Self-Identity and the Origins of Equality: A Non-Platonic Conception
Ahmed Adil

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Argument:

A particular idea that Platonic philosophy insists upon or at least necessitates is the abstract tools of cognition that make the forms accessible to humans and their role in enabling the self to understand the material world. Plato claims that in order for the self to know of abstract ideas like equality, justice, order, etc, one must already know of them as they are not observed in external reality (Phaedo 74a-75d).

The form of equality, as Plato claims it to be, is never observed in external reality. We only ever see things approximately equal to other things, never truly equal. He uses this to prove his point about the inexistence of a true perfect equality in reality.(Phaedo 74b-c)

I, however, disagree with this idea, but not solely due to the standard objection against the forms and their existence in a higher reality i.e them just being cognitive tools we have developed through evolution.

Rather, I would like to argue that we do have access to perfect equality in external reality. Perfect equality exists in things in themselves. E.g., a pen named A at any point in time, let's say T, is always perfectly equal to itself. When one says that an object A is equal to object B, they do not *intuitively* mean it in terms of measurement of any form. What it rather means is that object A *is* object B. It is the projection of the identity of object A onto object B. The person observes object B to be object A, regardless of what the truth might be outside its appearance. Approximation is an entirely different concept. It is the observation of differences between what is being projected to be equal in the self-equality sense and fails to meet the criteria of perfect equality. This failure can be observed through sense data processing, where what appears to be is not what it is in the truest and most precise sense.

The *concept* of equality is parasitic on self-identity. We learn what "same" means reflexively, then extend it. The relation between distinct things is an application, not the source. Equality-as-relation depends on equality-as-identity

Rebuttal A:

One might say, "Even if equality starts as self-identity, how do we get the *concept* of perfect equality between two *different* things? You've never seen A and B with zero distinction. Yet you can imagine it. Where does that idealized 'no distinction between distinct things' come from?

Reply A:

Cognitive limitations are the answer. Our sense data perception is flawed and limited. One does not think of distinction first, they observe one thing to be perfectly (due to cognitive limitations) similar to what it was previously; there is no 'other'. In reality, if we bring a third-person perspective, what is observed to be perfectly similar to what it was previously is in fact another thing entirely. So equality applied to distinct things is a cognitive error caused

by limited perceptive depth. Of course that is to say, Perfect self-identity *at a single moment* (A=A at time T) is **not** affected by this, it remains directly observable/definitionally true

Rebuttal B:

Someone might say, "The idea that equality is a principle of measure is absurd. If you claim that what we as humans consider to be equality is a self-referential relation, then why is it that we are intuitively able to know what is larger and what is smaller? What weighs more or less? Does this not show that we instinctively measure things whenever we apply equality? What goes to show that the idea of measurement is not the source of the idea of equality as opposed to the self-referential conception? Maybe measurement is primitive, and self-identity is just one application of it."

Reply B:

Firstly, merely because we instinctively measure things whenever we apply equality does not mean that self-equality is not the source of that measurement. How can one prove that self-equality is also not as (if not more) instinctive than measurement?

To show that the idea of self-referential equality is more fundamental to the formulation of a perfect equality, we must understand the cognitive biases that underlie such a claim(Cognitive biases are a valid philosophical framework to apply here because we are operating on a cognitive fundamental level rather than a universal truth level of conception).

Human beings are creatures of categorization. The idea of self-equality is more fundamental than measurement because self-equality is in fact the act of categorization itself. What we see, name, think to be let's say a category like object A at time B and place C, is and always will be object A at time B and place C. That is how we categorise identity. Measurement is an act of association, which is an operation on the categories themselves. When we say that a category is self-referential, it means it is associated with itself, which is a trivial operation and does not need proof of the validity of the association itself more than the validity of the category itself. As opposed to this, when we approximate or measure things, we need to prove the consistency of relations and associations across DISTINCT categories. Therefore, self-referential ideation of equality is *MORE fundamental than measurement.*

Perception → Categorization (A=A) → Association/Comparison → Measurement

Rebuttal B2:
Someone might object: "But pattern recognition (seeing similarity/difference) is more primitive than discrete categorization. Infants detect 'different' before they form stable object concepts.

Response B2:
You seem to be conflating stable object concepts with the idea of self-referential equality of singular categories. Yes, infants do associate things in relationship to each other, before they claim a connected and associated category cluster A to be equal to another category cluster B. If infants associate primitives, then primitives already have self-identity.

Rebuttal C:
But A at time T_1 isn't perfectly equal to A at time T_2 (Ship of Theseus)

Reply C:
Yes, but at any given moment A=A holds. The continuation of identity through the passage of time is another matter entirely.

Rebuttal D:
How would one go about classifying something observed in external reality as A. To what extent do we claim that the category of A(cognitive) is equivalent to what A actually is(external reality)? There obviously exists a mismatch of precision in equality between A(cognitive) and A(external reality), how does one justify that? Does this not show that precision/accuracy/approximation is more fundamental than self-equality?

Reply D:

No, it just goes to show that there is a fundamental difference between the map and the territory (Korzybski, 1933). The map is equivalent to the map and the territory might still be equivalent to the territory (we cannot truly know). If you are to say that the map should be self-referentially equal to the territory, then that is a misunderstanding of what I am proposing. I have never claimed self-referential equality between distinct things, that goes against the very definition of self-referential.

Rebuttal D2:

Even if cognitive categories are part of external reality and exhibit self-identity, you still never directly observe A(external object) = A(external object). All observation is mediated through cognition. When you claim 'the pen equals itself,' you are actually just observing your cognitive representation of the pen equaling your cognitive representation of the pen. You have zero epistemic access to whether the pen-object-itself has self-identity independent of your categorization of it. So your claim that 'perfect equality exists in external reality in the form of objects equaling themselves' is an inference, not an observation. You have never actually seen it, only seen your own cognitive categories being self-identical.

Reply D2 (The map is external reality too):

You seem to think that categories are somehow not external reality? The map is still external reality, rather it is the lens through which we observe external reality, it almost certainly does not equal the territory, but it is self-referentially equivalent to itself and is observed in external reality. One does not need self-equality to be observable in every part of external reality, one needs it to be symmetrically observable in one's own mind. The self-equality of categories in themselves is the only way we can access external reality outside of our mind in the first place, so all our understanding of the external world is through those tools of cognition. As I have already shown, self-reference of equality operates on a more fundamental level when it comes to the mind than approximation, because it is only through our minds that we are able to draw the picture of the possibly infinite external reality.

All observation is interaction between parts of reality. The external object constrains the category I form through whatever the actual relationship is (which we model as 'causation' but may not be). That interaction is real and observable. If you claim I can't observe the object through this interaction, then you can't know external objects exist at all. The objection defeats itself.

Reply D2(The nature of interaction):

So if external reality exists

In order for a thing to interact with another thing, it must by its very nature be similar to or share properties with the thing it is interacting with. For example, for one atom to interact with another atom, it needs to share the property of exerting force and reacting due to force exertion.

Similarly, since we are able to understand external reality perhaps partially, our minds must share some properties with external reality that allow us to comprehend sense data. This of course does not mean this shared property is something physical in the truest sense. I do not know what this shared property is per se, but it could possibly be structural, functional, informational or a combination of these. Therefore, we can say that the property of self-equality is representative of something in external reality and as I have shown before, self-equality at least of the mind is more of a fundamental process than association or approximation.

Note: Mutually responsiveness between two distinct things means shared properties, the difference between things is due to structural or functional properties that are not shared.

Rebuttal E:

If equality is in the truest sense self-referential, then why is it that mathematics translates so well to phenomena that were not previously observed in physical reality? (Wigner, 1960)

Reply E:

Mathematics works not because it captures perfect Platonic equality between distinct objects, but because it's a powerful approximation system that ignores differences below operationally relevant thresholds. It is a deliberate simplification optimized for prediction, not metaphysical truth. This of course does not mean that mathematics is invalid. Only that it simplifies external reality into a subset of its true properties. Why we find that to be extremely useful is due to the fact that some properties of things are more useful for sustenance and efficient functioning of a civilisation.

Additionally, mathematics translating well to reality and even predicting novel physical phenomena has nothing to do with whether equality is self-referential.. Mathematics just goes to show a certain level of homogeneity in the universe(which includes our cognitive tools) which are approximately universal.

Also, mathematics is not perfectly representative or reality at all, it is deeply flawed when it comes to absolutes(singularities, blackholes, etc).

Note: One must understand that homogeneity does not require transcendent explanation, just that reality has consistent physical laws.

Conclusion:

Thus, contrary to Plato's claim that perfect equality is never observed in external reality, we have direct observational access to perfect equality through self-identity. We do not necessarily require the form of equality, because the phenomena it attempts to explain can be accounted for through self-identity and cognitive projection, without requiring transcendent entities.

Bibliography:

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