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CHAPTER 8

PLATO'S METAPHYSICS

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I. Identifying Our Topic

Any attempt to write about Plato's metaphysics must be, to some extent, a work of construction and runs the risk of artificial separation between topics that are, for Plato, naturally related. Plato's writings are not themselves shaped in reflection of modern subdivisions of philosophical areas and the form in which they are shaped—the often heavily and self-consciously crafted dialogue form—does not naturally invite separate identification and treatment of the writings' often tightly interwoven philosophical threads. With the possible exception of the *Parmenides*, no work of Plato presents itself as being as a whole on a topic that we could without distortion understand as metaphysics narrowly construed, although it is fair to say that some works are more obviously metaphysical in character than others. In what follows, therefore, readers should understand that there is an engagement with the works of Plato from a perspective that, in certain respects, may differ from his own.

"Metaphysics" is a heading under which a range of topics might be considered. In discussions of Plato's metaphysics, what takes center stage is, typically, a certain feature of Plato's ontology: his commitment, at least in certain works, to the existence of a special class of entities, once known in English as "Ideas," these days more commonly referred to as "Forms." The present essay is no exception in this regard. This narrowing of the subject has some justification. Forms are seen to play a central role in Platonic counterparts to many of the topics one might expect to find discussed in a modern course on metaphysics (topics, for example, such as the nature of reality, the metaphysics of properties, and causal responsibility), while not all the topics one might find in such a course (topics, for example, such as

possible worlds or paradoxes of time travel) have obvious counterparts in the work of Plato. There are, however, recognizably metaphysical topics, Plato's treatments of which would undoubtedly be valid and interesting objects of study but which are not considered in any detail here. Examples include the metaphysics of composition, the nature of time and space, personal identity, and the existence and nature of god(s).[1] Omission of such topics is partly due to the limitations of space and partly due to the desirability of having a relatively unitary focus.

This narrowing of the topic of Platonic metaphysics to Plato's *ontology* itself has some advantage as regards locating Plato's metaphysical theorizing within his own immediate tradition. For, unlike metaphysics as such, *ontology*—understood as the rational investigation of what there is or of being—is a branch of study for which Plato could find obvious precursors in his philosophical predecessors, perhaps most notably, the Eleatic philosopher, Parmenides, in whose *Way of Truth* one finds an account of a subject identified only as "being" (in Greek: *to eon*), which, as has often been noted, attributes to being many of the characteristics that Plato would subsequently ascribe to Forms.[2] In Plato's works, Forms themselves are identified most generally as "the beings" (in Greek: *ta onta*, or at least in many places apparently equivalently: *ousiai*).[3]

Plato's place in this tradition provides the overall focus of this essay. Like Parmenides, and like Democritus, the atoms of whose atomic theory are also noticeably Parmenidean, at least on common understandings of these two Presocratic thinkers,[4] Plato is a philosopher for whom reality differs from the way in which it presents itself to us in perceptual experience and must be rationally discovered. Plato is a realist, at least in one common use of the term "realist"; he is committed to the existence of a world that is objective and mind-independent.[5] But he is a realist, we might say, of an essentially optimistic variety. Given the existence of a world that is genuinely objective and independent of human thinking, there are, we might think, no very good reasons to suppose that human thinking will have *any* means of access to the character of the world. Plato, like rationalist-minded philosophers before and after him, believes that our most prominent apparent sources of access to the world—our senses—are often radically mistaken about it. Nevertheless, he nowhere doubts that knowledge—through rational inquiry—is possible.[6] This metaphysical orientation underlies the

1. There has also, it's fair to say, been rather less discussion of these topics in the literature on Plato generally. However, on composition, see my discussion in Harte 2002; on time and space, see Algra 1995, Owen 1966a, Sorabji 1983 and 1988; on personal identity, see Bostock 1999, Gallop 1982, Gerson 2003, Gill 1996, McCabe 1994, ch. 9, and 2000; on the existence and nature of god(s), see Menn 1995, Morgan 1992.

2. For a sophisticated treatment of Plato's relations to Parmenides, see Palmer 1999.

3. See, for example, *Phaedo* 65d13, 66a3.

4. For an introduction to Parmenides and Democritus, see Long 1999, chs. 6 and 9.

5. This, if anything is, is a point on which there is now broad consensus, although this has not always been the case: see Natorp 2004.

6. Again, there is now broad consensus that Plato is not skeptical about the possibility of knowledge. In antiquity, however, there was a long-standing tradition of skeptical readings of Plato, on the history of which, see Brittain 2001.

central contrast in his metaphysical theorizing, a contrast between what is intelligible and what is perceptible. It is this contrast and no other, I argue, that shapes the contours of his ontology.

II. Is There a *Theory* of Forms? And Does That Theory *Develop* over the Course of Plato's Writings?

Our focus is on Forms. But we must first consider what sort of evidence is available to us about Plato's views about Forms. In addition to talking about Forms, discussions of Plato's metaphysics commonly talk of Plato's Theory of Forms. But not everyone agrees that Plato has what should be described as a *theory* of Forms,[7] and many people who are content to talk in terms of a theory find that theory only in one or other subset of Platonic works. Discussion of Plato's Theory of Forms thus gets quickly caught up in controversies regarding the development of Plato's thought. Indeed, on one view, the Theory of Forms, its development and its subsequent rejection, is the central narrative in this development, whose transitions are marked, first, by the introduction and elaboration of a theorized account of Forms in central works of Plato's so-called middle period—works such as the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, in particular—and, second, by Plato's signaled rejection of this account of Forms in the *Parmenides*.[8] A few words on these matters are in order, then, although my remarks are made with the intention of setting such questions about development aside so far as is possible.

The answer to the question of whether or not there is a Theory of Forms will depend on one's criteria for theory. What does seem clear is that Forms are *theoretical* entities. By this, I do not mean simply that they are not given in perception, nor are they among the data of "commonsense," although, at least prima facie, they are not. Rather, Forms are theoretical entities in the sense that they do some theoretical work. I give four (what seem to be the) central examples. As I have already said, Forms have a role to play in Plato's theory of being or what there is:

1. Forms are (among the primary) beings.
2. Further, especially in the *Phaedo* (96–106), Forms are identified as having causal responsibility[9] for things other than Forms having some of the character they do; the Form of beauty, for example, has causal responsibility

7. For example, consider the doubts expressed in Annas 1981, ch. 9.

8. Contrast, for example, Ryle 1966 and Owen 1953 and 1966b with Kahn 2007; and see Peterson, chapter 16 in this volume.

9. I choose "causal responsibility" as the least misleading translation of the Greek terms under discussion in this passage of the *Phaedo*: the adjective *aitios* and the noun *aitia*. For discussion of the terminology, see Frede 1980, and for the notion in Plato, see Sedley 1998.

for the beauty of anything else that is beautiful. In this way, Forms are not only themselves beings, they are causally responsible for at least certain other aspects of the character of the world, as well.

Given these roles in Plato's theory of being, it comes as no surprise that Forms have central roles to play in Plato's theories about the ways in which we talk and think about the world also.

3. In the case of language, it seems from several works that Forms play a special role in relation to the language we use to describe the world; they are in some way privileged bearers of the terms that we use to describe those aspects of things for which they turn out to be causally responsible.[10]
4. In Plato's theory of knowledge, Forms turn out to be objects of knowledge and of a privileged sort.[11]

It is, of course, conceivable that Plato started out with some (independently motivated) commitment to this favored sort of entity—the Form—and then sought out contexts in which to put it to theoretical work. More likely, however, is that Forms are theoretical entities in the sense of being entities whose claim to existence is justified or defended in light of the theoretical work they do. One might defend this view by appeal to a passage of the *Parmenides* (130b1–e3) in which Socrates, invited to answer questions about the range of Forms to which he is committed and finding himself uncertain, suggests that the reason not to subscribe to a Form for such items as hair, mud, and dirt is that these are things that are "just as we see them to be" (130d3–4). Socrates appears to reason here in the following (reasonable) way: where there is no theoretical work for Forms to do, there is no reason to posit them.[12] In general, this understanding of the theoretical status of Forms gains support from the fact that, within the Platonic corpus, there are no clear examples of direct arguments for the existence of Forms.[13]

Given this understanding of Forms as theoretical entities, when it comes to possible lines of development, one might expect that any developments in the conception of Forms would be driven by developments in his views on questions associated with the various theoretical roles that Forms play, developments in his views about the nature of language or knowledge, for example. This makes the task of considering whether Plato's theorizing about Forms is something that develops over the course of his writings considerably more complicated. In what follows, questions about development are left outside the frame of this discussion, to the

10. See *Phaedo* 102b11, *Republic* X 596a7–9, *Parmenides* 130e5–131a2. Passages like these have sometimes led people to think that Platonic Forms are meanings; see Bostock 1986. See also Crivelli, chapter 9 in this volume.

11. See *Phaedo* 73b–76e and *Republic* 476a–480a. I take no stand here on the controversial question of whether, especially in this *Republic* passage, Forms are assumed to be the *only* objects of knowledge. Contrast Annas 1981, ch. 8, and Fine 1978 and 1990; see also Taylor, chapter 7 in this volume.

12. For this understanding of his reasoning and its significance, see McCabe 1994, 78–81.

13. Arguments for the existence of Forms can be found in Aristotle's *On Ideas*, together with his criticisms of them. See Fine 1993.

considerations elsewhere in this handbook of the larger topics within which Forms have theoretical work to do.

III. The Language of Forms

This still leaves open the question of where we should look for evidence of Plato's views about Forms. As far as use of language goes, the central terms used to identify Forms in indisputably canonical accounts of Forms—in particular, the Greek terms *idea* and *eidos*[14]—turn up in a wide range of works across the corpus that cut across candidate boundaries between developmental stages in Plato's thought. In some places, these go along with comparatively rich characterizations of the nature and role of the objects picked out by these terms, in others not; in some places, these characterizations are obviously similar, in others less obviously so.

For example, in Socratic dialogues of definition, such as the *Euthyphro*, for example—works that on widely accepted chronologies of the order in which Plato's works were written were produced earlier rather than later—we find the language of Forms, including hallmarks of what, as we have already indicated, are Forms' central roles.[15] In *Euthyphro* 6d11, for example, Socrates indicates that he is looking for "that form (*eidos*) in virtue of which all the pious things are pious," using causal language comparable to that found in the explicit theory of Forms as causally responsible set out in *Phaedo* 96–106. But the Socratic dialogues provide no real detail as to the ontological character of Forms. Had an accident of survival left us in a position where these and only these works of Plato survived, it would, I think, be something of a challenge to reconstruct from them the Theory of Forms of scholarly conception or, indeed, of the sort that could warrant Aristotle's much publicized objections.

This lack of detail might be taken to indicate that these works constitute an early stage in the development of Plato's theory, where later works develop or extend the account of Forms so as to provide the metaphysical underpinnings for Socrates' search for definitions.[16] Alternatively, one might view it as a consequence of a presentational strategy that takes you through an ordered sequence in which the picture does not develop but is gradually filled out.[17] The evidence does not

14. On the terminology, see Motte et al. 2003.

15. The dialogues of definition I have in mind are *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, and *Hippias Major*; *Republic* I and *Theaetetus* share the general form but for different reasons do not naturally go with this group—*Republic* I because it opens the *Republic*; *Theaetetus* because it is generally viewed as a later return to the form and is much more elaborate. Not all the works that would typically be identified as early works are dialogues of definition; to name just two examples, the *Apology* and *Crito* are not works of this type.

16. On the idea of "Socratic" Forms in contrast to "Platonic" Forms and the possible relations between them, contrast Vlastos 1991, Irwin 1999, and Penner 1987.

17. Kahn 1996.

seem to me clearly to decide between these positions. Nor do we need to, for there are pragmatic reasons not to consider the evidence about Forms from these Socratic dialogues. Precisely because they do not offer a rich characterization of the ontological character of Forms, it is difficult to derive much of our view about the nature of Forms from them. Note, however, that this is in reality only a matter of degree. Even in the "canonical treatment" of Forms in the *Phaedo*, the *Republic* or *Symposium*, the characterizations of Forms are *richer*, but not *rich*; at the least, they leave open many unanswered questions, a fact the *Parmenides*' searching "reprise" might be thought to acknowledge.

More difficult is the question of what *other* dialogues to include; the *Timaeus*, *Sophist*, *Politicus*, and *Philebus*, for example, all have discussion involving the language of Forms. These are dialogues generally held to be among the later group of Plato's writings, postdating not only the discussions of Forms in the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic* but also those in the critical examination of the *Parmenides*.[18] Their discussion is in certain respects like and in certain respects unlike the discussions of Forms in these earlier works, so that it is unclear the extent to which it indicates a departure from their view of Forms. These later works do not play a central role in the discussion here, again for pragmatic reasons. Both they and the *Parmenides*, the nature and import of whose treatment of Forms would be critical to any attempt to tackle the question of where these later discussions fit within the context of Plato's treatment of Forms, are considered in detail elsewhere in this handbook.[19] So far as is possible, however, I attempt to remain neutral on the question of development related to the characterizations of Forms therein.

For better or worse, then, our (main, if not exclusive) focus is the somewhat, but by no means fully rich characterizations of the ontological character of Forms in the canonical discussions of the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic* (to which we might add also the *Phaedrus*).

IV. What Forms Are There?

One striking feature of discussion of Forms in both *Phaedo* and *Republic*, especially, is that discussions of Forms are typically framed as though all participants in the conversation are already familiar with Forms and have some idea of what Forms there are. This is somewhat surprising if Forms are here being introduced and theorized for the *reader* for the first time, although it is possible that the

18. In the case of the *Timaeus*, this dating has been disputed, however, by Owen 1953, precisely on grounds related to questions concerning the developments in Plato's attitude to Forms. Contrast Cherniss 1957.

19. For the view that Plato abandons Forms in light of the *Parmenides*' criticisms, see, for example, Owen 1953 and 1966b. For an alternative, more "unitarian" approach to Plato's treatment of Forms, post-*Parmenides*, see now Kahn 2007.

mismatch between reader and participant is precisely designed to draw the reader's attention to the novel features of what is being said. Whatever its intended purpose may be, one effect of the strategy is resulting unclarity as to what the scope of the theory is intended to be.

Consider, for example, the following passage that occurs early in the *Phaedo* and is its first introduction of Forms:

> What about the following, Simmias? 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 things of this sort with your eyes?—Not at all, he said.—Or have you grasped them with any of your bodily senses? I'm speaking of them all, for example, of Largeness, of Health, of Strength, in sum of the being of all of the others that each happens to be.[20] (*Phaedo* 65d4–e5)

Here, we have a list of examples of Forms:[21] Just, Beautiful, Good, Largeness, Health, and Strength. This list, in itself, is a rather odd assortment of items, including values, a size property, and physical characteristics. It is completed by a generalization—"all the rest"—whose scope is utterly opaque.

Somewhat better is the generalizing move that follows Socrates' subsequent argument, in the *Phaedo*, to the effect that the soul can be shown to preexist its embodiment on the grounds that, when embodied, it has cognitive abilities requiring that, prior to embodiment, it had knowledge of Forms. The argument takes the Form of Equality as example, but it applies, Socrates says, to Forms in general, whose range is indicated as follows:

> For our present argument is no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious, and, as I say, about all the things on which we put as a seal this mark "what is," and about which we ask and answer in our questions and answers. (*Phaedo* 75c10–d5)

Socrates here ties the scope of Forms to the scope of Socratic questions and answers. Socratic questions ask "What is F?" for some range of properties. The Form is identified as "What is [F]"—that is, as the referent of the answer to this Socratic inquiry. In this way, he fixes the scope of Forms. But this fixing is not very informative, since we are no clearer on the intended scope of such Socratic questions and answers than on the scope of Forms.

If the passages containing examples and generalizations of this sort are not helpful in fixing the scope of Forms, we might turn to the arguments in which we find them. As I have said, the Platonic corpus does not provide us with direct arguments for the existence of Forms, which we might use to establish their scope.

20. Translations of Plato here and elsewhere are taken from or take as a starting point those in Cooper 1997, although in some cases I have modified them more or less extensively.

21. The passage does not refer to the items mentioned as Forms, but it seems clear that this is what they are.

Forms do play roles in a number of arguments, however, and we might turn to these arguments to investigate what range of Forms they could be used, indirectly, to establish. The results of such investigation, however, turn out not to be straightforward.

Commonly, Forms are introduced as pairs of opposites. In both *Phaedo* 102b–105b and *Republic* 475e–476e, for example, we find as examples of Forms a series of pairs of opposites: in the *Phaedo*, Largeness and Smallness, Hot and Cold, Odd and Even; in the *Republic*, Beautiful and Ugly, Just and Unjust, Good and Bad.[22] And it is a central feature of Forms, in these passages, that a Form cannot be characterized by its own opposite, something that isn't the case for other, perceptible bearers of the same name as the Form (this point is central to the *Phaedo* passage cited above; see especially 102d–103c).[23] And it is sometimes suggested that a passage of *Republic* VII makes explicit a restriction of Forms to opposite properties.[24]

In *Republic* 523b ff., in preparation for the establishment of the educational curriculum for the philosopher-rulers, Socrates contrasts two sorts of sense perception: one sort does not summon the understanding to investigate, and one sort does exhort it to investigate. Socrates illustrates this contrast by the example of looking at three fingers: the smallest, ring, and middle fingers. Perception of a finger *as a finger* is an example of the sort of perception that does not summon the understanding to investigate, precisely because perception does not deliver up two opposing perceptions at the same time: "sight doesn't suggest to [the soul] that the finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger" (523d5–6). In the case of perception of the finger as having certain opposing properties, by contrast, as being, for example, large or small, thick or thin, hard or soft, Socrates says that perception precisely reports that the very same thing that the sense reports as large, thick, or hard, it says to be the opposite also (524a6–10 especially). And perception of opposing properties like these is the sort of perception that, for this reason, *does* summon the understanding to investigate.

> Sight, however, saw the large and small, not as separate, but as mixed up together. Isn't that so?—Yes.—And, for the sake of clarity on this, understanding was compelled to see in turn large and small, not mixed up, but distinguished, in the opposite way from that.—True.—And isn't it from these sort of cases that it first occurs to us to ask what the large is and what the small.—Absolutely.—And thus we called one intelligible, the other visible.—That's right. (*Republic* 524c3–d1).

The investigation that is initiated by perceptions that summon is an investigation of the sort that lead to the recognition and identification of Forms. Hence the contrast between those properties perception of which summons and those

22. Are these contraries or contradictories? The examples suggest that opposing Forms are contraries, not contradictories, but whether this distinction is observed throughout is unclear.

23. This feature of Forms is central to the contrast between Forms and their perceptible counterparts, which I consider in detail below.

24. Annas 1981, ch. 9.

properties perception of which does not summon could be taken as an indication of a restriction upon the range of Forms to that of the summoning properties: that is, to Forms that are opposites.[25] However, if this passage is understood to imply such a restriction in the scope of Forms, it is inconsistent both with examples of Forms we find elsewhere and with another passage of the *Republic* that has also been taken to indicate the scope of Forms.

First, the examples: even without going outside the works on which we are focusing (and which are indisputably home to the canonical Theory of Forms), it is easy to find at least candidate examples of Forms that do not have opposites: in *Republic* X, Forms of Couch and Table (596b1–2); in the *Phaedo*, Forms of Fire and Snow (103c13). And if we were to consider works throughout the corpus, examples would come easier still. But these latter examples will be moot, because of questions about development, and the first group of examples can all be brought into doubt, if doubt is sought. *Republic* X is an unusual context, and it is just not clear what we should make of this talk of a Form of Couch and of Table, which plays a role in Socrates' development of an elaborate analogy between painting and poetry in the service of his notorious criticisms of mimetic art.[26] And there is some external evidence (for what this is worth) that Plato did not, in fact, believe in Forms of artifacts.[27] As to the *Phaedo*'s examples, the passage does not provide unequivocal evidence that Fire and Snow are themselves understood as Forms, as opposed to being entities that stand in some necessary relation to a Form, which Form conforms to the restriction of Forms to opposites.[28]

Turning from the examples to the other passage of the *Republic* that appears to speak to the question of the scope of Forms, we find, at least on the face of it, a different result from the book VII passage. In book X, immediately before the introduction of a Form of Couch and of Table, Socrates offers what appears to be a procedure for generating Forms, which is commonly translated along the following lines:

> Do you want us to begin our examination, then, by adopting our usual procedure? As you know, we customarily hypothesize a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name. (*Republic* 596a5–7)

Read in this way, the passage proposes a range of Forms far wider than that implied by reading the scope off the distinction in *Republic* book VII. Indeed, the range

25. So Annas (ibid.).

26. Annas (ibid.) remarks on the unusual context; for the salience of couches and tables to this context, see Burnyeat 1999, 232–36.

27. For the evidence and discussion, see Fine 1993, ch. 6. This same external evidence would not restrict Forms to opposites, however, since it would include Forms of natural kinds.

28. *Phaedo* 104d1–7 is the best evidence that Three, and so, arguably, by analogy, Fire, Snow, and so on, are indeed Forms, but it is not indisputable. The *Timaeus* does provide unequivocal evidence as to the existence of a Form of Fire (see especially 51b7–d3), but the *Timaeus* is an unusual work in many respects and, as I have said, one whose dating has been controversial in light of views about the ways in which Plato's views about Forms develop.

would be wide to the point of potential absurdity: Do we really want a Form for *any* general term, no matter how unnatural, gerrymandered, or empty it might be? Again, however, the evidence is not decisive, again because of the unusual context and also because the passage need not be translated in this way. Smith proposed that the passage should be construed, rather, as making the claim that we commonly assume, "[as a rule of procedure,] that the Idea which corresponds to a group of particulars, each to each, is always one, in which case we call the group of particulars by the same name as the [Form]."[29] On this construal, the passage does not carry any implication about the scope of Forms.

My view is that it is a mistake to seek to use either of the *Republic* passages considered (book X or book VII) to settle the question of the scope of Forms, and not simply because they appear to answer the question in ways that are inconsistent with each other. For all practical purposes, the book X passage is unavailable for use to settle this question. Its construal is vexed, and its context is such that it is hard to know what more general use can be made of the points that are made therein. In the case of book VII, I think it mistaken to view the passage either as making or implying a point about the scope of Forms. Notice the care with which Socrates puts his claim, at 523d4–5: in the case of those properties, like being a finger, perception of which does not summon the understanding, "the soul *of the many* is not *compelled* to question what a finger might be" (emphasis mine). What could and should be questioned by the soul of the few (the author of the *Parts of Animals*, for example) is another matter.

It thus does not follow from what Socrates says in book VII that properties like being a finger are ones whose content does not merit rational inquiry of the sort that would discover and identify a Form. And it certainly does not follow—as Socrates does not claim, anyway—that the distinction he draws between properties that summon and those that do not corresponds to an ontological distinction between Forms and other non-Formal properties. What follows is just what Socrates emphasizes and the sort of point that the passage's educational context requires: properties that summon are those for which the fact that an understanding of them needs rational inquiry is conspicuous or obvious in a way that it is not in other cases; such properties are thus well chosen for use in the design of an educational curriculum that has as its object the turning of attention away from perception to reason.

Suppose, nevertheless, that we ask ourselves what this passage can tell us about the intended scope of Forms. Its moral, I suggest, is the contrast from which we began: between reason and perception. The scope of Forms is set by the limits to the unproblematic deliverances of perception, if unproblematic deliverances there be. But this passage has not told us what these limits might be, and the limits may themselves be things about which Plato has shifting conceptions, according as his views of the respective contributions of perception and reason develop and change. This general claim may not satisfy, inasmuch as it fails to deliver a determinate

29. Smith 1917; translation put together from pp. 70–71.

answer as to what Forms there are. However, it has the merit of being consistent with the verdict arising from the one passage in which Plato explicitly raises, without settling, the question of the scope of Forms for our consideration. This is the passage of the *Parmenides* mentioned above that gives indications of the sort of criteria that ought to be used to settle the question. Forms are not needed in those cases where things are "just as we see them to be." What cases these are may be for us to discover.

V. How, in General, Are Forms Characterized?

When Forms are characterized, it is, as often as not, as part of a contrast between the characteristics attributed to Forms and the characteristics attributed to certain perceptible counterparts to Forms. These perceptible counterparts are generally called "particulars," but I argue below that this label is importantly misleading. Typically, Forms are identified as having features that their perceptible counterparts prominently lack (such as unity and stability, for example) or as lacking features that their perceptible counterparts prominently have (a susceptibility to qualification by conflicting pairs of opposite qualities most notably among them). Questions about the characteristics of Forms are thus bound up with questions about the differences between Forms and their perceptible counterparts.

Consider, for example, the contrast drawn in the following passage from the *Phaedo:*

> Let us then return to those same things with which we were dealing earlier. That being of whose being we give an account in our questions and answers: is it always in the same condition in the same respects or does it vary from one time to another? Does the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing itself—that which is—ever admit any change whatever? Or does each of these things that is, being of a uniform character taken by itself, remain the same in the same respects and never in any way admit any sort of change whatsoever?—Necessarily, said Cebes, it remains the same in the same respects, Socrates.—But what about the many beautifuls, such as people or horses or clothing or any other things of this sort, or about the equals, or about all those sharing a name with those things? Do they remain the same, or, in complete contrast to those others, do they, practically never in any way remain the same as themselves or each other?—The latter is the case, said Cebes, they never remain the same.—Then, is it the case that, whereas you could touch and see and perceive with the other senses these latter, there is no way to grasp those that always remain the same than by reasoning of the mind; rather, such things are invisible and not seen?—You're absolutely right. (78c10–79a5)

Socrates uses this contrast to establish that there are two sorts of being: one visible, the other invisible (79a6–7). And this is the overarching contrast between Forms and their counterparts: Forms are not perceptible, but intelligible; their counterparts are perceptible. These two sorts of beings are further characterized in terms of their respective stability or instability. Intelligible Forms are invariant; they do not change. Their perceptible counterparts, by contrast, are in no way invariant but subject to change. It is unclear quite how these two contrasts are meant to be related, but the shape of the passage suggests that the receptivity to change of their perceptible counterparts is intended to support the view that changeless Forms are intelligible as opposed to perceptible.

The passage raises a number of questions. First, how should we understand the terms of the contrast here and elsewhere—the contrast between the "many beautifuls" and the Form with which they share a name? This is a question I return to later. Second, how should we understand the comparative instability of the perceptible counterparts to Forms? Is the suggestion that Forms' perceptible counterparts "never in any way remain the same" meant to imply that they are, instead, subject to variation *in every respect?* Plato has sometimes been regarded as taking such an extreme view of the condition of perceptible things. However, if this extreme view were in question, it would be hard to see why Cebes would immediately agree with this picture without any question. Still, even if we do not suppose that Plato's view is extreme in this way, we must still ask ourselves what sort of change is at issue.[30] This is linked to the third question, which is how susceptibility to change of this sort (or these sorts) would support the view that (insusceptible) Forms are intelligible as opposed to being perceptible.

The change to which the perceptible counterparts to Forms, unlike Forms, are subject may include such unproblematic examples of change as coming into being or perishing, growth or diminution, and so on. But it seems likely, also, to include a phenomenon that we might not be immediately inclined to think of as an example of change. This is the phenomenon generally known as "the compresence of opposites." Certainly, when, in the *Symposium*, Diotima seeks to explain to Socrates the Form of Beauty's manner of "always being," she denies both that it is subject to ordinary sorts of changes and that it is subject to the compresence of opposites; this is in implied contrast to its perceptible counterparts.

> First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another, nor is it beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others. (*Symposium* 210e6–211a5)

At its most general, the compresence of opposites is a situation in which it would be true to say of some subject both that it is F and that it is un-F (the

30. A now classic discussion of these questions is Irwin 1977. See also Irwin 1999.

opposite of F): that it is, for example, both beautiful and ugly. This is among the things here denied of the Form of Beauty. A simple example of the occurrence of the compresence of opposites in a perceptible counterpart to a Form might take the form of the following example from *Phaedo* 102b3–6: Simmias is both large and small (or, perhaps, both larger than and smaller than—it is the comparative terms that Socrates himself uses at b5): large in comparison with Socrates (larger than Socrates), small in comparison with Phaedo (smaller than Phaedo). This example may be misleadingly simple. Whether it illustrates the only or central form of example and the manner in which it might be expected to provide support for the intelligibility of Forms are matters I return to later.

The respective invulnerability and vulnerability to the compresence of opposites of Forms and their perceptible counterparts is one candidate, and, in my view, the best candidate explanation of what is meant by another broad contrast between them, which has prominence in the *Phaedo* especially. This is the view that the perceptible counterparts to Forms are in some way deficient in comparison with the perfection of Forms. Consider, for example, the following agreement between Socrates and Simmias, applied to the Form of Equal and its perceptible counterparts:

> Well, then, he said, do we experience something like this in the case of the equals among sticks and the other equals we mentioned just now? Do they seem to us to be equal in just the same way as what is Equal itself is? Is there some deficiency in their being such as the Equal, or is there not?—A considerable deficiency, he said. (*Phaedo* 74d4–8)

Equality here means geometrical (rather than, as it might be, political or social) equality, that property in virtue of which things are of the same measurement in some dimension of measurement. Socrates and Simmias agree that the perceptible counterparts of the Form of Equal have some deficiency in respect of this property when compared with the Form itself. This deficiency has been interpreted in one of two ways.[31] On the Approximation View, Socrates and Simmias agree that two sticks, for example, cannot be exactly equal in any dimension of measurement; they may *look* equal, but, with sufficiently accurate measuring equipment, we would find they are not. On the Compresence of Opposites View, by contrast, Socrates and Simmias agree that equal sticks are both equal and unequal (albeit in different respects); they may, for example, be equal in length but not in weight; equal to each other but not to some third stick of different dimensions.[32] Notice that Plato cannot simultaneously maintain both of these views, for they are inconsistent with each other. By Approximation, sensible equals are not in any respect exactly equal; they merely approximate equality. By Compresence, in contrast, sensible equals are, indeed, exactly equal, *in some respect*; they are also unequal in some (other) respect.

31. For the contrast, see Nehamas 1975.

32. For Approximation, see, for example, Ross 1951; for Compresence, see, for example, Nehamas 1975 and Irwin 1977, 1999.

I favor the Compresence of Opposites view of deficiency for the following reasons. First, it seems to me that it would at the least be hugely controversial to claim that, as a matter of fact, no two perceptible objects could have exactly the same measurements as each other in some dimension of measurement. The very existence of one case of the dimension in some perceptible object seems to prove the possibility of its occurring twice. The claim at issue, it should be noted, is much stronger than the possibly trivial claim that we are often fast and loose in our identification of things as being equal, and that many things we identify as such turn out to fall short of equality upon closer examination. It is, however, the stronger claim that is needed for the Approximation View. And it seems to me that we should avoid the attribution of controversial claims where none are needed. Second, the Approximation View seems unable to deal with those instances in which there are Forms for each of a pair of (binary) opposites. The Form of Equal is one example, if there is a Form of Unequal also.[33] The problem for the Approximation View is that whatever is only approximately equal seems to be something exactly unequal. The view cannot thus be simultaneously maintained for each of a pair of (binary) opposites.

These first two reasons have been illustrated with reference to the *Phaedo*'s own example, but both would appear to generalize across at least a wide range of candidate Forms. It also seems important that both reasons do apply so readily to the very Form that Socrates chooses as an example when making the point about the deficiency of sensibles in comparison with Forms; the greater plausibility of one or other view with respect to this very example should count in its favor. The final reason to favor the Compresence View is that it seems to cohere much better with those passages in which there seems undeniable interest in the compresence of opposites, both in the *Phaedo* and elsewhere (*Phaedo* 102b3–6, mentioned above; more controversially, but, I think, plausibly, in a vexed passage in the immediate context, 74b7–c3;[34] and, for example, *Republic* V, 478e7–479d5), especially since, as we have seen, Plato cannot consistently maintain *both* views of the status of Forms' perceptible counterparts.

Notice, however, that we now find ourselves confronted once more by the question of the scope of Forms—in particular, by the question of whether there are Forms only for pairs of opposites. If perfection is a defining characteristic of Forms in contrast to their perceptible counterparts, and if what perfection amounts to is an invulnerability to the compresence of opposites with which their perceptible counterparts are afflicted, then it looks as if there can be Forms only of opposites.[35]

33. Perhaps this might be doubted, if one thinks that Formal pairs of opposites are *contraries* (see n. 22 above). The reference to "inequality" at *Phaedo* 74c2, identified using the abstract noun *anisotês*, might be taken as evidence for a Form of Unequal.

34. For recent discussion of this vexed passage, see Sedley 2007.

35. This problem arises on the Compresence of Opposites View of the imperfection of Forms' perceptible counterparts, but it is not clear that we would be in a much better position if we, instead, adopted the Approximation View of their imperfection, for it seems at least less obvious what would be meant by the claim that perceptibles approximate nonoppositional features such as humanity, for example, than that they do so for oppositional features such as equality or beauty.

As it is, however, there seems no clear evidence for this restriction in the scope of Forms (which would have been easy enough to state). And there is some evidence against such a restriction in scope, in candidate examples of Forms that do not have opposites.

Faced with this question, there seem to be three different options for keeping the scope of Forms broader than the focus on compresence of opposites might be taken to suggest. First, one might decide that Plato thinks the phenomenon of compresence of opposites is found more broadly than we might think.[36] Second, one might deny that the contrast between perfect Forms and imperfect sensible counterparts is, in fact, a defining characteristic of Forms.[37] In this way, we need not take imperfection, so understood, to constrain our understanding of the scope of Forms. But we would still need to explain the prevalence of interest in the presence or absence of the compresence of opposites, whether or not it is part of a contrast between imperfect perceptibles and perfect Forms. Finally, then, in a manner similar to the point made above in connection with *Republic* book VII, one might suggest that the compresence of opposites is given attention as an especially conspicuous aspect of some broader phenomenon that has the potential to apply to a broader range Forms, under which broader phenomenon compresence may be subsumed.

How might this final strategy be cashed out? Without pretending to the sort of detailed examination one would really need of this question, two possibilities suggest themselves. One is to recall that Forms are contrasted to their perceptible counterparts as being invulnerable to ordinary sorts of change, as well as to the compresence of opposites (as in the *Symposium* passage quoted above). Suppose that Plato shares with Aristotle the view that negative predicates like "is not human" are true not only of presently existing things that are not human but also of things that previously existed as humans, but which no longer exist.[38] Then, it is as true to say, today, that Socrates is not human, as it would have been true to say of him that he was human, on the fateful day recorded in the *Phaedo*.[39] This is not a case of compresence of opposites. But it is a case of something of which compresence of opposites might be construed as a more vivid example.

A second, possibly related way in which to cash out the strategy would be to draw on one final broad contrast associated with the difference between Forms and their perceptible counterparts: the contrast between being and becoming, a key, but unclear statement of which is found in the *Timaeus:*

> In my judgement, then, we must first make the following distinction: what is that which is always, having no becoming, and what is that which becomes always, never being? The former is such as to be grasped by thought with

36. For indications of this sort of strategy, see Fine 1993, 100–101.

37. This strategy has recently been defended by Sedley 2006.

38. For this view in Aristotle, see *De Interpretatione* 3, 16b11–15 and *Categories* 10, 13b14–19.

39. I set aside the complications raised by questions about the possible humanity of Socrates' putatively immortal soul.

> reason, being always in the same condition, whereas the other is such as to be grasped by judgement with unreasoning perception, becoming and ceasing to be, but never really being. (27d5–28a4)

While the relation between the *Timaeus* and the discussions of Forms on which we have been focusing has been left an open question, the contrast drawn here seems clearly in some way related to the contrast drawn at *Phaedo* 78–79, quoted above.[40] Consider, then, one persuasive interpretation of what Plato may mean by the contrast between that which becomes and that which is, put forward by Michael Frede.[41] Things that become are things that, relative to some specific times, contexts, or relations take on the character or marks of some formal feature, F, but not in virtue of having or being some nature that *is* F. Only Formal natures—that which is captured by a definition of "F"—*are*, as opposed to *become*, F. Occurrence of the compresence of opposites, in respect to some F, is one conspicuous, but not the only, indication that perceptibles fail to satisfy the requirements on things that *are* (what is) F, and hence merely *become* F, at some times and in some contexts or relations.

VI. *Where* Are Forms?

The question "*Where* are Forms?" may seem an odd one, but it seems to me worth considering, insofar as it will sharpen our understanding of the questions there are about the relation between forms and their perceptible counterparts. Further, odd though the question may be, it is one that, even in popular thought about Plato, as found in a nonspecialist encylopedia, is commonly given an answer: Forms exist in some "Platonic heaven."[42] This answer may be intended metaphorically, since Forms are also (and with justification) commonly understood to be immaterial, nonspatially extended objects of a sort that are not naturally thought of as having spatial location. Nevertheless, the metaphor implies the existence of a location or quasilocation for Forms, which is distinct from that of the location of ordinary material objects. Since Forms are the objects of intellect and material objects are the objects of perception, the metaphor often extends to talk of two quasi-spatially distinct "realms": the sensible realm and the intelligible realm.

Such talk, of course, reflects the sort of contrast between two sorts of being—the perceptible and the intelligible—on which we have focused thus far. And the "location" of these two sorts of beings in two different "realms" undoubtedly reflects

40. Note that the dual contrast will be further complicated, as the *Timaeus* proceeds, by the introduction of the receptacle. See, for example, 50c7–d2, 51e6–52b5.

41. Frede 1988. See also response by Code 1988.

42. See, for example, the entry on Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Theory_of_Forms&oldid=73131620%Wikipedia.

some of Plato's own choices of image and language. In the *Republic*'s analogy of the cave, for example, the intellectual ascent involved in turning one's attention from the perceptible to the intelligible is depicted as a journey out of a cave to an environment outside. And the *Phaedrus* talks of the "place beyond heaven" (247c3) as the location of truth. But there are questions as to what is the best way in which to understand this sort of language and image.

One direction we should be careful to avoid being led is in the direction of talking as though Plato is somehow committed to two different *realities*. Assuming that reality is what there is—whatever that turns out to be—then it is hard to see that it makes any sense to talk of *two* realities; Plato's view, rather, should be understood as the view that the deliverances of perception do not exhaust (and may in some way distort) the contents of reality. There remain, however, two rather different ways to understand this view. On one, the view is that there is in reality what we ordinarily think that there is (the perceptibles), but that there is, *in addition*, an aspect of reality besides what is evident in perceptual experience and which is in various ways metaphysically explanatory of what is evident in experience. On another, the view is that the evidence derived from perceptual experience in certain respects *distorts* our understanding of what there is in reality, and that the reality discovered through rational inquiry corrects or replaces aspects of what our experience suggests to us there is. On the first view, perceptibles and intelligibles work in tandem, though in distinction from each other; on the second, perceptibles and intelligibles are more like rivals.

The second view is more in line with the rationalist tradition antecedent to Plato, from which I began. On this view, Plato (like Parmenides and Democritus before him) is best understood as proposing that it is only by using our intellect, as opposed to our senses, that we will come to understand what there really is in the (single) world around us, the world with which we are, indeed, in contact through perception, but about which perception to a greater or lesser extent misinforms us. And, we may note, in the case of Democritus, for example, there is no parallel temptation to talk of a distinct "atomic realm." Of course, the prevalence of this temptation with regard to Plato may be a reflection of (another) respect in which Plato differs from Democritus (one of many). But it may also be a hazard arising from an overly literal interpretation of spatial imagery that is, in fact, designed to accentuate the intelligibility—as opposed to the perceptibility—of Forms.

A second potential hazard of an overly literal reading of the talk of Forms as residing in some "Platonic heaven" is the assumption that, if Forms are separate, as Aristotle suggested, they are therefore not immanent, not *in* the things that have them. However, as Fine has argued, these matters are far from clear.[43] Even if Plato does assume that Forms are in some sense separate—not literally spatially, but in the sense of being capable of independent existence—it is not at all clear that he concludes from this that Forms are not also *in* certain things. In the *Phaedo*, presence (*parousia*, 100d5) is among the candidate relations that Socrates canvases

43. Fine 1984 and 1986. Contrast Devereux 1994.

for the relation between participant and Form, and he is prepared to license inferences of the following sort:

> When you then say that Simmias is larger than Socrates but smaller than Phaedo, do you not mean that there is *in* Simmias both Largeness and Smallness? (102b3–5)

It is disputed whether, in this passage, Socrates has in mind that the Forms, Largeness and Smallness, are themselves in Simmias, or whether there are, in addition to Forms, additional corresponding items, so-called Immanent Forms or Immanent Characters, and it is one of these Immanent Forms or Characters that is, for example, the Largeness in Simmias.[44] On a credible reading of the passage, however, Forms do turn out to be items that can be located.[45] But they are not located off in some remote "Platonic heaven"; they are located where everything else is, around here, sometimes in (at least some of) the things we see.[46]

VII. What, Metaphysically Speaking, Are Forms? And What, for That Matter, Are "Particulars," the Perceptible Counterparts to Forms?

Are Forms universal in character, or are Forms particular? That is, are Forms repeatable items—not only located, but multiply located in many spaces and times in the things that have them in common—or are they unique and nonrepeatable in character? Both views of the metaphysical character of Forms have been defended.[47] On balance, there seems to me reason to favor the view that Forms are universal in character. This is, in part, because Forms appear to perform the central function that is typically adduced as the reason for introducing a universal, the performance of which has some claim to be constitutive of being a universal; Forms underlie genuine similarities in the character of things by being (in some

44. Contrast Fine 1986 and Vlastos 1969.

45. Does the idea of their being located call into question their immaterial character? No: no more than does the claim that the immaterial soul is to be found—at least some of the time—*in* a body.

46. "Sometimes": if Forms' capacity for independent existence includes (or amounts to) the capacity to exist even if no perceptibles participate in them, then Forms need not always be located *in* some perceptible object(s). But it does not follow from this that they are—as well or instead—in some alternative location, a Platonic heaven; it may be that in this case they exist without any specific location(s).

47. For the view that Forms are universals, see, for example, Fine 1993; for the view that Forms are particulars, see, for example, Geach 1956 (at least implicitly); yet another view is that Forms are best understood as something like chemical elements, for which, see Denyer 1983.

way) common to them. But it does not follow from this that the Theory of Forms is itself a *Theory* of Universals. After all, it is not clear that their performing this function, if they do, constitutes the central reason for their introduction as Forms, and performing this function is not the sole function of Forms.

If, in the Theory of Forms, Plato were giving us a Theory of Universals, then he would, in all likelihood, be the first to do so (and, indeed, he is cited as such by Armstrong,[48] for example). One of the consequences of being the *first* to offer a theory of the existence of a certain sort of metaphysical object is that the metaphysical terrain is not already carved up in such a way that distinctions of the sort that might emerge from such a theory are readily available to draw on. I argue that the distinction between universal and particular, understood as the distinction between items that are repeatable and those that are not, is not, in fact, central to the contours of Plato's ontology as he conceives them, if, that is, he would recognize the distinction at all. This fact may go some way toward explaining why these two, as it seems to us, fundamentally different metaphysical characters, universal and particular, have both seemed feasible in characterizations of Forms.

There are two main reasons to suppose that the distinction between universal and particular is not, in fact, central to Plato's ontology (at least, not in his construction of the Theory of Forms). These two reasons complement each other. The first is that Forms do not appear to be the only item in Plato's ontology that are universal in character, so it would seem that, if he does think of Forms as being universal in character, this cannot be what he takes to be especially distinctive of them. The second is that when Plato constructs the "other" to Forms, he does so in a way that encompasses both items that are particular and items that are universal. By the "other" to Forms, I mean, of course, not merely whatever is different from Forms but the items that are typically contrasted with Forms in arguments centrally involving features of Forms—that is, in the type of argument that one might take to indicate Plato's reasons for positing Forms (with the features proposed). Misleadingly, these "other" to Forms are often referred to as "particulars"; Plato's "particulars," however, are not all metaphysically particular, or so I argue.

I take the first reason first. In saying that Forms are not the only items in Plato's ontology that appear to be universal in character, I follow an interpretation according to which, in talk of the perceptible counterparts to Forms, Plato at least sometimes refers to perceptible universals. Consider, for example, the following central passage from *Republic* book V:

> (S) Now that these points have been established, I want to address a question to our friend who doesn't believe in the beautiful itself or any form of the beautiful itself that remains the same in all respects but who does believe in the many beautiful things—the lover of sights who won't allow anyone to say that the beautiful is one or the just or any of the others; and let me ask him this: of these many beautiful things, friend, is there one which will not also appear

48. D. M. Armstrong in his entry on "universals" in Kim and Sosa 1995, 502.

> ugly? Or, of the many just, one which will not appear unjust? Or, of the many things that are holy, one that will not appear unholy? (G) No, he said, rather they must appear in some way both beautiful and ugly, and the same goes for the others you asked about. (S) What about the many doubles? Do they appear less halves than doubles? (G) No. (S) And the many large and small things, or light and heavy things, is any one of these any more whichever of these we say it is than the opposite? (G) No, each will always be both. (S) Then *is* each of the many any more whatever someone says it is than it *is not?* (478e7–479b10)

According to the interpretation I follow, the items referred to here as, for example, "the many beautifuls" are universal perceptible properties such as "being brightly colored" of the sort that might (erroneously, in Socrates' view) be offered as a candidate explanation of the beauty of some perceptible beautiful object (a lithograph by Miró, for example).[49] Such properties are universal, insofar as they are themselves repeatable items. Many Miró lithographs, for example, have in common being brightly colored. But they are clearly distinguished from Forms, which are *nonperceptible* universals.[50]

This brings us on to the second reason for supposing that the distinction between universal and particular is not central to Plato's ontology. For it is these very items—the perceptible universals of, for example, *Republic* book V—that turn out to be included in Plato's construction of the "other" to Forms. They are included in, but, in my view, do not exclusively constitute the other to Forms, which elsewhere seems to include things that are metaphysically particular in character. Consider, for example, a portion of the *Phaedo* passage quoted before:

> But what about the many beautifuls, such as people or horses or clothing or any other things of this sort, or about the equals, or about all those sharing a name with those things? Do they remain the same, or, in complete contrast to those others, do they, practically never in any way remain the same as themselves or each other? (*Phaedo* 78d10–e4)

Here again, we have mention of "the many beautifuls." On this occasion, however, the expression would appear to refer to metaphysically particular items—people, horses, clothing.[51] Part of the difficulty is that Plato does not have explicit terminology with which to mark the particular-universal distinction, a fact which itself is grist to my mill. Further, as we have seen, he is prepared to use the very same expression—"the many beautifuls," for example—for items on both sides of this metaphysical divide. Neither the lack of explicit terminology nor the indifferent use of terminology across the division shows that Plato could not draw the distinction. But it does support my case that the distinction, if he has it, is not

49. For this reading, see Gosling 1960 and compare Irwin 1977 and Fine 1993. For doubts, see Silverman 2002, ch. 4.

50. Or: nonsensible universals. So, for example, Fine 1993.

51. But, contrast here, Irwin 1977.

central to his own conception of the contours of his ontology, nor to where he puts the fault lines in his arguments about Forms.

Further, from the point of view of his theorizing, the heterogeneity apparent in Plato's construction of the "other" to Forms has certain advantages. I focus on two. The first takes us back to some questions left outstanding in section V above about the compresence of opposites. It is clear from the *Republic* V passage already quoted that perceptible universals can take a prominent role in arguments involving compresence of opposites. I now argue that, even when not directly referred to, it is the perceptible universals that do the lion's share of the philosophical work involved in appeals to compresence.

While sometimes more nuanced, claims about the occurrence of the phenomenon of compresence of opposites are sometimes put as the claim that all "perceptibles" (of the relevant sort) necessarily give rise to compresence of opposites. Our *Republic* V passage has this tone.[52] But what does this mean? Is it the claim (PC) that, for any particular perceptible having some relevant feature, F, necessarily, that particular perceptible also has the opposing feature un-F? Or is it the claim (UC) that, for any perceptible type, a token of which is F, for some relevant feature, necessarily that type has un-F tokens also?

Plato would certainly be well advised not to commit himself to (PC) as stated, which seems an implausibly strong claim. Could there not, for example, be an action that was *just* and that was not, in any respect, *unjust?*

We may make this point (and the force of (UC) more concrete) with an example exploiting the *Phaedo*'s chosen Formal exemplar, Equality. Consider the following (apparently reasonable) possibility that (PC) rules out. Imagine a world in which there are exactly two objects that, as a matter of fact, are equal in every dimension. *Ex hypothesi*, they are not unequal in any respect, contra (PC). However, just because these equalities of length, weight, and so on involve specific lengths, weights, and so on, then clearly there *could* be an object to which these objects were unequal, although, in fact, there is not.[53]

But what does it mean to say that there *could* be an object to which the equals of this world were unequal? One aspect of the possibility in question is a possible object that does not, but could, exist in the actual world we're considering. Call it *U* (for unequal). Another aspect relates to the objects that do exist in the actual world considered in view of the possibility of *U*. It is this aspect that matters as far as the actual equals are concerned, and this is their *possible inequality to U* (a possibility realized in all those worlds in which both they and *U* exist). Such *possible inequality to U* must have some basis in some (actual) feature of the equal objects in every (relevant) world, including the actual.[54] But what this feature amounts to is just the claim that there is some type that these equals instantiate,

52. The "sometimes" of *Phaedo* 74b8 may be an example of nuance.

53. The advisability of stepping down to a modal claim about (particular) compresence is noted in Kelsey 2000, 105 (where the thought is attributed to Sarah Broadie, n.26).

54. The domain of worlds must be fixed to those in which the equal objects (or their counterparts) exist and where all relevant dimensions bearing on their equality in the actual world are constant.

and that this type has equal and unequal tokens across the relevant worlds.[55] Once considered across worlds, then, it becomes easier to see that the *possibility* of compresence is grounded in (UC). But any actual occurrence is possible and thus open to the same explanation. Both actual and possible occurrences of compresence in perceptible particulars may thus be grounded in the occurrence of the phenomenon at the level of types.

A second advantage of the heterogeneity of Plato's "other" to Forms is the effect it has on our understanding of predicates, in particular as applied to their perceptible counterparts and to Forms. Given the existence and pertinence of certain perceptible universals, metaphysically particular beautiful objects—such as a lithograph by Miró—turn out often to be instances both of a perceptible universal (being brightly colored) and of a Form (the Beautiful). They are not instances of the Form in virtue of being instances of the perceptible universal (because the perceptible universal is vulnerable to compresence). And this leaves open how we should understand the relation between the particular's instantiation of the perceptible universal (its bright color) and its instantiation of the Form (beauty). This question approaches, albeit somewhat indirectly, one of the most controversial features of Plato's Theory of Forms: self-predication.

Self-predication is the view that a Form can in some sense be predicated of itself: that the Form of Beauty can have the predicate "beautiful" applied to it. Self-predication might occur in certain specific cases without being a matter of theory. For example, if every Form is one and if there is a Form, One, then this Form self-predicates. The interesting question, however, is whether Forms self-predicate systematically and as a matter of theory. And there are grounds for thinking they do. Consider, for example, the following passage from the *Phaedo*:

> Consider, then, he said, whether you share my opinion as to what follows, for I think that, if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything. Do you agree to this sort of cause? (*Phaedo* 100c2–7)

Since this passage assumes that the Beautiful itself *is* beautiful—and goes on to make a claim about what must be true about anything *besides* the Form that counts as beautiful—we have here a pretty clear statement of self-predication in what looks to be a sample case: the Form, the Beautiful itself, is beautiful. Further, it is sometimes thought that the theory of causal responsibility that Socrates is here in the process of developing and illustrating requires that a cause resemble its effect in the relevant causal respect.[56] This would provide a theoretical motivation for

55. The argument proceeds on the assumption that (at least in some cases) compresent opposite properties are attributed on the basis of one and the same feature of the object(s) in question. The case of Simmias, who, while remaining the same in height, can be viewed as large in relation to Socrates and small in relation to Simmias is of this type.

56. See Sedley 1998; for discussion of the causal principle itself, see Makin 1990.

systematic self-predication. Notoriously, self-predication plays some central role in the so-called Third Man Argument at *Parmenides* 132a1–b2.[57]

If there are good grounds for supposing that Forms self-predicate, it is nevertheless hard to deny the apparent absurdity of some pictures of how this would work. (No doubt, this is one reason that, among *Parmenides* interpreters, self-predication is high on the list of targets for attitudes to Forms to be repudiated or revised.)[58] The apparent absurdity is brought out nicely by Fine: self-predication would have the consequence that "the form of White (if there is one) is coloured white; the form of dog (if there is one) can scratch its ears."[59] And, lest we think absurdity occurs only in cases where it is disputable whether there are Forms, consider two very clearly evidenced Forms, the Large and the Small. Is the Large some *massive* object? And *how small* would the Form of Small have to be?[60]

The absurdity arises on what Fine describes as "Narrow Self-Predication," the view that "the Form of F is F in roughly the same way in which F sensibles are F."[61] This is probably why attempts to rescue (or revise) self-predication have focused on identifying some different way in which the Form "is F." Without rejecting this strategy, I want to suggest that we should have in mind a question about the way in which perceptible Fs *are* F, Forms aside.

Think once again about my lithograph, a perceptible beautiful (metaphysically particular) object. It is an instance both of a perceptible universal (being brightly colored) and of a Form (the Beautiful). But it is not an instance of the Form in virtue of being an instance of the perceptible universal (because the perceptible universal is vulnerable to compresence). Being brightly colored cannot be the explanation of my lithograph's beauty, because these same bright colors have ugly instances (such as the sweater I bought, but never wear). Not only that: many cases of beauty will not be brightly colored—in the case of beautiful souls or beautiful theories, for example, the beautiful items in question will not be colored at all. But Plato is committed to the view that an explanation of beauty must be capable of covering all cases.[62] Bright coloration, then, is at most coextensive with some cases of beauty. But this would appear to leave it an open question how, if at all, the *beauty of my lithograph* relates to its being an instance of this perceptible universal? The (salient) perceptible features of my lithograph could be either (a) in no way constitutive of the beauty of my lithograph or at least (b) not constitutive of it in any way that invites the drawing of the absurd parallel when it comes to

57. This was originally brought out by Vlastos 1954 and has been the subject of much discussion; see, among many others, Meinwald 1992, Peterson 1973, Sedley 1998.

58. This is the strategy of Meinwald 1992, for example.

59. Fine 1992, 25. And see discussion of self-predication in Peterson, chapter 16 in this volume.

60. This sort of picture is only encouraged—to its discredit—by the Approximation View of imperfection, rejected in section V above.

61. Fine 1992, 25.

62. At least he often appears so committed, although it is not clear how well this would work in the case of the "more subtle" forms of explanation endorsed in *Phaedo* 105b ff., for while it may be the case that, for example, fever, when present in a body, always makes it sick, it is far less clear that whenever a body is sick, fever is present.

considering the way of being beautiful that applies to the Form. Self-predication might be defended from evident absurdity, that is, by supposing that the basis for the application of predicates to perceptible particulars is already somewhat different from what we might have been ordinarily inclined to think. Indeed, I take this to be one way to understand the claim that Socrates makes at *Phaedo* 100c (quoted above).

Finally, therefore, this raises a question about the perceptibility of the properties corresponding to Forms. In adjudicating between the two options regarding my lithograph presented above, we may be concerned about proving too much. It proves too much, one might think, if the beauty of my lithograph turns out to be nonperceptible, just like the Form. Or perhaps this is not too much. After all, if Forms *are* immanent, the beauty of my lithograph is brought about by the presence of the nonperceptible Form of Beauty within it. This issue has arisen, indirectly, more than once over the course of my discussion. Take, for example, some particular beautiful human being. This is a metaphysically particular object that I can directly perceive. In some sense, I can directly perceive it as human and as beautiful. But it seems to me far from clear whether, on Plato's view, I can directly perceive its humanity or its beauty. While it may seem unsatisfactory for me not to be able to answer this question, it does have the merit of being consistent with the emphasis of my overall theme: Plato as metaphysician for whom the fact that Forms are intelligible rather than perceptible is the primary point of focus, and who, in positing Forms, is concerned to argue that many aspects of the (single, local) world that appears to us in perception are not in reality how they appear.[63]

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CHAPTER 9

PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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IDEAS in and problems of philosophy of language surface frequently in Plato's dialogues. Some passages briefly formulate, or presuppose, views about names, signification, truth, or falsehood; others are extended discussions of important themes of philosophy of language.

It is impossible, within the limits of this essay, to follow all the leads. I focus on three topics. The first is the linguistic dimension of the theory of forms; the second is the discussion of names in the *Cratylus*, Plato's only dialogue almost completely dedicated to linguistic themes; the third is the examination of semantic and ontological issues in the *Sophist*, whose linguistic section (259d9–264b10) presents Plato's most mature reflections on statements, truth, and falsehood.[1]

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