

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 4 – Valaida Fullwood – Reframing Love

Plato and the Theory of Forms

And now a personal word,

The story that Valaida Fullwood tells of an idea that landed upon her that was fully formed summons another idea about ideas. Is there a place outside ourselves where ideas live independent of our material bodies? Some nonphysical place where ideas exist perfectly and then embed themselves imperfectly in the physical world we inhabit? This is an old idea, of course. It is the theory of forms that Plato speaks of through his characters in his dialogues.

Plato was troubled by two problems that in thinking about life and meaning, we consider on this podcast:

1. How can humans live happy and fulfilling lives in a contingent, changing world where everything we attach ourselves to eventually slips away?
2. How can the world appear both permanent and impermanent? The world we perceive through our senses is always changing, but the ideas and concepts we contemplate seem eternal. Which is real, and why does it appear both ways?

Plato resolved these questions by splitting up existence into two realms: the material realm and the transcendent realm of forms. Forms are abstract: pure and perfect and outside of time and space. The two realms are connected. All objects in the world are copies of forms. Forms *inform* the lives we lead.

Humans have access to the realm of forms through our minds, through reason or rational thinking. Contemplation of the realm of forms, a realm Plato called “the good” or what we might call “the Platonic ideal,” allows us to consider what is good and then bring goodness into the world.

Valaida speaks of idea whispering, of summoning forms into material existence or having the idea land upon her. With her book and exhibit and programming, she is realizing the idea she had for reframing philanthropy in this world.

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