, Vlastos and Owen agree that the statement "Forms are the characters sensibles have" expresses well what Plato's theory either was or should have been. For those of us who do view Platonic Forms of the middle dialogues as "platonic entities" of some sort (rather than as paradigmatic exemplifications of themselves), why is this formula not a tidy solution to the problem? Well, that position does (if taken in the intended sense) correctly steer one away from paradigm case interpretations and toward a platonistic

type distinction between sensible and intelligible F. So it is correct, as far as it goes. But regarding our particular problem, that formula only leaves off where Ross began. Are the characters that sensibles have separate from or immanent in their participants? And if the former, how are we to understand this "having" or "participating in" separate Forms?<sup>1</sup>

Due to space limitations I must deal very briefly with the bearing of Plato's image analogy on the problem. I believe the analogy is intended to illustrate a type distinction between separate abstract natures or essences and worldly exemplifications of these essences; it is not meant to illustrate a theory of Form as paradigm case or unqualified exemplar of being F, and sensible participant as non-paradigm case of being F. Beyond that it should be emphasized for present purposes that the counterpart to participating in a Form is an image's being of its model. A painting or reflection or dream image of a horse is not itself a horse at all, in the sense of participating the Form of Horse. With respect to being a horse, all it really is (as the Eleatic Stranger of the Sophist would put it) is an imitation, an eikon or eidolon of a horse. Or, it is the lowest "kind" of horse of Republic X, which, as Socrates says, is in fact not a horse, but only a phantasma of a horse. Nonetheless it is labeled 'horse' rather than 'cow' or 'couch', and is an (imitation) horse or a (phantasmic) horse -- recalling Phaedo 100c-- for no other reason than that it is an image of a horse. Its being an image of a horse is what "makes" it what it is, i.e., a (phantasmic or imitation) horse, rather than a cow, or just so much pigment spread about.

But while the analogy can help one see what Plato did or did not want to claim about participation and about the nature of Forms, it is not at all obvious that sensible and intelligible F can be related in an analogous way, or how the analogy should be applied to the case of worldly objects and "other-worldly" natures or essences (as opposed to paradigm exemplifications) taken as models.

Although I shall reestablish contact with the image analogy at the end of the paper, when I hope it will be clearer how we are to apply it to the case of participation, I would like to introduce first a slightly different analogy, suggested by Socrates' discussion of the just city in the Republic. The analogy is drawn to a system of city government in which various sorts of people and their functions, along with various political offices, their perquisites, responsibilities, and interrelations, are defined in a comprehensive charter. The various sorts status groups, offices, official acts, and so on defined in the charter may then be regarded "in the abstract" as so many governmental types or kinds. These may include, for example, the offices of mayor, dog catcher, policeman, and such kinds of official acts as appointing deputy mayors, making arrests, performing marriages, etc.<sup>1A</sup>

These governmental kinds are in one clear way independent of the people or actions that hold or perform them: there may be no dog catcher or justice of the peace, though one or both offices exist, vacant, in a given town. Even if the town never has a dog catcher but always has a mayor, the former office still exists just as surely as that of mayor, since it is equally provided for in the city charter. One might say that in establishing the office and describing the duties of dog catcher, the charter "provides the being and essence" (Rep. 509b) of that abstract governmental type. Thus the office itself is "separate", in that it depends not at all for its being on any worldly mayors or dogcatchers, but only on the charter. (Let us suppose the charter is independent, having been handed down by a god.) Why, then, is the mayor of the town mayor? Or, what "makes" the mayor mayor? One might cite an "efficient cause"--his or her having been elected mayor by the officially eligible voters, or appointed by the Town Council, or whatever. That leaves out what is more important for present purposes (but which

normally goes without saying), that M. is mayor simply because he holds the office of mayor. More generally, worldly mayors are mayors for no other reason than they hold the office of mayor. This is "simpleminded" in the same way as Socrates' "safe" aitiai. But it is non-trivial in the same way, too, as it presupposes the existence of a type of office which people may hold. And of course the office holder will be "called after" the office he holds: holders of the office of Mayor are called (not 'office of mayor' but) 'mayor'; participants in the F-in-Nature or What-is-F are called (not 'F-in-nature', but) 'F'.

Still, this example may not seem to go far enough. For while M. is "made" to be mayor by holding that office, M. is also many other things: human, pale, musical, equal (in age, to the JP), just, etc. And there is no obvious way in which he is made to be these things by some counterpart to holding political office. But with the help of certain key Platonic assumptions about the Good and its relation to other Forms, I believe it can be shown that this example provides an accurate and fully generalizable model for understanding how participation in separate Forms makes sensibles be what they are. Raising the topic of the Good is something like opening Pandora's box. I hope to clamp the lid down on all but three related propositions. The first will be agreed to by virtually everybody (and is also, I think, true); the second is somewhat controversial, but has strong textual support; the third is, again, largely uncontroversial.

The first proposition is that the Good is separate from all sensible things. It is not located where they are, not contaminated by any admixture with them, and not dependent on them for being what it is. This seems to be one intended implication of Socrates' analogy to the sun in Republic VI, where the sun provides for the generation of living things but does not depend for its being on them. I will for the moment assume this first point without further comment, though we shall soon see part of Plato's reason for thinking the Good--and all other Forms--separate.

The second point is that Plato's Forms constitute a realm of "natural" essences restricted in population. (I.e., not every onoma, or every property of things, or every grouping of worldly things will correspond to a Form; some are only arbitrary aspects or parts of the world rather than natural ones.) That Forms are "in nature"--though not, of course, in the sensible world, to which some physikoi restrict the "realm of nature"--is explicitly attested. Forms of important opposites are located "in nature" at Phaedo 103b on the F-in-nature as opposed to the F-in-us and the things that have F. (Cf. the "cycle of opposites" argument, 69e-72e. The examples of increase and diminution, separating and combining, heating and cooling, waking up and going to sleep are all processes leading to natural opposites (some of which had been basic to "pre-Socratic" theories of nature). Socrates then asks whether there is a process to balance that of dying, or whether "nature will be lame in this respect", alla tautēi chōlē estai hē physis; 71e). Key Forms (the Just, the Good) are again placed "in nature" at Republic 501b. The Phaedrus and Statesman make clear, in their discussion and exercise of Platonic division, that the Forms turned up in proper division correspond to natural kinds of things or natural distinctions among things, as opposed to non-natural ones (see esp. Phaedrus 265e-266a, Statesman 262c-263c). And the notion of many Forms, at least, as natural kinds to be exemplified in the visible cosmos is central to the creation story of the Timaeus. The Sophist's introduction of a divine craftsman points in the same

direction. (It does not matter for this particular point whether the creator god of either dialogue is a literary fiction, or whether the Forms of the Sophist are separate.) Assuming that this demiurge works, like all Platonic craftsmen, with an eye to some eidōs, he will be looking to much the same natural kinds as the demiurge of the Timaeus. At 265c the Eleatic Stranger explicitly mentions, as examples of divine handiwork, animals (cf. Tim. 39c-40a), plants (Tim. 76c-77c) and inanimate bodies compacted beneath the earth, both fusible and non-fusible (for fusibles, Tim 58c-61c).<sup>1B</sup> Further testimony could be gathered from these and other dialogues. But I think it is clear that when Young Socrates describes Forms as 'models fixed in nature' (or 'in the nature of things', paradeigmata hestanaī en tei physei, Parmenides 132d) he is only making explicit a basic connection between two thoroughly Platonic conceptions of Forms (at least as they appear in middle dialogues)--one as the paradeigmata (models) of which worldly participants are images, the other as natural essences or types.

It is slightly more controversial that Plato consistently held a theory of natural Forms restricted in population. Republic 596a might seem to postulate a Form for every (general) onoma and so to contradict the Phaedrus and Statesman on this point. But Socrates' observation that "we customarily hypothesize one Form for every plurality to which we apply a common onoma" is, as others have pointed out, just as well regarded as a description of a usual procedure which would, in any controversial case, include further considerations. No further considerations (e.g., of naturalness) arise in that context because the particular example there (a couch) is a sort of thing with a clear function corresponding to natural needs of human beings. Indeed in that context Socrates will want an undisputed example of a Form to use in discussing the three "levels" of reality; to choose a controversial case would only be a distraction.<sup>2</sup>

Parmenides' remark in the Parmenides that in time Young Socrates will cease to worry about what people might think and will recognize Forms for even undignified kinds of things like mud, hair, and dirt (130c-e) does not imply that Socrates will eventually acknowledge Forms for every predicate. Parmenides' prediction is entirely in harmony with a restricted population of Forms, because the kinds mentioned, though they lack the glamour of a Beauty itself, are natural kinds. The natural function of hair is described at Timaeus 76c-d; dirt will be essential in many ways to the operation of the cosmos; and mud (or perhaps clay, pēlos) will be useful for brickmaking, doll making, pot making, and other things' (the Theaetetus lists these uses for varieties of pēlos and supplies their common logos, 147a-c). Thus in time Socrates will give due recognition to every naturally deserving kind, regardless of its standing in public opinion.

The Stranger's comments in the Sophist on the bathman's art and on the "motley" of business haggling carry the same suggestion. The former deserves recognition by the dialectician, who cares not at all that it may be undignified (227a-b). The latter is a class (eidōs) distinguishable by reason (as, of course, are the arbitrary, non-natural "parts" of the Statesman), but does not form any unified art, so will not be given a name by dialectic in the division of arts (225c; see also 224b). (There is more to be said about the evidence of the Sophist on this general issue, esp. about the parts of the Different. But adequate treatment of that issue would be rather lengthy, so is perhaps best left for discussion.)

So there would seem to be no good reason to question the limitation of Forms in the Phaedrus and Statesman to natural distinctions among things, or to suppose that Plato vacillated or changed his mind on that point.

The third point is that if the realm of Forms is restricted, then its population is determined in some manner by the Good itself. The only alternative is to suppose either that something other than the Good accomplishes this, or that

nothing at all does (perhaps it's just a matter of chance). I take it that for Plato the latter alternative is out of the question. And in view of his express view in the Republic that the Good provides the being and essence of the other Forms (kai to einai te kai ten ousian hup' ekeinou autois proseinai, 509b7-8) it appears inescapable that the population of Forms is determined by the Good rather than by something else.<sup>3</sup>

From these unassuming results some interesting things follow. For one, if the Good is separate from sensibles and if the Good is the provider and guarantor of the existence and nature of a restricted realm of Forms--then all Forms will be separate from, in the sense of independent of, their sensible participants. They will owe their existence to the Good itself rather than to any happenings in the sensible world, as our abstract governmental types owed their existence and nature to the (divine) city charter rather than to the activities of worldly legislators.<sup>4</sup> Or again, sensibles will not be an aitia of the Forms in which they participate.<sup>5</sup>

Plato's depiction of the cosmos as created in the image of an intelligible model allows one to view the separateness of Forms also from the vantage point of the sensible world. Because the relevant Forms are separate, one could say that it would be good to have a cosmos containing these kinds of things (these animals, plants, fusible metals) even if (per impossibile) the actual cosmos lacked some of these kinds. Here the kinds it would be good to have in the cosmos and their interrelations with one another are determined eternally, and independently of the actual state of any sensible realm.

The same could be said for the objectively determined excellence of cities and the natural virtues of individual human beings.<sup>6</sup> Each of these three sorts of thing--cosmos, city, and individual soul--has corresponding natural virtues and vices, and the character of such excellence and its natural corruptions are objectively and immutably determined by the Good itself rather than by anything that happens here below. This is perhaps Plato's most basic reason for believing in separate Forms (though it remains to be seen how this idea would apply to all sorts of Forms).<sup>7</sup>

We may also see now why this particular basis for the separateness and population of Form gives force to the sort of dependence on Forms as simple aitiai described earlier. This will be best seen through specific examples of sensibles and Forms of different sorts. A survey of different sorts of Forms--for artifacts, kinds of living things, "moral" Forms, basic opposites, mathematical and vowel Forms--will at the same time verify that the central picture of participation proposed here will apply over the entire extent of the intelligible realm.

Forms of artifacts are a relatively easy case. With regard, for example, to the pruning knives of Republic I, if there is a nature Tree Itself (or perhaps relevant subspecies thereof), there will be natural kinds of actions (e.g. pruning) pertaining to the proper care and nurture of trees of certain kinds, and natural kinds of artifacts suited to do those jobs. Under those conditions an appropriately shaped piece of metal is a pruning knife rather than just a piece of scrap metal. The fact that there is a functionally defined Form of Pruning Knife entails that to be a pruning knife just is to be a thing suited to do a type of job, or to serve a type of function that has a place in the natural order. And any sensible object can be that only if a) there is that natural type of ergon to be performed and b) the object's (corporeal) parts are so constituted and distributed that it is suited to perform that job. When those two conditions are met, the piece of metal will "participate in" the separate, intelligible Form of Pruning Knife "fixed in the nature of things."

The good city will be an especially important human artifact. Here the various offices, stations in life, or roles essential to its goodness are all objectively determined whether or not any earthly city ever measures up to perfection, or even includes members of all the kinds that would be represented in a good city. If anyone were to create such a city it would be the philosopher-king, moulding it with an eye to the Good and Just "in nature" (Rep. 501b). But again, even if no philosopher were to appear on earth, or none was ever made king, that would not alter the fact that a good city would include these kinds of craftsmen, those kinds of farmers and herders, this kind of ruling group, and so forth.

Various members of the community will then be what they are--guardian, shepherd, carpenter--because their abilities and actions are such as to fulfill some role represented in the natural order. As their type of contribution is essential for a good city, so they, considered as guardians or carpenters, essentially are makers of some specific, natural kind of contribution. Again, they can be makers of a natural sort of contribution only if, in the natural order of things, there is such a contribution or function to be made, and they have the skills and training to make it.

In general one may suppose that the kinds of artifacts (beds, tables, knives, shoes, houses, cloaks, shuttles, awls) and kinds of activities (weaving, ruling, piloting, building) that answer to natural needs of living things of natural kinds will be represented in the world of Forms and will have their own natural excellence, determined by the purpose or use for which they are produced or undertaken. As Socrates sums up the matter at Republic X, 601d:

And does not the excellence and beauty and correctness of every implement and living thing and action have to do with nothing other than the use for which each is made or naturally suited? 7A

It has already been indicated that kinds of living things have their place in the natural order. (In fact certain kinds of artifacts and actions have their place because they corresponded to needs of kinds of living things.) Accordingly, to understand the natural order of things--and to understand nature even in the narrow sense of 'phenomenal realm'--one must recognize this particular compaction of flesh, bones, and sinew as an embodiment of a kind or essence having a place in the intelligible realm. By contrast another fleshly creature must be recognized as a monstrosity not embodying any type included in the Intelligible Model on which the Demiurge modeled the cosmos.

Of course any such moon-calf will be something, if only a mass of bones, flesh, hair, sinew, etc., and even if only a composite of earth, air, fire, and water. To say that there is no Form of Mooncalf is not to say that mooncalves do not exist. Nor does the Eleatic Stranger's denial of a Form of Barbarian imply that there are no barbaroi. It is to say, rather, that mooncalves, as such, do not embody any nature having a place in the intelligible scheme for a good cosmos. Nonetheless there is a clear sense in which the moon-calf will be what it is only because it participates in appropriate natural Forms. It is easy to see that bones, flesh, hair, and sinew can be regarded as natural kinds, if there are Forms for men or dogs or things of which those are functional parts. Timaeus 73e-74b treats bone, flesh and sinew as the handiwork of god and discusses their natural functions. And as noted earlier, hair is one of the kinds that, according to "Parmenides," young Socrates will eventually come to appreciate as being a genuine Form along with the Just, Equal, etc. The natural purpose of hair is described at Timaeus 76c-d.

Thus it is reasonable to suppose that there are Forms for blood, bone, and many other parts of living things. If there are such Forms, then even the moon-calf would have to participate in some Forms to be what it is. From the point of view of mother nature the moon-calf is really nothing more than a freakish arrangement of organs of certain kinds. And that what makes it be that is the participation of various of its parts in certain natural, functionally defined Forms. Its parts will perform kinds of functions (locomotion, digestion, perception) necessarily performed in any optimal cosmos, but taken as a whole it embodies no type fixed in the natural order of things. The eternal model calls for organs of the sorts it possesses; but it does not call for organisms put together like that. This would be true even if several such things arose and were all called by the common onoma, 'moon-calf'.

Decending further, the various bodily organs of moon-calves will necessarily be composed in an appropriate way of earth, air, fire, and water. And these kinds of "elements" will certainly be guaranteed a place in the natural order. Obviously a good deal of planning and co-ordination is required to produce a sensible cosmos that will maintain a certain harmony of parts and an overall equilibrium while recycling itself for all time. To manage this feat requires, according to Timaeus, that there be four basic kinds of 'elements', that they occur in proper proportion to one another, that they come in a variety of sizes to provide for the various sorts of metals, liquids, etc., required by the overall economy and stability of the cosmos, that they be capable of undergoing transformations into one another, and, of course, that they be beautiful. As Timaeus realizes, microscopic regular solids responsible for the dynamis of sensible earth, air, fire, and water, are just the right thing for the job. Fire, for example, will play a multiplicity of roles in the turning of the seasons, the nurture of living things, the power of sight in sighted animals, etc. In this light the primary bodies are like artifacts and living things in that they occupy a certain well-defined place in the life of the cosmos, as the bearers or embodiments of kinds of "powers" called for in the Demiurge's cosmic model. At the same time, the several kinds of elementary geometrical Forms such as Line, Plane, Triangle, Solid, Pyramid involved in construction of the primary bodies must have a place in the intelligible realm. The Sphere will enter, among other reasons, as the kind of shape "fitting" for an all-inclusive cosmos, Timaeus 33b. (This last sort of case shows especially clearly that a Form's definition needn't be framed in terms of some natural work or function for it to secure a place in the realm of nature. More on this below.)

So far we have dealt with sorts of things that could be seen as "natural kinds" in a modern sense (kinds of living things) and seen how the idea of having a place in the natural order can be extended to artifacts, actions, the "elements," and certain geometrical types. But Plato's Forms "in nature" include the Greater, the Less, Beauty, Justice, Unity, Plurality, Similarity, Dissimilarity, Fast(er), Slow(er), and many others that will probably seem to us rather far removed from natural kinds. From an ancient point of view, however, basic opposites would in fact be primary candidates for "first principles of nature." In one way or another, primary opposites were, as Aristotle observed, basic to everyone's conception of nature (allowing, of course, for considerable variation in opinion as to which opposites were basic to what). Plato, aside from his platonizing of kinds of opposites, was only a limited exception to that general rule: to judge not only from the modest but important suggestions of the Phaedo noted earlier but also from the more sweeping claims of the Philebus, Plato at least considered the description of the (phenomenal) realm of nature in terms of opposites to be a useful complement to his less traditional geometrical analysis of sensibles in the Timaeus. (The two approaches are complementary rather than contrary; I do not discuss here the issue of which, if either, has priority.)



But even in the Timaeus some basic opposites will be required by the intelligible Model. In some cases they will correspond to intelligent purpose in much the same way as Forms for living things and artifacts. The use of the stars, for example, to distinguish and preserve all the parts of time (38c) will involve giving them speeds that are faster, slower, or equal to one another according to a complex plan. These relative speeds have to do also with the capacities of the world soul, and will presumably figure also in the operation of individual souls. And Timaeus' account of human physiology and life activities often appeals to functional heating and cooling, depletion and replenishment, growth and diminution, and so on.

In the Philebus Socrates emphasizes more broadly the role of opposites in securing an array of goods--e.g. in maintaining the health of individual lives, and in the proper turning of the seasons, which will depend on the alternation of greater and less between opposites such as hot, cold, wet dry, fast, slow (see esp. 25c, ff.). To the extent that living things of the Timaeus, the fair weather, health, and so on of the Philebus, or the realm of nature as a whole of the Phaedo consist of combinations of various opposites in certain proportions, these opposites, and requisite kinds of relations between them (e.g., greater, less, equal, unequal) will be as natural as the things they constitute.<sup>8</sup> And opposites having to do with the natural excellence or defectiveness of worldly items and of features of the cosmos as a whole (their beauty, ugliness, justice, injustice, strength, weakness) will from the first be central to a theory drawing basic connections (especially explanatory ones) between goodness and that which is in accord with nature. Thus various forms of excellence and their opposites, along with kinds of things essential to the realization of excellence, figure centrally already in the Phaedo (and Meno). These will secure a place in such a theory of the natural order even at a stage when many details of how goodness or excellence may be manifest in the world have yet to be worked out.

For the contemporary reader, one might better capture the broad range of natural Forms by speaking of "natural distinctions" among things, rather than of "natural kinds" of things. The naturalness of platonic divisions of living things and crafts would still be apparent, while the application to basic opposites such as the Equal, Fast, Soft, etc. might then seem (to us) more natural. But in any case, once one has gotten down to the level of primary bodies or of primary opposites (or of primary motions, a third all pervasive account of worldly things, proposed in Laws X) one can see that nothing that is anything can fall outside the range of participants in Forms. Everything will be "named after" some Forms, even if some of its onomata (e.g., 'moon-calf') do not correspond to any Form. Beneath the level of participants in Forms lies only the undifferentiated receptacle.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time this survey of Forms as paradeigmata fixed in the nature of things brings out a connection between all Forms and the Good. It has seemed to some readers of Plato that although Forms for living kinds, artifacts, and actions do have a direct connection to the Good (in that things of those sorts straightforwardly have some goodness or excellence), certain other Forms, such as vowel Forms and mathematical Forms do not have any particular connection to the Good.<sup>10</sup> But while it is true that some Forms (or participants in Forms) may show a connection to the Good that does not apply to other Forms, all Forms will have one common connection to the Good in that each Form is, as it were, one place or position in the natural (good) order of things.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is that Good of the Republic provides the being and essence of all Forms and their natural subdivisions, including Number, Even, Odd, Large, Fast, and Triangle, as well as Justice and Beauty, Shuttle and Man.

Accordingly, one might (to adapt another Platonic metaphor) view the entire realm of paradeigmata fixed in nature as the "language (or vocabulary) of nature" (or the "natural language") whose tokens are impressed in the receptacle as on a wax tablet. Anyone who properly understands nature will recognize certain sorts of things, or features of things, or distinctions among things, as tokens of certain natural types--will know that a given object or feature of the cosmos is an example of an Intelligible Kind having a place in the order of nature. To the Platonic observer of nature, various sensible features of the cosmos and the cosmos as a whole are not "just what we see" (Tim. 51c), but appear as exemplifications of intelligible natural types and must be sharply distinguished from features that do not embody or exemplify any nature or essence included in the realm of natural paradeigmata.

To suppose that there are no Forms is thus doubly objectionable. First, it deprives this world of its "meaning" (that is, in default of another basis for teleology). It is as though one were to somehow discover that there never was any such language as Linear A, and that those rows of orderly, apparently purposeful, and (let us pretend) beautiful marks on clay are not significant linguistic tokens, but only so many chicken scratches. Those marks would have no meaning of the sort previously assumed and sought for by linguists. Similarly many features and parts of our cosmos would no longer have any "higher meaning", as exemplifications of eternal natural types or essences. Thus to deny the existence of Forms is to abandon a fundamental Platonic objection to those who believe that nature works "spontaneously," without the guidance of wisdom.

On their assumption one might imagine many, perhaps infinitely many, different world orders arising in this or that corner of the universe during one stretch or another of time. And even if there were only one cosmos its construction would have nothing to do with the handiwork of god (Sophist, Timaeus) or the guidance of mind and wisdom (Philebus) bringing certain things about because it is better that way, or with goodness and the right binding things together (Phaedo 99c ). Such people, including some self-styled physikoi, have no inkling of the fact that the supposedly automatic works of nature, along with the works of human "arts and sciences" are alike "products of mind in accordance with right reason" (nou gennēmata kata logon orthon, Laws X, 890 ).

Second, denying the theory of separate Forms would (again, without some other basis for teleology) commit one to the view that, in a broad perspective, humans, shuttles, etc. do arise as the result of cosmic chicken scratches rather than of purposeful activity by craftsmen human or divine. (Here they in effect deny the role of Forms as final cause.) Plato (like Aristotle) would consider it quite fantastic that such things as human beings--beings having themselves the intelligence to perform certain advantageous actions, master arts and sciences, and produce various implements--could have arisen blindly, spontaneously, or "by chance and necessity." Similarly, most observers will consider it incredible that certain marks on clay tablets could have gotten there by accident, rather than as the inscriptions of some language user.

A less serious error would be to acknowledge the roles of goodness and reason, but to fail to perceive correctly which parts of the cosmos, or which distinctions among things in the cosmos do embody or image natural essences and which do not. In the more vivid figure of the Phaedrus one must carve nature at the joints, not hack off portions like a clumsy butcher.

By contrast, the true student of nature will both map the various relationships among Forms and appreciate their roles as formal and final aitiai of things in this world. He will realize that many features of the world are embodiments of types of things included in the intelligible scheme for a good cosmos. And on the most general level he will "simply and safely" assert that they are what they are-- members of some natural kind of living thing, corporeal objects suited to perform some natural sort of work or function, possessors of some type of dynamis, or some kind of opposite essential for a good cosmos (or a corresponding "bad" dynamis or opposite) and so on--for no other reason than that they participated in some natural essence, or Form.

To return to the image analogy: given 1) that the analogy is intended to illustrate a Platonistic theory of abstract, separate essences and worldly exemplifications of those essences; 2) that the models imaged are exclusively natural essences, or paradeigmata fixed in nature, and 3) that an image's being of its model--what we might call an "intensional" relation--is what "makes" it be an (image or imitation) F or G, one could say that the true student of nature is the one who knows that many features of the world are images of intelligible natural models and who can distinguish those features which do image some such model from those which do not. Thus on the interpretation of participation urged here there could be no better capsule description of the theory than Young Socrates' at Parmenides 132d-e.

FOOTNOTES

1. Nor is it a solution to point out that 'participation' is a primitive term of the theory of Forms. This, too, is true, as far as it goes. But that does not imply either that the nature of participation is clear, or that we need not try to understand it by whatever means present themselves. (On the contrary!) The truth, and disarming familiarity of the "having vs being" formula can easily combine with the notion that 'having' or 'participation' as a primitive term to produce a false sense of security.

1A Cf. John Rawls: "An institution may be thought of in two ways: first as an abstract object, that is, as a possible form of conduct expressed by a system of rules; and second, as the realization in the thought and conduct of certain persons at a certain time and place of the actions specified by these rules." A Theory of Justice, Cambridge, 1971, p. 55 ).

1B. The same holds for fire, water, etc. (Soph. 266b, Tim. 51b, 53b-55c).

2. In fact the argument just given may be irrelevant (and unnecessary). It may be that the passage should be translated not in the usual way (along the lines given above), but as follows:

"for we are as you know, in the habit of assuming [as a rule of procedure] that the Idea which corresponds to a group of particulars, each to each, is always one, in which case [or: and in that case] we call the group, or its particulars, by the same name as the eidos".

If this translation is correct "all that is said is that if there is an Idea that Idea is indiscerptibly one, and must not be divided or multiplied" (J.A. Smith, CR 31 (1917) pp. 69-71 ). Considered in its own context, in which Socrates goes on to argue that there could be only one Form of Couch, Smith's translation is highly plausible. (Thank to Alexander Nehamas for this reference.)

3. This view is shared by many commentators who disagree over exactly how the Good is related to Forms in general. The two main lines of interpretation are first, that the Good is itself one distinct intelligible entity among others, though somehow presupposed by all the others, and second, that the Good is not a

further intelligible object in addition to Justice, Equality, etc., but is identical to the complete system of Forms. The position adopted here is neutral between these two readings. For discussion of those two views, see A.E. Taylor, Plato: The Man and His Work, London, 1926, 286ff., W.H.B. Joseph, Knowledge and the Good in Plato's Republic, Oxford, 1948, esp. Ch. 3, I.M. Crombie (see ref., n. 4 below), T.E. Irwin, Plato's Moral Theory, Oxford, 1977, p. 225f. (Irwin draws an interesting possible application of this issue to ethics), J.C.B. Gosling, Plato, London, 1973, esp. 66ff., Nicholas White, A Companion to Plato's Republic, Indianapolis, 1979, p. 78ff. White's discussion of the issues is brief but lucid and substantial. For a much fuller treatment of many questions concerning the Good and its relation to other Forms, see G. Santas, "The Form of the Good in Plato's Republic", read before SAGP, Dec. 1977. I agree with Santas that the Good is responsible for the categorial (or "ideal") properties of Forms (a point not at issue here), but disagree when he denies that the good will account for their "proper attributes" (p.5). I have just argued in effect that the Good is so responsible; I try just below to give this view more direct intuitive force.

Notice also that if Socrates believed that the natures of justice, goodness, piety, et.al. were objectively determined regardless of whether there were any examples of justice or piety in the world, then Plato's separation of Forms is Socratic in spirit, even if Socrates himself supplied no particular ontology. (My thanks for this intriguing observation to Gail Fine.)

4. I.M. Crombie sees clearly the connection between the separateness of Forms and the role of the Good as guarantor of their being and intelligibility. (An Examination of Plato's Doctrines, London (1963) Vol. I, 155ff.). So far as I know, Crombie does not make the main point under development here about the manner in which participation in Forms makes sensibles what they are.

5. The sort of independence described here is consistent with the fact brought home forcefully by Michael Rohr ("Empty Forms in Plato," Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, 1979) that some Forms must be instantiated at least some of the time. (Rohr actually argues for a much stronger version of a Platonic principle of plenitude

and makes some trenchant criticisms of Lovejoy's treatment of that topic in Plato.) According to the Timaeus, goodness itself requires that the cosmos contain representatives of all the kinds of living things (39e). So in some sense of 'cannot', some Forms (at least) cannot be permanently empty. Thus commentators' frequent characterization of separateness in terms simply of "possible permanent emptiness" is not, as it stands, adequate. But that is not to say that even in such cases the Form depends upon its sensible participants, or that they are an aitia of it. In such cases, participants may be said to depend on F itself and on the Good (and on other factors, such as a craftsman and a "medium of becoming"), while F itself will still depend only on the Good (and perhaps relevant relations with other Forms) for its being. Similarly, it may be necessary that at a certain hour on a sunny day Socrates will cast a shadow --that one cannot have Socrates without a shadow. But while the shadow depends on Socrates and on the sun, Socrates depends on the sun (as in Plato's example in Republic VI) but not at all on his shadow.

6. Socrates affirms at the end of Republic IX that even if no city such as they have described should ever exist on earth there is a paradeigma of it "laid up in heaven" (592a-b). Judging from what had been said earlier, the paradeigma will determine the specific kinds of inhabitants, kinds of activities, and kinds of responsibilities (guardians, auxiliaries, carpenters, etc., and their functions) that must be provided for in any just city.

7. To say that the Good determines the population of Forms is not to deny the existence of "bad" Forms (Injustice, Ugliness, Disease, etc.) If there are such Forms one may say that the natural intelligible order will include Forms not only for the natural excellence of animals, plants and artifacts, but also for the natural opposites of those excellences (e.g., disease, injustice, weakness). One might suppose on epistemological (or other) grounds that the "bad" opposites will necessarily accompany the "good" ones. This is not to say that it is in itself good that the bad ones be exemplified in the cosmos. On the contrary, there will be "good" arts with the aim of correcting, removing, or preventing those natural types of corruption, and instating a natural excellence (e.g., medicine, and justice as conceived narrowly in the Gorgias as a psychic corrective corresponding to medical treatment of a diseased body. Cf. The Sophist's arts of bodily purgations for the purpose of separating the worse from the better, 226d,ff). Unfortunately, there are also arts whose effect is to bring about corruption (as, e.g., sophistry results in deformity of the souls of its pupils and, apparently, disease in the souls of its teachers (see Sophist 227d-228e).

7A. Obviously not every use of a natural artifact or every performance of a "natural act", or every creation of a new member of some natural species will be good. These things must be done, as Plato emphasizes, as the right time, in the right way, in the appropriate context. The abstract natures of artifacts and living things will not give us that sort of guidance. (For that, one needs knowledge of such Forms as the Just or the Good.) The model will tell us, however, that certain kinds of things must be found in the optimal cosmos, and that others would not be missed.

8. For these and other reasons Numbers and certain types of distinctions and relations between them will find a place--in fact, a ground-floor position-- in the order of natural essences. Recall also that (harmonic ratios of) numbers are essential for making the world (and human beings) rational, a vital step in producing a good cosmos. For this purpose the Forms Being, Sameness, and Difference are also essential (Timaeus 35a). Numbers will also be essential to the mastery of most "natural" arts and sciences. But in fact it is obvious that Numbers, Being, Sameness and Difference will all be presupposed by any realm, intelligible or sensible, natural or non-natural.

9. Some interpreters will still find all of this unsatisfactory, objecting that it does not make Forms responsible for the "very existence" of sensibles. Thus Ed Lee urges that sensibles are the result of "interaction" between Form and receptacle. ("On the Metaphys of the Image in Plato's Timaeus", Monist 50 (1966), p. 354. I cannot do justice here to his very detailed treatment of the relevant passage of the Timaeus.) I have also heard it said that Forms "infuse" sensibles. Other readers have made Forms into efficient causes of sensibles. Lee rightly denies that Forms are efficient causes, but does not explain how separate Forms can interact with the receptacle (since they "neither receive anything else into themselves...nor enter into anything else anywhere", Tim. 52a). All these positions try to make separate Forms do things they cannot do and which they are under no obligation to do. One might say the Form is (indirectly) responsible for the "very existence" of a sensible in cases in which it serves as the model of which some human or divine craftsman creates an image. In that important role it does figure in the very coming into being of a sensible. But that involves no interaction of Form with the receptacle, but rather a craftsman who looks to the Form in creating some object.

10. G. Santas goes even further, asserting that without (regress-prone) self-predication there is no way to understand the Good's being the source of the being and essence of any other Forms ("The Form of the Good...", p. 16).

11. If memory serves, I am indebted to Michael Rohr for this formulation of the point.