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**«Государственный университет - Высшая школа  
экономики»**

***Факультет философии***

**Программа дисциплины (на английском языке)**

**“Современные проблемы философии”**

**Contemporary Metaphysics**

для специальности 030100.68 «Философия»  
магистерская программа «Философская антропология»

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## Contemporary Metaphysics Spring 2011

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### Course description

Contemporary Metaphysics is a course on metaphysical topics in Analytic Philosophy of the end of XX century - first decade of this century. There was very fruitful return to classical topics in Philosophy around 1980 in Australia, Great Britain and US. The salvation of classical problems has appeared to be unique because of the analytical method, elaborated by Analytical Philosophy in 1950-60. Though the nominalist theories are prevailed in Analytic Philosophy, we will be concentrated on topics that coming into the field at recent decades.

The main topics are:

1. Possible Worlds and Modalities, stated by Alvin Plantinga, David Lewis, Saul Kripke and Robert Stalnaker
2. Universals and methodology of Realism, elaborated by David Armstrong and others (David Lewis, Sidney Shoemaker) Bertrand Russell
3. Theory of Non-existent objects, as suggested by Terence Parsons, who bases his investigation on phenomenology of Alexius Meinong,
4. Theory of Abstract Objects of neo-fregeanists Bob Hale, Crispin Wright, Edward Zalta. Frege

The target of this course is not only in reading and understanding suggested texts, but in juxtaposing them to greater classical tradition of Plato, Scholiasts, Leibnitz and Philosophy of XX century to make a conceptual analysis.

### **Grading**

30% Class Participation  
20% First Paper  
20% Second Paper  
30% Final Examination

### **Required Texts:**

- Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology / David J. Chalmers, David Manley & Ryan Wasserman (eds.), Oxford University Press (2009)
- Metaphysics: An Anthology // Kim J., Sosa E. (eds.), Blackwell Publishing, (1999).

**Plan of the course:***Topic I.*

Lecture 1. Overview of main trends in Realist Metaphysics

Seminar 1. Discussion on Roots of Analytic Metaphysics

*Topic II.*

Lecture 2. Universals

Seminar 2. Discussion on Russell and Armstrong's texts

1st Paper - 2 pages

*Topic III.*

Lecture 3. Theory of Non-existent objects

Seminar 3. Discussion on Meinong and Parsons's texts

*Topic IV.*

Lecture 4. Possible Worlds and Modalities

Seminar 4. Discussion on Kripke and Lewis's texts

*Topic V.*

Lecture 5. Theory of Abstract Objects

Seminar 5. Discussion on Frege and Wright's texts

2nd paper - 5 pages

*Topic VI.*

Lecture 6. Platonism in Metaphysics

Seminar 6. Discussion on Frege and Thomasson's texts

*Topic VII.*

Lecture 7. Essentialism

Seminar 7. Discussion on Baker and Thomasson's texts.

Final Exam

## Main Description of the Course

### *Topic I. Realist Metaphysics.*

The question of the nature and plausibility of realism arises with respect to a large number of subject matters, including ethics, aesthetics, causation, modality, science, mathematics, semantics, and the everyday world of macroscopic material objects and their properties. Although it would be possible to accept (or reject) realism across the board, it is more common for philosophers to be selectively realist or non-realist about various topics: thus it would be perfectly possible to be a realist about the everyday world of macroscopic objects and their properties, but a non-realist about aesthetic and moral value. In addition, it is misleading to think that there is a straightforward and clear-cut choice between being a realist and a non-realist about a particular subject matter. It is rather the case that one can be more-or-less realist about a particular subject matter. Also, there are many different forms that realism and non-realism can take.

The question of the nature and plausibility of realism is so controversial that no brief account of it will satisfy all those with a stake in the debates between realists and non-realists. This article offers a broad brush characterisation of realism, and then fills out some of the detail by looking at a few canonical examples of opposition to realism. The discussion of forms of opposition to realism is far from exhaustive and is designed only to illustrate a few paradigm examples of the form such opposition can take.

There are two general aspects to realism, illustrated by looking at realism about the everyday world of macroscopic objects and their properties. First, there is a claim about *existence*. Tables, rocks, the moon, and so on, all exist, as do the following facts: the table's being square, the rock's being made of granite, and the moon's being spherical and yellow. The second aspect of realism about the everyday world of macroscopic objects and their properties concerns *independence*. The fact that the moon exists and is spherical is independent of anything anyone happens to say or think about the matter. Likewise, although there is a clear sense in which the table's being square is dependent on us (it was designed and constructed by human beings after all), this is not the type of dependence that the realist wishes to deny. The realist wishes to claim that apart from the mundane sort of empirical dependence of objects and their properties familiar to us from everyday life, there is no *further* sense in which everyday objects and their properties can be said to be dependent on anyone's linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, or whatever.

Non-realism can take many forms, depending on whether or not it is the existence or independence dimension of realism that is questioned or rejected. The forms of non-realism can vary dramatically from subject-matter to subject-matter, but error-theories, non-cognitivism, instrumentalism, nominalism, certain styles of reductionism, and eliminativism typically reject realism by rejecting the existence dimension, while idealism, subjectivism, and anti-realism typically concede the existence dimension but reject the independence dimension. Philosophers who subscribe to quietism deny that there can be such a thing as substantial metaphysical debate between realists and their non-realist opponents (because they either deny that there are substantial questions about existence or deny that there are substantial questions about independence).

*Literature:*

1. Michael Dummett "Realism" // Kim J., Sosa E. (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 1999).
2. David J. Chalmers (2009). *Ontological Anti-Realism*. In David J. Chalmers, David Manley & Ryan Wasserman (eds.), *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Oxford University Press. URL: <http://consc.net/papers/ontology.pdf>

*Additional literature:*

1. Putnam, Hilary. *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge University Press (1981)
2. W. V. Quine. 'Ontological Relativity.' In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1969, pp. 26–68.

*Topic II. Universals*

Universals are a class of mind independent entities, usually contrasted with individuals (or so-called "particulars"), postulated to ground and explain relations of qualitative identity and resemblance among individuals. Individuals are said to be similar in virtue of sharing universals. An apple and a ruby are both red, for example, and their common redness results from sharing a universal. If they are both red at the same time, the universal, red, must be in two places at once. This makes universals quite different from individuals, and controversial.

Whether universals are in fact required to explain relations of qualitative identity and resemblance among individuals has engaged metaphysicians for two thousand years. Disputants fall into one of three broad camps. Realists endorse universals. Conceptualists and Nominalists, on the other hand, refuse to

accept universals and deny that they are needed. Conceptualists explain similarity among individuals by appealing to general concepts or ideas, things that exist only in minds. Nominalists, in contrast, are content to leave relations of qualitative resemblance brute and ungrounded. Numerous versions of Nominalism have been proposed, some with a great deal of sophistication. Contemporary philosophy has seen the rise of a new form of Nominalism, one that makes use of a special class of individuals, known as tropes. Familiar individuals have many properties, but tropes are single property instances. Whether Trope Nominalism improves on earlier Nominalist theories is the subject of much recent debate. In general, questions surrounding universals touch upon some of the oldest, deepest, and most abstract of philosophical issues.

An inventory of reality's most fundamental entities would almost certainly include individuals. Individuals are singular objects. They can exist over time, but in only one place at a time. Individuals also have properties (also called qualities), at least most of which can vary over time. A ripening apple goes from being green to being red, for instance. Almost everyone agrees that individual apples exist, and that they are colored, but are redness and greenness entities themselves? If so, what are they like? And if redness and greenness are not real entities, how could our apple be colored at all? Without its distinctive qualities, an apple wouldn't even be an apple.

Let us use the term "universal" for properties (or qualities). In a philosophical tone of voice we can now ask, "Are there really such universals? If so, what is their nature? How are they related to individuals?" These questions start us down a road philosophers have been exploring since philosophy itself was young.

We can approach the question about the existence of universals from a linguistic perspective. Consider how often we speak of things having properties: "That apple is red;" "The oven is hot;" or "My shirt is dirty." Such sentences have a subject-predicate structure. The subject term refers to the individual described in the sentence. The predicate, on the other hand, describes; it tells us something about the way that individual is, how it is qualified. Do predicates also refer? Some philosophers think they do. Alongside the individuals picked out by subject terms of sentences, it is thought, there are entities of a different kind, picked out by predicates. Once again we can call these "universals".

Prima facie, there seems to be every reason to believe in universals. They look to be just as much a part of our experience as individuals are. Philosophical questions and problems arise, however, when we try to specify their natures. If universals are real, but are not individuals, what are they? Some philosophers

contend that universals are too strange to accept into our world view. In a similar vein, it has been alleged that any philosophical work done by universals can be done just as well without them; whether they are strange or not, many argue, universals are simply unnecessary. Of course, it would need to be shown that universals really can be dispensed with, and we'll return to this controversy. But first we will examine competing Realist conceptions of the nature of universals.

*Literature:*

1. Armstrong D.M. "Universals as Attributes" in Kim J., Sosa E. (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 1999).

*Additional literature:*

2. Russell, Bertrand (1912). "The World of Universals," in *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press.
3. W.V. Quine: "Logic and the Reification of Universals" in *From a Logical Point of View*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953, pp. 102-129.

*Topic III. Non-existent objects*

A nonexistent object is something that does not exist. Some examples often cited are: Zeus, Pegasus, Sherlock Holmes, Vulcan, the perpetual motion machine, the golden mountain, the fountain of youth, the round square, etc. Some important philosophers have thought that the very concept of a nonexistent object is contradictory (Hume) or logically ill-formed (Kant, Frege), while others (Leibniz, Meinong, the Russell of *Principles of Mathematics*) have embraced it wholeheartedly.

One of the reasons why there are doubts about the concept of a nonexistent object is this: to be able to truly claim of an object that it doesn't exist, it seems that one has to presuppose that it exists, for doesn't a thing have to exist if we are to make a true claim about it? In the face of this puzzling situation, one has to be very careful when accepting or formulating the idea that there are nonexistent objects. It turns out that Kant's view that "exists" is not a "real" predicate and Frege's view, that "exists" is not a predicate of individuals (i.e., a predicate that yields a well-formed sentence if one puts a singular term in front of it), has to be abandoned if one is to accept the claim that there are nonexistent objects.

This entry is an examination of the many questions which arise in connection with the view that there are nonexistent objects. The following are particularly salient: What reasons are there (if any) for thinking that there are nonexistent

objects? If there are nonexistent objects, then what kind of objects are they? How can they be characterized? Is it possible to provide a consistent theory of nonexistent objects? What is the explanatory force of a consistent theory of nonexistent objects (if such a thing is possible)?

The very concept of a “nonexistent object” has an air of paradox about it, at least for those philosophers whose thinking is rooted in the Humean tradition. For Hume suggested that to think of an object is always and necessarily to think of an existent object, or to put it differently, that to think of an object and to think of the same object as existing are just one and the same thing. Immanuel Kant took up Hume's idea and claimed that existence is not a “real predicate”, a claim that is often interpreted as an anticipation of Gottlob Frege's famous doctrine that existence is not a predicate of individuals. (See Hume 2000, Book 1, Part 2, Sect. 6; Kant 2003, B 627; Frege 1966, pp. 37f.) Kant's motivation for rejecting the view that existence is a “real predicate” was the so-called “ontological proof” of God's existence, which says, roughly, that God's perfection entails God's existence, since a being that would have all of God's perfections except existence (i.e., omniscience, omnipotence, benevolence) would be less perfect than a being with the same perfections plus existence. For centuries, philosophers have felt that there is something wrong with this proof, but Kant was the first one who was able to point out a possible error: he argued that the mistake of the “ontological argument” lies in the treatment of existence as a “real predicate”.

If Hume is right, then the concept of an object includes the concept of existence, and the concept of a nonexistent object would be as self-contradictory as the concept of a round square. If existence is not a predicate of individuals, then one might suppose that neither is nonexistence. Therefore, if Frege is right, to say of an object that it is nonexistent is a kind of nonsense that arises from a violation of logical grammar.

Thus, in order to take the idea of nonexistent objects seriously, one has to give up views held by important philosophers about the nature of existence and adopt the view that existence is some kind of predicate of individuals. This view entails, among other things, that to say, for instance, that some white elephants exist is to say that some white elephants have the property of existence (or, to put it the other way around, that not all white elephants are nonexistent)—a consequence that might strike some as strange.

Furthermore, in order to assert “there are nonexistent objects” without implying “nonexistent objects exist”, one has to suppose that sentences of the form “There are Fs” mean something different from sentences of the form “Fs exist”. [1] Some philosophers reject a distinction between “there is” and “exists” (see,

for instance, Lewis 1990, Priest 2005, Quine 1953), some philosophers (e.g., Meinong 1960, Parsons 1980, Zalta 1988) think that there are good reasons for making this distinction. Some of the latter think that the distinction between “there is” and “exists” is rooted in ordinary language, but others deny this firmly (see for instance, Geach 1971). Obviously, although there might be a tendency among competent English speakers to use “there is” and “exists” in different contexts, ordinary language use is too wavering and non-uniform in this respect to be a stable ground for a philosophical theory. Of course, this does not rule out that there are theoretical reasons for a distinction between “there is” and “exists”, some of which are discussed below.

*Literature:*

1. Terence Parsons “Referring to Nonexistent Objects” in Kim J., Sosa E. (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 1999).

*Additional:*

1. Alexius Meinong. *The Theory of Objects*, URL: <http://www.hist-analytic.org/Meinongobjects.pdf>
2. Quine, Willard van Orman, 1953, “On What There Is,” in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1–19.

*Topic IV. Possible Worlds*

In philosophy and logic, the concept of a possible world is used to express modal claims. The concept of possible worlds is common in contemporary philosophical discourse and has also been disputed. Those theorists who use the concept of possible worlds consider the actual world to be one of the many possible worlds. For each distinct way the world could have been, there is said to be a distinct possible world; the actual world is the one we in fact live in. Among such theorists there is disagreement about the nature of possible worlds; their precise ontological status is disputed, and especially the difference, if any, in ontological status between the actual world and all the other possible worlds. One position on these matters is set forth in David Lewis's modal realism (see below). There is a close relation between propositions and possible worlds. We note that every proposition is either true or false at any given possible world; then the modal status of a proposition is understood in terms of the worlds in which it is true and worlds in which it is false.

From this groundwork, the theory of possible worlds became a central part of many philosophical developments, from the 1960s onwards – including, most famously, the analysis of counterfactual conditionals in terms of “nearby possible worlds” developed by David Lewis and Robert Stalnaker. Today, possible worlds play a central role in many debates in philosophy, including

especially debates over the Zombie Argument, and physicalism and supervenience in the philosophy of mind. Many debates in the Philosophy of religion have been reawakened by the use of possible worlds. Intense debate has also emerged over the ontological status of possible worlds, provoked especially by David Lewis's defense of modal realism, the doctrine that talk about "possible worlds" is best explained in terms of innumerable, really existing worlds beyond the one we live in.

To understand the thesis of actualism, consider the following example. Imagine a race of beings — call them 'Aliens' — that is very different from any life-form that exists anywhere in the universe; different enough, in fact, that no actually existing thing could have been an Alien, any more than a given gorilla could have been a fruitfly. Now, even though there are no Aliens, it seems intuitively the case that there could have been such things. After all, life might have evolved very differently than the way it did in fact. For example, if the fundamental physical constants or the laws of evolution had been slightly different, very different kinds of things might have existed. So in virtue of what is it true that there could have been Aliens when in fact there are none, and when, moreover, nothing that exists in fact could have been an Alien?

To answer this question, a philosopher should try to identify the special features of the world that are responsible for the truth of claims about what could have been the case. One group of philosophers, the possibilists, offers the following answer: 'It is possible that there are Aliens' is true because there are in fact individuals that could have been Aliens. At first blush, this might appear directly to contradict the premise that no existing thing could possibly have been an Alien. The possibilist's thesis, however, is that existence, or actuality, encompasses only a subset of the things that, in the broadest sense, are. Rather, in addition to things like us that actually exist, there are merely possible things — possible Aliens, for example — that could have existed, but, as it happens, do not. So there are such things, but they just happen to exhibit a rather less robust but nonetheless fully-fledged type of being than we do. For the possibilist, then, 'It is possible that there are Aliens' is true simply in virtue of the fact that there are possible-but-nonactual Aliens, i.e., things that do not exist but which could have been, and such that, moreover, if they had existed, they would have been Aliens.

Actualists reject this answer; they deny that there are any nonactual individuals. Actualism is the philosophical position that everything there is — everything that can in any sense be said to be — exists, or is actual. Put another way, actualism denies that there is any kind of being beyond actual existence; to be is to exist, and to exist is to be actual. Actualism therefore stands in stark contrast

to possibilism, which, as we've seen, takes the things there are to include possible but non-actual objects.

Of course, actualists will agree that there could have been Aliens. An actualist theory, therefore, will be a metaphysical theory that attempts to account for the truth of claims like 'It is possible that there are Aliens' without appealing to any nonactual objects whatsoever. What makes actualism so philosophically interesting, is that there is no obviously correct way to account for the truth of claims like 'It is possible that there are Aliens' without appealing to possible but nonactual objects. In this article, we will clarify the "possibilist challenge" to actualism in some detail and lay out the various attempts to meet the challenge and assess their effectiveness.

*Literature:*

1. David Lewis "Counterparts or Double Lives?" in Kim J., Sosa E. (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 1999).
2. Alvin Plantinga. *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford University Press, 1978

*Topic V. Abstract Objects*

The contemporary distinction between abstract and concrete is not an ancient distinction. Indeed, there is a strong case for the view that despite occasional anticipations, it plays no significant role in philosophy before the 20th century. The modern distinction bears some resemblance to Plato's distinction between Forms and Sensibles. But Plato's Forms were supposed to be causes par excellence, whereas abstract objects are normally supposed to be causally inert in every sense. The original "abstract"/"concrete" distinction was a distinction among words or terms. Traditional grammar distinguishes the abstract noun "whiteness" from the concrete noun "white" without implying that this linguistic contrast corresponds to a metaphysical distinction in what they stand for. In the 17th century this grammatical distinction was transposed to the domain of ideas. Locke speaks of the general idea of a triangle which is "neither Oblique nor Rectangle, neither Equilateral, Equicrural nor Scalenen; but all and none of these at once," remarking that even this idea is not among the most "abstract, comprehensive and difficult" . Locke's conception of an abstract idea as one that is formed from concrete ideas by the omission of distinguishing detail was immediately rejected by Berkeley and then by Hume. But even for Locke there was no suggestion that the distinction between abstract ideas and concrete or particular ideas corresponds to a distinction among objects. "It is plain, ..." Locke writes, "that General and Universal, belong not to the real existence of things; but are Inventions and Creatures of the Understanding, made by it for its own use, and concern only signs, whether Words or Ideas".

The abstract/concrete distinction in its modern form is meant to mark a line in the domain of objects. So conceived, the distinction becomes a central focus for philosophical discussion only in the twentieth century. The origins of this development are obscure. But one crucial factor appears to have been the breakdown of the allegedly exhaustive distinction between the mental and the material that had formed the main division for ontologically minded philosophers since Descartes. One signal event in this development is Frege's insistence that the objectivity and a prioricity of the truths of mathematics entail that numbers are neither material beings nor ideas in the mind. If numbers were material things (or properties of material things), the laws of arithmetic would have the status of empirical generalizations. If numbers were ideas in the mind, then the same difficulty would arise, as would countless others. (Whose mind contains the number 17? Is there one 17 in your mind and another in mine? In that case, the appearance of a common mathematical subject matter is an illusion.) In *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884), Frege concludes that numbers are neither external 'concrete' things nor mental entities of any sort. Later, in his essay "The Thought" (Frege 1918), he claims the same status for the items he calls thoughts -- the senses of declarative sentences -- and also, by implication, for their constituents, the senses of subsentential expressions. Frege does not say that senses are "abstract". He says that they belong to a "third realm" distinct both from the sensible external world and from the internal world of consciousness. Similar claims had been made by Bolzano (1837), and later by Brentano (1874) and his pupils, including Meinong and Husserl. The common theme in these developments is the felt need in semantics and psychology as well as in mathematics for a class of objective (i.e., non-mental) supersensible entities. As this new "realism" was absorbed into English speaking philosophy, the traditional term "abstract" was enlisted to apply to the denizens of this "third realm"

*Literature:*

1. Hale, Bob (1987), *Abstract Objects*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
2. Wright, Crispin (1983), *Frege's Conception of Numbers as Objects*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

*Additional literature:*

1. Zalta, Edward (1983), *Abstract Objects: An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

*Topic VI. Platonism in Metaphysics*

Platonism is the view that there exist abstract (that is, non-spatial, non-temporal) objects. Because abstract objects are wholly non-spatiotemporal, it

follows that they are also entirely non-physical (they do not exist in the physical world and are not made of physical stuff) and non-mental (they are not minds or ideas in minds; they are not disembodied souls, or Gods, or anything else along these lines). In addition, they are unchanging and entirely causally inert — that is, they cannot be involved in cause-and-effect relationships with other objects. All of this might be somewhat perplexing; for with all of these statements about what abstract objects are not, it might be unclear what they are. We can clarify things, however, by looking at some examples.

Consider the sentence ‘3 is prime’. This sentence seems to say something about a particular object, namely, the number 3. Just as the sentence ‘The moon is round’ says something about the moon, so too ‘3 is prime’ seems to say something about the number 3. But what is the number 3? There are a few different views that one might endorse here, but the platonist view is that 3 is an abstract object. On this view, 3 is a real and objective thing that, like the moon, exists independently of us and our thinking (i.e., it is not just an idea in our heads). But according to platonism, 3 is different from the moon in that it is not a physical object; it is wholly non-physical, non-mental, and causally inert, and it does not exist in space or time. One might put this metaphorically by saying that on the platonist view, numbers exist “in platonic heaven”. But we should not infer from this that according to platonism, numbers exist in a place; they do not, for the concept of a place is a physical, spatial concept. It is more accurate to say that on the platonist view, numbers exist (independently of us and our thoughts) but do not exist in space and time.

Similarly, many philosophers take a platonistic view of properties. Consider, for instance, the property of being red. According to the platonist view of properties, the property of redness exists independently of any red thing. There are red balls and red houses and red shirts, and these all exist in the physical world. But platonists about properties believe that in addition to these things, redness — the property itself — also exists, and according to platonists, this property is an abstract object. Ordinary red objects are said to exemplify or instantiate redness. Plato said that they participate in redness, but this suggests a causal relationship between red objects and redness, and again, contemporary platonists would reject this.

Platonists of this sort say the same thing about other properties as well: in addition to all the beautiful things, there is also beauty; and in addition to all the tigers, there is also the property of being a tiger. Indeed, even when there are no instances of a property in reality, platonists will typically maintain that the property itself exists. This isn't to say that platonists are committed to the thesis that there is a property corresponding to every predicate in the English language. The point is simply that in typical cases, there will be a property. For

instance, according to this sort of platonism, there exists a property of being a four-hundred-story building, even though there are no such things as four-hundred-story buildings. This property exists outside of space and time along with redness. The only difference is that in our physical world, the one property happens to be instantiated whereas the other does not.

In fact, platonists extend the position here even further, for on their view, properties are just a special case of a much broader category, namely, the category of universals. It's easy to see why one might think of a property like redness as a universal. A red ball that sits in a garage in Buffalo is a particular thing. But redness is something that is exemplified by many, many objects; it's something that all red objects share, or have in common. This is why platonists think of redness as a universal and of specific red objects — such as balls in Buffalo, or cars in Cleveland — as particulars.

But according to this sort of platonism, properties are not the only universals; there are other kinds of universals as well, most notably, relations. Consider, for instance, the relation to the north of; this relation is instantiated by many pairs of objects (or more accurately, by ordered pairs of objects, since order matters here — e.g., to the north of is instantiated by <San Francisco, Los Angeles>, and <Edinburgh, London>, but not by <Los Angeles, San Francisco>, or <London, Edinburgh>). So according to platonism, the relation to the north of is a two-place universal, whereas a property like redness is a one-place universal. There are also three-place relations (which are three-place universals), four-place relations, and so on. An example of a three-place relation is the gave relation, which admits of a giver, a givee, and a given — as in 'Jane gave a CD to Tim'.

Finally, some philosophers claim that propositions are abstract objects. One way to think of a proposition is as the meaning of a sentence. Alternatively, we can say that a proposition is that which is expressed by a sentence on a particular occasion of use. Either way, we can say that, e.g., the English sentence 'Snow is white' and the German sentence 'Schnee ist weiss' express the same proposition, namely, the proposition that snow is white.

There are many different platonistic conceptions of propositions. For instance, Frege (1892, 1919) held that propositions are composed of senses of words (e.g., on this view, the proposition that snow is white is composed of the senses of 'snow' and 'is white'), whereas Russell at one point (1905, 1910-11) held that propositions are composed of properties, relations, and objects (e.g., on this view, the proposition that Mars is red is composed of Mars (the planet itself) and the property of redness). Others hold that propositions do not have

significant internal structure. The differences between these views will not matter for our purposes. For more detail, see the entry on propositions.

Numbers, propositions, and universals (i.e., properties and relations) are not the only things that people have taken to be abstract objects. As we will see below, people have also endorsed platonistic views in connection with linguistic objects (most notably, sentences), possible worlds, logical objects, and fictional characters (e.g., Sherlock Holmes). And it is important to note here that one can be a platonist about some of these things without being a platonist about the others — e.g., one might be a platonist about numbers and propositions but not properties or fictional characters.

*Literature:*

1. Frege, G., 1884, *Der Grundlagen die Arithmetik*. Translated by J.L. Austin as *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953.
2. Thomasson, A., 1999, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Topic VII. Essentialism*

In philosophy, essentialism is the view that, for any specific kind of entity, there is a set of characteristics or properties all of which any entity of that kind must possess. Therefore all things can be precisely defined or described. In this view, it follows that terms or words should have a single definition and meaning.

In simple terms, essentialism is a generalization stating that certain properties possessed by a group (e.g. people, things, ideas) are universal, and not dependent on context. For example, the essentialist statement 'all human beings are mortal'.

According to essentialism, a member of a specific group may possess other characteristics that are neither needed to establish its membership nor preclude its membership, but that essences do not simply reflect ways of grouping objects; they also result in properties of the object.

Anthropology professor Lawrence Hirschfeld gives an example of what constitutes the essence of a tiger, regardless of whether it is striped or albino, or has lost a leg. The essential properties of a tiger are those without which it is no longer a tiger. Other properties, such as stripes or number of legs, are considered inessential or 'accidental'.

This view is contrasted with non-essentialism, which states that, for any given kind of entity, there are no specific traits which entities of that kind must possess.

An essence characterizes a substance or a form, in the sense of the Forms or Ideas in Platonic idealism. It is permanent, unalterable, and eternal; and present in every possible world. Classical humanism has an essentialist conception of the human being, which means that it believes in an eternal and unchangeable human nature. This viewpoint[which?] has been criticized by Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre, and especially Stirner, as well as many other modern and existential thinkers.

In Plato's philosophy (in particular, the *Timaeus* and the *Philebus*), things were said to come into being in this world by the action of a demiurge who works to form chaos into ordered entities. From Aristotle onward the definition, in philosophical contexts, of the word "essence" is very close to the definition of form (Gr. *morphe*). Many definitions of essence harken back to the ancient Greek hylomorphic understanding of the formation of the things of this world. According to that account, the structure and real existence of any thing can be understood by analogy to an artifact produced by a craftsman. The craftsman requires hyle (timber or wood) and a model, plan or idea in his own mind according to which the wood is worked to give it the indicated contour or form (*morphe*). Aristotle was the first to use the terms hyle and *morphe*. According to his explanation, all entities have two aspects, "matter" and "form". It is the particular form imposed that gives some matter its identity, its quiddity or "whatness" (i.e., its "what it is").

Plato was one of the first essentialists, believing in the concept of ideal forms, an abstract entity of which individual objects are mere facsimilies. To give an example; the ideal form of a circle is a perfect circle, something that is physically impossible to make manifest, yet the circles that we draw and observe clearly have some idea in common — this idea is the ideal form. Plato believed that these ideas are eternal and vastly superior to their manifestations in the world, and that we understand these manifestations in the material world by comparing and relating them to their respective ideal form. Plato's forms are regarded as patriarchs to essentialist dogma simply because they are a case of what is intrinsic and a-contextual of objects — the abstract properties that makes them what they are. For more on forms, read Plato's parable of the cave.

Karl Popper splits the ambiguous term realism into essentialism and realism. He uses essentialism whenever he means the opposite of nominalism, and realism only as opposed to idealism. Popper himself takes the position of a realist in both meanings of the word, though his essentialism is modified in various respects compared to the classical version.

Essentialism, in its broadest sense, is any philosophy that acknowledges the primacy of Essence. Unlike Existentialism, which posits "being" as the

fundamental reality, the essentialist ontology must be approached from a metaphysical perspective. Empirical knowledge is developed from experience of a relational universe whose components and attributes are defined and measured in terms of intellectually constructed laws. Thus, for the scientist, reality is explored as an evolutionary system of diverse entities, the order of which is determined by the principle of causality. Because Essentialism is a conceptual worldview that is not dependent on objective facts and measurements, it is not limited to empirical understanding or the objective way of looking at things. Just as Eastern mysticism teaches that reality is more than what the rational mind can formulate analytically from observing the nature of "otherness", the essentialist ontology transcends self/other dualism to define the undivided source — the ineffable Oneness alluded to in Eastern Philosophy.

Despite the metaphysical basis for the term, academicians in science, aesthetics, heuristics, psychology, and gender-based sociological studies have all seen fit to advance their disparate and sundry causes under the banner of Essentialism. Possibly the clearest definition for this philosophy was offered by gay/lesbian rights advocate Diana Fuss, who wrote: "Essentialism is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties [of] which define the 'whatness' of a given entity". Metaphysical essentialism stands diametrically opposed to existential realism in that finite existence is only differentiated appearance, whereas "ultimate reality" is held to be absolute essence.

Although the Greek philosophers believed that the true nature of the universe was perfect, they attributed the observed imperfections to man's limited perception. For Plato, this meant that there had to be two different realities: the "essential" and the "perceived". Plato's dialectical protégé Aristotle [384-322 B.C.] applied the term "essence" to the one common characteristic that all things belonging to a particular category have in common and without which they could not be members of that category; hence, the idea of rationality as the essence of man. This notion carried over into all facets of reality, including species of living creatures. For contemporary essentialists, however, the characteristic that all existents have in common is the power to exist, and this potentiality defines the "uncreated" Essence.

It was the Egyptian-born philosopher Plotinus [270-204 B.C.] who brought Greek Idealism to the Roman Empire as Neo-Platonism, and with it the concept that not only do all existents emanate from a "primary essence" but that the mind plays an active role in shaping or ordering the objects of perception, rather than passively receiving experiential data. But with the Empire's fall to the Goths in A.D. 476, Neo-Platonism gave way to the spread of Christianity in the Western World, leaving Aristotle's multiple "essences" unchallenged to dominate philosophical thought throughout the Middle Ages on into the modern era of scientific objectivism.

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