

The Beyond

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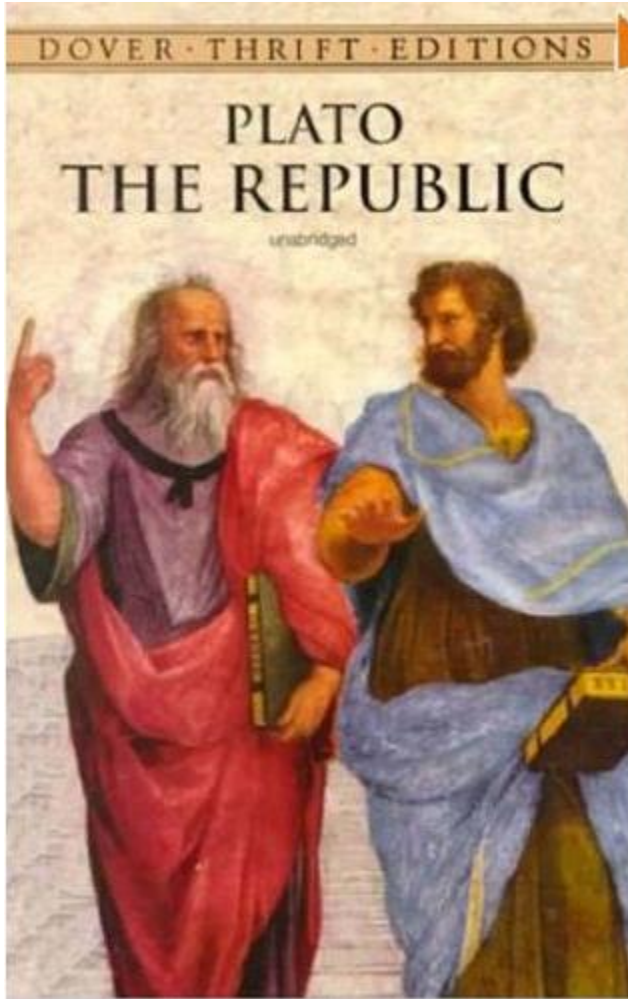
*Is This the
Real World?*



The Republic (380B.C.)

Plato

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Table of Contents

Editorial

Ontology and the Real World.....4

Philosophy in the News

Neanderthal Clone Possible in the Future.....5

The Materialistic Reality of Consciousness.....6

Materialistic Knowledge.....9

The Meaning of Life.....10

A Brief Discussion of God.....11

Letters to the Editor.....12

Film Review

Shutter Island (2010).....14

Platonic Idealism.....15

Comics

Lost in the Many Realities.....17

Editorial

Ontology and the Real World

Ontology, or the nature of reality, is something that has been debated for many millennia. A central debate is what the universe is made of. Is the universe made up of the laws of science, in which case it is materialist? Is the universe simply made up of ideas in our minds, in which case it is idealist? Or is it both, where ideas and the laws of science are both real, in which case it is dualist?

The debate about the nature of reality in the Western world began in Ancient Greece. Democritus proposed the idea that all matter is comprised of small particles called atoms, and interactions between atoms were responsible for everything in nature, including consciousness. Antiphon and Plotinus proposed that the mind is responsible for the flow of time and the perception of space, and thus the universe exists only in the mind. These were the beginnings of materialism and idealism. Toward and into the Middle Ages however, idealism grew and spread, while materialism did not. The main reason for this was the arrival of Christianity to Europe. As Christianity took hold, the majority of the Western world converted to Christianity. Christianity preached idealism, and because of the power of the Church in Europe, those who went against it were punished. Because a materialist world offered little room for God and souls, religious idealism dominated the Western world. Rational thought was not common in philosophy in the Middle Ages, as anything that went against Christianity was considered heresy. As a result, materialism did not develop much beyond what it was in Ancient Greece.

In the 16th century, science began developing again in Europe, and many doctrines of the middle ages were thrown out. However, in this era great philosophers arose, including French philosopher Rene Descartes. Descartes was a strong supporter of idealism, and made it even stronger a theory. He stated that he knows that he himself is real, as to be able to think, he must be real, but he has no reason to believe that he is not being deceived by his senses. Meanwhile, most of the scientists of this era were still Christian, and did not oppose idealism.

In the modern ages idealism still seems more widely accepted than materialism, but materialism is an accepted theory. Materialists support the scientific model of the universe, and argue that everything in our scientific model allows all of the phenomena that we can observe. There are two major arguments against materialism. One argument is the fact that there is no way to explain consciousness. Why do humans have a consciousness when robots do not? The other argument is from religious bias. Most of the human population is still religious, and many refute materialism because it contradicts God. Idealists argue that everything that we know or understand has been acquired by our senses, and our senses are easily able to deceive us. They also argue that it is our soul that is responsible for our consciousness and morality, and religious idealists argue that our souls are our connections to God. However, there are many arguments against it. One such argument is that there is no logical evidence for it. Most of the arguments for it rely on the logical assumption that we actually are being deceived. Also, why should such a logical scientific model not be true? Dualism has become probably the most believed

theory of ontology. It offers the scientific logic of materialism, and the religious presence of idealism. However, dualism does not explain the interaction between the mind and the soul well, as according to science the brain is responsible for logic and emotion, which would either reduce the soul almost to nothing, or contradict the scientific model.

This issue of *The Beyond* focuses on ontological theories. In particular, it focuses on my ontological theory of materialism. The main article “The Materialistic Reality of Consciousness” argues for materialism, and as any good materialistic theory must, explains consciousness as part of the theory. The three following articles discuss God, ethics, and knowledge and the implications that they face from a materialistic world. Plato’s theory of ontology is also discussed, as well as some interesting news that relates to ontology.

Philosophy in the News

Neanderthal Clone Possible in the Future

Scientists have recently announced that they have mostly pieced together the DNA of a 4000 year old Greenlandic man. This is a great scientific accomplishment that would not have been possible even a few years ago. However, with this new ability to piece together DNA, scientists are looking at something even more advanced. Scientists are attempting to rebuild the DNA of a Neanderthal Man. Neanderthal Man is a species either of humans, or closely related to humans which is now extinct. Some modern humans are partly descendent from Neanderthal Men. Scientists are getting closer to the completion of the project.

Once scientists have the genetic code, they will attempt to go one step further. They will attempt to create a clone of a Neanderthal Man. Neanderthal Men have been extinct for more than 30,000 years, but soon they may no longer be. If they can isolate a human cell and make millions of changes inside of it, they can have a Neanderthal cell. Using a stem cell, a colony of Neanderthal cells could be produced, which could be made into an entire Neanderthal Man. Similar processes have been performed before to clone other animals, such as cows.

While there are still many challenges to be overcome, it is still something that could be done in the near future. With it, a lot of philosophical questions are raised. Is it ethical? What kind of ethical rights is the Neanderthal entitled to? Would the Neanderthal Man have a consciousness? This last question is related to this issue of the magazine, and so it is the one that this article will look at. Ethics are an interesting and complex issue, but will not be dealt with here.

Would a cloned Neanderthal Man be conscious? This can be broken into two questions: Because a Neanderthal Man is not exactly human, would a Neanderthal Man be conscious? Would a clone be conscious? There is a lot of debate as to whether or not non-human animals have a consciousness. Those who say yes would then undoubtedly

say that Neanderthals would also be conscious, but what about those who say no? Where is the line drawn between human and non-human? Because Neanderthal Men are so close to being human, and often considered human, likely they would be considered to have a consciousness by most people. This is a very good question for those who doubt animal consciousness.

Most would likely consider a Neanderthal Man to be conscious, but what about a cloned Neanderthal man? This question is a lot more divided in opinions. Most materialists would argue that a clone is scientifically an exact replica of the original, and so it should have as much of a consciousness as the original. Idealists however see it differently. Some idealists would believe that a clone, because it is as much alive as the original, would be conscious. However, many idealists, especially religious ones, including Christians, would argue that souls cannot be artificially cloned, and therefore a clone would not be conscious. This would be a very interesting debate for idealists to have.

Information from: <http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2010/02/10/scientists-clone-neanderthals/>

The Materialistic Reality of Consciousness

In our models of the universe, we rely on a certain principle to be true: the Principle of Uniformity. The Principle of Uniformity states that **if a set of laws applies at one point in space and time, the same laws will apply uniformly throughout space and time.** However, this is an assumption; we can never prove it to be true. We can perform as many experiments as we want at as many points in time and space as we want to attempt to prove any law to be true, but we can never actually prove it through experimentation definitively. We can test the law at an amount of times approaching infinity, and get the same results every time, in which case we would get a probability as close to 1 (guaranteed fact) as we want. However, there is a possibility that there is an outer cause at play in determining the laws. This cause could have its own laws, laws which we can never detect. So we have to consider a new principle, the Principle of Isolation, which states: **For a system completely isolated from an observer, the observer cannot in any way determine the odds of any laws or states being true in that system.** So there could be another system which controls the laws of our universe, but we cannot observe that system except as the laws of our universe. Thus we cannot determine any kind of odds as to whether or not there actually is such a system, or if there is such a system, whether it will ever change the laws of our universe. So the laws which, by our knowledge, are almost 100% certain may in fact not be true by a probability in which we can never calculate.

This brings us to the concepts of materialism, idealism, and dualism. Materialism is the idea that humans possess no spirits; that the world is real and we are just a process within it. Idealism is the idea that we are real, and we are souls that are being deceived into thinking that we have bodies and observing the world; the world is but an illusion and is

not real in idealism. Dualism is a combination of the two, in which the world is real, but so are our souls.

By the Principle of Isolation, it is currently impossible to prove whether the world is materialist, idealist, or dualist. We cannot even calculate the odds of any of the three schools of thought being true. However, we can say materialism to be more likely to be true by any odds that we are capable of calculating.

Scientifically, while we do not understand everything, we have a very effective model of how the universe works. Despite areas still missing in our model, there is nothing which makes the model un-functional, and nothing that causes critical errors in it. Similarly, every time the model has been tested, it has held. While this does not, as discussed earlier, guarantee the model to be true, it does provide a perfect counter argument against any arguments for idealism, as it explains, or does not fail to explain, every brain process which causes thoughts and emotions. Also in favour of materialism is the fact that physical processes, such as trauma or circulatory problems, can reduce consciousness. Materialistically this is perfectly explainable, but idealistically it would imply that consciousness is a deception. Materialism thus seems more likely, but we cannot know whether or not it is more likely. However, the odds of there being more than the physical universe are outside of our ability to calculate, and therefore from our point of view outside the realm of mathematics, and so in all ways that we can reason materialism is far more reasonable. And, even if it is not true, anything that defies the materialistic world is outside of our observable system, and as far as we are capable of reasoning, not real.

So in a materialistic world, what is consciousness? We have no souls, and everything that occurs in our brain can be explained by a scientific model. Consciousness itself is not a factor in this model; it is only a result. By the Principle of Isolation, consciousness does not affect the universe in anyway, and so to us is not a real thing. So we can call consciousness to be a pseudo-result of a process (i.e. our brain). When we talk about consciousness then, we are just talking about a complex process, which in our brains manifests as thinking and emotion.

Is there any reason why we are conscious and something less complex, such as an electron, is not? No. Everything must have some level of consciousness, regardless of how basic that consciousness is. It seems hard to imagine an electron being conscious, but its consciousness is only very simple, much simpler than ours. An electron only knows one thing, its wavefunction (which describes its entire state in one vector). It doesn't reason anything, and the only decision making that it does is following the simple forces moving it (like a human making an instinctive reaction without any ability to act differently). Similarly, a human is a collection of conscious electrons, all of which interact to form a much more complex consciousness. A nation is a collection of humans, and therefore has an even more complex consciousness.

Perhaps the best way to understand consciousness with other entities is with the concept of mysticals. Before defining mysticals, we shall consider an example. Imagine that we are looking at a green light. Scientifically, it can be described as a wave of a certain

frequency radiating away from its source, or a stream of particles of a certain energy level radiating from the source. But, when our brain receives it, we must interpret it in some way. We are unable to interpret it as vibrating photons, so we interpret it in the most basic way that we can, as green light. And so the colour green can be called a mystical. A mystical is the most basic interpretation of an experience. It is something that cannot be described by the one experiencing it; it can only be compared with another mystical. Everything that we experience is ultimately comprised of mysticals. For other entities, mysticals are different. For example, for an electron the capture of a green photon is a mystical, while for a smoke detector, the reception of smoke is a mystical. The following discussion about quantum physics will help to explain the cause of mysticals.

Mysticals and Reality

Until it was overtaken by quantum physics, classical physics was the main way in which scientists described the universe. Classical physics explains the interactions between objects, the dynamics of electricity, and most of what we observe in simple mathematical models. However, in the 20th century it was overtaken by quantum physics.

The theory of quantum physics, which is an integral part of our model of the universe, has two fundamental principles, those of probability and of quantization. According to the theory, everything exists at fixed energy levels, and cannot exist between. For example, an electron can have an energy level of $n = 1$, or $n = 2$, but not $n = 1.5$. This is called quantization. The other major principle, probability, says that it is impossible to know the exact position and momentum of any particle at the same time. So there is always an unknown variable, and so the variable becomes a collection of probabilities. For us this is only really a mathematical interpretation; on a large scale, classical physics appears to be just as accurate. However, classical physics is just an approximation of quantum physics, and quantum physics is more accurate, and on a smaller scale there is a big difference between the two. Quantum physics always wins out in its predictions.

However, we do not see the “grainy” quantization and the “blurry” probabilities. We only see the approximation of these things: we see smooth and solid things that can be anywhere, but are always definitive. Why? There are two reasons. One is that the difference between allowed energy levels is very small, far less than a billionth of the energy of a crawling ant. Similarly, the average range of possible locations in which a particle can be is far less than a billionth of a millimetre. These are both far too small for us to observe. The other reason is that there are limitations on what our brain can observe. Down to the lowest level, our brain exists as a collection of particles which are controlled by quantum physics. When we observe something, we observe it in context to our brain. The most basic observations that we can make are not able to be such low level, as it takes large areas of our brain to interpret any observation. Thus we see things as less complex, as the base context for what we observe is much more complex. This restriction is what makes things into mysticals. We may be able to understand them mathematically, but we can not directly observe these mathematics. We can only observe what we are restricted to observe by the level at which our brains function. If we consider the example of the smoke alarm, the smoke alarm “smells” the smoke and “feels” itself sounding, but

it does not make any meaning of it. This is because the detection of smoke activates its whole processing mechanism as one action.

This is a philosophical description of reality, not scientific. Some things mentioned here, such as the Principle of Isolation, an electron's wavefunction, and the nature of light are scientific, but the general concept of materialism, consciousness, and experience are not. Scientifically, the universe may be materialist, or it may not, but, by our knowledge, there is no way that we can know. What's outside of our observable realm is unobservable and non-scientific, so is philosophical. As far as we can be concerned then, we can consider any philosophical view to be true, but at the same time we can consider any one to be false. The scientific unknown connects to the universe in every way, but as far as we know is not real.

Materialistic Knowledge

From a materialistic viewpoint, what is knowledge? Knowledge is considered by many to be a belief which is proven true. However, all that we can ever prove to be true is that we have received information. Let us consider an example. Every year in the night sky, we observe the constellation Orion rising a few hours after sunset in late summer. Every day it rises four minutes earlier. Does that mean that we know that it will rise again? Do we know that the stars will stay at fixed distances from each other, and that the constellation will not change shape? Do we even know that our past observations were not a deception? No, we do not. So then what do we know? We know that, whatever caused it, we have made these observations.

We can then attempt to define knowledge as information that is representative of something. All that we know is this information that we possess. Whether or not this information represents a truth, we know the information. However, we are not the only thing capable of possessing knowledge. From a materialistic viewpoint, we might be far more complex than, say, a book, but just like a book we are but a physical entity. We store knowledge as an alteration of brain tissues, while a book stores knowledge as ink on a set of paper. We might make other connections with the knowledge which the book cannot, but nevertheless the book possesses knowledge of whatever subject is printed in the book.

Let us then define knowledge as *a physical phenomenon resulting from another phenomenon*. Knowledge of a phenomenon is a phenomenon which results from the initial phenomenon. To know something is simply to possess knowledge, where the knowledge is the only thing which is known. So for example, a sound wave caused by a clapping hand is knowledge of the hand clapping, even if the sound wave could have been caused by something else. Anything that intercepts this sound wave will have knowledge of the hand clapping, even if they do not know that the hand clapped. All that they will know is that they heard the hand clapping.

If a rock is present, the sound wave will hit the rock and transfer energy into the rock. Thus the rock will possess knowledge of the hand clapping, and will know that it is itself vibrating but it will not make any rational thought as to what is happening (any thoughts that are anything like ours).

Briefly, this brings us to the concept of logical interpretation. The rock does in a sense think rationally about what is happening, because the rock, just like our brains is a set of particles which all communicate information with each other (in a rock, if one particle vibrates, inadvertently most of the others will collide with it, or collide with particles that have collided with it... and the energy will transfer). Materialistically, there is no way to define the rock as more or less ordered than our brain, so the rock interprets the information in a way that the rock considers logical.

The Meaning of Life

What is the meaning of life? This is a question often asked by many people. Many people want to live for a cause, but first need to find a cause to live for. However, in a materialist universe we cannot have a divine purpose. There is no divinity in the universe, and we are just beings that arose from chaos. We certainly have desires, and they can be satisfied to bring happiness to us, but any meaning that we make for our lives is subjective.

In the 19th century, English biologist Charles Darwin created the Theory of Evolution. According to the Theory of Evolution, we evolved from chaotic processes. By a lightning strike, or similar catalyst, a simple amino acid formed. A very basic biological process started with it. This process was able to create more acids, and respawn itself with more processes. Survival of the fittest took place, in which the processes fought each other for resources and the stronger processes survived and the weaker ones ceased. A process would produce clones of itself, with a few slight variations. The stronger variations survived, and clones of these were produced. The stronger ones of these then survived, and the biological processes got stronger and stronger. Complexity was an asset in survival, and so the processes got more complex, to the point where a simple organism resulted. Survival of the fittest continued, and stronger organisms evolved, and these were the ones that survived. Bacteria formed, plants formed, basic animals formed, more complex animals formed, and eventually humans formed. Humans began grouping together to form societies. These societies began competing, and survival of the fittest allowed societies to evolve from basic hunter-gatherer tribes to powerful civilizations.

Emotions became an asset that made animals better able to survive. As a result, we feel emotions, and we feel desires for things that would aid in our survival. This then becomes what we instinctively consider to be the meaning of life. For societies, moral rules came into existence, and the societies with stronger moral conviction were stronger as societies, and better able to overtake other societies to gain resources and form prosperous civilizations. We became ingrained with these moral beliefs, as societies were best able to develop moral order if their citizens had these moral beliefs themselves.

Right and wrong, and our purposes in society, are formed from this. Each person has their own beliefs of what is right, and what is the meaning of life, but ultimately right and wrong are determined by the balance of power. If a more powerful entity wants to enforce its beliefs and it makes its will shown, then a weaker entity may do what it feels is right, but what it believes is right might be wrong by the belief of the stronger entity, and so it will still face punishment for its actions. This is ultimately what determines right and wrong. And ultimately, the meaning to our life is subjective. It is not a scientific concept; it is a philosophical one. Survival of the fittest is the main way in which it is defined.

A Brief Discussion of God

In a materialistic world there is little room for Gods. According to our current model of the universe, with few exceptions every event can be predicted by physics. However, according to the same model there is some randomness in the universe in which God could have power. Similarly, many people argue that the universe needs a creator. They argue that the universe is complex, and a complex universe must have been created by a complex being. However, there is a fallacy here. If the universe was created by a complex being, what created this complexity? If it takes a complexity to create a complexity, should God not then need a creator? If God does not, why would the universe need one?

Something complex can arise from simplicity. For example, the laws of the universe can almost be described by one physics book. Yet, humanity has risen out of these laws, and it takes many books to describe even a general overview of human history, and many books to describe all of the politics, ideologies, and philosophies that we have created. The process by which we became complex is not too difficult to understand. Simple processes started occurring in the chaos of the Earth, and these processes initiated similar processes. The processes with the strength to survive did for longer, and produced more offspring processes. Slight differences occurred in these offspring, making some processes even stronger than the initial ones and even more able to survive. Slowly, these processes got more complex, as complexity made them better able to survive, and after millions of years humans resulted from what had initially been chaos controlled by a few simple laws. As for the randomness in the universe, it is possible that there is a God that controls it, but there is no evidence whatsoever for that, and the God would be relatively powerless anyways.

There are two ways in which we could define God which comply with our scientific models. However, these ways would just be figurative. However, just like we are simply comprised of processes which are occurring in the universe, so can God be.

The first possible definition of God is that God is the universe itself. God is usually considered all powerful and all knowing, and the universe certainly fits those criteria,

even though there is no central rationalizing centre. However, the universe can be considered to have its own consciousness, just like a nation can.

The other possible definition of God is that the concept of God is itself God. The concept of God has had a major influence on most civilizations in the world, and is responsible for most of the moral principles that we have. So even though the Gods that most religions describe are likely not real, the concepts of these Gods have been almost as powerful to society as the Gods themselves are considered to be.

Letters to the Editor

Hello, recently I was at a bookstore and I found a book on philosophy. I have always wondered about some philosophical questions and so I decided to pick it up. However, reading through it I started to realize how unfulfilling my life really is. Then I came by an interesting term: "the good life." I think that this is the way to fulfillment, but I don't know what the good life is. So, what I am asking you is, what is the good life?

Jane Doe

The good life is one in which you are achieving happiness, while at the same time helping others to live a good life. That being said, happiness is different for everybody. You need to find the balance of the different aspects of happiness that makes you happy. At the same time, you must make sure that you are not affecting other people's happiness. Following is a brief theory on happiness, as well as a general idea for you to base your idea of the good life upon. However, along with these is a very important thing: you must have a positive attitude. This is the main way to differentiate between satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

We feel happiness because it is beneficial to our survival. Happiness is the fulfillment of a desire, which leads to a state of the brain that we instinctively consider good. The reason that we consider this state good is because it is the positive end to a desire. And happiness is not just one emotion; it is a closely tied set of emotions.

In general, happiness comes from satisfaction, pride against adversity, relaxation, and accomplishment. The most satisfying aspect of happiness for most people is bringing a good life to others. Because this is also important to live a good life regardless of personal happiness, you should make sure to satisfy this aspect. Even if you are missing many other aspects of happiness, as long as you have this one, as well as a positive attitude, you will be happy.

After this is satisfaction of the necessities, such as food, water, sleep, heat, oxygen, and waste expulsion. However, just having these is not enough. There must be a desire for them. For example, to feel satisfied with heat, one must first feel cold. Food and sleep will be much more satisfying when you are hungry or tired. Looking positively and

treating these as luxuries will make them seem far more satisfying as well. However, you must not deprive yourself of the necessities. You still need enough food, water, sleep, and oxygen to be healthy.

The ability to relax is very important, and for that you must negate stress. A feeling of personal power will be able to make you feel more relaxed in life despite stress, and a positive attitude will relieve much stress.

You must also get daily physical activity in which you face physical adversity and challenge. This gets rid of stress chemicals in you blood, and produces chemicals linked to predator reward and accomplishment. It also sends oxygen to your brain, and brings a sense of pride and power. It will prevent mental and muscular loss from lack of oxygen and use, and it will cause you to properly feel hungry and tired.

As humans, we constantly seek knowledge and understanding. Understanding the world around us is very rewarding, and overcoming mental challenge also is. This is probably why you started reading this magazine in the first place. Make sure to use your brain daily, and always attempt to better understand the world around you.

Ultimately, as you can see, the best way to be happy is through pride and power against adversity, the feeling of having purpose, satisfaction, the ability to relax, and an understanding of the world around you. There are many other things that will help you to be happy, such as enjoyment of nature and art, socialization, competition and sports, and so on. You must find and balance these to determine your own good life. But, it is important that it does not take away from the good life for others, or there will be no point of you living a good life.

I've always hated mosquitoes. I hate how they buzz around my head, and that itchy feeling that they leave. But I also enjoy being outside in the summer, and so I tough them out. Whenever they get near me, I kill them. However, lately I've been wondering, is it right? Am I as bad as a mass murderer? I've tried meditating on it, but I can't meditate in my favourite place (outside) without murdering those bloodsuckers or being distracted by that annoying whine. And, because I'm not a philosophy expert, I can't just pull the answers out of the air (unlike mosquitoes). So tell me, is it right to kill mosquitoes? Does it make me as bad as a mass murderer? As soon as I find out, hopefully I will be able to meditate outside again and answer the complex questions of philosophy.

John Doe

This is a very complex issue. First, consider a few things. The life span of a mosquito is typically less than eight weeks. During the time that they are alive, they are only very simple creatures. For them, reality is not nearly as vivid as it is for us. They do still feel happiness, or something that resembles it, and by killing it you are taking it away from them. However, you are only taking a few weeks of very slight happiness away from

them, and you are avoiding a few minutes of slight unhappiness from yourself and you are going to feel a temporary reward by killing them. When you kill a mosquito, it is also helping to control the mosquito population. And remember, they are dying as a sacrifice so that you can enjoy being outside, which is ultimately bringing more good than all the mosquitoes you kill would bring and receive. But at the same time, consider each mosquito. Imagine that you are starving, and you receive a full hot plate of turkey, stuffing, and potatoes. The mosquito feels the same way when it eats your blood, and you have to ask, does it matter if reality is less vivid for them? They are being entirely consumed by happiness. How do you compare happiness, which isn't a mathematical quantity, between two beings? Could it be worth the slight itch for something to enjoy a meal?

My answer has probably complicated your uncertainty, but I cannot give you an exact answer. You will have to find your own ideas for the ethics of the situation, but that is what makes philosophy so rewarding. Consider what I have said, and make your own decisions. But for now, I suggest that you don't worry about it and kill what you feel like (insects only). You will be much happier. However, look at things with a positive attitude. For the mosquitoes with the skill to get away, they get rewarded with a nice hot meal.

Film Review

Shutter Island (2010)

Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Ben Kingsley, Mark Ruffalo, and Michelle Williams, and directed by Martin Scorsese based on the book by Isaac Asimov, *Shutter Island* is a psychological thriller. It deals with psychological insanity and alternate perceptions of reality by the mentally insane. The plot is very dynamic, and the actors play their roles well. Despite many lengthy scenes, it ultimately raises the philosophical question "What is real?"

At the beginning of the movie, U.S. Marshals Edward Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Chuck Aule (Mark Ruffalo) are ferried to Shutter Island which hosts Ashecliff Hospital for the criminally insane. They have been called to investigate the disappearance of a patient from the prison. The patient was a mother of three who killed her children, but to cope she now lives in a fantasy world in which she believes her children are still alive, and she still lives happily at home with them. But soon Daniels begins to question the motives of the hospital, and suspects that it is a laboratory for brain experiments, and the prisoners are like lab rats. At the same time though, Daniels is a veteran of the Second World War, and he had lost his wife in a fire, and the mental hospital is bringing back memories of these events. He starts having hallucinations, and soon he fears that he has been set up on this case and lured to the island to be used himself as a part of the experiment. He believes that he has been drugged, and that they are trying to convince him that he too is insane. And so it appears that they are, but Daniels starts to question reality for himself. Has he been drugged, or is he not really who he thinks he is?

The movie asks the question “What is real?” This same question is a fundamental part of philosophy as well, so the movie has philosophical implications. The movie illustrates the difficulties in determining what is real very well. A person may believe that they are a sane, rational being, but it could just be an illusion of drugs or insanity. But the person who believes that they are sane has no reason to believe that they are experiencing an illusion out of insanity, and so they have no indication that the reality that they are experiencing is artificial.

Idealists may argue that this greatly supports their beliefs. This is proof that a person that is self-declared to be extremely rational may in fact be experiencing a deception. If this is the case, how can we ever know if what we are experiencing is real? Idealists would argue that this demonstrates that there are many realities to the world.

However, materialists could also use the concept of Shutter Island in their favour. These hallucinations are completely explainable by modifications to the brain. In fact, drug use and insanity cause proven modifications to the brain. It’s proven that these cause the brain to function differently, and the change in brain function causes a change in the perception of reality. How do idealists explain why physical brain alterations cause different perceptions of reality?

Shutter Island, despite a lack of action, is very interesting from a philosophical standpoint. Both materialists and idealists can attempt to use it as an argument against the other. In the end, it might not resolve much in the great debate between the two schools of thought, but it does spark more debate. In philosophy, this is usually as important as an answer. And Shutter Island also leaves one wondering, what is real?

Platonic Idealism

Socrates is regarded by many as the founder of Western philosophy. However, he did not leave behind any writings, and so his student Plato did. What Socrates believed was copied into Plato’s works. Much of what each one of them believed is now indistinguishable and inseparable, but Plato came to be considered by many as the greatest philosopher of all time. So, what is Plato’s ontological theory of reality?

Plato believed in what is now referred to as Platonic Realism, a form of dualism which Plato founded himself. In Platonic Realism, the world that we observe is merely an illusion. However, it is not in the same way as is idealism. In idealism, the world is an illusion which exists only in the mind. In realism, what we observe is an illusion of something more real. In realism the illusion is only caused by a limitation of our minds to see the more real world.

Platonic Realism is based largely upon the Theory of Forms. According to the Theory of Forms, everything in the material world is an approximation of something non-material,

known as a form. Forms are considered to be perfect, and more real than the material world. An example of a form is a circle. In everyday life we see many circles or near-circles, for example the path traced by any star, or the letter O. However, these are all based on the concept of a perfect circle, but are not themselves perfect. These all then are illusions of the form of the circle.

Plato uses the Analogy of the Divided Line to describe reality. Imagine a line that has been divided into two unequal parts. Now imagine each part of that line has again been divided into two parts of the same proportion. Ultimately this will result in four line segments, each one larger than the last. Each one represents a level of reality.

The first and smallest segment represents the shadow world, and includes shadows and reflections. However, these are just illusions of material bodies, which comprise the next segment. The second segment, the material world, is the level at which most of us perceive reality. The third segment, which is the same length as the second one, represents the mathematical world. The material world is just an illusion of this, the same way as the shadow world is just an illusion of the material world. The fourth and largest segment represents the realm of reasoning, in which the forms are based. Mathematics is just an illusion of reasoning. So ultimately everything is an illusion of the realm of reasoning, and the forms which reason is comprised of.

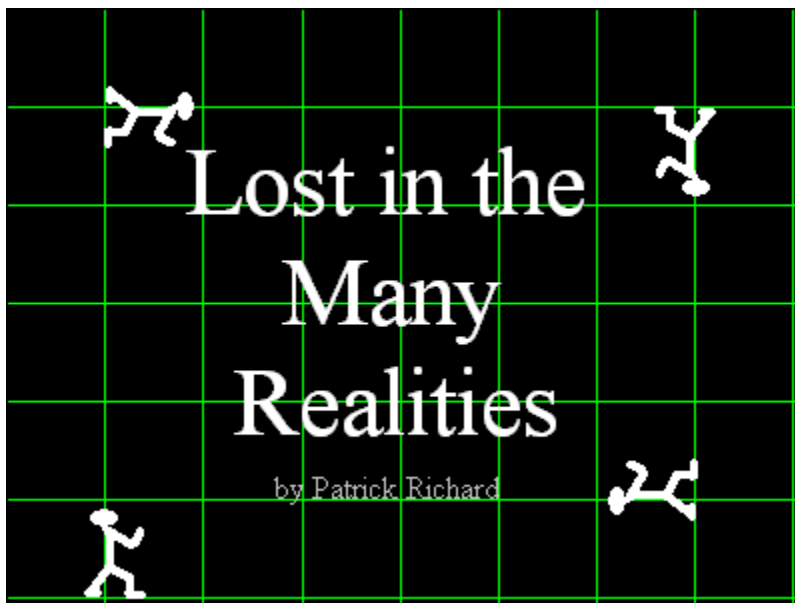
Plato believed that the human mind was a soul which could see these things. It was common Greek belief that the human body consisted of both a soul and a body, and Plato believed that as well. He explained that depending on the strength of the soul, one could see reality at different levels. A person with a low intelligence was only capable of seeing the material world. He would not be able to understand anything more complex. However, a person that understands mathematics would be able to see the mathematical world, and could understand the material world entirely mathematically. Ultimately though, a person attempted to find the Form of the Good. This was said to be the form in which all other forms were derived from, and it could only be seen by one who truly understood the world, and a soul who was truly able to rationalize the entire universe. Then this person would see reality from the most basic level, the level of reason.

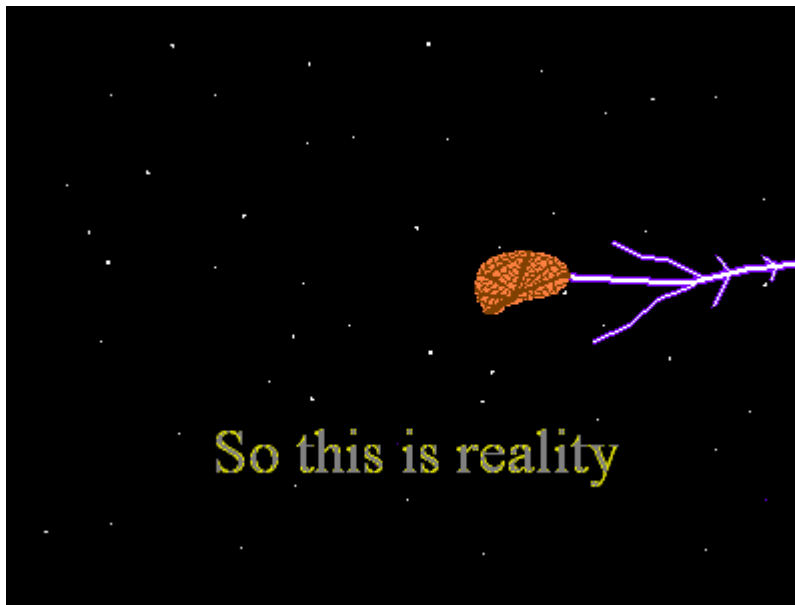
Plato used the Allegory of the Cave as a thought experiment to demonstrate what it is like to experience a different level of reality. Imagine a group of men that since birth have been tied to chairs in a cave. They face a wall, and their heads are restricted to see nothing but that wall. Opposite to the wall the cave opens to a pathway where people walk by. Behind this pathway is a fire. This fire casts shadows of the people on the pathway on to the wall in which the cavemen are looking at. At the same time, any sounds echo off of the cave wall as to appear that they are originating from the shadows. So the cavemen can see nothing but shadows, and everything that they hear appear to originate from the shadows. The shadow world is the only thing that the cavemen know, and to them this appears to be reality. To them, the shadows are the people that they get to know. They have no idea what the material world even is. The whole time they are part of the material world, and they see the wall in front of them which is part of the material world, but they know nothing but the shadow world. However, if they leave the cave,

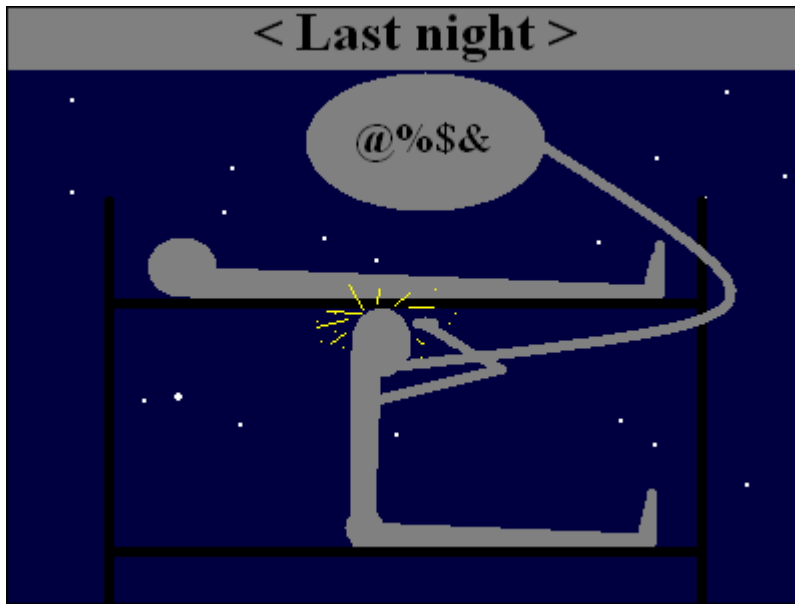
they will see the colours and dimensions of the material world, and they will certainly realize that it is more real than the shadow world. They will see that the shadow world is just an effect caused by the material world. Similarly, Plato reasoned, anybody with a clear understanding of mathematics will see the mathematical world as more real than the material world, and will see that the material world is just an effect occurring in the mathematical world. And if somebody truly is able to see the world through reason, they will be able to see the forms.

Comics

Lost in the Many Realities



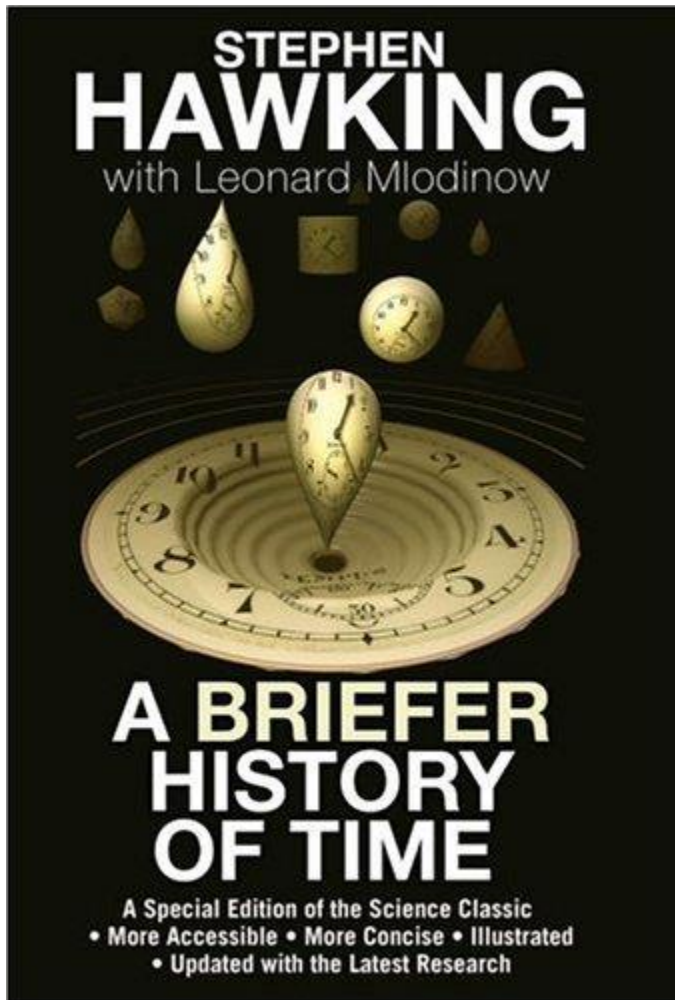




"If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life."
 –Plato

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 The Beyond
 Issue #1
 "Is This the Real World?"

A Briefer History of Time (2005)
 Stephen Hawking
 with Leonard Mlodinow
 \$16.89



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By Stephen Hawking with Leonard Mlodinow, *A Briefer History of Time* discusses relativistic and quantum physics in a very easy to understand way. The science discussed in the book is closely related to many metaphysical theories, and forms the backbone of most modern science. It is hard to understand philosophy without understanding the scientific concepts discussed in this book, and this book is possibly the easiest way to understand these concepts thoroughly. The book can be found for \$16.89 at:

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