

Edited by
Michael Bruce and Steven Barbone

JUST THE ARGUMENTS

100
of the Most
Important
Arguments
in Western
Philosophy

POSSIBLE WORLDS



 WILEY-BLACKWELL

This edition first published 2011
© 2011 Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ,
United Kingdom

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

The right of Michael Bruce and Steven Barbone to be identified as the authors of the editorial material in this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Just the arguments : 100 of the most important arguments in Western philosophy / edited by Michael Bruce and Steven Barbone.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4443-3637-5 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4443-3638-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Philosophy—Introductions. I. Bruce, Michael. II. Barbone, Steven.
BD21.J87 2011
190—dc22

2011012212

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is published in the following electronic formats: ePDFs 9781444344400; Wiley Online Library 9781444344431; ePub 9781444344417; mobi: 9781444344424

Set in 10/12pt Sabon by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited
Printed and bound in Singapore by Ho Printing Singapore Pte Ltd

1 2011

The Existence of Forms: Plato's Argument from the Possibility of Knowledge

Jurgis (George) Brakas

Plato. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. New York: Bollington Foundation, 1963.

Cornford, F. M. *The Republic of Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Ross, William David. *Plato's Theory of Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951.

The existence of Forms is at the heart of Plato's philosophy. Take them away, and no philosophy that could reasonably be called Plato's would remain. To the layman (not to mention many philosophers), they are strange creatures indeed. This demands that any discussion of them attempt not only to make clear what these Forms are supposed to be like but also why we should believe they exist at all. Plato gives us several arguments for their existence, but the most important one is arguably what may be called his "argument from the possibility of knowledge." Its premises can be found in several of his dialogues. The argument, naturally enough, is the product of his own passionate convictions and the influence of his predecessors upon his thinking.

Deeply influenced by Socrates, he took from him the love of wisdom, the love of genuine knowledge, with its corresponding withering contempt

Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy, First Edition. Edited by Michael Bruce and Steven Barbone.
© 2011 Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Published 2011 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

for pretensi
his contemp
come to gri
Parmenides
(#14) claim
certain One
is constantl
remaining v
thing, to kn
it, it has alr

To know
change, som
Only such a
Parmenides
must exist i
are what Pl
is not that F
edge exists l
ence of Form
of knowledg
ontological.)
this world, a
their possess

[Socrate
beauty or
there is. Th
anything o
whether th
can that be
Nor yet, ca
approaches
no longer k
that there i
is nothing
unless con
of knowled
no knowled
be no know
modified us

In the *Rep*
- or, if you li
form.

for pretensions to it – including the relativism and subjectivism of many of his contemporary thinkers, the Sophists. He also realized that he had to come to grips with the views of two other major thinkers, Heraclitus and Parmenides – Heraclitus claiming that nothing is, only becoming, Parmenides (#14) claiming that change does not exist, only what does not change (a certain One). If – as Plato believed with Heraclitus – everything in this world is constantly changing in every way, constantly “morphing,” never, ever remaining what it is, how could it ever be possible for us to “grasp” anything, to know what any thing is? By the time you think you have grasped it, it has already slipped out of your hands.

To know something must therefore be to know something that does not change, something that always remains what it is (something Parmenidean). Only such a thing can be known, and only such a thing – Plato agrees with Parmenides – is really real. Since such things do not exist in this world, they must exist in, and constitute, a nonspatial, nontemporal dimension. These are what Plato calls “Forms.” (Note that the structure of Plato’s argument is not that Forms exist because knowledge exists; it is, rather, that knowledge exists because Forms exist. Knowledge is not the source of the existence of Forms; the reverse is true: the existence of Forms makes the existence of knowledge possible. Plato’s argument, therefore, is not epistemic; it is ontological.) They are also perfect, eternal, the source of the existence of this world, and many other things as well, but Plato gives other reasons for their possession of these attributes.

[Socrates asks Cratylus] Tell me whether there is or is not any absolute beauty or good, or any other absolute existence? Certainly, Socrates, I think there is. Then let us seek the true beauty, not asking whether a face is fair, or anything of that sort, for all such things appear to be in flux, but let us ask whether the true beauty is not always beautiful. Certainly [. . .]. Then how can that be a real thing which is never in the same state? [. . .]. They cannot. Nor yet, can they be known by anyone; for at the moment that the observer approaches, then they become other and of another nature, so that you can no longer know their nature or state. [. . .]. Nor can we reasonably say [. . .] that there is knowledge at all, if everything is in a state of transition and there is nothing abiding. For knowledge too cannot continue to be knowledge unless continuing always to abide and to exist. But if the very nature of knowledge changes, at the time when the change occurs there will be no knowledge, and if the transition is always going on, there will always be no knowledge. (*Cratylus*, qtd. in Ross, 439C–440C; Ross’s trans., slightly modified using Jowett’s in *The Collected Dialogues*)

In the *Republic*, Plato gives us the same argument in more explicit form – or, if you like, a different version of the same argument in more explicit form.

'S
nilton and
rsity Press,
don Press,
y. Take them
Plato's would
ey are strange
attempt not
but also why
ents for their
be called his
can be found
s the product
scessors upon
e of wisdom,
ing contempt
osophy,
td.

[Addressing Glaucon, Socrates asks] [If] a man believes in the existence of beautiful things, but not of Beauty itself [. . .], is he not living in a dream? [. . .]. Contrast him with the man who holds that there is such a thing a Beauty itself and can discern that essence as well as the things that partake of its character, without ever confusing the one with the other – is he a dreamer or living in a waking state? He is very much awake. So we may say that he knows, while the other has only a belief in appearances; and might we call their states of mind knowledge and belief? Certainly. [. . .] When a man knows, must there not be something that he knows? [. . .] [T]here must. Something real or unreal? Something real. How could a thing that is unreal ever be known? [. . .]. So if the real is the object of knowledge, the object of belief must be something other than the real. Yes. Can it be the unreal? Or is that an impossible object even for belief? Consider: if a man has a belief, there must be something before his mind; he cannot be believing nothing, can he? No. [. . .]. So what he is believing cannot be real nor yet unreal. True. [. . .]. It seems, then, that what remains to be discovered is that object which can be said both to be and not to be and cannot properly be called either real or purely unreal. If that can be found, we may justly call it the object of belief [. . .]. (Plato *Republic*, 476C–479A; Cornford's trans.)

Socrates then goes on to identify that object as the world in which we live, a world which he earlier implicitly referred to as a world of appearances. Although one of the basic operating premises here is not that all things in this world are in constant flux, but rather that they are neither fully real nor fully unreal, it is not a far stretch to argue that they are neither fully real nor fully unreal because they are in constant flux. If so, then the argument is fundamentally the same as the one given in the *Cratylus*; if not, then it is another version of it. In the latter case, premise 4 would have to be modified accordingly as well as the wording in all the lines relying on it.

- P1. Knowledge is possible.
- P2. Knowledge is knowledge of some object. That is, if a (putative) piece of knowledge does not have an object, then that (putative) piece of knowledge does not exist.
- P3. All knowledge (unlike opinion) is stable. That is, all pieces of knowledge are stable: they do not change, being one thing at one time, another at another.
- P4. If the object of knowledge could change (for example, if beauty, the object I know, could become something other than beauty), then the knowledge of that object would not be stable (my knowledge of beauty would not be stable).
- P5. All things in this world, as Heraclitus says, are in constant flux. That is, all things in this world are things that are always changing in every way, or, all things in this world are not things that are stable.

- P6. Some object
tion for *reductio*
C1. Some ob
P5, P6).
- C2. Some pie
- C3. All know
edge are n
- C4. No objec
P6–C3).
- P7. If objects of
another, then
- P8. Objects of k
indirect proof
- C5. Objects
knowledge
- C6. Objects c
- C7. Knowled
- C8. Knowled
P1, C7).
- C9. Objects o
(*reductio*, l

the existence of
ng in a dream?
a thing a Beauty
t partake of its
he a dreamer or
ay say that he
d might we call
] When a man
] [T]here must.
g that is unreal
ge, the object of
the unreal? Or
an has a belief,
ng nothing, can
et unreal. True.
at object which
alled either real
: object of belief

orld in which we
world of appear-
re is not that all
they are neither
t they are neither
x. If so, then the
: *Cratylus*; if not,
se 4 would have
the lines relying

a (putative) piece
utative) piece of
ces of knowledge
time, another at
le, if beauty, the
eauty), then the
wledge of beauty
nstant flux. That
hanging in every
stable.

- P6. Some objects of knowledge exist among things in this world (assumption for *reductio*).
- C1. Some objects of knowledge change; they are not stable (syllogism, P5, P6).
- C2. Some pieces of knowledge are not stable (*modus ponens*, P4, C1).
- C3. All knowledge (unlike opinion) is stable and some pieces of knowledge are not stable (conjunction, P3, C2).
- C4. No objects of knowledge exist among things in this world (*reductio*, P6-C3).
- P7. If objects of knowledge do not exist in this world and do not exist in another, then objects of knowledge do not exist.
- P8. Objects of knowledge do not exist in another world (assumption for indirect proof).
- C5. Objects of knowledge do not exist in this world, and objects of knowledge do not exist in another (conjunction, C4, P8).
- C6. Objects of knowledge do not exist (*modus ponens*, P7, C5).
- C7. Knowledge is not possible (*modus ponens*, P2, C6).
- C8. Knowledge is possible, and knowledge is not possible (conjunction, P1, C7).
- C9. Objects of knowledge – called “Forms” – do exist in another world (*reductio*, P6-C8).