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A Metaphysical Paradox of Gregory Vlastos¹

Referring to Book X of Plato's *The Republic*, Gregory Vlastos starts his article about *A Metaphysical Paradox*. What kind of paradox does he have in mind? We should not wonder that he pertains to the metaphysical paradox wording by Plato in Book X of *The Republic*.

The forming of paradox in Book Ten of Plato's *The Republic*: "the Form of bed is the 'real' bed (597a2-4); the physical bed ... in not 'perfectly real' (597a2)"; the physical bed "is a shadowy sort of thing by comparison with reality (597a10)" (p. 5).

Vlastos contemplates Plato's distinction between the form of a bed (real bed) and the bed "made by the carpenter." Is a bed maker's bed "as real as anything could possibly be?" These threads of contemplation run throughout the article. By this example and question, Vlastos reminds us of another basic platonic question; is reality entirely real, perfectly real or of reality's own shadow? Here, in the moment, Vlastos's statements, which are grasped above, cause a problem: if something is "a shadowy sort of thing" (p. 5) can we still use comparative methods to speak about this distinction? When Vlastos was an undergraduate, he talked about it in text, he appreciated this paradox. This appreciation was an effect of special logic demonstration in which the conclusion is demonstrated by proper proof and therefore this kind of proof is connected with a conception of demonstrative knowledge where conclusion is an effect of background. Vlastos uses the exact term "demonstrative truth." It is the reason why we should be convinced that the solution of paradox depends on the premises. According to Aristotle, premises should be truth – primordial, direct and better known. If so, the conclusion should also be like the premise. (comp. Popper's arguments). It

¹ G. Vlastos, *A Metaphysical Paradox*, "Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association" 1965, vol. 39, pp. 5-19.

is the reason why, I suppose, Vlastos found something metaphysical in the same basis of such proof, and tried to inform us that not all of the whole ground has a metaphysical connotation. From where From where then are the premises? Vlastos doesn't go into this side of Plato's philosophy in his article. He reminds us of Plato's conception of "grades or degrees of reality."

Degrees of reality doctrine in *The Republic: to be or to be real* in comparative form: "being or reality pertains in higher degree to the Ideas or Forms than to their sensible "nametakes" (comparison between Book Five (475e ff.) and Book Ten). Next arguments: 'more real' and 'less real' in *The Republic* (515d, 585b-e). Here is also "the really real reality" *Phaedrus* (247c). In *The Republic* "really real" in: (597d2); in *The Republic* "physical bad is not the 'real' one" (597a4-5), *Timaeus* (37e28a; 52c6-6), *Philebus* (58a2, 59d4). Based on the above mentioned text, Vlastos claims that "the grades of reality doctrine ... staked out in *The Republic* remained one of his permanent convictions, weathering the storm of perplexity and self-criticism recorded in the *Parmenides*."

After that Vlastos draws two examples: "1. Unicorns are not real. 2. These flowers are not real" (p. 6). Then he says that "In 1 the real is the existent in contrast to fictitious, the imaginary" (p. 6). We suppose that in *the first example* "the real is the existent" so unicorns are not real in the sense that they do not exist. They are products of imagination. Vlastos's conclusion is based on the assumption that imaginings do not exist.

In the next step he considers issues of the non-existential sense of real and also shows connotations between real and existential, or with *genuine*. The author cites the Oxford English Dictionary (p. 7) to illustrate that "the non-existential sense of *real* has always been in common use" (p. 7). Vlastos also pertains to: a) the modern philosophers which have ignored the mentioned sense (for example I. Kant, G. E. Moore) b) English-speaking philosophers which "allowed non-existential sense of 'real' (p. 7)" although he lists exceptions (neo-Heglians: Bradley, Royce; and the critic of the idealists Lewis). After the Second World War the problem came back in Austin's Oxford lecture.

Afterwards Vlastos bears out that modern interpreters by identifying 'real' with 'exist'. That 'real' and 'existence' has equal range. Vlastos says "some things are 'more real' than others (p. 8)." Does it mean "that they *exist* more than others," immediately he claims that this assumption has been made by modern interpreters, philologists and philosophers. Vlastos mentions also R. C. Cross's and A. D. Woozley's (p. 8) commentary on *The Republic* because these authors identified 'exist' with 'real' (they "occur as synonyms"). A premise to this conclusion is that Plato "does not make this distinction." Vlastos explicitly says that "it cannot be true." Why?

Vlastos refers to the G. E. L. Owen's essay as being in agreement with his "method of analysis by paraphrase in the *Sophist*" (p. 9). In that dialogue, the 'is' of identity from its other uses" is isolated. Vlastos stipulates, however, that that

method is used inconstantly because it does not “sort out in the same way the ‘is of existence from that of predication.” After that Vlastos recalls an angle of Noam Chomsky (p. 9), referring to the linguistic knowledge that the use of the rules of language “say nothing of any ability to state them” (p. 9). Chomsky’s statement proves that Plato could observe the distinction between *Troy is famous* and *Troy is* “even if he never stated or discussed it” (p. 9).

Vlastos also cites the cases of Plato’s prose in which phrases like these are used: ‘the really good and noble man’; ‘the real sophist’; ‘a really divine place’, ‘he had really stopped talking’” (p. 9). These examples come from *The Republic* 396b, *Sophist* 268d, *Phaedrus* 238c, *Prot.* 328d. Vlastos does not quote the original Greek version this time, however, we want to accentuate that, for example in *Sophist* 268d, there is ὄντως (τόν ὄντως σοφιστήν εἶναι); ὄντως is an adverb, adv. of εἶμι (*sum*) ‘be’, translated as *really, actually, verily*. There is also εἶναι which is an infinitive present of εἶμι (LSJ). The above instances show a problem of synonymy between the ‘real’ and the ‘existing.’ Vlastos says that “the world ‘existingly’ would simply not fit these contexts ... Plato is talking about what would be really good and noble even if he did not exist.” Vlastos finds this kind of “subtlety of language” in *Politicus* (293e). Here, Plato talks about contras between “correct constitution” and “not genuine, nor really real.” In this way, Vlastos assures us, “that really real cannot mean ‘existingly existing.” So this statement of Vlastos’s can be expressed in other words: If we said that orthodox constitutions are ‘really real’ then non-orthodox could ‘exist’. Vlastos supposes that these examples from Plato’s dialogues proves that “Plato’s evidences the knowing of the non-synonymy of ‘existing’ and ‘real’” (p. 9)

In the next step Vlastos says that if something is not real (in the sense of unicorns) then it can not be linked with the doctrine of reality degree. Vlastos’s opinion is that phantoms of the imagination are not the degree of reality. “... while the second ‘real’ often admits of degrees the first one never does” (p. 10). Vlastos wants to persuade us that something might not half-exist. However, he shows that, according to his opinion, the products of imagination could not be linked with the doctrine of reality degree. But if goat stags might not half-exist then they have to exist. So in this moment (compare Vlastos’s example on p.10 “flowers and unicorns are not real”), they are not real but not in the sense that they do not exist. A sentence that ‘something is not real’ assumes the existing subject of the sentence. The features of flowers and unicorns are denied by contradiction. Vlastos, summarizing the thought, says “Not so in the case of the non-existential use of ‘real’” (p. 10). What does it mean? With unicorns it is a case of non-existential sense of real; unicorns do not exist and they are not real in a nonexistent sense.

In addition Vlastos, grasping other examples, says that in the case of, for example diamonds, teeth, duck, “the possibilities are also restricted to either ‘real’ or ‘not real’ and with gold, copper. The ‘real’ here means that something has the appropriate properties, for example also as good, bellyful, pious. Vlastos’s

conclusion of this paragraph: ‘Not-real’ does not mean that ‘x’ does not exist. We can say “‘he is not really educated’ without implying that he is *not* educated” (p. 10). “Real” does not mean “existence” but it is also a feature. It is the reason why Vlastos talks about “extension of the sense of ‘real’” (p. 10).

In the next section of articles, Vlastos remarks on a problem of relation between the existence and the Form. “Plato does not believe that while the form does exist, its sensible instances do not. (p. 11).” In *Timaeus* (54) Plato talks about the unchanging Form. The namesakes of Form ever-changing and about Space. Form, namesakes and Space, according to Plato, exist. Vlastos says that in 52D2-4 “it is clearly existential – and – it is applied to all grades of reality (p. 11).” This proof, based on Plato’s text, lets us conclude that, if something is more or less real, it does not mean that it exists more or less. Only the Form “is said to be ‘really real’ not assert, but categorize, its existence. ‘More real’ does not mean ‘more existent’” (p. 11). Thus Vlastos passes to the next point.

Vlastos wants to link ‘real’ with Form. So he asks “What could his Forms or Ideas have in common with real gold, real coffee ... in contrast to the debased gold ... or superficial beauty?” (p. 11). Features help us to grasp “cognitive reliable F.” The essential differences between unicorns and flowers (compare the above list) is that unicorns are ‘uncounterfeited’ “if you want to investigate the nature of gold ... you must look to the genuine article” (p. 11). The first common feature is that Form or Ideas determine which items are true and which are not. The second attribute is summarized in the following opinion “the real F would be the *reliably valuable one*” (p. 12). This Vlastos’s statement means that the real F is, on the one hand, connected with the reality; and on the second with the value. (p. 12 line 8). One of them is linked up with epistemological function. The point is that “the Forms are the objects of knowledge ... They are the most rewarding to the mind” (p. 12) – in comparison with things. Why are they so adequate to the mind? The nature of Forms is “logically perspicuous.” The next reason is that natures of Form “can be made so with adequate training in dialectic (p. 12).” It means that this mind’s reward can be revealed by ample directions, and that this directions are a dialectic key of Forms.

The next cause is “all their properties follow from their natures in conjunction with the natures of other similarity luminous and stable objects (p. 12).” Vlastos uses here language of dualism. We know this because he predicates that example “intellectually opaque and shifty” (p. 12). We suppose that this is quite different, that they are in light of mind. In this sense they are not opaque and shifty. But he’s still has his mind on something else, that they do not exhibit “their intelligible structure on their sensible surface” (p. 12) We should emphasise, that according to Plato *Parmenides*, the world of Forms (Ideas) participate in the world (comp. μετέχω, μεταλαμβάνω, συγκοινωνέω). line 20. When we want to ascertain an intelligible structure “by inference and extrapolation and extrapolation.” But this method of a discovery of an intelligible structure, based on a group of properties,

shows a weak point because the world of properties are not eternal and that the world is changing. This, according to Plato, refers to all senses which delude as. "Form, ... will never deceive" (p. 12). The Form does not change; it is invariant. This description of the Form is compared by Vlastos to the real F "which can be trusted absolutely in our pursuit of knowledge" (p. 12). But Vlastos wants to speak of something else about Forms, that the philosopher is not a Formknower but a Formlover (*The Republic*, 47c ff., p. 13). But here is another prospect of forms understanding. They are "objects of knowledge." Vlastos highlights that love of the object of knowledge has a different spectrum than Ideas. But it causes a problem. Is aesthetic theory knowledge? Plato responds that it is knowledge of the Form of beauty. Vlastos stresses that its knowledge is "deductively articulated." Its certainty is based on demonstrative proof and of course, Form (Idea) of beauty has unlimited range. Here, as we see, Vlastos uses Form and Idea interchangeably and it is problematic. But Vlastos notices here that in *The Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, the Idea of Beauty is the most adorable but beauty does not pleasure completely. "In the very act of giving one kind of beauty, they deny another" (p. 13). Reliance on great beauty leads to frustration, restlessness. Vlastos's saying of this relies on *Symposium* (210e). The reaching of peak of "wonderful sort of Beauty" stills restlessness. But is this reaching constant? Vlastos does not develop this motif in this direction. He refers to the recent commentaries in which English speaking philosophers link vision of Beauty with Goodness, Justice, Temperance, Holiness, and Knowledge. In this vision common is the king of experiences. But Vlastos wants to reflect on this part of Plato's work (p. 14) and as a result he returns to the older books of Santayana, Cornford's and Pater's and adds that the interpretations contained in this book are problematic because they disfigure matter and are erroneous. As a counterargument, Vlastos touches on fragments of Plato's *The Republic* (582A ff.) where there is a story about the good man who doesn't have a fortune and is "happier than the bad one at the fortune best." (p. 14). There is a point as to why Vlastos says that this story, told about experiences, "excels all other" less permanent experiences. (p. 14). It is an aesthetic experience – intellectual and moral (p. 14). Vlastos also finds this kind of experience in *The Republic* (500c2-d1) in form of a) "gazing daily at the Form" and b) imitation of love. Here Vlastos detects a transition "from the moral to the religious dimension" (p. 14). Hereby Plato's religion is stimulated by Bacchic or Eleusinian rites. A vision of the Form becomes a kind of piety (*Phaedrus*, 249c, *Phaedo*, 69c-d. "Plato puts Form in a place of God" (p. 15). Therefore Form turns out to be adorable "as a sacred communion" (p. 15). Although, this philosophical experience is uncommon. A part of the philosopher's claim is that Plato's philosophy is esoteric. The Forms, according to Plato's philosophy, are not created by us but only imitated and it is a characteristic attribute only of this relation. (p. 16). A sense given in the second "s" is not relevant to the grades of reality doctrine. The Form is a group of features. Vlastos says that "Plato had said: The Form, *F*, is to sensible *F*s as is real gold

alloyed with baser metals” and discerns two analogies which in turn awaken two paradoxes.

Firstly, studies of pure Forms (essential properties) are necessary if we want to know anything about Forms and its namesakes – “restriction of knowledge to the *a priori*.” What is a premise such a conclusion? Grades of reality are translated into grades of language. “... bed... is not the carpenter product” (p. 16). Secondly, because of our anxiety of, for example, purity standards, we should “seek vision of Form” (p. 16). This analogy is linked with a mystical experience which probably is based on metaphysics as such. It is not only about mysticism as “sporadic state of ecstatic awareness (p. 16)” or “qualityless, undifferentiated, unity” or “emptying consciousness of ... content (p. 17)” or “total recall sensation, where consciousness of vivid particularity” or “being reduced to zero.” Plato’s “seek of form” conception is most similar to Spinoza’s dogma of “*amor intellectualis Dei*, where beatitude is achieved in a miraculous junction of love, knowledge, moral resolve, and spiritual exaltation” despite this, the conception of Plato and Spinoza according to Vlastos are not similar. Furthermore, Vlastos claims here that Plato’s conception of “vision of form” “differs ... from Plotinian union with One which transcends form.” In contrast we should emphasize a small problem because in Plato’s *Parmenide* the One is separated as such so we can say that one according to Plato transcends form, so in fact we can’t entirely agree with Vlastos.

Vlastos finds the similarity between Spinoza’s and Plato’s philosophy on ecstatic consciousness, “every mystic ... can never find in them (things) ultimate security and fulfilment” (p. 17). Trusting in the things, mystics become slaves of unsatisfied desire. On the side of shadow mystic finds “vexation of spirit.” In the inside of mystic state things leave him. After a period of slavery the mystic discovers liberation and peace, framing a renewed grammar contrasting time with eternity ... time without eternity represents the state of bondage” (p. 17). In short Plato’s vision of form is a bridge between an eternal world and a world of enslavement (p. 18). Essentially “be,” “existence of Form” do not have any grades. Forms as “a creature of time touches eternity” (p. 18). Furthermore, Vlastos admittedly summarizes that Forms as such, touching it, contacts with incorporeity; “eternity – says Vlastos – is incorporeal Form and the corporeal world has meaning and value so far as it copies, or can be made to copy, Form, and where time itself is redeemed as the image of eternity” (p. 18). However, Vlastos finds a flaw in an incomplete or faulty analysis: a) ontological: a problem of explanation of “the difference between the sense of ‘real’ ... from the existential” (p. 18). The sense of “real” fits the Plato theory whereas “existential” does not (on the contrary, Vlastos probably forgets here that Plato specifically grasps relation between “real” and “existential” in *Parmenides*) b) semantic: in this analysis Plato should show that “real” is not used as the subject or the predicate of a proposition – “‘real’ is syncategorematic.” “Predicate completes its sense. (p. 18)” c) logical: here Vlastos claims that a “self-predication” is a problem and logical error in Plato’s

conception (If Vlastos, essentially, had noticed a relation between “self-predication” and “self-awareness” he should have balanced his opinion about this issue). d) Methodological: here Vlastos speaks about two problems. Firstly, a content of epistemological and metaphysical scopes within the grades of reality theory is not distinguished enough. Secondly, the metaphysical content “would have ... propounded ... as a personal vision for which demonstrative certainty cannot be claimed” (p. 18).

“Forms are not meant to be more real in every possible way (p. 18).” Forms, from the side of their “existence” are not more or less real but as well as if forms are real in every possible way then – Vlastos divagates – then if circle is circular it will be “a more reliable object of knowledge” likewise beauty if it is beautiful. In addition Vlastos gives a rule of this assumption: “in general the form for *F* is itself *F* (p. 18).” Also, according to Vlastos, only if the Forms play a role “as objects of value” then self-characterization of Forms is important. Other predicates are “literally senseless” however they could have a metaphorical sense – as Vlastos says (p. 19).

Vlastos ends his article arguing that Plato’s metaphysical paradox is unprovable. At the source of a paradox is an unprovable experience, private, however deep. As a consequence *A Metaphysical Paradox of Gregory Vlastos*, mysticism let us grasp Plato’s doctrine in a non-authoritarian way that weakens Popper’s arguments about Plato’s philosophy.

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Abstract

In the present paper I come to the conclusion that article about *A Metaphysical Paradox* written by Gregory Vlastos can lead to argument against Popper’s interpretation of Plato’s philosophy. Of course Gregory Vlastos never formulated, explicitly way, any such argument in above mentioned article.

Keywords: Gregory Vlastos, Karl Popper, Plato.

