

# Class Seven - Phaedo (84c to End)

Philosophical Perspectives - Ryan Simonelli

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## 1 Two Objections (84c-88c)

- **Simmias's Harmony Objection:** Consider a lyre's harmony, the property of the strings being in tune with one another.
  - The harmony of the lyre is not, itself, a visible, bodily thing like the strings and the wood.
  - If one reasons in accord with the Socrates's Argument from Affinity, one would conclude that the harmony of the lyre, as an invisible, immaterial thing, should exist even if the strings and wood of the lyre are destroyed.
  - Clearly, however, this is not the case.
  - So, the reasoning of Socrates's argument can't be correct.
- **Cebes's Cloak Objection:** Consider a weaver who makes cloaks and has persisted through the wearing of many cloaks that he has made, yet still, at some point, dies.
  - The fact that he persists beyond the destruction of the cloakes does not mean that he is himself immortal—it just means that he lasts longer than the cloaks.
  - For all Socrates's arguments have established, it's possible that one soul goes through many bodies, but it still dies after some number of bodies.
  - So, unless one is able to rule out that this body isn't the soul's last (like the cloak is the weaver's last), one still has grounds to fear death.

## 2 Socrates's Response to Simmias (92a-95a)

- **An Inconsistency:** The main response to Simmias is to bring out the following inconsistency in his claims:
  - Simmias claims to be convinced by Socrates's theory of recollection.
  - The truth of this theory requires that the soul exist *before* its existence in a body, where it can encounter the forms that are to be recollected.
  - The harmony of a lyre, however, only exists *after* the lyre has been put together and tuned.
  - So, if the soul is analogous to the harmony of the lyre, the theory of recollection cannot be true.

Since the theory of recollection has (supposedly) been given a conclusive argument, and the claim that the soul is (like) a harmony has been made "without proof" but "because of a certain probability and plausibility" (92d), the latter should be dropped in light of this inconsistency.

- **Some Disanalogies:** Socrates substantiates the claim that the soul is not like the harmony of the lyre with the following disanalogies:
  - A lyre can be more or less harmonized, but a soul cannot be more or less fully a soul, (93b).

- Even if we stretch the analogy to suppose that lyres that is always fully harmonized or not harmonized at all, it still doesn't work, since wickedness would be analogous to disharmony, and yet souls can be wicked

### 3 More on the Forms (100b-102a)

- **Participation in Forms as Explaining the Existence of Attributes:** Anything that is beautiful "is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in [the] Beautiful," (100c). Socrates says that he "no longer understand[s]" any specification of "other sophisticate causes" for why things have the attributes that they do—that such specifications "confuse" him, (100d). Here are some examples:
  - **Question:** In virtue of what is a beautiful thing beautiful?
    - \* **"Sophisticated" Answer:** Varies depending on the thing, but, in the case of a painting, for instance, virtue of having certain colors and shapes that go well together.
    - \* **Socrates's Answer:** In virtue of participating in the Beautiful.
  - **Question:** In virtue of what is ten greater than eight?
    - \* **"Sophisticated" Answer:** In virtue of being a quantity of two more.
    - \* **Socrates's Answer:** In virtue of a fuller participation in Numerousness.
  - **Question:** Aren't Socrates's answers here just vacuous, whereas the other answers are actually informative?
  - **The "Safest" Answer:** Socrates's says that he is answering this way because such an answer is "the safest answer" he can give, and "if I stick to this [sort of answer] I think I shall never fall into error." So, he's simply trying to establish such facts as a set of *minimal truths* about what it is in virtue of which things possess the attributes that they do. Regardless of what else we may say, which may be right or wrong, it is always correct to say that something is X in virtue of participating in X-ness.
  - **The Only Philosophical Answer:** One way to interpret Socrates here is to think that, while many people with specific areas of expertise (such as aesthetics or mathematics) can provide various "sophisticated" answers, the sort of answer he gives is the only completely *general* answer, and it's the only answer that the *philosopher* should give.
- **Some Question on Self-Exemplification:** Socrates clearly thinks that the forms perfectly exemplify the things of which they are forms. The Beautiful, for instance, is extraordinarily beautiful. Likewise, Tallness must be tall.
  - This is a unique feature of Plato's account, one that is not shared by most contemporary "platonists" who agree with Plato that the explanation of something's being X is always that it participates in (or "instantiates") X-ness.

If we start thinking seriously about this idea, some questions immediately come to mind.

- How tall is Tallness? Presumably, it must be *really* tall, much taller, for instance, than Mt. Everest, since Mt. Everest is only tall in virtue of participating in Tallness. Could we measure it in feet? Presumably, for any height that we might specify, there could exist some particular object that is that height, and would count as tall by reference to Tallness which must be taller than it. Does that mean that tallness must be infinitely tall, and shortness infinitely short? But isn't part of what it is to be tall or short to have some specifiable, and so finite, height?
- Socrates is clear that the forms aren't visible things—they don't belong to the realm of visible. However, it seems like certain attributes, such as tallness, can only be possessed by visible things. After all, what would it be for something invisible—like the number 3—to be tall? But tallness itself is supposed to be tall. Assuming that tallness is invisible like the other forms, what would it mean for it to be tall? The same worry arises for heat, cold, and various other forms Socrates speaks of. Can we raise the same worry about beauty?

- \* In a later dialogue, the *Parmenides*, Plato considers a more restrictive theory of the forms in which we have the forms of such things as the just, the good, the beautiful, but not such things as man, or fire, or (presumably) the tall.
- How should we make sense of the way in which beauty itself “is” beautiful? On Socrates’s account, when we say that some particular thing—such as van Gogh’s “Starry Starry Night”—is beautiful, we are saying that it participates in beauty. Is beauty itself beautiful in virtue of participating in itself, beauty? Or is there a different way for something to “be” beautiful, a relation to the beautiful to which only the beautiful itself stands, other than participating? Is this relation identity? Or something else?
- What role is the idea that the beautiful is itself beautiful doing in Plato’s account? How much of Plato’s account could we maintain if we drop this (potentially metaphysically problematic) idea? What about Plato’s epistemology, based on the theory of recollection? Must not one encounter that which is most perfectly and truly beautiful in order to grasp the standard by which things are to be judged to be beautiful or not?

#### 4 Socrates’s Response to Cebes - The Argument From Essential Properties (102b-107a)

- **Forms Can Never Admit of Their Opposite:** Tallness cannot possibly be short—that is, it can take no part at all in Shortness.
  - **Clarification with the Argument from Opposites:** Recall the argument from opposites, where it was said that something always comes to be taller from being shorter. It is not the tallness in the thing coming to be short; but rather, the things participating *less* in tallness and *more* in shortness.
- **Some Things Essentially Participate in Certain Forms and So Likewise Cannot Admit of Their Opposite:** Some things *essentially* partake in certain forms such that they cannot admit of the opposite form.
  - Fire is essentially hot. There is no way to have fire and *not* have it to be hot. So, if you have fire, and you do something so that you have something cold, the thing you now have is no longer the thing you previously had, namely, *fire*.
  - Three is essentially odd. That is, there is no way for three to be the number that it is and not be odd. If you add one to three, so that it becomes even, then you no longer have *three*; you have four.
  - We might say that fire is “un-cold-able,” impossible to be made cold, and three is “un-odd-able,” impossible to be made odd.
- **The Soul Essentially Participates in Life:** Just as fire, bringing heat wherever it goes, is essentially hot and three, bringing oddness wherever it goes, is essentially odd, the soul, bringing life to whatever it occupies, is essentially living.
- **The Soul Is Immortal:** So, just as fire is “un-cold-able” and three is “un-odd-able,” the soul, we might say, is “un-death-able,” or, rather, *immortal*.
- **Response to Cebes:** This shows that the soul doesn’t just last longer than several bodies but will still die at some point. Rather, it shows that it cannot possibly die; it is immortal.
- **Question:** Does sense of the “deathlessness” of the soul secured by this argument really ensure immortality?