Introduction

Socrates claims that philosophers, above everyone else, should welcome death. Death is defined as the separation of body and soul (psuche). The Greek word was later translated in Latin as 'anima', which is closer to the original meaning. It is something that animates a body, i.e., it is that which gives life to a body. On this view, every living creature has a soul (because it has something which animates it). S's argument that philosophers should welcome death:

P1: Philosophers desire knowledge.

P2: Philosophers cannot acquire that knowledge while they are alive, i.e., when their soul inhabits their body.

P3: Either philosophers are mortal and can never acquire knowlege, or they are immortal and can acquire knowlege when they die (when their soul is separated from their body).

P4: Philosophers are immortal.

C1: Philosophers can acquire the knowledge they desire when they die, i.e., when their soul has been separated from their body.

C2: Thus, philosophers should welcome death, since upon dying they are most likely to obtain the knowledge they have been seeking their whole life.

Our focus this class is on premise 2. S claims that the philosopher despises bodily pleasures such as food, drink, and sex, so he more than anyone else wants to free himself from his body. Why does S think that the philosopher despises bodily pleasures? There are at least two broad reasons given in 66a–67e. Class project: read togther.

Forms

S believes that the objects of knowledge are what are called "forms" later in the dialog (103e). Forms mentioned are the just itself, the beautiful, and the good; bigness, health, and strength; and "in a word, the reality of all other things, that which each of them essentially is" (65d). In general, (i) a form F is predicated of individual sensible F things; individual sensible things are F by participating in the form of F, (ii) the form of F is itself F and is never not-F, the form of beauty is beautiful and cannot be ugly, (iii) individual sensible things can be both F and not-F, i.e., e.g., a vase can be both beautiful and ugly.

Aristotle on Plato's reasons for positing forms

The *Phaedo* is a transitional dialog. While it likely reports S's death accurately, and while there was likely some conversation between S and his friends, interpreters generally believe we find in this dialog some of Plato's own views;

P developed his teacher's ideas and offered new arguments for them. So, for instance, S is unlikely to have used the word 'forms', but P calls S's search for the just itself as a search for the form of justice. According to Aristotle, P introduced forms becaseu P was influenced by Heraclitus' and Cratylus' views that everything in the sensible/observable/material world is somehow changing or unstable. The worry was that we could only find a satisfying definition of F (and hence have knowledge of F things) if there are stable, unchanging, forms. By 'change', P seems concerned with two issues:

Succession of Opposites (SO): If X undergoes SO, then X is F at t1, but becomes not F at some later time t2; in other words, cases of SO are cases where one and the same thing has opposite properties or characteristics at different times. F and G are opposite properties iff an object can be either F or G, but not both F and G at the same time.

- I was sick in January (t1), but I was healthy by February (t2). healthy.
- I was cold last night (t1), but I am wam today (t2).
- Your example:

Compresence of Opposites (CO): X has properties F and not-F at the same time.

- Simias is both taller and shorter; he's taller than X, shorter than Y.
- Your example

Since perceptiblel objects undergo change, P believes we can't appeal to them in finding definition. Why? The worry seems to be that if we focus on the sorts of properties that are matters of observation we'll come up with properties that pick out F things no more than not-F things. For instance, suppose you define beauty as the observable feature of equal proportions between parts. P believes that some entities with equal propertions between their parts will be beautiful, but we will find other objects with such parts that are not beautiful. Here is a summary of the argument:

1. To have knowledge about F, one must have a definition of F. (Recall Meno 71b: In order to know whether or not virtue is teachable, one must first have a definition of virtue
2. Sensibles are in flux (suffer compresence of opposites).
3. So, we cannot appeal to any sensible/perceptible object or property to get an adequate definition of F; any sensible object or property that we pick out will be both F and not F.
    - I can't focus on some observable act to define justice, because any observable thing that I pick out—e.g. returning what I have borrowed—in some cases will be just, and in other cases will be unjust.

4. Knowledge is possible.
5. So, there must be adequate definitions that would give us this knowledge
6. So, there must be non-sensible abstract objects (forms) to which we can appeal when defining F.

The "Imperfection Argument" (Phaedo 74-76)

A helpful formulation from http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/phaedo.htm

1. We perceive sensible objects to be F.
2. But every sensible object is, at best, imperfectly F. That is, it is both F and not F. It falls short of being perfectly F.
3. We are aware of this imperfection in the objects of perception.
4. So we perceive objects to be imperfectly F.
5. To perceive something as imperfectly F, one must have in mind something that is perfectly F, something that the imperfectly F things fall short of. (e.g., we have an idea of equality that all sticks, stones, etc., only imperfectly exemplify.)
6. So we have in mind something that is perfectly F.
7. Thus, we must have at one time encountered something that is perfectly F (e.g., the form of equality), that we have in mind in such cases.
8. Therefore, there is such a thing as the F itself (e.g., the equal itself), and it is distinct from any sensible object (given that we recognize that all sensible things are imperfectly F).

According to this argument, there must be perfect forms—a form of equality, beauty, etc—from which we acquire our concepts/ideas of (perfect) equality, beauty, etc, since there's no way that we could have acquired such concepts from (imperfect) sensibles.

What do both arguments tell us about forms?

The first argument tells us, for instance, that forms are imperceptible. What else do we learn about them?

Death and the forms

S believes that 1) we cannot gain knowledge of the forms by perceiving them, and 2) the body is a constant impediment to philosophers in their search for knowledge of them.

> "It [the body] fills us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense, so that, as it is said, in truth and in fact no thought of any kind ever comes to us from the body" (66c).

So, to obtain knowledge of the forms, philosophers must escape from the influence of the body as much as is possible. The only way to fully to do so is to die.