

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
Fall 2014
Russell Marcus

Class #2 - Reality and Illusion
Plato, from *Republic*

Business

- Ray Charles
- Presentations
 - After class, email me your top three choices
 - Required preparatory meeting with Jackson
- Jackson dinner - when and where?
- Descartes for Thursday

Reading Philosophy

Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, §1

Philosophy's Central Challenge

- Aim for the truth
- But be open to a wide variety of perspectives
- Humility and charity (in reading and listening)
- But also: some answers are right and some are wrong.
 - Country of the Blind
 - Plato's Cave

The Country of the Blind

It is impossible to make a man, blind by nature, understand that he does not see, impossible to make him want sight and regret his lack (Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (1576), §7).

- How do the people respond to Nunez's discussions of sight? (pp 6-7)
 - ▶ What do we actually see?
 - ▶ Blind people given sight don't see chairs and trees.
 - ▶ Our beliefs about the world are mediated by our sensory apparatus.
 - ▶ They are also mediated by our minds themselves.
- Why doesn't Nunez become king? (p 7)
- Read 29-end (of long version)
- Are the blind people's reactions to Nunez, and his description of sight rational?

Error

- About what can we be wrong?
 - What have you been wrong about?
- What kinds of things can we not be wrong about?

Parmenides on Lying

- NL1. Lying is saying what is not.
- NL2. That which is not has no sort of being.
- NL3. When I say something, it has at least some sort of being.
- NLC. So, lying is impossible.

On Being Wrong

- Children are systematically wrong about some things.
 - False belief test and theory of mind
 - Piaget and conservation
- One might look at such entrenched inabilities to have false beliefs and wonder about ourselves.

Estimate the Following Product

5 seconds

Group A:

$$8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$$

Estimate the Following Product

5 seconds

Group B:

$$1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8$$

Results

Tversky and Kahneman 1974

- Group A:
 - ▶ $8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$
 - ▶ Median: 2,250
- Group B:
 - ▶ $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8$
 - ▶ Median: 512
- Actual product: 40,320
- This is called *anchoring*.
 - ▶ A cognitive bias

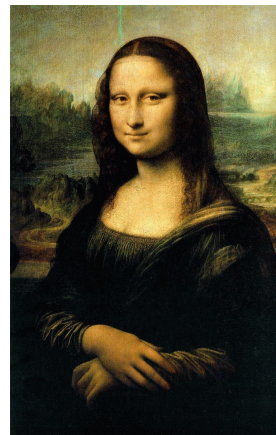
Framing

Another cognitive bias

- Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimate of the consequences of the programs are as follows:
 - Program A: 200 people will be saved.
 - Program B: A 1/3 probability that 600 people will be saved, and 2/3 probability that no people will be saved.
- Or...
 - Program C: 400 people will die
 - Program D: A 1/3 probability that nobody will die, and a 2/3 probability that 600 people will die.
- 72% chose program A and 28% chose program B.
- 22% chose program C while 78% chose program D.
- But A and C have exactly the same results, as do B and D.
- Ariely

Two Ways Not to Be Wrong

- Some people believe that we can be wrong about a lot of things.
- Others believe that we can be wrong about very few things.
- There are two different kinds of reasons that one could be resistant to error.
 1. We could be resistant to error because we are almost always right about something.
 - simple arithmetic calculations
 - whether we are in pain, or are happy
 2. We could be resistant to error because the claim we are making are neither true nor false.
 - Whether the *Mona Lisa* is attractive
 - Whether lima beans are yummy

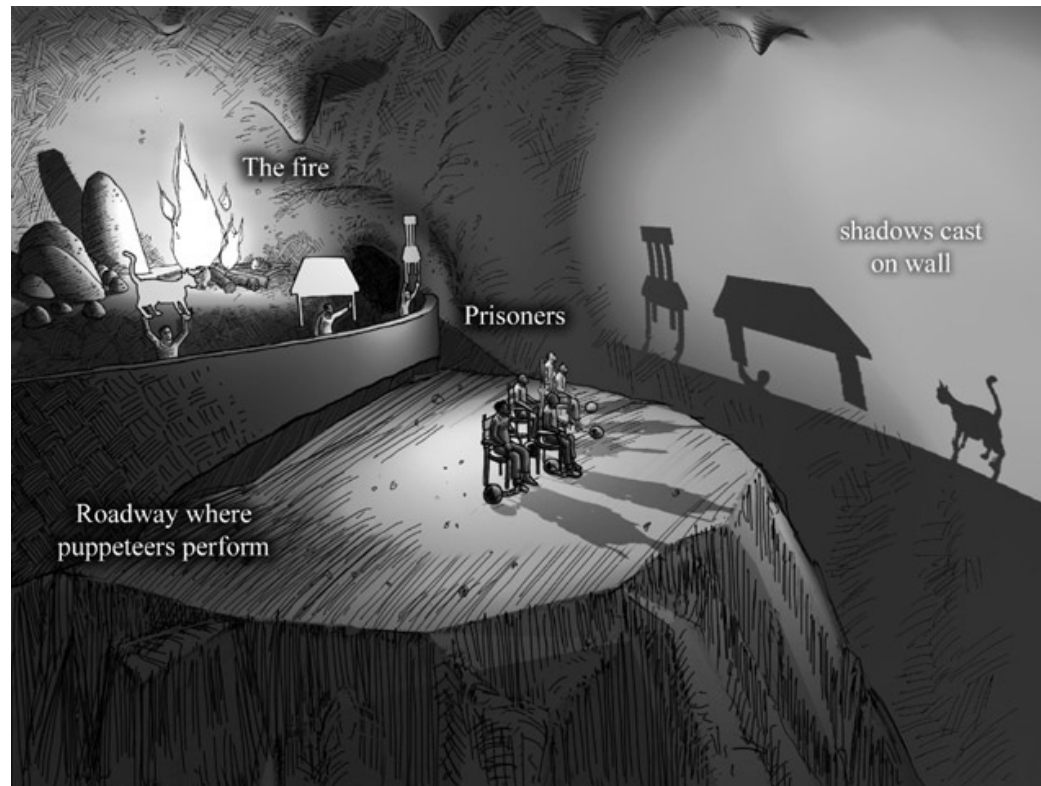


Truth Values



- Some of us think that many or even most claims are matters of opinion.
- If we want to know the nature of reality, we need to consider claims of the first sort.
- Mathematical claims are not matters of opinion.
- Neither are the claims of science.
 - ▶ the force of gravitational attraction
 - ▶ the genetic code of a chipmunk
 - ▶ the structure of the set-theoretic universe
- In what ways might we be in error?
- Are there systematic ways in which we make mistakes?

Plato's Cave



The prisoners believe that the shadows are reality.
[Also: See 8-bit video.]

Setting Free a Prisoner

When one was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his neck around, walk, and look up toward the light, he would be pained by doing all these things and be unable to see the things whose shadows he had seen before, because of the flashing lights... If we pointed to each of the things passing by and compelled him to answer what each of them is, don't you think he would be puzzled and believe that the things he saw earlier were more truly real than the ones he was being shown? (515c-d).

Returning to the Cave

- If this man went back down into the cave and sat down in his same seat, wouldn't his eyes be filled with darkness, coming suddenly out of the sun like that?... Now, if he had to compete once again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, while his sight was still dim and before his eyes had recovered, and if the time required for readjustment was not short, wouldn't he provoke ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he had returned from his upward journey with his eyes ruined, and that it is not worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And as for anyone who tried to free the prisoners and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hand on him, wouldn't they kill him (516e-517a)?
- The people in the cave will not let go of their images.

Two Reasons for Hostility

Anyone with any sense...would remember that eyes may be confused in two ways and from two causes: when they change from the light into the darkness, or from the darkness into the light. If he kept in mind that the same applies to the soul, then when he saw a soul disturbed and unable to see something, he would not laugh absurdly. Instead, he would see whether it had come from a brighter life and was dimmed through not having yet accustomed to the dark, or from greater ignorance into greater light and was dazzled by the increased brilliance (517e-518a).

Interpreting the Allegory of the Cave

- Who are the people in the cave?
- What are the images we are reluctant to give up?
- What are the images Plato wishes us to give up?
- How do we feel about those who refuse to listen to those who see the world differently?

Plato's Challenge

- Find the reality behind the images.
- Do not let our preconceptions lead us.
- Problem: doxastic involuntarism