
Plato's *Phaedo* I

Background to Plato's Theory of Soul

A Surprising Contention

- ❖ Then, when they reach the age of fifty, one must lead those who have survived, who have excelled in all matters and manners, in both their deeds and their studies, to their immediate goal; and one then must compel them to throw open the soul's shining eye, to focus on that very thing which provides light to all, and then—once they have seen the Good Itself—to order the city, the citizens, and themselves by using it as their paradigm (*Rep.* vii 540a4-b1).
- ❖ Two peculiar claims:
 - ❖ One cannot come to experience the Good Itself until one has had a long course of education, comprising, for those who have passed a demanding examination at the age of 20, after their childhood training in music and gymnastics, ten years of mathematics, and then, for those who have passed a still more demanding examination at 30, 5 years of dialectic, which is in turn followed by 15 years of working to allow others to free themselves from the tyranny of the visible by means of dialectic.
 - ❖ All of this is done to liberate the soul from its bondage to the physical—a long journey, which Plato allows will be painful.
 - ❖ The soul has, so to speak, its own eye.
 - ❖ Here we might pause and reflect upon the ease with which grammarians distinguish between aesthetic and intellectual meanings of such verbs as: *to grasp*, *to see*, *to hear*, and *to perceive* more generally. —Plato is suggesting that the intellect has its own proprietary mode of apprehension, akin to but distinct from the senses, precisely it is ranging over non-sensible objects.

Plato's Theory of Forms

- ❖ Sometimes (misleadingly in my view) Plato is held to hold a 'two-worlds' doctrine:
 - ❖ Broadly speaking, we can divide all of reality into two realms or 'worlds':
 - ❖ *The Visible Realm*: this is the world of sense perception, where visibility is in fact just one point of access.
 - ❖ This is the familiar world of sense perception.
 - ❖ *The Intelligible Realm*: this is the world of intelligibility, where access is gained by the intellect rather than by sense perception.
 - ❖ This is the realm of Forms.

The Visible Realm

- ❖ *The Visible Realm*: this is the world of sense perception, where visibility is in fact just one point of access: this is the familiar world of sense perception.
 - ❖ One might think that this realm needs no special pleading: this is just the domain of sense perception—what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.
 - ❖ As we will see, though, Plato has some surprising things to say about this realm
 - ❖ Still, you might think of yourself as one kind of ‘empiricist’ who thinks that the the VR exhausts all of reality:
 - ❖ What exists is co-extensive with what can be perceived.
 - ❖ That is to say, for any object o , (i) if o exists, then o can be perceived; and (ii) if o , can be perceived, then o exists—otherwise not.
 - ❖ So, for all objects o , o exists if, and only if, o can be perceived by the senses.

The Intelligible Realm

- ❖ The Intelligible Realm: the Realm of Forms
 - ❖ This is also the realm of mathematical objects, if we take these to be distinct from Forms.
 - ❖ What is a Form?
 - ❖ An abstract, mind- and language-independent entity which has all of its intrinsic properties essentially
 - ❖ An unchanging, context-invariant paradigm.
 - ❖ Forms can be discovered by mental focus, but never perceived by the senses: they are intelligible but not sensible.

Why think there are Forms?

- ❖ At the very least, Plato owes us a reason for thinking that Forms exist.
- ❖ We might reasonably think that sensibles are, so to speak, for free:
 - ❖ They need no special pleading: they are, so to speak, right in front of our noses.
 - ❖ Broadly speaking, one might think, only the insane and deranged (and, well, a few philosophers. . .) deny the existence of the sensible realm.
 - ❖ Forms, though, require special pleading.
 - ❖ Happily, Plato shows himself up to the task.

Three Arguments for Forms

- ❖ Two background, broadly Platonistic arguments:
 - ❖ one epistemological argument
 - ❖ one metaphysical argument
- ❖ An argument from the *Phaedo* [We will not consider this one today, but we will come back to it anon.]

The Epistemological Argument: Background Assumptions

- ❖ Three Background Assumptions:
 - ❖ Knowledge is not the same as belief:
 - ❖ $K \neq B$
 - ❖ $K \neq TB$
 - ❖ We do have some knowledge.
 - ❖ Knowledge is secure, in the sense of unchanging.

The Epistemological Argument

- (1) If we have knowledge, the objects of knowledge are abstract entities.
- (2) We have some knowledge.
- (3) Hence, there are abstract entities.

On Behalf of (1)

- (1) Knowledge is of what is precise and invariable.
 - (2) Every object of sense is imprecise and variable.
 - (3) Hence, objects of sense are not objects of knowledge.
 - (4) Hence, every (possible) object of knowledge is an abstract entity.
 - (5) Hence, if we have knowledge, the objects of knowledge are abstract entities.
- Let us call these abstract objects *the Forms*.

❖ Some Background Assumptions

- ❖ No physical object can be altogether in more than one place at one time.
- ❖ It is possible for two physical objects to be exactly alike in some regard.

The Metaphysical Argument

- (1) If x is F and y is F , then there is something, F -ness, which is the same in x and in y .
- (2) If x and y are in different places, then they share something, F -ness, which is altogether present in different places.
- (3) No physical object can be altogether present in different places at one time.
- (4) Hence, F -ness is not a physical object.
- (5) Hence, F -ness is an abstract object, a universal.

Again, . . . let us call them *the Forms*.

Background to the *Phaedo*

- ❖ Also known in antiquity by the title *On the Soul*
- ❖ The dramatic setting: Socrates is in prison in Athens, sentenced to death, awaiting his execution by drinking hemlock
- ❖ Most scholars assume, as will we ourselves, though nothing essentially turns on this, that the Socrates of this dialogue, though in some ways modeled on the historical Socrates, even to the point of recounting the actual events of his life, is in fact a character of fiction, rather than the historical person.
 - ❖ We will assume, further, that Socrates is a mouthpiece for Plato, representing his philosophy, including his point of view about the soul. (Here the Socrates of the *Phaedo* may be usefully contrasted with the Socrates of other dialogues, including, most notably, the *Apology*.)

First Sketch of Our Situation

- ❖ 62b: We find ourselves in this world in a kind of prison.
 - ❖ We are beholden to the gods as our masters and we should not seek to free ourselves and flee.
 - ❖ Here, to free ourselves would be to commit suicide, thereby removing ourselves from the prison in which we find ourselves.
- ❖ 63b-c: Dying is not death: 'Be assured that [after death]. . .I expect to join the company of good men. . . I shall come to gods who are very good masters. That is why I am not resentful, because I have a good hope that some future awaits men after death, as we have been told for years, a much better future for the good than for the wicked.'
- ❖ 64a: The aim of who practice philosophy proper manner is to practice for dying and death.

Practicing Philosophy Aright

- ❖ 64c: Death is nothing but the separation of the soul from the body
- ❖ 64e: A philosopher's dominant concern is not with the body, but with the soul; she turns away from the body and towards the soul
- ❖ 65a-d: This involves disdaining corporeal pleasure and a focus on knowledge
- ❖ 65d: Knowledge, though, is of the Forms:
 - ❖ 'Do we say that there is such a thing as the Just itself, or not?' — 'We do say so, by Zeus.'
 - ❖ 'And the Beautiful and the Good?' — 'Of course.'
 - ❖ 'And have you ever seen any of these things with your eyes?' — 'In no way, he said.'
- ❖ 65e-67a: One approaches the Forms with thought alone; the body is but a hindrance.

A Tinge of Doubt

- ❖ 70a: Hard to believe all that—
 - ❖ ‘Socrates, [Cebes said], everything else you said is excellent, I think, but men find it very hard to believe what you said about the soul. They think that after it has left the body it no longer exists anywhere, but that it is destroyed and dissolved on the day the man dies, as soon as it leaves the body; and that, on leaving it, it is dispersed like breath or smoke, has flown away and gone and is no longer anything anywhere.’

Cyclical Argument: First Formulation

- (1) Whatever comes to be comes to be from its opposite (large from small, hot from cold, tall from short. . .).
- (2) So, if something comes to be alive or dead, it comes to be from its opposite.
- (3) The opposite of being alive is being dead.
- (4) So, whatever comes to be dead comes to be from being alive; and whatever comes to be alive comes to be from being dead.
- (5) Hence, whatever comes to be alive comes to be from having been dead.
- (6) Hence, whatever comes to be alive comes to be from something that was previously alive.
- (7) If (6), then the soul never perishes.
- (8) So, the soul never perishes.
- (9) Therefore, the soul is immortal.