
Is Being One Only One? The Uniqueness of Platonic Forms¹

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There are many things in the world, including the standard rod in Paris, that are one meter long. The length of each of these, call it 'L', is identical to one meter. Suppose there were a second length of one meter, qualitatively-identical to L but numerically-different from it, call it 'L''. Since both these lengths are qualitatively the same, their length would be common to both, call it 'L'''. Neither L nor L' could be identical to L''; and it would now be L'' that is identical to one meter. Why?

This is the realisation Plato made about the Forms: each Form is qualitatively and numerically unique. Plato gives the argument in *Republic X*. In brief, and simplified, the argument is that there is only one Form F for *f*-similar things, e.g. for beds, all of which are likenesses of that Form. If there were *two* Forms of Bed, they would be qualitatively-identical to one another, but numerically-different from each other. Their qualitative identity and numerical distinctness would point to a further entity, which would be the Form whose instances they both are. The reason is that their qualitative identity requires a *common* Form to explain it. Their numerical difference prevents either of them from being this common Form; i.e., from being identical to what is common between the two of them without thereby violating their qualitative identity. Forms explain the resemblance between their instances. Whatever, in the instances of a Form, makes them numerically different from one another also makes the instances different from their Form.

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I am interested in examining the reasoning of Plato's extremely condensed argument in *Republic X* for the uniqueness of Forms. I will explore the metaphysical principles and assumptions that are supplied in the text, or need to be presupposed in order to understand the reasoning in the argument. Further, I will reflect on the truth and philosophical significance of its conclusion.

1 Kinds of Bed: the One and the Many

In this section I will examine the metaphysical principles used by Plato in the argument, the so called Third Bed Argument, put forward in *Republic X* 596a-7d.

Plato begins with what describes as his usual approach:

We are, I suppose,² in the habit of positing some one Form (*eidōs*) for each group of many things to which we apply the same name. (596a6-7)³

So, by hypothesis, a single Form is posited for each group of entities in the world of our experience, 'the many', to which we apply the same

2 I take the particle *pou*, which I translate 'I suppose', as meant to convey 'assumed diffidence, by a speaker who is quite sure of his ground', according to one of the uses that Denniston (1991: 490-1) reports.

3 There are two possible construals of this passage. One can take *tithestai* [*einai*] in an existential sense, i.e. 'we posit that there is an *eidōs*', or in a predicative sense, i.e. 'we posit that the *eidōs* is one'. The text allows both readings. The majority of the scholars adopt the existential reading, and so do I. *Contra* the majority of the interpreters, Smith (1917) argues for the predicative reading, which Burnyeat too finds preferable (1989: 102). There are various textual reasons to be found in the passage itself to prefer the existential reading to the predicative one, and further evidence, external to the passage in question, is to be found in *Phaedo* 79a6-7, where *tithestai* is used in an existential sense for positing *duo eidē tōn ontōn*. Furthermore, on the existential reading, as we will see, Plato's claim is a type of One-Over-Many assumption; while on the predicative reading Plato mentions as a familiar principle the claim which will be the conclusion of his argument, namely that each Form is unique. Although I agree with Fine (1993: 305) that either of the two claims would fit the context, I believe it is likely that Plato would have mentioned the principle he will use rather than state at such an early stage of the argument the conclusion. This consideration adds further support to the existential reading.

name. I will use the term 'idonyms' (= identically named) to refer to the members of such a group. This gives us the first principle:

The Idonyms Principle: There is a Form F that corresponds to the group of things that are called by the same name '*f*'.

Here '*f*' is any general term of language. Plato uses the term '*onoma*' (name) for these terms, and gives only sortals of artefacts as examples. But there is nothing in the context to restrict the principle to these and exclude any other term that picks out a type of object.

The idonyms principle gives roughly the domain of *f*-things relevant to the argument; these are the things that we call '*f*'. We will see presently that *f*-things are imperfect reproductions of F in various ways and degrees. If imperfection comes in ways and degrees, there may be a slippery slope and borderline cases as to what is an *f*-likeness of F (e.g. is a table an imperfect reproduction of a bed?). Although there can be many degrees and ways in which the *f*-idonyms are imperfect reproductions of the Form F, we can assume that things called by its name are sufficiently like the Form to merit the name.

For reasons that will become clear, we should not be misled by the way Plato introduces the principle ('we are ... in the habit') into letting past unnoticed the fact that in *Republic X* Plato is performing an innovative metaphysical experiment, which he has not undertaken anywhere else in his writings. The innovation lies in choice of objects Plato includes in the group of *f*-idonyms. I shall focus first on the members of a group of idonyms, in order to highlight what Plato's innovation is; then on the nature of the *eidōs* that corresponds to the group of idonyms; and finally on the relations of the idonyms to each other and to the *eidōs* that corresponds to them. Examining the ontology of the group of idonyms will lead us to the principles at work in the Third Bed Argument.

Let us start from the members of the group of idonyms. The two examples that Plato gives are beds and tables respectively, such as made by craftsmen (596a10-b1). Led by these examples it would be natural to assume that members of a group of idonyms are things of a kind; and that the *eidōs* that corresponds to the group is the kind that the things in each group fall under — in this case the artefact kind 'bed' for beds, and the artefact kind 'table' for tables. But in what follows in the same discussion, Plato insists that the name 'bed' (*klinē*) also applies to paintings of beds: 'in a certain way, the painter does make a bed, doesn't he?'

(596e9-10, and 597b11). It follows that paintings of beds, *qua* having the name 'bed' applied to them, are included in the group of objects sharing the name 'bed'. But paintings of beds are not tokens of the artefact kind 'bed'; they are tokens of the artefact kind 'painting', or of the specific kind 'painting of bed'. So the bed-idonyms, which include beds and paintings of beds, are not objects that fall within a single artefact kind. Thus, membership in a group of idonyms cannot be explained as *kind-membership*.

Can it be explained as *genus-membership*, since there is variation in the specific kinds among the bed-idonyms? But the *eidos* corresponding to the group of idonyms is not to the bed-idonyms as a genus is to the tokens of its species; to see the difference, consider turtles, canaries etc., which are different kinds of animal, but are all equally animals. By contrast, bed-idonyms include, not only different kinds of bed in the sense of bunk-beds, swing-beds and collapsible beds, but also paintings and sculptures of beds. There is no single genus they all fall under. Grouping together into an ontological group idonyms that fall under various kinds and genera is an innovation in the argument we are currently examining.⁴

This immediately raises the question of what the nature of the *eidos* that corresponds to a group of idonyms is. We need to look at the *relation* of the idonyms to the *eidos*, in case it sheds some light onto the *eidos*' nature. In the argument we are currently examining in *Republic X*, Plato says that craftsmen make 'something which is like [*toiouton*] that which is but not it' (597a4-5). In this passage Plato does not explicitly mention resemblance. But it is reasonable to assume that the relation between

4 Even though, as Cherniss (1962: 260) points out, there is another passage in which Plato makes use of what I call the Idonyms Principle, in *Philebus*, 34e3-4, the two cases are to be kept distinct. The example in the *Philebus* is that of the *eidos* desire, while the instances are species of it such as thirst and hunger. This is importantly different from the examples of *Republic X*, where the table is grouped together with an image of a table. Whereas thirst and hunger *are* desires, images of tables are not tables — although we use the term 'table' to describe them — but appearances of tables. Similarly in *Republic V*, 480a2, Plato talks of beautiful sounds and colours, where the beauty is different in kind respectively, but here too, the sounds and colours *are* beautiful, even if in a very different ways. Other interpreters, who note the uniqueness of Plato's claim about idonyms in *Republic X*, have even 'questioned whether 596a does in fact make this claim, or can be interpreted in a weaker way compatible with the other passages about the Forms', as Annas reports (1981: 227). Annas herself finds the uniqueness of the claim 'in tune with the other oddities of Book 10' (228), but she does not develop any further interpretation of it.

the idonyms and the *eidōs* in *Republic X* is the same relation of resemblance between a Form and its tokens which is explicitly mentioned in one of the accounts of the Form-token relation in the *Parmenides*. There Plato takes the relation of the particulars to their *eidōs* to be that of resemblance, as there is between likenesses (*homoīōmata*) and their model (*paradeigma*).⁵ In both passages, Plato describes the particulars as being like the *eidōs* (*homoīōmata* in the *Parmenides*, and *toiouton* in the *Republic*). Further, Plato says in our passage: 'Don't we also customarily say that their makers look towards the appropriate form⁶ in making the beds or tables we use, and similarly in the other cases?' (596b6-9, my emphasis). And he adds that paintings of beds are at a third remove from the *eidōs*, calling the painters 'imitators' (597e); at the second remove are the artefacts, which, on the same principle, are also a kind of imitation, a likeness, of the *eidōs*. Thus, in what follows we shall take the relation between the artefacts and their *eidōs* to be a likeness-relation between a model and what is modelled on it.

But as we have seen in the case of beds, bed-onyms comprise different kinds of artefact, such as beds and paintings of beds. How can the *eidōs* of bed be a model for different kinds of artefact in the bed-onyms group: beds, paintings of beds, sculptures of beds, etc.? It can be by having a variety of likeness-relations that relate it to the idonyms in its group; e.g. a stretch-bed is a bed with limited functionality, while a painting of a bed is only a two-dimensional bed, etc. Allowing for different kinds of the likeness-relation between a single *eidōs* and its idonyms can give rise to a group of idonyms that contains different kinds of artefact, in the case of beds, or generally different kinds of thing. Importantly, by being likened, the *eidōs* is distributed, in some way or other, to the many. Thus, any account of what a Form is will

5 *Parmenides* 132d1-4: 'What appears most likely to me is this: these Forms are like patterns set in nature, and other things resemble them and are likenesses; and this partaking of the Forms is, for the other things, simply being modelled on them'.

6 In the passage just quoted, Plato does not use the term *eidōs* but the term *idea* to refer to the entity which is the model for the craftsmen in making artefacts. The same term *idea* is used two more times in the immediate context, at 596b3, and b9, and the continuity of the discussion makes it clear that it is being used just as an alternative to the term *eidōs*, for the entity which corresponds to a group of idonyms. For a very erudite discussion of the terms *eidōs* and *idea* see e.g. Motte-Rutten-Somville (2003).

need to allow for the resemblance between it and its likenesses, the idonyms.⁷

On the nature of the Form, Plato tells us the following: “*eidōs* ... is our term for what ‘bed’ really is [*hō esti klinē*]” (597a1-2); which gives us the second principle in the argument:

The Constitution Principle: Form F is what ‘*f*’ really is.

In the case of beds, the Form of Bed is what ‘bed’ really is (*hō esti klinē*, 597a2). It is possible to read the Constitution Principle, and the Greek expression it derives from, *hō esti klinē*, either as predicative or as identity statements. As a *predication* statement the Principle would say that Form F is a real *f*, while as an *identity* statement it would say that Form F is identical to the entity that is the real being of an *f*. As we will see, the central hypothesis in the Third Bed Argument is the assumption that there are two different Forms of Bed, each of which is what ‘*f*’ really is. If we read these statements as identities, a contradiction arises immediately. The reason is that on the identity version, the expression “what ‘*f*’ really is” functions as a definite description settling in effect the question of whether the Form of Bed is one or not by assuming from the start that there is a unique thing to which the two Forms of Bed are identical, namely what ‘*f*’ really is.⁸ But Plato wants to prove the uniqueness rather than assume it, so we shall read the Constitution

7 I do not take issue with the question whether the *eidōs* is a paradigm; it could be a blueprint or a form instead. Even if the *eidōs* was a set of instructions which the craftsmen follow in making the artefacts, still there would be resemblance in the sense that the artefacts would be like the form embodied in the instructions.

8 I disagree with Cohen’s claim that the uniqueness thesis ... is simply built into Plato’s way of referring to the Forms. To refer to a Form as ‘The *F* itself’ does not prove the thesis — but it should forestall any objections to it. Thus when Parmenides, at the second step of the TMA claims to have proved the existence of a second Form [*mutatis mutandis* for the TBA, when Socrates mentions god’s creation of a second Form], what one would expect ... is a charge of unintelligibility ... But no such charge is to be found in the text ... Plato does not seem to be interested in making that point. Plato, it seems, just turns his back on the sort of reasoning which could save the uniqueness thesis. (1971, reprinted 1999: 295-6)

In my view, Cohen’s suggestion does not do justice to Plato, for it ignores all the metaphysical tools Plato has available and employs in *Republic X* in arguing for the uniqueness thesis, as we shall see in the reconstruction of the Third Bed Argument.

Principle *predicatively*. On this reading, the Constitution Principle determines the nature of a Form as what '*f*' really is.

Plato explains the fact that an *f*-idonym is what it is, e.g. a bed, through its likeness-relation to Form F, here the Form of Bed. Similarly for paintings of beds which are a different kind of likenesses, namely copies of likenesses of the Form of Bed. Thus, more generally,

The Predication Principle: An *f* thing (other than Form F) is *f* by being a likeness of Form F.

We saw how Plato describes a Form — the Form of Bed is what 'bed' really is — which makes clear what use he intends the likeness-relation to have: it facilitates the transference or the distribution of the being the Form exemplifies to the artefacts. So, the likeness-relation between the *f*-idonyms and Form F entails that the property which Form F exemplifies is instantiated in its likenesses in one way or another (or to a degree or another, as we shall see below, p. 000). This excludes from membership in the group of *f*-idonyms anything that is considered an *f*-likeness by convention or stipulation. Plato tells us that even the painted bed possesses in some manner the property of being a bed; 'in a certain way, the painter does make a bed, doesn't he? Yes, he makes the appearance of one' (596e10-11). Bed-idonyms do not only share the same name; they are *kinds* of bed (*eidē klinōn*, 597b14). This requires a non-trivial likeness between an *f*-idonym and Form F rather than a stipulated one. Thus for anything (but the Form) to *be a bed* is for it to *be a likeness* of the Form of Bed; it is to *possess* in one way or other the property that the Form of Bed exemplifies, namely what 'bed' really is. So it is not just the name of the Form the *f*-idonyms have, but something of its nature too.

We saw just above that every bed-idonym is by hypothesis a bed of some sort. In virtue of the fact that all *f*-idonyms are instances of the Form F by being likenesses of it, they are all *f*-things that resemble one another in that respect. This gives us (from the Idonyms principle above):

The Existential Principle: There is a Form F that corresponds to the group of *f*-resembling things.

What is the relation between the Idonyms Principle and the Existential Principle? Both principles are existential principles introducing a Form for each group of things which share the same name or which resemble one another in the same respect. Are both, then, needed for the argu-

ment? Both contribute to the argument, as the Existential refines the domain of a Form's instances set by the Idonyms Principle for each Form. The Idonyms Principle, which is explicit in the text, tells us that there is a Form F for every group of things that are called by the same name '*f*'. Since Plato's argument is concerned with things which are likenesses of Form F, namely things that do, in fact, possess the property of the Form by being like the Form, calling things *f* by convention or stipulation is set aside. Therefore, as a matter of fact, the remaining *f*-idonyms all possess the property of the Form and therefore resemble one another in that respect. So the Existential Principle which tells us that there is a Form F for every group of *f*-resembling things is just a restatement of the restricted version of the Idonyms Principle once stipulations are excluded. Either principle would do the work for Plato's argument, if appropriate qualifications are added each time. (In the derivation in section 2 I use the Existential Principle for economy).

Why does the Predication Principle apply to every *f*-thing but not Form F?

Plato is explicit that Form F is *f*; the Form of Bed is a bed (*klin*). He says that 'we get, then, these three kinds of beds [*trittai tines klinai*]' (597b5), where the bed made by god, namely the Form of Bed, is one of the three kinds of bed; and again 'the painter, carpenter, and god correspond to three kinds of bed [*treisin eidesi klin n*]' (597b13-14). These claims make it clear that the Form of Bed is not just called a bed, but is a kind of bed. This generates an important concern: how is the *f*-ness of Form F to be explained? The reason why the Predication Principle does not account for the Form's being *f* is that the Form is not what it is by being like itself in any meaningful understanding of 'by'. Even if it were possible to allow that the Form is a likeness of itself by taking the likeness relation to be identity in this application, this move would just lead to a tautological account, with no explanatory benefits — Form F is *f* by being itself.

Plato could have been claimed that Form F is *f* by being a likeness of a further Form *F'*, and so on *ad infinitum*. Yet, Plato does not register any concerns about an infinite regress here, which would have been obvious, so we need to assume that the *f*-ness of Form F is to be explained differently, without a regress. How then is the Form's *f*-ness to be explained? The Constitution Principle provides the answer: the Form of Bed is a bed because it is what 'bed' really is. This is the nature of the Form, primitively, not derivatively (592a2).

Plato's theory aims to explain resemblance between things, broadly understood. It explains the resemblance between two qualitatively identical beds; between two beds of different kinds (e.g. bunk-beds and swing-beds); between beds and paintings or sculptures of beds; and between instances of the Form of Bed and the Form of Bed. The resemblance is greater in some cases and smaller in others. But as we saw, every bed-idonym is by hypothesis a bed of some sort, and in so far as it is a bed, it resembles other beds.

By definition:

The Resemblance Principle: x resembles_{df} y with respect to f -ness iff either x is a likeness of y with respect to f -ness, or x and y are likenesses of z with respect to f -ness.

The (vertical) resemblance between an f -particular and Form F is explained by the fact that the f -particular is a *likeness* of Form F . Plato tells us what the likeness relation delivers, namely imperfect copies of the Form. But he does not reduce it to more primitive ontological building blocks in the theory by explaining what it takes to be a likeness of something, and so it must be treated as a starting point in it.⁹ But since the likeness between the instances and their Form is a primitive element in the theory, claiming resemblance between them on that ground is more a statement than an explanation.

The (horizontal) resemblance between any two f -particulars is explained by the fact that both of them are likenesses of one and the same f -thing, the Form. This is the driving force behind the One-over-Many principle in Plato's ontology: the many share, in one way or another (e.g., through a relevant relation to it), in the one, which is the Form. In the context of *Republic X*, it is the likeness-relation that distributes the property the Form exemplifies to all its instances. The *resemblance* of f -instances to one another secures the *universality* of Form F .

If the resemblance between f -particulars were to be explained by the f -particulars being likenesses of two different Forms, some being likenesses of the first and the others of the second Form, this would

9 Contrast this to the *Parmenides* which contains attempts at offering a mechanism for the distribution of the property the Form stands for, e.g., by possessing part of the Form, which tacitly appeals to physical models.

still leave the resemblance between the two groups of *f*-particulars, and between the two Forms, to be explained. So it is the *oneness* of the original *f*, Form F, that explains the *f*-resemblance between the *f*-particulars, since all of the *f*-particulars are modelled on one and the same thing.

As we have noted, the Theory of Forms as Plato builds it in *Republic X* does not face a regress of the Third Man type.¹⁰ Such a regress does not arise here because, although there is Self-Predication, the *f*-ness of Form F is primitive, as given in the Constitution Principle. So, the Non-Identity principle applies to *f*-particulars, since they are all *f* in virtue of their likeness relation to something other than themselves, to Form F, but Non-Identity does not apply to Form F, which is *f* primitively.¹¹

10 My reasons for claiming that Plato's argument in *Republic X* is not open to a Third Man type of regress are entirely different from those of the other interpreters who argue for the same conclusion. I mention here only two representative views I disagree with, one by Cherniss and one by Fine.

Cherniss (1962: 295-8, and also Shorey (1884), Apelt (1879) and Goblot (1929)) holds that the argument in *Republic X* actually shows that Plato considered the Third Man an invalid argument. For Cherniss Plato's answer to the Third Man is to distinguish, as he does in *Republic X*, what it is to *be* the Form of Bed, and what it is to *possess* the Form of Bed. But in my view there is no evidence that Plato took the distinction between being a Form and possessing a Form to imply that the Form and its instances are not similar, thereby blocking the regress. In fact this distinction is clear in the *Parmenides* where the instances possess the Form by having only a part of it in them, and yet, the Third Man regress is generated in the very context.

Fine argues that there is no regress in the Third Bed argument and takes Plato to use appropriate versions of the One-Over-Many, the Non-Identity, and the Self-Predication assumptions, as to prevent the regress. I find myself in disagreement with the formulation of NI-TBA that Fine attributes to Plato: 'Unlike NI ... [TBA-NI] does not say that nothing is F in virtue of itself; it says only that if there is more than one F at a given level, they cannot be F in virtue of themselves (or in virtue of one another)' (233). Why would Plato want to make this an assumption? What constitutes a metaphysical level? Why does it make a difference if there is one or more than one F at a given level as to whether they are F in virtue of themselves or not? And why are paintings of beds not included at any level under the Form of Bed, despite Plato's calling them a kind of bed?

11 But not all regresses are avoided here. Although no regress of Forms is generated, as it is in the Third Man, a relational regress can be generated as Armstrong has already shown. It is a regress of a Form of Participation, to account for the participation relation between instances and their Form (1980: 69-70). Plato does not talk of a Form of Participation in any context, but of course there is a Form of Likeness, which in our context would suffice for this regress. Plato's option would have been to argue that participation is not a relation that is to be explained in the

But there is a further aspect of the relation of a Form to its likenesses to be investigated. Plato says that if a craftsman ‘doesn’t make what is (*ho estin*), he isn’t making that which is (*to on*), but something which is *like* that which is (*to on*), but is not [it]’ (597a4-5). He concludes that an artefact is not ‘completely [or, perfectly] that which is [*teleōs einai on*]’ (597a5-9). The language Plato uses allows for interpretative variation, because from one sentence to the next the term ‘*klinē*’ (‘bed’) was left out of ‘*ho esti klinē*’ (‘what “bed” really is’); so, is the craftsman making what is not quite a real *bed*, or what is not quite *real*? Plausible readings of this passage can be developed either way. But for our present purposes we need not disambiguate it between the incomplete and the complete readings.¹² What the text says is that the likeness-relation entails *imperfection*, where the imperfection can be qualitative, or existential. By that I mean that modelling something on something else can result in the likeness failing in some way or other to be qualitatively like the model is, as a painting of a bed fails to be a three-dimensional functioning bed, or a bed fails to be comfortable, etc. Or modelling something on something else can result in the likeness failing to be as real a thing as the model is, not in being an *f*, but in its grasp on reality, as for example, by being an *f* that is vulnerable to corruption or extinction.¹³ (In section 3, we shall talk of a further type of imperfection, which can, but need not, combine with qualitative and existential imperfection.) Either way, it follows that the likeness-relation introduces a kind of imperfection in the copy: any likeness of the Form *F* fails to be *exactly similar* to Form *F* — qualitatively, or existentially, or both.¹⁴ Hence,

way that relations between things around us are, but a metaphysical relation that is to be differently explained (or not at all) than as an instantiation of the Form of Likeness.

- 12 For a discussion of the complete *versus* the incomplete readings see, e.g., Mohr (1985: 49-50), who argues for the complete, existential reading.
- 13 Other conceptions of being less real, such as degrees of reality, can be entertained here.
- 14 My understanding of imperfection in the context of the Third Bed argument is that it is an umbrella type of requirement that allows for many types of failure in the likenesses. A clarification is in place: in my interpretation the imperfection in play in Plato’s argument is not of the kind of imperfection by which a perfect replica of the Mona Lisa fails to be the Mona Lisa, namely because the replica does not have the same material basis and historical origin as the Mona Lisa. A copy of the Mona

The Imperfection Principle: Likenesses of Form F are imperfect reproductions of it.

The introduction of imperfection in the likenesses is not further explained by Plato. Clearly it is not an aspect of the nature of a likeness — in principle there can be perfect replicas of originals, as in modelling something on e.g. a chair or a desk. But in the present context this is precluded by the Imperfection Principle. It follows from this principle that Forms are not likenesses of themselves — i.e. despite the variation in degree and respect, the likeness relation cannot be identity in any instance; for nothing can be an imperfect reproduction of itself. (So the likeness-relation, in the sense just explained, is non-reflexive and asymmetrical.)

The Imperfection Principle gives us a further insight into the role of the likeness-relation in Plato's theory. Imperfection, as opposed to perfection, allows for degrees, and even for kind-variation. We saw that *f*-particulars can vary radically in their degree of imperfection in relation to what the Form exemplifies; and they may belong to different kinds, as beds and paintings of them do (597b13-14). The likeness-relation can furnish this variety (e.g. two-dimensional or three-dimensional material or immaterial copies such as paintings, mirror images, and so on). The variation in the likeness-relation is the key to understanding the membership in the group of *f*-idonyms that correspond to Form F, and the way that the Form recurs in the many.

The imperfection of the likenesses of a Form is metaphysically significant. It is my contention, as I will argue in the last section, that the Third Bed argument *explains why* the *f*-particulars can be only imperfect reproductions of F. The *recurrence of universals* places demands on the natures what is distributed. Recurrence requires the *imperfection* of the instances.

Lisa fails to be the Mona Lisa; it *fails to be* the original. But a likeness of a Form fails to be, not the Form, but just *perfectly like* the Form.

In the history of the tradition, many alternative interpretations of the imperfection of the particulars have been put forward. For reasons of space, I mention only two representative ones, by Nehamas and Fine. Nehamas gives a metaphysical interpretation of imperfection (1999: 186, and 185; but also 190, and 178, 179, 180, 191), shared by Annas (1981: 230-1); Fine explains it in terms of the explanatory inadequacy of the *f*-particulars with respect to their being *f* (1991: 99, 100, 227 *et alibi*).

2 The Third Bed Argument

Let us now turn to the Third Bed Argument. It is stated briefly in the text:

if he [god] made only two [Forms of Bed, each of which is what 'bed' really is], then again one would come to light whose form¹⁵ they in turn would both possess, and *that* [Form] would be the one which is what "bed" really is [*ho estin klinē*] and not the other two. (597c7-9, my emphasis)

Let us call the two Forms of Bed made by god B1 and B2. Then, by hypothesis, (\neq indicates numerical difference)

1. B1 \neq B2
2. B1 is what 'bed' really is and B2 is what 'bed' really is.

(2) is read predicatively.¹⁶ B1 and B2 are bed-idonyms, namely, they are beds (see *toiautai* [*klinai*] and *monas* [*klinas*], 597c4, 7). They are beds because by hypothesis each of B1 and B2 is such (*toiautai*, 597c4) as a bed made by god that is what 'bed' really is, namely a Form of Bed, and so each of them is what 'bed' really is and resemble one another in that way. By the Existential Principle:

3. There is a Form of Bed, B3, that corresponds to the group of beds (including B1 and B2).

By the Constitution Principle,

15 Plato says that 'one [Form of Bed] would come to light *whose form* [*eidos*] they [two Forms of Beds] in turn would both possess' (597c7-9, my emphasis). I will simply take this to be Plato's way of saying that the two beds are similar to the Form of Bed — they have its form. I do not assume that Plato introduces a new ontological entity, namely the form of a Form, which is possessed by Forms and their likenesses.

16 Reading (2) as an identity statement would deliver a contradiction of the sort that Cohen thinks Plato could have used to defend the uniqueness of Forms claim (see note 7). But this would be of no help towards understanding, or showing the truth of the uniqueness claim, which the predicative reading attempts.

4. B3 is what 'bed' really is.

Although the hypotheses that B1 is a Form of Bed and B2 is a Form of Bed explains that each of them is a bed (by being what 'bed' really is), the hypothesis requires but does not explain the resemblance between B1 and B2. How then can the theory explain their similarity? Neither of them is a likeness of the other, since by hypothesis they are exactly similar to each other. The *f*-resemblance of any two *f*-idonyms, where the one is not a likeness of the other, can be explained by the Resemblance Principle only through their both being likenesses of one and the same Form F. In this case, B1 and B2 are likenesses of the Form of Bed which corresponds to the bed-idonyms, B3:

5. B1 and B2 are likenesses of B3.

But since they are likenesses of B3, by the Imperfection Principle,

6. B1 and B2 are imperfect reproductions of B3.

But since, by (4), B3 is what "bed" really is, it follows from (6) that

7. B1 and B2 are imperfect reproductions of what "bed" really is.

Thus,

8. B1 is not what "bed" really is and B2 is not what "bed" really is.
(597c9)

But this contradicts (2). The reason is that being "what 'bed' really is" does not allow for degrees of imperfection, since it requires perfection; any imperfect reproduction of it would not be what 'bed' *really* is, but something that falls short of it (597a4-5).

If (2) is false, since neither B1 nor B2 are what the Constitution Principle tells us a Form of Bed is, neither of them is a Form of Bed. So the hypothesis that there are two Forms of Bed resulted in the conclusion that neither of them is a Form of Bed, but some other entity is the Form of Bed. Hence, there is at least one (by (3) and (4)), and at most one (by (8)) Form of Bed; the Form of Bed is exactly one.

3 The metaphysical significance of the Third Bed Argument

Why is there only one Form of Bed? What is the metaphysical import of this argument? It is recognised that the One over Many principle that Plato follows in his Theory of Forms explains *resemblance* between the many in terms of the *singularity* of the Form. For example, that each of the many has a part of one and the same thing, or that the many are modelled on one and the same thing explain why these partakers or likenesses resemble each other. Hence the uniqueness of each Form is needed to explain the resemblance between the Form's many instances. But here Plato takes one metaphysical step further. He introduces *imperfection* into this picture, and I want to argue that this is an integral part of his explanation of *the possibility of resemblance*.

Recurrence requires sameness and difference. The relation between a single Form and its many instances makes possible the distribution of the property the Form exemplifies to the many *f*-things — through likeness or other relational mechanisms that achieve the property's distribution. But the very possibility of the recurrence of the one imposes a requirement on what recurs: recurrence must also provide for the numerical difference between the instances. Even in the cases where the property recurs without any qualitative compromise, something in the constitution of the uncompromised instances must account for the numerical difference between them; otherwise there will be no plurality. Hence the final product needs to be constitutionally different from what recurs, by the addition of the numerical difference. The instance will be the recurrent item plus a difference, whatever this difference may be in alternative metaphysical systems — spatial location, bare particulars, subjects that are multifariously different, etc. But this addition to the constitution of the recurrent is a kind of deformation of it; hence the imperfection required for recurrence. It follows that the one that explains through its recurrence a resemblance between the many will always be constitutionally different from the many.

We can capture Plato's conception of the recurrence of a property as follows: *instantiation is cloning by imperfection*. Although this conclusion is derived here within the framework of Plato's Theory of Forms, I believe its scope is much wider for theories of universals. The intuition is disarmingly simple: for a one to become many, it needs additionally a ground for the numerical distinctions; this interferes with its constitution, and the interference is the imperfection of the instances. I think that any realist theory of universals will need to account for the constitutional difference between instances and their universal, which for

Plato is the imperfection of instantiation. I see this as an a priori necessary truth, which will be given different formulations according to the ontological version of universals in each theory.

There are signs that Plato lacks confidence that he has established his conclusion with such modal status; but there are also firm indications that he saw the uniqueness of Forms at least as a candidate for being a necessary metaphysical truth. He says: "the god, whether he chose not to, or because he was constrained by some *necessity* [*anangē*] that he should make no more than one couch in nature, created just that one which really *is* 'couch'. But two or more such couches were *never* brought naturally into being by god, nor will *ever* be" (597c1-5, my emphasis).

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