

Plato's *Phaedo*

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Spring, 2017 / Philosophy 1

Lessons from the Euthyphro

- In the *Euthyphro*, we find a number of philosophical theses.
- Several proposals were made concerning the nature of piety.
 - That which is loved by the gods.
 - That which is loved by all the gods.
 - That part of justice which is concerned with attending to the gods.
- The support offered by Euthyphro for the first two items was authority.
- Socrates tried to argue on rational grounds against the theses.
- He mainly provided counter-examples to them.
- No philosophical thesis was endorsed, and no theory was developed.

A Background Thesis

- Socrates proposed, and Euthyphro accepted, a philosophical thesis that set the ground-rules for their discussion.
- To state what piety is requires statement of the “form” that makes acts pious.
- The agreed-upon need to find a form undermined Euthyphro’s accounts of piety in terms of what the gods love.
- The form is what “makes” a pious act pious, and no subjective reaction can “make” something the kind of thing it is.
- The suggestion that piety is a part of justice would evade this criticism—if there is a form of justice.
- Plato went on to develop in the *Phaedo* a philosophical theory of what the forms are and how we come to know them.

The Forms

- A form is described by attaching ‘itself’ to the term that signifies the kind.
 - Two sticks are equal in length.
 - The form that makes them equal in length is the Equal itself.
- Plato mentions a number of forms in the *Phaedo*:
 - The Equal itself,
 - The Greater itself,
 - The Smaller itself,
 - The Beautiful itself,
 - The Good itself,
 - The Just itself,
 - The Pious itself,
 - The Odd itself,
 - The Even itself,
 - Smallness itself,
 - Bigness itself,
 - The Cold itself,
 - Twoness itself,
 - Oneness itself.

The Theory of Forms

- Things of a kind are *distinct* from the form that makes them of that kind.
 - Equal sticks are distinct from the Equal itself.
- Things of a kind are *inferior* to the form that makes them of that kind.
 - The equality shared by equal sticks is inferior to the Equal itself.
- A form makes a thing be of a kind in the sense that it is the *cause* of its being of that kind.
 - The Equal itself causes equal sticks to be equal.
- Things *share in* the forms that make them the kind of things they are, taking on the corresponding quality.
 - Two equal sticks share in the Equal itself and have the quality of being equal to each other.

Properties of the Forms

- In various places in the *Phaedo*, Plato enumerates various properties that the forms have:
 - They contain no complexity within themselves, and as a result they “remain the same and never in any way tolerate any change whatever.”
 - They are invisible, and more generally not perceivable by any of the senses.
 - They never come to be or cease to exist: they always exist.
 - They are divine.

Forms and Opposites

- It is observable that things change into their opposites.
 - The larger comes from the smaller,
 - The smaller comes from the larger.
- Forms are of the same kind as the things they make to be of that kind (“self-predication”).
 - The Tall itself is tall.
- Forms cannot change into their opposites.
 - The Tall itself can never become short.
- The quality in a thing which shares in the form cannot change into the opposite quality.
 - The tallness in Neal Monson can never become shortness in Neal Monson.

Excluded Qualities

- Some qualities of things exclude other qualities indirectly.
 - A trio of things is made a trio by Threeness.
 - But a trio of things is also odd and shares in the Odd.
 - The Odd and the Even are opposites and thus exclude each other.
 - So, a thing which is odd cannot be even.
 - So, a trio of things cannot be even.
- The point is that although the quality of being even is not the opposite of the quality of being three, it is still excluded from anything that is three.
- This point will be used in an argument below.

Knowledge of the Forms

- The forms are not perceivable by the bodily senses.
- Plato assumes that if the forms are not perceivable by the bodily senses, they cannot begin to be known in the course of one's life.
- If knowledge of the forms is not acquired in the course of life, then either:
 - It was possessed at birth, or
 - It was not possessed at birth.
- Knowledge of the forms was not possessed at birth, since if it were, more people would know them.
- Plato concludes that if one knows the forms now, then one must have acquired knowledge before birth, lost it, and recovered it after birth through "recollection."

Immortality

- Plato develops the theory of the forms in the *Phaedo* to aid in his arguments for the immortality of the human soul.
- He claims that only by being free from the body can the soul attain the knowledge it desires.
- The body is a hinderance to the soul, by giving rise to needs and desires, which disrupt it.
- The philosopher is really in training for death, which will release him from the tyranny of the body—if the soul survives.
- It requires "a good deal of faith and persuasive argument" to show that the soul exists after the body dies.

Preliminary Argument for Immortality

- The first argument for immortality has two parts, the first of which establishes a conditional conclusion, and the second of which supplies the condition.
 1. If a quality of a thing comes to be, then it comes to be from its opposite. (E.g., it becomes hot, so it was cold.)
 2. Being alive is the opposite of being dead.
 3. So, if something comes to be alive, then it comes to be alive from being dead.

4. If a person comes to be alive from being dead, then it does so in virtue of a soul existing before its birth that had been in a body that died.
5. So, if a person comes to be alive, then before birth it had a soul that was in a body that died.
6. Suppose a soul exists before birth.
7. Then the soul had been in a body that died.
8. So, if a soul exists before birth, then it exists after (some) death.

The Argument from Recollection

- Plato needs to establish that souls exist before birth in order to establish that they exist after death.
- In so doing, he appeals to knowledge of the forms.
 1. The soul knows the forms.
 2. If the soul knows the forms, then it knows them through recollection.
 3. So, the soul knows the forms through recollection.
 4. If the soul knows the forms through recollection, then the soul existed before birth.
 5. So, the soul existed before birth.
 6. If a soul exists before birth, then it exists after (some) death. [From the previous argument]
 7. So, the soul exists after (some) death.

The Argument from Analogy

- Another argument for immortality is based on the resemblance between the soul and the forms.
 1. Suppose the soul ceases to exist.
 2. For any x, if x ceases to exist, then x is a complex thing that has been decomposed.
 3. The forms are simple, and hence not subject to decomposition.
 4. The soul resembles the forms in many respects, and in investigating the forms it actually passes into their realm.
 5. So, the soul resembles the forms with respect to their simplicity.
 6. So, the soul cannot be decomposed.
 7. So, the soul cannot cease to exist.

The Argument from Excluded Qualities

- Plato constructs a final argument for immortality, to counter the objection that a given soul might be inhabiting its last body.
- This argument rests on the earlier claim that a thing can exclude a quality which is not its opposite.
 1. The soul can only bring life to the body into which it enters at birth.
 2. So, the soul excludes the opposite of life.
 3. The opposite of life is death.
 4. So, the soul does not admit death.
 5. So, the soul is deathless.
 6. What is deathless is indestructible.
 7. So, the soul is indestructible.

Assessment

- The theory of forms has been described in the *Phaedo* to support the arguments for the immortality of the human soul.
- Arguments for the existence of the forms, and for our knowledge of them, must be given for the theory to be credible.
- The arguments for immortality seem to be very weak.
- Historically, the only argument which adapted by later philosophers is related to the “Argument from Analogy.”
- One tries to establish (on grounds other than the resemblance of the soul to forms) that the soul is simple, and then argues from that premise to the conclusion that the soul is immortal in the way Plato did.
- This argument was convincingly attacked by Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century.

Aristotle’s Description of Plato’s View

- Aristotle, a student of Plato, discussed the theory of forms in the context of their causal role.
- In any causal relation, there is a cause and what it causes to be what it is.
- On Plato’s view, these two elements of causality are:

- The Forms, which make a thing the kind of thing it is (causes),
- The matter which takes on qualities by its relation to the Forms (is caused).
- A thing is said to “participate” or “share” in the form which makes it the kind of thing it is.
- Each form is a “one over many” which is supposed to explain what things of the same kind have in common.

Aristotle’s Criticism of the Forms

- Aristotle criticizes the theory of Forms in a number of ways, including the following.
- Redundancy: if there are already kinds of things in the world, it is redundant to introduce a separate set of forms corresponding to each kind.
- Inappropriateness: we can group things into kinds in many ways, and each one would have to have a form, such as:
 - Negations (non-animal)
 - Relatives (taller than)
- Inefficacy: Forms are distinct from the world of perceptible things, and so cannot be causes of change in that world.
 - They are not mixed in with the perceptible things.
 - To say that they “share” in the perceptible things is an empty metaphor.
 - A source of motion is needed to account for change in the world.

“The Third Man”

- Aristotle mentions an argument against the forms which was considered by Plato himself in his *Parmenides*.
- The quality of men (the “first man”) that they are man is explained by their sharing in the form Man itself (the “second man”).
- But by self-predication, Man itself is man, just as individual men are.
- The quality of Man itself, that it is man, must be explained by a separate Form (the “third man”) because forms are distinct from that whose qualities they explain.
- Applying self-predication to the higher form regenerates the need for an explanation, and the process goes on infinitely.

- But (Aristotle would hold), there are no infinite explanations; all must come to a stop.
- Therefore, at least one component of the theory of Forms must be given up.

Contemporary View of Forms

- In contemporary philosophy, it is standard practice to use the notion of a *property* rather than “form.”
- Properties are said to be “instantiated” by the things that have them.
 - A red apple instantiates the property red.
- There are many disagreements, expressed in a large literature, about properties.
- There is disagreement about whether properties are *universal*, i.e., instantiated by more than one thing.
- Other disagreements have to do with the reality of properties.
 - *Realism* holds that properties have mind-independent existence (as Plato held).
 - *Nominalism* holds that properties do not have mind-independent existence.
 - *Conceptualism* holds that terms that appear to refer to properties actually refer to concepts in the mind.