

Phaedo

Phaedo

Introduction

Socrates claims that philosophers, above everyone else, should welcome death. His argument is as follows:

- P1: Philosophers want knowledge of forms.
- P2: Philosophers cannot acquire that knowledge while alive.
- C: Philosophers can acquire that knowledge when soul has been separated from the body.

Socrates claims that death is the separation of body and soul (psuch). The Greek word was later translated in Latin as ‘anima’. This is closer to the original meaning. It is something that animates a body, i.e., it is that which gives it alive. On this view, every living creature has a soul (because it has something which animates it).

Socrates offers two reasons for why a philosopher welcomes the separation of body and soul.

1. The philosopher despises bodily pleasures such as food, drink, and sex, so he more than anyone else wants to free himself from his body (64d-65a).
2. The bodily senses are inaccurate and deceptive, the philosopher’s search for knowledge is most successful when the soul is “most by itself.”

Our main interest is the second claim. Socrates is here claiming that the objects of philosophical knowledge that Plato later on in the dialogue (103e) refers to as “Forms.” Here Forms are mentioned as 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). Socrates believes that we cannot gain knowledge of these entities by perceiving them.

The body is a constant impediment to philosophers in their search for truth: “It 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). To have pure knowledge, therefore, philosophers must escape from the influence of the body as much as is possible in this life.

Thus, Socrates concludes, it would be unreasonable for a philosopher to fear death, since upon dying he is most likely to obtain the wisdom which he has been seeking his whole life.

Aristotle on Plato's Reasons for Positing Forms ## According to Aristotle, P introduced Forms b/c 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 Forms. Question: what kind of change are we talking about here? 1. Succession of Opposites (SO): Typically, when we think of change we think of SO. To say that something undergoes SO is to say that it 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. Example: I was fat in January (t1), but I went on a diet and by June (t2) I was no longer fat but rather thin. 2. Compresence of Opposites (CO): Use "change" in a broad sense. One thing has properties F and not F, but at the same time. Heraclitus' examples. Plato's own examples in the *Phaedo* suggest that he's concerned primarily with CO. 1. Simias is both taller and shorter; he's taller than X and shorter than Y (102b 2. "By a head" (material cause) explains BOTH something's being taller, and its being smaller. 100e5-101b2 So, material things suffer from CO. Why does that mean that we can't appeal to them in finding definitions? One idea: Perceptible objects and properties don't give us the right answer to our search for definitions. If we focus on the sorts of properties that are matters of observation, we won't get the right answer, because we'll only come up with properties that pick out F things no more than not-F things. I can't focus on some OBSERVABLE ACT to define justice, b/c 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. So, this tells us that if we're going to find definitions (and hence get K), we must find something IMPERCEPTIBLE that can serve as the objects of these definitions. These insensible things are FORMS. Plato's 1st Argument for Positing Forms (Summary):

1. To have knowledge about F, one must have a definition of F. (Recall PDK, 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.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. This sort of argument tells us the following about Plato's Forms1. Forms are imperceptible2. Forms are the materials of definitions. ## The "Imperfection Argument" (Phaedo 74-76) on Forms ##How does the argument go? 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.

2. 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., 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). So, this gives us a second argument for the existence of Forms. 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 does the argument tell us about Forms?+ Forms are what we recollect during recollection.+ Forms are somehow "more perfect" than sensibles. ## Argument for Immortality 1 ##
3. All things come to be from their opposite states: for example, something that comes to be "larger" must necessarily have been "smaller" before (70e-71a).
4. Between every pair of opposite states there are two opposite processes: for example, between the pair "smaller" and "larger" there are the processes "increase" and "decrease" (71b).
5. If the two opposite processes did not balance each other out, everything would eventually be in the same state: for example, if increase did not balance out decrease, everything would keep becoming smaller and smaller (72b).
6. Since "being alive" and "being dead" are opposite states, and "dying" and "coming-to-life" are the two opposite processes between these states, coming-to-life must balance out dying (71c-e).

7. Therefore, everything that dies must come back to life again (72a).

Argument for Immortality 2

1. Things in the world which appear to be equal in measurement are in fact deficient in the equality they possess (74b, d-e).
2. Therefore, they are not the same as true equality, that is, “the Equal itself” (74c).
3. When we see the deficiency of the examples of equality, it helps us to think of, or “recollect,” the Equal itself (74c-d).
4. In order to do this, we must have had some prior knowledge of the Equal itself (74d-e).
5. Since this knowledge does not come from sense-perception, we must have acquired it before we acquired sense-perception, that is, before we were born (75b ff.).
6. Therefore, our souls must have existed before we were born. (76d-e)

Argument for Immortality 3

1. There are two kinds of existences: (a) the visible world that we perceive with our senses, which is human, mortal, composite, unintelligible, and always changing, and (b) the invisible world of Forms that we can access solely with our minds, which is divine, deathless, intelligible, non-composite, and always the same (78c-79a, 80b).
2. The soul is more like world (b), whereas the body is more like world (a) (79b-e).
3. Therefore, supposing it has been freed of bodily influence through philosophical training, the soul is most likely to make its way to world (b) when the body dies (80d-81a). (If, however, the soul is polluted by bodily influence, it likely will stay bound to world (a) upon death (81b-82b).)