

This, at any rate, is what Plato suggests in the *Phaedo*, when he notes that we do not explain the largeness of a giant man by what we see in him.³⁹ If the man, Andre the Giant, is eight feet tall, then we explain his largeness by his being eight feet. This, however, cannot be an adequate explanation of largeness as such, since being eight feet tall in some other cases, for example in a giraffe, explains shortness, not tallness. Even so, we do know what largeness is, even if we cannot at present offer a completely satisfying analysis. That would be the purport of (HAF-4), the assertion that we do have some knowledge, even if our knowledge is not occurrent and conscious. (Perhaps, as Plato has suggested in the *Meno*, this knowledge may be available to us only by recollection or *a priori* reflection.) If we now must give up (HAF-4) by denying that we know what largeness is, then Plato will have a certain sort of victory, at least in the sense that we would need to claim something which ought to seem rather strange, that we do not even know what largeness is. What is more, our success in applying the property across a wide range of discrete contexts might tend to undermine any such admission. By contrast, if we affirm (HAF-4) by allowing that we do have some knowledge, then if we agree with (HAF-1) and (HAF-2) as we have been characterizing them, Plato has made at least some progress toward establishing the existence of Forms.

Plato's Heraclitean argument for Forms raises large and difficult issues. Our consideration of it has not established that it is obviously sound or unsound. Our interest has rather been to show how, as Aristotle suggests, someone enamored of Heraclitean themes, as Plato was, might well have a legitimate epistemologically based motivation for believing in the existence of abstract ideas, including even Forms.

Equality itself: an argument from the *Phaedo*

Aristotle's account of Plato's motivation for believing in Forms presents one kind of existence argument. That account is useful in part because it brings into especially sharp relief Plato's epistemological motivations for Forms by explaining his reaction to Heracliteanism. Another existence argument, given directly by Plato himself, has a more metaphysical cast. It is a short argument, one which makes a central appeal to the compresence of opposites. It is a metaphysical argument because it is best understood as an attempt to thwart all efforts to *reduce* context-sensitive properties to sets of the sense particulars which manifest them. The argument, if sound, shows that no such reduction is forthcoming. If that is correct, then the properties themselves must be non-sensible, and so abstract. What is more, as abstract entities, Forms are assumed by this argument to have a special character: they never suffer the compresence of opposites. Instead, they are purely and essentially what they are, bereft of context-sensitivity, and so explanatorily basic relative to the particulars which, to use Plato's word, *participate* in them.

The argument occurs in the *Phaedo*, where Plato yokes together the

doctrine of recollection and the theory of Forms by insisting that they are equally necessary and indeed that the entire notion of recollection would be futile if there were no Forms.⁴⁰ Minimally, his idea here is that there is no point in positing *a priori* knowledge if there are no abstract entities to serve as the objects of that knowledge. At any rate, he feels secure in asserting the existence of such objects, since he has just offered the following argument,⁴¹ an argument which relies on the assertion that Forms never suffer the compresence of opposites (NCO):

- 1 Equal sticks and stones sometimes, staying the same, appear equal with respect to one thing and unequal to another. (They suffer the compresence of opposites.)
- 2 Equality itself⁴² is never unequal (and so never suffers the compresence of opposites).
- 3 Therefore, Equality itself and equal things are not the same.

The argument is a simple appeal to Leibniz's Law.⁴³ Equality itself never suffers the compresence of opposites; that is, it lacks the property of suffering the compresence of opposites with respect to equality. Since all equal sense particulars suffer the compresence of opposites with respect to equality, Equality itself can never be identified with any sense particular or set of sense particulars. It follows, then, that Equality itself is an abstract entity.

The argument is plainly valid. Moreover, if the appeal to Leibniz's Law is legitimate, then as long as the premises are true, Plato has given us a good reason for accepting Equality as an abstract entity. Since he could easily have chosen any other context-sensitive property at random, the argument about Equality, if sound, also establishes that all such properties are abstract entities. This conclusion would not yet entail that there are Forms, abstract mind- and language-independent entities which have all of their intrinsic properties essentially; but it would take us a step closer to that conclusion, and would in fact provide additional evidence for accepting the existence of Forms for a full range of context-sensitive properties.

Again, (NCO) is best understood as an *anti-reductive* argument. That is, Plato is here envisaging an interlocutor who agrees that there is such a thing as Equality, but who denies that it is a Form or any other kind of abstract entity. Instead, the imaginary interlocutor insists that Equality is simply to be identified with all of the equal things there are. Plato thinks that facts about the compresence of opposites preclude any such identification. Since, then, all parties have agreed that there is such a thing as Equality, if (NCO) shows that it is not to be identified with any collection of sensible objects, Equality will have to be an abstract object.

(NCO-1) makes the point that equal sticks and stones, or any other randomly selected collection of equal things, will be both equal and not equal. Though the premise admits of a number of different interpretations,

one simple and straightforward reading takes it to be suggesting merely, for example, that a stone and a stick may be equal in weight while not being equal in length. In some respects they will be equal and in others not. Now, suggests Plato, contrast this situation with what obtains for Equality itself. According to (NCO-2), Equality itself is never unequal; so, it never suffers the compresence of opposites. This might be for either one of two reasons: (1) Equality itself is equal, but never not equal; or (2) Equality itself is neither equal nor not equal. On the second approach, Equality itself would not be the sort of thing which could be equal or not. It would then be a category mistake to say of Equality itself that it is equal, akin to the mistake committed by someone who says that the plus function either snores or does not snore. Here it seems reasonable to point out that the plus function is not the sort of thing which can snore. In the same way, there might be some point in saying that Equality itself is not the sort of thing which can be either equal or not. On the first approach, one which much of Plato's language suggests,⁴⁴ and one also accepted by Aristotle,⁴⁵ Equality itself is equal, but never not equal. If this is his view, then Plato accepts a form of *self-predication*, a commitment which may cause him difficulty.⁴⁶ Minimally, the idea here would be that Equality itself is equal, where this might mean as much as its having the property it is and as little as its being the essence of equality. In either case, though, Equality would never be not-equal. If not, it would never suffer the compresence of opposites. Since collections of sense particulars always do, Equality cannot be identified with them. It must therefore be an abstract entity, like a Form.

It is tempting to complain at this juncture that Plato simply begs the question in favor of Forms in (NCO). After all, (NCO-2) uses "Equality" as if it were a singular term, a referring expression which picks out some one definite entity. That, however, seems to be the question at issue.

In response, Plato may fairly and appropriately appeal to the dialectical context of the argument. It had been agreed by all parties that there is such a thing as equality. Perhaps, though, this admission is dubious. In fact, an admission of this sort is a familiar and defensible strategy of Plato's. He will often pose the question: Is *the F* something or nothing?⁴⁷ Is, e.g., justice something or nothing? Is equality something or nothing? In each case, Plato's interlocutors assent. Although this may retroactively strike them as rash, this sort of concession is really rather modest. They are not conceding that justice or equality is something of any particular character or category. They are not even conceding that justice is a quality or property. Instead, they are merely allowing that justice is not nothing, that it exists. It is here important to recognize that if they later recant their earlier concession, they cannot lament that they had wrongly, if implicitly, accepted some form of realism about justice. Plato's ultimate strategy is to get them to appreciate that *if* justice is something, then it will turn out to have features which require it to be a Form. The denial of the antecedent of this conditional is not itself an affirmation of nominalism or of relativism. It is instead an

avowal of nihilism, the view that really there is no such thing as justice. However coherent this position may be, it is not one which Plato's interlocutors have been willing to entertain; nor is it one which has the attractions of various types of nominalism about the qualities whose nature Plato investigates. Plato's strategy is thus best regarded as an attempt to force either realism or nihilism by showing that some moderate-sounding intermediate positions cannot be defended.

This can be appreciated by focusing again on the strategy of (NCO). The argument merely attempts to block one reductive analysis of equality, without trying to establish from unassailable first principles that there must be such a thing as Equality itself alone and by itself. In the dialectical context, it is rather as if a police detective when asked about the identity of a murderer had conjectured the butler. When it is pointed out to her on the basis of sound forensic evidence that the murderer, *whoever that is*, weighs over 200 pounds, but that the butler weighs only 145, she will be right to conclude, on the basis of Leibniz's Law, that the proposed identification fails. Similarly, Plato can now insist that Equality, *whatever it turns out to be*, cannot be identified with any collection of sense particulars. That blocked reduction, however, also yields some positive information about Equality, that it must be some sort of abstract entity. Of course, it is open to someone to opt out at this point by renegeing on the admission that Equality exists, which in the context would be akin to denying that there was a murderer to be sought, since the death must have been accidental or a suicide. While there might, of course, be good reason to conclude this, it does not seem to be recommended by the mere fact that the butler did not do it. By analogy, suggests Plato, we should not immediately endorse nihilism when nominalist reductions fail.

If in view of these considerations we agree with Plato that Largeness cannot be reduced to any collection of sense particulars, then we will also be interested in seeing how he extends his observations about compresence of opposites in order to show that Forms cannot be reduced to another sort of more familiar entity. For he equally thinks that Forms cannot be identified even with some more familiar sorts of abstract entities, *sensible properties*, the kinds of properties whose instances are immediately accessible to sense experience. (So, *being green* is a sensible property; *being just* is not.) In seeking to extend his argument this way, Plato relies upon the explanatory role of Forms, as he conceives it. According to Plato, the presence of a Form *explains* why a given action qualifies as manifesting this or that property.⁴⁸ If Euthyphro's prosecution of his father really is an instance of piety, then what makes it so is its participating in Piety itself. If participation in a Form *F*-ness explains why some sense particular is *F*, then we can conclude more than that a reduction of *F*-ness to a collection of sense "*particulars*" is impossible. In addition, Plato urges, a reduction of Forms to sensible "*properties*" will be no less implausible. For example, if a stick and a stone are both large, perhaps because each weighs ten kilos, then we might be tempted to analyze

Largeness as *weighing ten kilos*. Plato counters that that same property, weighing ten kilos, might equally explain, in a different context, why something qualifies as small. So, for example, weighing ten kilos would render a fully mature female lynx small rather than large. Similarly, dissonance in one context makes a concerto ugly, when Bach is played poorly, and makes another concerto beautiful, when Bartok is played well. So, in different contexts, the same sensible property explains why different things, sometimes of disparate sorts and sometimes of the same sort, have completely opposite properties. Hence, that sensible property cannot be identified with Largeness or with Beauty, whatever these turn out to be. In these cases, Plato's observation about context sensitivity among properties intersects with his views about the compresence of opposites to show why attempted reductions of Forms to more familiar sorts of sensory properties fail.

In each of these ways, Plato relies upon (putative) facts about the compresence of opposites to block the reduction of Forms to more familiar sorts of entities, sense particulars in one instance and sensible properties in the other. Each of these two non-reductive arguments tends in the same positive direction. As long as we agree that there is such a thing as Largeness or Beauty, and we also agree that Plato's anti-relativistic arguments have some force, then we will also agree that Forms are not sense particulars, and so are abstract, and that they are not even sensible properties, and so are not even graspable indirectly by the senses. They are, as Plato often suggests, objects of thought, rather than objects of sense. In the argument from the *Phaedo*, Plato relies especially clearly on facts about compresence of opposites ultimately rooted in Heraclitean doctrines about flux. It is in response to such doctrines that Plato comes to think of Forms as permanent, unchanging, abstract entities, graspable by discerning minds but unavailable to unabridged sense perception. Further, depending upon how one understands such claims as "Justice itself is just," Plato may have additional reason to regard Forms not only as abstract, but as perfect exemplars which sense particulars only approximate but never realize completely.⁴⁹

Knowledge and belief: an existence argument from Republic v

Aristotle's presentation of Plato's argument for Forms is largely epistemological in orientation; Plato's own argument in the *Phaedo* is more narrowly metaphysical, although it too is continuous with arguments which rely upon Plato's conception of explanatory adequacy. An extended and important argument from the *Republic* relies on all of these different sorts of considerations; by braiding together these strands in his thought, Plato seeks to convert someone skeptical about the existence of Forms into a full-blown Platonic realist.

The argument melds together Plato's metaphysical and epistemological interests in Forms by correlating different mental states or faculties and different classes of objects. He maintains that: (1) knowledge is set over

what is; (2) ignorance is set over what is not; and (3) if there is something which is and is not, and this is between what is and what is not, there must be something between knowledge and ignorance, which turns out to be opinion.⁵⁰ The division Plato offers here is a bit obscure, especially if we understand him to be using, as well we might, the same sense of "is" throughout. There are effectively three choices in interpreting these correlations: existential, predicative, or veridical. Taken as existential, (1) claims that knowledge is of what exists, that ignorance of what does not exist, while opinion deals with what exists and does not exist. Taken predicatively, (1) claims that knowledge is of what is F, (2) that ignorance is of what is not F; and (3) opinion is of what is both F and not F. Finally, taken veridically, (1) maintains that knowledge is of what is true, (2) that ignorance is of what is false, and (3) that opinion is of what is both true and false.

A brief reflection on these alternatives suggests that no one sense of "is" makes perfect sense in all cases. Thus, though it makes ready sense to assert that knowledge is of what is true, it is not immediately evident why ignorance should deal with the false (there are many true things I do not know). Similarly, while it is true that knowledge deals with what exists, it is hard to fathom what it means to say that opinion concerns what both exists and does not exist; indeed, it is difficult even to comprehend what could be meant by the claim that something both exists and does not exist. Existence seems to be an on/off notion, such that either something does or does not exist. Finally, if we reflect on Plato's preoccupation with the compresence of opposites, things may seem initially more hopeful. For it makes perfect sense to assert that opinion trades in what is F and not-F and that knowledge concerns what is purely F. Nonetheless, here too it is a bit hard to appreciate how ignorance concerns what is not-F. While it is true that as a result of ignorance I might make the false judgment that something which is not-F is F, perhaps that the mongoose is oviparous, it is hard to construe my ignorance in this or any other case as concerned exclusively with what is not-F.

Still, Plato clearly relies upon at least the predicative sense of "is" in his argument for Forms, even if he does not rely upon it exclusively. This is because he once again relies upon some facts about the compresence of opposites, where this undeniably employs a predicative sense of the verb.⁵¹ It is, however, important to realize that Plato may in fact rely on several senses of "is" in his argument without falling into fallacy, so long as the various senses do not result in equivocations which render the argument unsound. Even so, it is worth formulating the existence argument of *Republic v* in different ways, by employing different senses of "is," as Platonic scholars have in fact done. The following formulation can then be viewed as a kind of template, which adheres to Plato's own presentation and which provides a framework for more fine-grained analyses.

The existence argument of *Republic v* is intended in part to buttress Plato's astonishing claim that cities will be forever beset with all manner of evils and bereft of happiness, public or private, until philosophers become kings. Plato