

THE PHAEDO: A STUDY

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The Parmenideans had arrived at a view of reality according to which change is impossible. And the Heracliteans had arrived at a view of reality according to which permanence is impossible. In the Phaedo, according to my interpretation, using elements from Parmenides and Heraclitus, Plato constructs a third philosophical position.

I consider Plato's philosophy under three headings: (1) The Proof for the Immortality of the Soul, (2) The Theory of Forms, and (3) The Theory of Change.

(1) Briefly, according to my analysis, Plato's argument is this: Existence by definition belongs to the soul. Therefore, the soul cannot change with respect to the opposites, existence and non-existence, and that is to say, the soul can neither begin nor cease to be. Hence, it is eternal. In this argument, as in the ontological argument (in one version at least), "existence" is treated as a predicate, as a term which might legitimately occur in the definiens of an expression. It is this feature of the argument I attack, bringing the traditional objections against the ontological argument to my criticism of Plato's argument.

(2) I interpret the theory of forms as an attempt to resolve the Socratic paradox mentioned at 80d in the Meno:

...a man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know. He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for.

The problem raised is this: How do we learn to apply correctly such terms as "virtue" and the other general terms which are supposed to designate forms?

I compare Plato's theory of abstraction to Locke's, and using an argument similar to Plato's in the Meno, show that Locke's theory is defective. Locke's theory fails because it cannot account for how we are able to select those features from a particular which are essential to it as a representative of its kind, of a universal. Contrary to Locke's opinion, if you do not know what virtue is, seeing things which are virtuous will not be instructive to you about virtue, since you will not even recognize them as virtuous--i.e., if you don't know what virtue is, you won't be able to select the virtuous aspects from a sample which is both virtuous and non-virtuous. Plato sought to avoid this task of impossible selection, through which we are supposed to arrive at the bare essentials of a general concept, by postulating the existence of a realm of forms, of universals, where by the vision of conception we can behold perfect examples of our general ideas which contain only what is essential to those ideas, thus making selection unnecessary.

But Plato's assumption of a pre-existing soul and a realm of forms, as I argue, has no explanatory value so far as abstraction is concerned. For, unless Plato also assumes that we can make such discriminations as that between the just and the non-just, for example, he can have no basis for saying that we can recognize the form of justice as being itself just: and yet it is precisely our recognition of the form of justice as

being something supremely just that is supposed to account for our ability to discriminate the just from the non-just. But, if that very ability must be presupposed in order for his theory to work, then the theory presumes what it is supposed to explain.

(3) According to Plato's theory of change, as I interpret it, things are supposed to have a core of necessary properties which are absolutely unchangeable in the things themselves and a surrounding shell of contingent properties which are in a state of constant change, and the definitions of the things are supposed to be relative to these core of necessary properties. Whereas, in fact, as I argue, the necessity never reaches the level of things and their properties, but remains on the level of propositions. Moreover, essential properties are determined by definitions; definitions are not determined by essential properties.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche held that, since the philosophical systems of ancient Greece are all false, our primary concern should be with the minds and personalities that produced these systems and not with the systems themselves. But in truth the minds and personalities of these men have long since been lost to us, and very often the same fact is adduced as evidence for opposite conclusions, suggesting perhaps that one's temperament has more to do with the picture one paints of Plato than the facts at hand do. An artist produced the Dialogues, of course, and no doubt his personality is woven into the web of argument found there. But, like the timid spider who retreats to a dark corner when his web is investigated, the personality of Plato seems to withdraw from the Dialogues when we search for evidence of it, leaving us with just the web of Plato's reasoning. And it is with this web, the objective remains of Plato's thought, that I here propose to concern myself, investigating that portion of it which is found in the Phaedo. For there is much that can be learnt from a false theory.

The choice of the Phaedo for this study is not arbitrary. That dialogue, I believe, occupies a crucial position in Plato's writings and in his intellectual development. And, although I shall not be much concerned with Plato's intellectual development or with his writings as a whole, my principal reason for selecting the Phaedo as the object of this study is that it is probably the dialogue in which the theory of forms was first

explained to Plato's readers.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Phaedo is a very important dialogue for those who believe that in the later dialogues Plato radically overhauled the theory of forms, since, presumably, the Phaedo can be used as a measure of Plato's early views on the forms.

It is best to understand Plato's philosophy in the context in which it was offered. Later versions of Plato's philosophy are apt to be concerned with problems different from those with which Plato himself was concerned. Certainly, at least, the problems of Plato do not coincide with those of Christian Platonists. Plato's philosophy is offered as a solution to certain problems, and, therefore, to appraise the success or failure of his philosophy it is necessary to be acquainted with these problems. Aristotle, whose authority modern scholars are not in a position to dispute, says:

The supporters of the ideal theory were led to it because on the question about the truth of things they accepted the Heraclitean sayings which describe all sensible things as ever passing away, so that if knowledge or thought is to have an object, there must be some other and permanent entities, apart from those which are sensible; for there could be no knowledge of things which were in a state of flux. (Metaphysica 1078b 10)

The Heraclitean doctrine had seemed to undermine the very possibility of knowledge. For it was reasoned that, if all things are in a state of change in all respects at all times, then it is no more right to call something "A" than it is to call it "not-A." According to Aristotle, Heraclitus had claimed that,

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<sup>1</sup>G. M. Grube, Plato's Thought (London: 1935), pp. 291-4.



"All things are true and all are false." (Metaphysica 1012a 35)

According to this view, then, we can be no more justified in claiming that a given proposition is true than in claiming that it is false, since that which the proposition is about is constantly changing in all respects. Obviously, a view like this was apt to blossom into the most extreme of absurdities; and in fact it did. There are traditions to the effect that students of Heraclitus upon understanding his teachings were mute from that time until their deaths. Also according to tradition, Plato was once a student of Cratylus, a Heraclitean about whom Aristotle says that in the end he "did not think it right to say anything but only moved his finger." (Metaphysica 1010a 5)

Plato opposed these philosophers of change, arguing that the Heracliteans "have no phrases to fit their fundamental proposition [---'Everything is in a state of total change'---] unless it were 'not even nohow.'" (Theaetetus 183b) Thus the fundamental idea that everything is in a state of total change Plato rejected as meaningless. But, accepting the Heraclitean principles as applied to sensible things, Plato postulated an unchanging realm over which rational discourse was to range. In this he owed much to Parmenides.

Plato, I believe, throughout his career sought to navigate a course between the Heraclitean extreme of total change and the Parmenidean extreme of total changelessness, or total permanence. In the Theaetetus he writes,

Little by little, our advance has brought us, with-

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out our knowing it, between the two lines  $\lrcorner$ , i.e.,  
the Heraclitean and the Parmenidean,  $\lrcorner$  and, unless  
we can somehow fend them off and slip through, we  
shall suffer for it.... (Theaetetus 181a)

Sometimes Plato is pulled toward the one view, sometimes toward  
the other, as he develops increasingly sophisticated tools of  
conceptual analysis. Though, in the Phaedo, Plato tried to ac-  
commodate what he then thought was sound in both of the two po-  
sitions, he is decidedly pulled across the Parmenidean line;  
and he does indeed suffer for it, as we shall see.

PLATO'S PHILOSOPHICAL PREDECESSORS

1.1 Introduction. Our aim here is not the reconstruction of complete pre-Platonic philosophies, but simply the exhibition of certain pre-Platonic beliefs which were manipulated by Plato and used in the construction of his philosophy. There are two reasons for having these beliefs before us. First, by showing the context in which Plato's philosophizing took place, we provide the data with which to explain certain apparently bizarre moves on Plato's part. For they can be understood as a reaction to what his predecessors believed, or, perhaps in some cases, as an unexamined acceptance of what his predecessors and contemporaries believed. Second, by keeping before us the body of belief with which Plato worked, we mitigate the dangers of anachronism, which in Plato's case are particularly great because of the many ways in which he did stand out from his contemporaries. Fortunately, we can treat the pre-Platonic philosophers briefly and dogmatically since the confirmation of what we say is to be found in the text of Plato, not in the writings of these philosophers themselves. For it is with Plato's understanding of these philosophers that we are concerned, not with the philosophers themselves.

1.2 Heraclitus and Parmenides. In the Cratylus Plato writes, \*

Heraclitus somewhere says that all things are in process and nothing stays still, and likening existing things to the stream of a river he says that you could not step twice into the same river.  
(Cratylus 402a)

Change, according to Heraclitus, is from opposite to opposite--

that is, for example, from hot to cold and from cold to hot. Change, he says, is cyclic, not rectilinear. We can see the world being renewed constantly, he reasoned--renewed in the changing of the seasons, the coming of warm weather from cold and the return of cold weather from warm. Such things, according to his reasoning, prove that change is cyclic, opposite from opposite, not rectilinear. He sees, as Jaeger says, "the process of coming-to-be and passing-away as a constant intertransformation of opposites, one into the other."<sup>1</sup> The term "opposite" is never defined by Heraclitus; and he, like other pre-Platonic philosophers, does not consciously distinguish between properties and substances, so that his account of change remains on the level of crude empirical generalization.

Rather than giving priority to one opposite over its mate, ~~X~~ Heraclitus argues that, because both opposites are essentially bound together, being parts of the same cycle or process, they are on a plane.<sup>2</sup> He holds that change is universal, that nothing is exempt from "becoming." Now, since in his view change consists in the intertransformation of one opposite into its mate and then back again in an unending cycle, he is committed to the belief that everything has an opposite. The theory, therefore, implies that reality is exhaustively describable in terms of the various pairs of opposites which, he says, are the

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<sup>1</sup>W. Jaeger, The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers (Oxford: 1947), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Pre-Socratic Philosophers (Cambridge: 1964), p. 189.

basis of change.<sup>1</sup>

There unquestionably is a great deal wrong with what Heraclitus says. It is, as Aristotle remarks, very obscure. Later thinkers were to argue that change consists in the rearrangement of constant and abiding elements. But Heraclitus' speculation preceded both the conscious distinction between properties and substances and the birth of atomism, which did construe change as the rearrangement of constant factors. There is, therefore, no place for permanence or stability in Heraclitus' philosophy: "Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, in Heraclitus' philosophy of change from opposite to opposite, there is no underlying reality which is conserved throughout the process of change. This is a feature of his philosophy which was to lead to trouble later:

We cannot reasonably say, Cratylus, that there is knowledge at all, if everything is in a state of transition and there is nothing abiding. For knowledge too cannot continue to be knowledge unless continuing always to abide and exist. But, if the very nature of knowledge changes, at the time when the change occurs there will be no knowledge, and if the transition is always going on, there will always be no knowledge, and according to this view, there will be no one to know and nothing to be known. (Cratylus 440b)

The dialectic of Parmenides is very obscure--more obscure, in fact, than the metaphors of Heraclitus. This much, however,

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<sup>1</sup>Kirk & Raven, The Pre-Socratic Philosophers, p.197.

<sup>2</sup>P. Wheelwright, Heraclitus (Princeton: 1964), p. 29.

is clear, that in the Parmenidean philosophy opposites cannot be predicated of reality, that reality is not at all describable in terms of opposites. Parmenides, therefore, in effect breaks the cycle of change and explicitly claims that change is unreal, so that his philosophy implies that all change, all "becoming," all process is illusory.

1.3 Socrates. According to Aristotle, Socrates did not concern himself with metaphysics or the problems raised by Heraclitus and Parmenides. Socrates, he says,

was busying himself about ethical matters, and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical matters, he fixed thought for the first time on definitions.  
(Metaphysica 986a 35)

And elsewhere he says that, "Two things may be fairly ascribed to Socrates--inductive argument and universal definition." (Metaphysica 1078b 30) The early dialogues indeed show Socrates using inductive arguments and seeking "universal definition."

But the characteristic move of Platonism--the separation of the universal from the particular--Aristotle asserts is due to Plato, not Socrates. (Metaphysica 1078b 30) Socrates' inquiry into the meaning of moral terms--undertaken, no doubt, from a moral or religious impulse--lead Plato to a more general inquiry into the nature of language and knowledge.

Socrates sought the eidos, or mark, by which to distinguish all good actions from any bad ones. Plato raised the question of the status of the eidos, and in raising it, had to contend with Heraclitus and Parmenides. But before Socrates the problem of definition was much neglected.

## THE PHAEDO

2.1 Introduction. The Phaedo is, as I said, the dialogue in which Plato first articulates for his readers the theory of forms. Its avowed purpose is to demonstrate that the soul is immortal, and it purports to be an account of Socrates' final conversation in the last hours before his execution in 399. It has been argued that, since Plato would not use Socrates on such an occasion as a mere mouthpiece for his own innovations in philosophy, the conversation must be historically accurate, implying that Socrates was therefore acquainted with the theory of forms. This raises at once a difficult exegetic question--namely, what is the relationship of the historical Socrates to the Socrates of the dialogues? Dogmatically, I say that the internal evidence of the dialogues suggests that Socrates was unacquainted with the theory of forms and most of the philosophizing that is found in the dialogues, just as the testimony of Aristotle suggests this. In answer to this specific argument, it can be said with at least equal plausibility that in the Phaedo, as elsewhere, Plato is using Socrates as the spokesman for truth, and, as a final honor, representing Socrates as at last knowing the truth he had been striving after in his life.

2.2 Death and the Philosopher: 64c-70b. It is the philosopher's occupation, according to Plato, to know reality and acquire knowledge. The body, he says, is a hindrance to this occupation. For there is no certainty in human sight and hearing; yet of all the senses human sight and hearing are the most ac-

curate. Whenever the soul "tries to investigate anything with the help of the body, it is obviously led astray." (65c) Therefore:

The soul can best reflect when it is free of all distractions such as hearing or sight or pain or pleasure of any kind--that is, when it ignores the body and becomes as far as possible independent, avoiding all physical contacts and associations as much as it can, in its search for reality. (65c)

The philosopher's occupation, then, "consists precisely in the freeing and separation of soul from body." (67d) And death, we are told, is simply "a freeing and separation of soul from body," so that "true philosophers make dying their profession." (67e) It ill-becomes a philosopher, therefore, to be distressed by the approach of death, and the philosopher above all other men should welcome death.

But this reasoning is not persuasive, as Cebes points out, unless it can be shown that "...the soul exists after death and retains some active force and intelligence." (70b) Socrates agrees, and then undertakes a more serious and careful inquiry into death and immortality.

### 2.3 The First Argument for the Soul's Immortality: 70d-72e.

A hint of what Plato proposes to do in this sequence of reasoning, 70d-72e, occurs at 60b:

What a queer thing it is, my friends, this sensation which is popularly called pleasure! It is remarkable how closely it is connected with its conventional opposite, pain. They will never come to a man both at once, but if you pursue one of them and catch it, you are nearly always compelled to have the other as well; they are like two bodies attached to the same head. I am sure that if Aesop had thought of it he would have made up a fable about them, something like this--God wanted to stop their continual quarreling, and when



he found that it was impossible, he fastened their heads together; so wherever one of them appears, the other is sure to follow after. (60b)

There is in all probability a reference to Heraclitus here: the war between opposites and the impossibility of separating them were themes of his.

Echoing Heraclitus, Plato says, "In general everything that admits of generation is generated in this way and no other--opposites from opposites." (70e) And the example of pleasure and pain, therefore, is merely a special case of that general principle. Other illustrations are given. Beauty, he says, is opposite to ugliness; right is opposite to wrong; and strength is opposite to weakness. In all these cases, we are told, the one is generated from the other. "When a thing becomes bigger," Plato writes, "it must have been smaller before it became bigger.... And similarly if it becomes smaller, it must be bigger first, and become smaller afterwards." (70e) This last illustration is of a different type from the others, but it illustrates the pattern to which Plato would have all his examples conform. The fact that they don't all conform to this pattern is one of the things wrong with the theory--but I'll attend to that later. \*

There is another point to be made--namely, that "...between each pair of opposites there are two processes of generation, one from the first to the second, and another from the second to the first." (71b) For:

If there were not a constant correspondence in the process of generation between the two sets of opposites, going round in a sort of cycle, if generation

were a straight path to the opposite extreme without any return to the starting point or any deflection, ...in the end everything would have the same quality and reach the same state, and change would cease altogether. (72b)

Thus, for example, if the process of going-to-sleep were not counterbalanced by the process of waking-up, soon everything capable of sleep would be asleep and change would cease altogether with respect to these opposites, sleeping and waking. (72c) But this is not acceptable, given the view that change is cyclic, not rectilinear.

Applying this reasoning to the problem at hand, Plato argues that life is the opposite of death, and that, therefore, the living must come from the dead and the dead from the living, implying that the dead exist. (71d-72a) If this is so, Plato concludes, it is "a sufficient proof that the souls of the dead must exist in some place from which they are reborn." (72a) Death, then, cannot be annihilation, or so goes the argument, at any rate.

This is, prima facie, a very odd argument for Plato to use. We were told that the life of the philosopher is spent in preparation for death because, only when the soul is separated from the body, can it truly know reality. Death, which marks this separation, is, therefore, to be welcomed when it comes. But now we are told that after death we are born again, and that the transcendence of the soul over the body is not permanent. On this view, the philosopher by arduous training and discipline obtains in his life a measure of spiritual ascendancy, but is without lasting advantage, since upon death he is drawn down

again and forced to begin the cycle anew. As the argument in the Phaedo is refined, it becomes clear that this is a view Plato opposes.

#### 2.4 The Second Argument for the Soul's Immortality: 72e-77e.

As before, Plato again offers an early hint of what he proposes to do:

Do we recognize such a thing as absolute uprightness?

Indeed we do [ , Simmias replies ] .

And absolute beauty and goodness too?

Of course.

Have you ever seen any of these things with your eyes?

Certainly not, he said.

Well, have you ever apprehended them with any other bodily sense? By 'them' I mean not only absolute tallness or health or strength, but the real nature of any given thing--what it actually is. Is it through the body that we get the truest perception of them? Isn't it true that in any inquiry you are likely to attain more nearly to knowledge of your object in proportion to the care and accuracy with which you have prepared yourself to understand that object in itself?

Certainly. (64d)

In this passage, "...we are made to understand that there are realities which the mind or soul grasps without the help of the senses."<sup>1</sup> Precisely how the soul grasps these "realities" is the subject of the second argument for the soul's immortality.

After the conclusion of the first argument, Cebes says that the theory that learning is recollection also implies that the

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<sup>1</sup>G. M. Grube, Plato's Thought (London: 1934), p. 292.

soul is immortal. (72e) In the discussion which follows this claim it is pointed out that men will argue about whether two given things are equal: "Is it not true that equal stones and sticks sometimes, without changing in themselves, appear equal to one person and unequal to another?" (74b) Yet no one has ever thought that "things which were absolutely equal were unequal, or that equality was inequality." (74c) Things, therefore, fall short of realizing equality perfectly: they are never quite equal. (74d) From this reasoning it is concluded that "there is such a thing as equality--not the equality of stick to stick and stone to stone, and so on, but something beyond all that and distinct from it." (74a) Our notions of absolute, or perfect, equality cannot arise simply from our seeing it in the physical world since it is not there to be seen. Equal things "only approximate to equality" and are "poor imitations" of real equality. (74e) We use genuine equality as a "standard for comparison," showing that "all equal ob- Formjects of sense are desirous of being like it, but are only imperfect copies." (75b)

The senses then cannot be the source of our knowledge of perfect equality, for the senses reveal no such equality. Moreover:

...through the senses we obtained the notion that all sensible equals are striving after absolute equality but falling short of it.... So before we began to see and hear and use our other senses we must somewhere have acquired the knowledge that there is such a thing as absolute equality. Otherwise we could never have realized, by using it as a standard for comparison, that all equal objects of sense are desirous of being like it, but are only imperfect copies. (75b)

We obtain the use of our senses at birth. Therefore, since our knowledge of absolute equality precedes the use of our senses, it precedes our birth, implying that the soul exists before birth and is the center of our knowledge even before the use of our senses. The senses then aid us only in recalling what we knew before birth, and they do this in virtue of the association of sensation to knowledge, of copy to original. (75b-75d)

"Our present argument," as Plato points out, "applies no more to equality than it does to absolute beauty, goodness, uprightness, holiness, and, as I maintain, all those characteristics which we designate in our discussions by the term 'absolute.'" (75d)

It is concluded that:

If all these absolute realities, such as beauty and goodness, which we are always talking about, really exist, if it is to them, that we refer, as copies to their patterns, all the objects of our physical perception--if these realities exist, does it not follow that our souls must exist too even before our birth, whereas if they do not exist, our discussion would seem to be a waste of time? Is this the position, that it is logically just as certain that our souls exist before our birth as it is that these realities exist, and that if the one is impossible, so is the other?

It is perfectly obvious to me, Socrates, said Simmias, that the same logical necessity applies to both. (76e)

That is a very strong claim. But it is a curious argument which asserts that we have knowledge that could not possibly have been acquired in this life, and that, therefore, there must be another life, a previous life, in which this knowledge was acquired. If one were to argue that there is knowledge which, in principle, we could not have acquired in this life, so that

there must be a previous life in which this knowledge was acquired, in order to make his argument at all plausible he would have to show how the circumstances of this previous life are different in such a way as to enable us to acquire this knowledge. If Plato were here arguing for the immortality of the soul--I hold he is not, despite appearances--he would have to reply that, because in the previous life the soul is free of the body, it can know reality. But such a reply would be premature at this point in the dialogue. It would also be wrong, as I will argue later. In the end, however, the argument offered here is not the one on which Plato rests his case for human immortality. Here he is still forging the conceptual weapons with which he will eventually defend immortality.

The discussion does reveal much that is specifically Platonic. The absolutes are the objects of all genuine knowledge (65e); they are not in things (75b); and they are like their physical copies only to a limited extent, owing to the fact that they are perfect and their copies imperfect. (74d) Finally, the whole second argument for the soul's immortality is meant to introduce us to the idea that the soul is independent of the body when it is in a state of knowing, or at least it can be. Plato is still refraining in this section of the dialogue from using his favourite terms, "εἶδος" and "ἰδέα," to designate the absolutes. But there can be no doubt that these "absolutes" are to be identified with the forms. Plato is providing us with a very carefully graded explanation and gradual introduction to the theory of forms; even the vocabulary in

which the theory is expressed, as Grube points out,<sup>1</sup> is graded.

2.5 The Third Argument for the Soul's Immortality: 78b-84b. ✕

Cebes and Simmias were afraid that the soul might be destroyed by being dispersed, by being torn apart at death. (77e) Socrates here proposes to consider what kind of object might suffer this fate, and then to establish whether the soul belongs to this class of objects in order to determine whether their fear is justified. "A composite object," Socrates says, "or a natural compound [is] liable to break up where it was put together." (78c) But "...anything which is really incomposite [ought] to be the one thing of all others which is not affected in this way." (78c) It is, moreover, "extremely probable that what is always constant and invariable is incomposite, and what is inconstant and variable is composite." (78c)<sup>2</sup>

A very important passage follows, in which the "absolutes" are further described:

Does that absolute reality which we define in our discussions remain always constant and invariable, or not? Does absolute equality or beauty or any other independent entity which really exists ever admit change of any kind? Or does each one of these uniform and independent entities remain always constant and invariable, never admitting any alteration in any respect or in any sense?

They must be constant and invariable, Socrates, said Cebes.

Well, what about the concrete instances of beauty--

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<sup>1</sup>Grube, Plato's Thought, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup>I do not stress this particular argument that the soul, being incomposite, is indestructible; and in the Republic it is argued that the soul is not simple. (Rep. 434d-441c) The point of this sequence of reasoning, 78b-84b, is to establish the kinship of the soul to the forms.

such as men, horses, clothes, and so on--or of equality, or any other members of a class corresponding to an absolute entity? Are they constant, or are they, on the contrary, scarcely ever in the same relation in any sense either to themselves or to one another?

With them, Socrates, it is just the opposite; they are never free from variation. (78d)

The "absolutes" do not admit of change; whereas, the things of sense are never free from change. The "absolutes" possess Parmenidean being; whereas, the things of sense are in a state of Heraclitean flux.

In the argument which follows Plato says that the soul resembles these "absolutes" more nearly than it resembles the things of sense, that it is the body which resembles the things of sense. (79a-79c) When the soul investigates nature through the instrumentality of the body, he says, it becomes confused and loses its way in the realm of the variable, in that realm to which it is not native. (79c) But, when the soul investigates by itself, without the body,

it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer, but remains, in that realm of the absolute, constant and invariable. (79d)

As Aristotle relates, Plato, and a good many of his predecessors, accepted the dictum, "Like is known by like." Acceptance of this dictum lead Empedocles to maintain that:

'Tis by Earth we see Earth, by Water Water,  
By Ether Ether divine, by Fire destructive Fire,  
By Love Love, and Hate by cruel Fate. (Aristotle: De Anima 404b 15)

But there is no tendency in the Phaedo to identity the soul with



any, or all, of the constituents of the natural world. For the natural world, according to Plato, is perceived by the body, not the soul. The soul, therefore, is like what it perceives--namely, the unchanging "absolutes." And the body is like what it perceives--namely, the changing things of sense. Plato writes,

The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent. (80b)

As these "absolutes" are immortal, so is the soul. (80a-80d)

Not even the body is destroyed at once when a person dies, Plato adds; are we then to suppose that the soul lasts not even as long as the body, but is destroyed at once upon death? (80d)

A passage follows which demonstrates that Plato could not have intended us to accept his first argument for the soul's immortality at face value. He says that some souls by intercourse with the body and the corporeal in general become like the body and are permeated with corporeal nature, adding:

And we must suppose that the corporeal is heavy, oppressive, earthly, and visible. So the soul which is tainted by its presence is weighed down and dragged back into the visible world, through fear, as they say, of Hades or the invisible, and hovers about tombs and graveyards. The shadowy apparitions which have actually been seen there are the ghosts of those souls which have not got clear away, but still retain some portion of the visible, which is why they can be seen.

That seems likely enough, Socrates.

Yes, it does, Cebes. Of course these are not the souls of the good, but of the wicked, and they are compelled to wander about these places as a punishment for their bad conduct in the past. They continue wandering until at last, through craving for the corporeal, which unceasingly pursues them, they are imprisoned once more in a body. (81d)

It seems then that the soul of Socrates will not be reborn, and that, therefore, the first argument does not apply to him. For the goal of the philosopher, it is said, is not rebirth but freedom from the cycle of birth and death, and this is to be achieved by the contemplation of an absolute, unchanging reality to which the soul is akin. \*

## 2.6 The First Objection to the Soul's Immortality: 85e-95b.

Plato entertains two objections to this theory that the soul is immortal and independent of the body. The first is directed specifically against the last argument. Granted, the objector concedes, the soul is something splendid and incorporeal; it is more like the divine than it is like the earthly. But, the objector continues, to argue from this that the soul is therefore immortal is a mistake. For perhaps the living body resembles a tuned instrument in that the soul arises from the body in the way that the attunement arises from a musical instrument. The attunement of an instrument is something invisible and incorporeal and divine. Yet no one would argue that the attunement of an instrument must for that reason continue to exist after the instrument itself is destroyed. But, according to Plato's theory:

The attunement must still exist [after the destruction of the tuned instrument]--it cannot have been destroyed, because it would be inconceivable that when the strings are broken the instrument and the strings themselves, which have a mortal nature, should still exist, and the attunement, which shares the nature and characteristics of the divine and immortal, should exist no longer, having predeceased its mortal counterpart. You would say that the attunement must still exist somewhere just as it was, and that the wood and strings will rot away before anything happens to it. (85e)

As the attunement of an instrument is destroyed with the destruction of the instrument, so perhaps is the soul with the death of the organism. That is, the soul, according to this objection, is an epiphenomenon of the body. This objection, of course, if well-founded, entirely undermines the soul's independence of the body. XX

Socrates replies to this objection by attacking the analogy on which it is based: The soul, he says, is not like an attunement. For (1) an attunement does not control its elements; it rather follows their lead, whereas a soul does--or at least can--control the body. (93a) And (2) attunements admit of degree but souls do not; i.e., an instrument can be more or less in tune, but the body cannot be more or less with soul. (93e) \* \* \* \* \*

Moreover, Socrates had pointed out that it "is logically just as certain that our souls exist before our birth as it is that these realities [i.e., the 'absolutes'] exist, and if the one is impossible, so is the other." (76e) He now points out that the present interpretation of "soul" is incompatible with the pre-existence of the soul and therefore with the existence of the "absolutes." On the strength of the prior discussion alone, therefore, this objection can be rejected, it is said. (92d)

2.7 The Second Objection: 87a-96a. The soul, Plato said, is more enduring than the body, so that it would be foolish to suppose that the soul lasts not even as long as the body. The body is not destroyed at once upon death. The soul, therefore, Plato concluded, also is not destroyed at the instant of death.

But now it is objected that perhaps the soul does indeed have a more abiding nature than the body and enjoys many rebirths into many bodies: that does not make it immortal. An analogy is again offered:

Suppose that an elderly tailor has just died. Your theory would be just like saying that the man is not dead, but still exists somewhere safe and sound, and offering as proof the fact that the coat which he had made for himself and was wearing has not perished but is still intact. If anyone was sceptical, I suppose you would ask him which is likely to last longer, a man or a coat which is being regularly used and worn.... Anyone would dismiss such a view as absurd. The tailor makes and wears out any number of coats, but although he outlives all the others, presumably he perishes before the last one. (87b)

The two objections are aimed at different aspects of Plato's argument. The first is aimed at the independence of the soul from the body, and is rejected when it is found to be incompatible with the existence of the 'absolutes.' The second concedes the independence of the soul from any particular body and does not even require that the soul always be directly associated with some body. This objection, therefore, cannot be answered in the same way as the other. In fact, it is decided that the objection, if it is to be answered, requires "a full treatment of the causes of generation and destruction." (96a) Plato, therefore, prepares to offer a whole new proof in answer to the second objection, but the groundwork for this proof must be laid carefully lest doubt is again cast upon the result.

2.8 The Groundwork: 96a-105c. The theory of forms will serve as the groundwork for the final proof of the soul's immortality. From the beginning Plato hinted that the fate of the soul is bound to that of the forms. But he refrained from

explicitly introducing the forms and his full views on them, allowing the argument instead to terminate in scepticism and demonstrating thereby what in his opinion comes from denying the truth of Platonism. And in this section of the dialogue Socrates is represented as discovering the theory of forms in a time of personal philosophical agnosticism, having previously grown dissatisfied with the solutions and theories of other philosophers.

In this section, 96a-105c, Plato deals with some problems concerning causation and offers his account of causation. Launching his discussion, he says, it is difficult to understand how division--i.e., the mere physical separation of something into two--can account for the fact of one becoming two. (97b) Nor, he says, is it easy to understand how addition--i.e., the mere physical assimilation of two things into one--can account for the fact of two becoming one. (97a) The point of these examples is not yet clear, but from the discussion which follows it emerges that the abstract truths of arithmetic are not causally dependent upon the physical proximity of the objects we count and use to illustrate these truths, according to Plato's account. It is rather, in Plato's view, conformity to a pattern, to a form, that is the determining characteristic for these truths, that makes them truths.

Socrates reportedly heard someone reading from a book by Anaxagoras which asserted that "it is mind that produces order and is the cause of everything." (97c) This pleased Socrates, for then everything would be ordered according to what is best

and there would be a rational explanation for everything. (97d) But Socrates--i.e., Plato, I believe--was disappointed because Anaxagoras did not proceed from this beginning to a logical explanation of phenomena. (98c) Instead, he accounted for phenomena in terms of natural, physical causes, not "rational" objectives and ultimate purposes. Anaxagoras might just as well have said that the cause of all that Socrates does is mind, and then argued that,

The reason why [he is] lying here now is that [his] body is composed of bones and sinews, and that the bones are rigid and separated at the joints, but the sinews are capable of contraction and relaxation, and form an envelope for the bones with the help of the flesh and skin, the latter holding all together, and since the bones move freely in their joints the sinews by relaxing and contracting enable me somehow to bend my limbs, and that is the cause of my sitting here in a bent position. (98c)

This, I take it, is offered as the paradigm case of a mechanistic account of human behavior. Plato rejects it, saying that the cause of Socrates' behavior is mind and his conviction of what is best. (9a) The conditions described in this mock explanation are not part of the true cause of Socrates' behavior; the true cause is mind. (99b) They are preconditions to causality, but not causes themselves.

To return to arithmetic: The physical division or addition of objects cannot be causes of their numerical value--such operations are only preconditions to the causal efficacy of (presumably) the forms regulating arithmetical truth. It would not, of course, require much ingenuity to criticize this analogy of human behavior to arithmetical truth, but my purpose here is expository. That Plato means what I say he means is confirmed, I

think, by this passage:

It seems to me that whatever else is beautiful apart from absolute beauty is beautiful because it partakes of that absolute beauty, and for no other reason. Do you accept this kind of causality?

Yes, I do.

...If someone tells me that the reason why a given object is beautiful is that it has a gorgeous color or shape or any other such attribute, I disregard [it]. (100c)

Something is beautiful then because it conforms to the pattern of beauty and is made beautiful by that pattern: The physical state that the object is in is merely a precondition for the causal efficacy of the form of beauty.

Thus the only way "...in which any given object can come in- to being [is] by participation in the reality peculiar to its appropriate universal." (101c) But someone objects that this is at odds with what had been said before, that, if this is so, then generation cannot be from opposites. (103a) Socrates replies that the opposites themselves--i.e., the opposite qualities--cannot be generated from opposites: they are generated by the "absolutes." Rather, what was meant before is that "opposite things come from opposite things." (103b) This is certainly a distinction not found in Heraclitus, and one of considerable importance.

Plato's genuine views on change are beginning now to emerge. I propose to move away from the text somewhat and recast Plato's ideas into a more modern form, though retaining his basic meaning and neither attacking nor defending his thesis.

First, consider the concept of change (or becoming). "X

changes to Y," I imagine Plato saying, does not mean simply that X has ceased to exist and Y has come into existence. This interpretation surely does not capture the essence of "becoming." We do not say, for example, that a man who ceases to exist may become, say, a new book; although, if cessation and creation were all that are involved in change, we would be bound to this view. Change, therefore, involves a persistence of identity. On the other hand, something must cease in the process of change; otherwise there would be no change.

Second, consider what is meant by "a pair of opposites." Plato's conception seems to involve more than simply the notion of a property and its absence, or denial; his illustrations suggest this. "Big--small," "pleasure--pain," "beautiful--ugly," and finally, "tall-short"--these terms express properties which are related in a special way. In one sense, the opposite of "beautiful" is not "ugly," but simply "non-beautiful." What then does Plato mean by "opposite"? Consider the illustrations. Something that is big is the sort of entity which in some sense could be small; that is, it is an entity having spatial extension. An entity capable of experiencing pleasure is capable of experiencing pain; that is, it is a sentient being. An object that is beautiful belongs to the class of objects that are emotionally exciting; so does an object that is ugly. The last illustration, "tall--short," again brings in spatial considerations: Whether an entity is short or tall, it is nevertheless an entity to which length pertains. Whereas an entity which is simply non-tall can be the sort of entity to which neither short-



ness nor tallness pertains. Ideas, for example, are neither tall nor short, because the notion of length does not apply to them. Thus, given Plato's examples, in the notion of opposites there seems to be a reference to the thing in which the qualities reside. In addition to this reference to things, of course, the concept of exclusivity is involved: no object can at the same time have both qualities in a given pair of opposites. In view of these illustrations, then, by "a pair of opposites" Plato means a pair of qualities such that there is a class of objects each of whose members is capable of possessing either quality but not both at the same time.<sup>1</sup> (Tallness and shortness, as opposed to tallness and non-tallness or shortness and non-shortness, are opposites because there exists a class of objects--namely, the class of extended bodies, each of whose members has length.)

Third, a concept of unchangeable essence is involved in this theory. Let me quote Plato's development of it:

Surely the real reason why Simmias is bigger [than Socrates] is not because he is Simmias but because of the height which he incidentally possesses, and conversely the reason why he is bigger than Socrates is not because Socrates is Socrates but because Socrates has the attribute of shortness in comparison with Simmias' height....

And again Simmias' being smaller than Phaedo is due not to the fact that Phaedo is Phaedo but to the fact that Phaedo has the attribute of tallness in comparison with Simmias' shortness. (102c)

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Aristotle's definition of "opposite": "The term 'opposite' is applied to...the extremes from which and into which generation and dissolution take place; and the attributes that cannot be present at the same time in that which is receptive of both...." (Metaphysica 1018a 20) \*

Thus we see that shortness is an "incidental" attribute of Simmias: he is not short simply because he is Simmias. Had his nature been restricted by definition to include shortness, and, therefore, to exclude tallness, he would not have been able to change with respect to this pair of opposites. An object's essential nature is given by those properties which are defined as belonging to it. A "tall-man" must be tall, but a man as such need not. \*

We can now restate the principle given in 70e (and taken from Heraclitus) as follows: To say that an object is capable of change is to say that it is defined with respect to at least one pair of opposite qualities, so that it can change with respect to these qualities. By the expression "an object that is defined with respect to a pair of opposite qualities," speaking in Plato's behalf I intend to denote an object which, qua that object, is capable of having either opposite in the set with respect to which it is defined. Therefore, according to this, an object can lack a quality either because it is an entity which by definition is incapable of having that quality or because it merely happens at the moment to lack it.<sup>1</sup> \*

Plato brings out the fact that an object can change with respect to a pair of opposites only when its nature is not re-

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<sup>1</sup>It is evident at this point that there are deep conceptual difficulties in Plato's theory of change. Many of his illustrations are not even illustrations of change, but simply of a shifting of comparative properties: A man's height does not change according to whether he is being compared to a tall or short man; all that changes is the description appropriate for him. But I shall attend to criticisms later, and wish now simply to carry the argument to its conclusion.

stricted to either opposite in the pair, but is capable of alternately embracing both. Were it otherwise, the object would lose its identity and hence not change but be destroyed. He writes:

It seems to me not only that the form of tallness itself absolutely declines to be short as well as tall, but also that the tallness which is in us never admits smallness and declines to be surpassed. It does one of two things. Either it gives way and withdraws as its opposite shortness approaches, or it has already ceased to exist by the time that the other arrives. It cannot stand its ground and receive the quality of shortness in the same way as I myself have done. If it did, it would be different from what it was before, whereas I have not lost my identity by acquiring the quality of shortness-- I am the same man, only short--but my tallness could not endure to be short instead of tall. In the same way the shortness that is in us declines ever to become or be tall; nor will any other quality, while still remaining what it was, at the same time become or be the opposing quality; in such a situation it either withdraws or ceases to exist. (102e-103a)

Change is to be accounted for in terms of a persisting object's acquisition and abandonment of properties.

Given this theory, we are bound to the view that in the process of change what ceases to exist is the compound whose nature was restricted to just one of the opposite qualities, that what comes into existence is the compound whose nature is restricted to the other quality, and that what persists throughout the change is the object whose nature is unrestricted with respect to the opposites, but is capable of possessing either quality. For example, a short-building does not become a tall=building, it (the building) becomes tall; for the building as such did not have to be short. The term "building" is not restricted in the way that either the term "short-building" or

the term "tall-building" is.

In a passage already quoted, Plato tells us that the forms are incapable of change. (102e) On the basis of his theory of change, it is evident why he takes this view. For to be capable of change, we said, is to have a nature capable of alternately receiving both of two opposite properties. But no form satisfies this condition. Each form is a unity, incapable of acquiring any additional properties and incapable of changing to its opposite. The form of tallness per se can neither acquire any additional properties nor lose any; for the nature of the case restricts tallness itself to only those properties that its essential nature requires it to have. I.e., tallness itself is necessarily free from those superfluous characteristics which may accompany tall things. Nor can the form of tallness lose its essential nature and become its opposite; for then it would not change but would be destroyed. The forms are "uniform" and "ever self-consistent." (80b) That is to say, forms are simple and incapable of receiving opposite properties. Thus the forms are "constant and invariable" (78e), "never admitting of any alteration in any respect or in any sense." (78e) Visible things, on the other hand, having both an essence and an incidental nature, do admit of change. "The concrete instances of beauty--such as men, horses, clothes and so on--or of equality, or any members of a class corresponding to an absolute entity...are never free from variation." (78e) Not everything in physical nature, however, is subject to change. Plato said, both the form of tallness and the tallness that is

in us decline to change. (102e) It is rather that the things having the properties change; the properties themselves remain constant while they exist. (103b)

It is, I said, a part of Plato's theory of change that there are objects whose natures are restricted to just one property in a given pair of opposites. From 103d to 104c, Plato considers these objects. Fire is always hot and never cold; snow is always cold and never hot; three is always odd and never even; and two is always even and never odd. None of these is identical with its respective property, and yet each must by definition have that property. The properties cannot be lost without destructive consequences. E.g., "surely we must assert that three will sooner cease to exist or suffer any other fate than submit to become even while it is still three." (104c) As a property cannot become its opposite, so the object whose essential nature excludes that opposite property cannot become the object whose essential nature includes it. Thus a number can be either even or odd, but a given odd number must be odd and a given even number must be even. Numbers perhaps make bad illustrations of change; here then is another illustration: A man can be either tall or short; therefore, a man can change his height. But a tall-man cannot change his height; neither can a short-man. Therefore, in a change involving height, man is the substratum of change--i.e., the entity which persists throughout the change--and, if the change is from shortness to tallness, it is some instance of tall-man which comes into existence and some instance of short-man which ceases to exist dur-

ing the change. The theory of forms, of course, is intended to explain this relation of "being an instance of..." And the change as a whole is to be accounted for in terms of the withdrawal and imposition of the influence of various forms, so that the man is tall while under the influence of the form of tallness and short while under the influence of the form of shortness.

This reasoning has immediate application to our next topic, the final proof for the immortality of the soul.

### 2.9 The Final Argument for the Soul's Immortality: 105c-107c.

In the section, 96a-105c, the theory of forms is presented in full bloom: The causal relation of the forms to phenomena is discussed; the difficult relation of "participation" which is supposed to obtain between forms and particulars is explained, insofar as it admits of explanation; and at 103e in the course of the argument, the words, "εἶδος" and "ἰδέα," Plato's favourite terms for the forms are at last used to designate them.<sup>1</sup> As Grube says, Plato appears to have refrained deliberately from using the terms until this point in the dialogue. So we may assume that the groundwork is finally laid and that Plato is prepared now to offer what he considers a valid demonstration of the soul's immortality.

Change involves a triad of things--it involves a compound whose essential nature is restricted to just one of two opposite properties (e.g., tall-man), a compound whose essential nature is restricted to the other opposite property (e.g., short-man),

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<sup>1</sup> G. M. Grube, Plato's Thought, p. 292.

and a single abiding entity which persists throughout the change (e.g., man). For this reason, according to Plato, not all changes are possible. Fire cannot change with respect to hot and cold; for, if it could, there would have to be such a thing as cold=fire: the meaning of "fire" is simply to be identified with that of "hot-fire"; for the idea of hotness is involved in the idea of fire, so that in this case the triad cannot be constructed.

According to Plato, it is the soul which brings life to the body. (105d) That is to say, Plato continues, soul is related to life in the way that fire is related to heat. As there is no fire without heat, so there is no soul without life. Considered in the context of Plato's theory of change, this implies that the soul cannot change with respect to the opposites, life and death--just as fire cannot change with respect to the opposites, hot and cold. The meaning of "soul" is simply to be identified with that of "live-soul"; for the idea of life is involved in the idea of soul. All things that admit of generation, Plato said, are generated in this way: opposites from opposites. An object that is awake was generated from an object that was asleep. Analogously, then, a live soul, if generated at all, is generated from its opposite, a dead soul. But there are no dead souls. Therefore, the soul is ungenerated and incapable of change with respect to the opposites, life and death. Whence it follows that the souls we have are eternal; for the soul, being incapable of death, is immortal, and, being immortal, is eternal.

Change, according to Heraclitus, involves two opposites. Plato accepted this, but added a third element in order that

there be a persistence of identity and continuity in the change. He did, however, depart radically from Heraclitus by saying that there are some things, like the soul, which are not exhaustively describable in terms of sets of opposites.<sup>1</sup> But he departed radically from Parmenides too by saying that there are some things which are exhaustively describable in terms of sets of opposites. In fact, he holds that everything in the material realm is thus describable, which is why he says that the things of sense are never free from variation.

There is prima facie a problem with this proof. Fires do after all die out, and their ashes do become cold. Perhaps then, although it is inappropriate to speak of the soul's death, the soul may nonetheless be annihilated when death overcomes the man to which it belongs. Then we would not be speaking of a "dead-soul," but of no soul at all. Plato replies:

...I assume that if what is not cold were imperishable when anything cold approached fire, it could never go out or cease to exist; it would depart and be gone unharmed.... Are we not bound to say the same of the immortal? If what is immortal is also imperishable, it is impossible that at the approach of death the soul should cease to be. It follows from what we have already said that it cannot admit death, or be dead--just as we said that three cannot be even, nor can two be odd; nor can fire be cold, nor can the heat which is in the fire. (106a)

Because the soul's essence includes life, the soul cannot admit

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<sup>1</sup>In the lost dialogue Eudemus, written in imitation of the Phaedo, Aristotle says, "Harmony has an opposite, namely disharmony. But the soul has no opposite. Therefore the soul is not a harmony." (Cited in: W. Jaeger, Aristotle, Fundamentals of the History of his Development (Oxford: 1962), p. 40.)



death; and, because the soul cannot admit death, it cannot cease to exist. By implication, then, existence, as well as life, is a part of the soul's nature. For, on Plato's principles, unless existence is a part of the soul's nature the soul can cease to exist. Moreover, if Plato does not accept existence as an essential property of the soul, he will have no reply to someone who objects that, while the soul does not "become" dead, it nevertheless ceases to exist at some time or other.

With this, our exegesis is complete, and we turn to philosophical analysis.

## THE PROOF FOR THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

3.1 Introduction. There is no doubt a certain kinship between Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul and the ontological argument, in that both arguments without recourse to any facts of experience seek to establish some sort of existential claim. Nor is it a coincidence that Anselm was a Platonist. Yet it is the aim of the ontological argument to show that God must exist. Whereas, it is the aim of the argument in the Phaedo to show that, if the soul exists at all, it exists eternally; and in the dialogue it is accepted without question that the soul does exist. In Plato's argument, then, there is a suppressed existential premise, and in this respect at least the arguments differ. Both arguments, however, make the same false assumption.

Briefly, Plato's argument is this: Existence by definition belongs to the soul. Therefore, the soul cannot change with respect to the opposites, existence and non-existence, and that is to say, the soul can neither begin nor cease to be. Hence, it is eternal. In this argument, as in the ontological argument (in one version at least), "existence" is treated as a predicate, as a term which might legitimately occur in the definiens of an expression being defined. It is this feature of the argument I wish to attack. If it can be shown that existence-terms are not predicates, then, even if Plato's theory of change were correct with respect to changes involving predicates, the theory could not be called upon to settle the point at issue here.

3.2 Existence and Predication. The criticism I wish to employ against Plato's proof for the immortality of the soul is due primarily, I think, to Kant<sup>1</sup> and Russell,<sup>2</sup> and was first directed against the ontological argument. But I am here concerned with the logical features of this criticism, not with its historical origins; and so fidelity to the positions of Kant and Russell will not be deliberately attempted.

To begin, there is a simple-minded objection to the view that "existence" is a predicate which one might raise--namely, that, because individuals cannot be classified according to whether they exist, though they can be classified according to--say--whether they are bachelors, existence is a presupposition of predication, but not a part of it per se: Before we can begin to classify, the objection continues, we must presuppose existence. We can classify individuals according to whether they are bachelors, but only because we can have a sample of objects, some of which are bachelors and some of which are not. We cannot, however, have a sample of objects, some of which exist and some of which do not. We cannot inspect objects for existence in the way that we can for redness or bachelorhood. There are people who are bachelors and there are people who are not; there are objects which are red and there are objects which are not. But there are not people who are existent and people who are not: all the people there are, are existent.

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<sup>1</sup>N. K. Smith, tr., Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (London: 1929), pp. 500-507.

<sup>2</sup>F. B. Fitch, "Some Logical Aspects of Reference and Existence," Journal of Philosophy, vol. LVII (January, 1960), p. 641.

This objection, however, as stated, really does take us off in the wrong direction. For we do not, in fact, always presuppose existence when we make predication statements. "Unicorns have horns" is true independently of whether there are unicorns, and this is so precisely because the predication does not presuppose the existence of unicorns. As Leibniz remarks, "I have preferred to consider universal concepts...as they do not depend on the existence of individuals."<sup>1</sup> In general, therefore, when we are reasoning from universal concepts--i.e., from definitions,--the validity of our reasoning is not dependent upon there being things in the world answering to our definitions.

One might therefore conclude that, if the ontological argument is, as it purports to be, a case of "reasoning from universal concepts," the validity of the argument must be independent of whether there is anything answering to the definition of "God." But, since the conclusion of the argument is that there must be something real answering to our definition of "God," it is difficult to understand how the argument might not "depend on the existence of individuals." This perhaps is Ryle's point when he says, against the ontological argument:

We can see how implications obtain between "predicates," i.e., how if something is an A, it is B-ish. But how can the existence of an A or a B be implied? How can "something is an A" follow from the proposition "anything that is an A, is B-ish"? How can a particular matter of fact be deduced from a priori or nonempirical premises?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. Parkinson, tr., Leibniz: Logical Papers (Oxford: 1966), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>G. Ryle, "Mr. Collingwood and the Ontological Argument." Contained in: J. Hick & A. McGill, ed's, The Many-faced Argument (New York: 1967), pp. 246-260.

The argument is clear--judgments concerning universal concepts do not depend upon the existence of individuals; existential judgments do so depend; therefore, existential judgments cannot be entailed by judgments concerning universal concepts. Leibniz, however, who in fact understood these issues, accepted the ontological argument as valid. And it must be conceded to the defenders of Anselm that the above argument begs the question: if the ontological argument is valid, there is a case in which an existential judgment is entailed by judgments concerning universal concepts. It won't do to assert right off that existential judgments are never so entailed, and that, therefore, the ontological argument must be invalid.

If it were not the case that we can make predication statements without presupposing existence, there would be little use for the term "existence": positive existential claims would all be tautologous, since we would always presuppose the existence of what we are talking about; and the status of negative existential claims would be very obscure. Moreover, a whole variety of propositions would have to be analyzed in very odd ways. Ryle, for example, maintained at one time, though he would no longer maintain it, that:

The proposition "Mr. Pickwick is a fiction" is really, despite its prima facies, about Dickens or else about the Pickwick Papers. But the fact that it is so is concealed.<sup>1</sup>

If we presuppose existence in our predication statements, some such view as this must be true. But we can avoid this unhappy

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<sup>1</sup>G. Ryle, "Systematically Misleading Expressions." Contained in: A. Flew, ed., Logic and Language, First Series (Garden City, New York: 1965), p. 18.

consequence if we simply allow that predication statements do not necessarily presuppose existence.<sup>1</sup> "Existence," therefore, is a useful term; and its use consists in marking out as existent certain things from the realm of mere possibility.<sup>2</sup> In other words, we use it to distinguish those predicational statements which involve existential commitments from those which do not--i.e., from those which involve mere possibilities. This use, I shall argue, is defeated if we give "existence" the status of a predicate, and, therefore, both the ontological argument (in one version at least) and Plato's argument fall.

3.3 The Refutation of the Ontological Argument and Plato's Argument. God, qua necessary being, it seems, can be defined as "something the non-existence of which is impossible." But these words yield little insight into the concept of a being for whom "existence" is a defining predicate. One might "define" a "round square" as a four-sided figure all of whose points are equidistant from the center. In so doing, however, one has not shown that a round square is conceivable, since the purported definition involves an obvious contradiction. If one could conceive of a necessary being, then there would have to be analytic existential judgments, since the existence of this

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<sup>1</sup>It might seem that I am belabouring an obvious point. But in fact the point has been disputed: "Every conception involves the predicate 'exists'. Thus, not only God's essence but every essence implies existence." (G. Nakhikian and W. Salmon, "'Exists' as a Predicate," in Philosophical Review, 1957, p. 541.)

<sup>2</sup>I do not offer this as an exhaustive description of the use of "existence," of course.

being would be necessary. Therefore, if it can be shown that there are no analytic existential judgments--Kant thinks it can-- it follows that this purported definition of "God" involves a contradiction, and so explains nothing.

If God's existence is logically necessary, then the assertion that He does not exist must be self-contradictory. But it is not, according to Kant. When a negative existential proposition is asserted, Kant says, the subject of the proposition and all its predicates are rejected, so that no question of contradiction can arise. For there is nothing left either to contradict or to be contradicted by something else. Kant compares the denial of "God is omnipotent" to the denial of "God exists." We cannot, he says, deny omnipotence of God without contradiction. If we posit a Deity, He must be posited as omnipotent. But, if we say that God does not exist, we do not even posit a Deity. Thus in the case of existential propositions, according to this reasoning, we do not predicate; we posit. And, therefore, to deny an existential proposition is not to deny a predicate of a subject, but to withhold the positing of that subject. Contradiction can occur only when a predicate is denied to a subject which must by definition have that predicate. In the case of negative existential propositions, therefore, because there is no predicate denial, there can be no contradiction. To argue that there are some subjects which must be posited and that, therefore, in some cases to withhold the positing of a subject is impossible, according to Kant, is simply to beg the question, since it will not be impossible to withhold the positing of a subject unless it is self-contradictory to do so.

This argument is perfectly general. If it is valid, it proves that there are no self-contradictory negative existential judgments, and, by implication, that there are no necessary positive existential judgments. The argument, however, presupposes a great deal about the nature of predication, and its presuppositions must now be investigated.

In general, a term is a predicate if there is some well-formed definition--even if it be purely stipulative--in which that term occurs as a part of the definiens. Let this be our definition of "predicate." The proposition, "God exists," will not be a tautology unless "existence" is a predicate of "God"--i.e., occurs as a part of the definiens of "God." But, if we allow that "existence" is a predicate of "God," what is to prevent us from generating a whole class of existential tautologies by means of stipulative definitions? If, that is to say, existence can be given by definition and, if, therefore, we can define "God" as that being which is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and existent, and infer from this that there is a God--then why can we not define "dinosaur," for example, as a four-limbed, one hundred foot long reptile, characteristic of the Mesozoic Era, which exists, and infer from this that there are dinosaurs walking about?

I take it now as established that predication per se does not presuppose existence, that various sets of predicates can be combined into "universal concepts," and that some deductions can be made on the basis of these universal concepts. Moreover, these universal concepts simply represent logically consistent sets of predicates and can be formed by stipulative definitions.



Take the set of predicates represented by "dinosaur," for example. We know that "dinosaur" refers to a logically consistent set of predicates because such creatures used to exist, so that this set of predicates can be used as the basis for a universal concept. Thus, we can make such a priori inferences as: "Dinosaurs are reptiles," "Dinosaurs are characteristic of the Mesozoic Era," and so on, using the other elements in the definiens of "dinosaur." Now, either "existence" is a predicate or it is not. No amount of talk about God's peculiarities can circumvent this. If "existence" is not a predicate, it cannot occur in the definiens of "God"; and the ontological argument (in one version at least) fails. Assume, therefore, that "existence" is a predicate. Then by means of a stipulative definition we can add existence on to the rest of the predicates with which we fashion our conception of the dinosaur, and produce a new conception of the dinosaur according to which the creature must exist. For the predicate of existence must be logically consistent with the other predicates applying to dinosaurs because dinosaurs once did exist, and this creature must exist because we can infer a priori from the concept of this creature that it exists--just as we can infer a priori that it is a reptile. The actual world, therefore, would be overrun by possibilities if "existence" were itself a predicate, since in all cases, by a stipulative definition, the predicate of existence could be added to a set of logically consistent predicates: the mere fact that something has logically consistent predicates implies it might exist. Moreover, it seems that issues like the extinction of the dinosaur ought not to be settled by the stipulative definitions men in fact draw.

We use the term "existence," I said, to distinguish the existent from the merely possible. But, if by an arbitrary definitional move, we can get from the possible to the existent, this distinction between the existent and the possible loses substance. We must, therefore, deny "existence" the status of a predicate in order to preserve the distinction.

This reasoning, I think, does establish that "existence" is not a predicate, and, therefore, that both the ontological argument (in one version at least) and Plato's argument are invalid. For "existence" cannot be a defining predicate of either "God" or "soul." And, if "existence" is not a defining predicate of "soul," there is no contradiction in supposing that the soul might cease to exist, that it is not immortal.

3.4 The Platonic Rejoinder. Plato makes a distinction between a thing's essence and its incidental nature. Existence, he says, is a part of the soul's essence, but it is only incidental to the nature of the dinosaur. That is why the dinosaur can cease to exist, while the soul cannot. My criticism of the ontological argument and his argument to prove the immortality of the soul presupposes that essences are simply a function of stipulative definitions, that they are arbitrary. According to Plato, however, they are not arbitrary, but are determined by the forms.

This absolute distinction between essential and incidental nature is integral to Plato's theory of change, and I prefer to attack it in that context. Here I simply assert that Plato is wrong in this regard, and that the criticism stands as given.

3.5 Sundry Related Matters. It may be questioned whether the argument I attribute to Plato is the one he had in mind when writing the Phaedo. He, after all, does not talk of "existence" as a necessary predicate of "soul." He rather links "soul" to "life" and "life" to "immortality." Perhaps, it might be objected, even if "existence" is not a predicate, all the terms which actually occur in Plato's statement of the argument are predicates. I am not sure just what could be made of such an objection as this one. However the situation is analysed, though, this much is clear: Plato in effect defines "soul" as something immortal and then argues, because the soul is immortal, it cannot die; for, if it could, then it was not immortal in the first place, which is contrary to the hypothesis. The appropriate question to ask, therefore, is whether the soul is immortal in the first place, whether the conditions of the definition have in fact been met.

Plato's whole argument for the immortality of the soul proceeds on its course without so much as a mention of Socrates, but it is clear that Plato is concerned with the individual human personality and not with some impersonal life force which is supposed to persist after death. It is not just the soul, but the soul of Socrates, which Plato seeks to prove immortal. I can imagine someone hearing my argument to prove the existence of dinosaurs, being convinced by it, and then asking, "Ah, but which dinosaurs must exist?" My only answer can be, "All." But that does not relate the matter to particular cases very well. There is this problem in Plato's argument too: it does not relate to particular individuals very well.

Moreover, the Greek word for "soul" is ambiguous--personal in one sense, impersonal in another; and we find both senses in Plato. In accordance with the impersonal sense Homer can say:

The wrath do thou sing, O goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles, that baneful wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans, and sent forth to Hades many valiant souls (ψυχας) of warriors, and made themselves (αυτους) to be a spoil for dogs and all manner of birds....<sup>1</sup>

Plato himself says, "Those who first used the name *ψυχη* meant to express that the soul when in the body is the source of life, and gives the power of breath and revival." (Cratylus 399e)

In this sense the soul is thought of as "what keeps the individual going," but is not identified with the individual; the soul is rather an impersonal "source of life and movement." Yet, when the soul reaches Hades, in accordance with the other side of the usage, it is said to be an image of the individual to which it formerly gave life and the power of movement. Jaeger says,

...the psyche that hovers about as an idol in Hades has a strictly individual character by reason of its manifest resemblance to the form of the living person, but the psyche of the living person is simply the animal life that is in him; it is in no way personal.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in Greek one can say that the identity of an individual resides in the soul, but one can also say that it does not; for the term is ambiguous.

In his proof Plato speaks of the soul as the source of

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<sup>1</sup>A. T. Murray, tr., The Illiad of Homer (Cambridge, Mass.: 1924), Vol. I, pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>W. Jaeger, The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers (Oxford, England: 1947), p. 77.

life and infers its immortality from this; and here his usage is impersonal. For it is by no means obvious that Socrates is the source of his own life. It is clear, however, that Plato is not trying to prove that some impersonal life force persists after the death of Socrates, but that Socrates himself survives death. After the argument in the Phaedo has run its course, Crito asks,

How shall we bury you [after your execution, Socrates] ?

Any way you like, replied Socrates, that is, if you can catch me and I don't slip through your fingers. He laughed gently as he spoke, and turning to us went on, I can't persuade Crito that I am this Socrates here who is talking to you now and marshaling all the arguments. He thinks that I am the one whom he will see presently lying dead, and he asks how he is to bury me! (115c)

And at 81d Plato speaks of the individual soul as hovering above the tombs of the wicked, which is again the personal use. In fact, except for the small sequence, 105c-107c, in which Plato attempts to prove the eternity of the soul, he confines himself to the personal usage according to which the soul is identified, not with the source of life, but with the living individual himself.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Plato is simply playing upon an ambiguity, whether consciously or unconsciously. In the Phaedo he carefully develops his concept of the soul, and wants to bring the usages of  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  together by means of the theory of forms. It is his substantive position that the soul, like the forms, is to be identified with the cause of its own being.

Prima facie, it is implausible that the individual human

personality should survive eternally and be independent of the body. The memories of a particular organism, for example, seem to require the support of a material brain. Leibniz has said that there can be no way to distinguish the rebirth of a poor man as a rich man from, simply, the birth of a rich man unless the man who was once poor can remember his former poverty. What reason could there be for even saying that poverty and richness in this case are two states of a single man and not two states of two different men, if there were absolutely no continuity of perception and memory? According to Plato, it was Socrates' aim to achieve total independence for the soul; and he believes that all the functions of the mind necessary to the maintenance of the individuality of Socrates can be carried on without the body. But it is highly doubtful whether mental happenings can go on independently of bodies in this way and yet remain directly associated with a distinct human personality which, until death, seemed to find the body quite useful to have around and, indeed, necessary. But, unless mental happenings can go on independently in this way, remaining directly associated with a given human personality, it is futile for the individual to seek immortality; and it would certainly be foolish for an individual to hope for a future life if he could not connect that future life with his former life.

Plato does, however, have his theory of forms, according to which the body is something that we regrettably drag around with us which is constantly positioning itself between us and reality, blocking our view. On this theory Plato rests his claim that the soul is independent of the body--and, therefore, capable of

persisting after the body's decay,--so that the evidence for Plato's claim is not all in until the theory of forms is examined.

## THE THEORY OF FORMS

4.1 Introduction. The second argument for the immortality of the soul, 72e-77e, reached the curious conclusion "that it is logically just as certain that our souls exist before our birth as it is that [the forms] exist, and if the one is impossible, so is the other." (76e) This does not have the appearance of a careless remark, suggesting that the theory of learning as recollection is vital to Plato. We are introduced to this theory in the Meno, where Socrates and Meno attempt to find a definition of "virtue." When asked by Socrates what virtue is, Meno replies that it is many things, that the virtue of a man consists in managing the city's affairs capably, that the virtue of a woman consists in being a good housewife, and so on. (Meno 72a) But Socrates says that, even if virtues are "many and various, yet at least they all have some common characteristic which makes them virtues" (Meno 72d); and he wants to know this common characteristic. After a number of attempts at reaching what is common and peculiar to virtues, Socrates and Meno are reduced to perplexity and forced to conclude that they do not know what virtue is. Socrates then says that they must set out to discover the nature of virtue and this exchange follows:

Meno: But how will you look for something when you don't in the least know what it is? How on earth are you going to set up something you don't know as the object of your search? To put it another way, even if you come right up against it, how will you know that what you have found is the thing you didn't know?

Socrates: I know what you mean. Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a



man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for. (Meno 80d)

The theory of learning as recollection is supposed to resolve this paradox; and this theory rests ultimately on the theory of forms. Our task here is to evaluate the theory of forms as an answer to this paradox: if the theory fails to resolve the paradox--I shall argue that it does--then it fails as a theory of how we learn to apply correctly such terms as "virtue" and the other general terms which are supposed to designate forms.

4.2 Locke and Plato. It will be instructive to compare the accounts Locke and Plato give of abstraction, the process by which we acquire our understanding of general terms.

Since "it is beyond the power of human capacity to frame and retain distinct ideas of all the particulars things we meet with," it is necessary, Locke tells us, to adopt terms which apply to collections of things--terms which are general in their signification.<sup>1</sup> (II. 15) Given that "all things that exist are only particulars," the difficulty, according to Locke, is to account for the production of these general terms, and the ideas associated with them, in the understanding. (II. 16) As an answer he offers his theory of abstraction:

Words become general by being made the signs of general ideas: and ideas become general by separating from them the circumstances of time and place, and

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<sup>1</sup>A. Fraser, ed., An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (New York: 1959), two vol.. The appropriate volume and page is indicated in the body of this thesis, when the text of Locke is cited.

any other ideas that may determine them to this or that particular existence. By this way of abstraction they are made capable of representing more individuals than one; each of which having in it a conformity to that abstract idea, is (as we call it) of that sort. (II. 16-17)

All ideas in their origin, Locke maintains, are "only particulars."

(II. 17) The ideas which children have of those with whom they converse are, "like the persons themselves," only particulars.

(II. 17) But as time goes by the children observe:

that there are a great many other things in the world, that in some common agreements of shape, and several other qualities, resemble their father and mother, and those persons they have been used to, [so that] they frame an idea, which they find those many particulars do partake in; and to that they give, with others, the name man, for example. And thus they come to have a general name and a general idea. (II. 17-18)

Furthermore, the abstract idea of man contains no more than what is contained in the ideas of particular men, from which it has been abstracted, since it simply retains what is common to all these particular ideas and deletes what is not. (II. 18)

Locke's account of abstraction makes it essentially a process of deletion, of leaving things out of our description so that more than one object will answer to these descriptions. But it would be absurd to argue that, because one day I happen to notice less about a given man than I did on the previous day--and, therefore, give a less detailed description of him--I am proceeding toward an understanding of the general term "man." And, of course, Locke isn't arguing this. He is arguing that we rationally select which features of the particulars to delete in order to arrive at our general idea, that we gather instances and note the relevant similarities and delete the irrelevant dissimilarities. Since Locke's theory is offered as

an account of how we come to understand such terms as "man" and their application, it must be assumed that, while the process of abstraction is going on, we do not yet know--in the case of man, for example--what it is to be a man, what "man" means. But, if this were so, it would be impossible for us to be able to determine the relevant features of individuals so as to include them in one class rather than another--i.e., we cannot gather instances in the way that the theory requires. Locke would have us refer to the similarities that exist between individual men, leaving unexplained how we can recognize them as similarities of men. Moreover, this presupposes a previous grouping of objects according to whether the objects in question are men, and it is our ability to make such groupings that the theory purports to account for: "In the end the kind of similarity which is meant can be specified only by a backward reference to the name,"<sup>1</sup> and it is the name, the general idea, which we are presumed not to know. So we can't gather cases in the way that Locke's theory requires and proceed therefrom to the formation of an abstract, or general, idea which is supposed to signal the similarity of these cases.

That Plato was aware, however dimly, of the trap into which Locke fell is indicated by the argument I cited from the Meno, which is akin to the one I just brought against Locke's theory. Plato recognizes that a process of abstraction from sense data of itself will not yield abstract, or general, knowledge.

According to Plato, when we see a man and recognize him as

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<sup>1</sup>D. Pears, "Universals." Contained in: A. Flew, ed., Logic and Language, Second Series (New York: 1965).

a man, we do so in virtue of our prior conception of man; there is no way to move simply from our experiences to the formation of a general concept. How then do we form our general ideas? Locke felt the point of this question because he thought that only particulars exist and can be encountered in the world. We see particulars, he says, and that accounts for the production in the understanding of our ideas of them and of the language with which we represent them. But, since we cannot encounter universals--there aren't any to be encountered--a theory is needed, he felt, to explain, in terms of our ideas of particulars, the production in the understanding of these general ideas and of the language with which we represent them. But Plato, of course, did believe that universals (i.e., forms) exist and can be encountered.<sup>1</sup> By the vision of conception, as Anselm puts it, we grasp "the essence of man, which is a rational, mortal animal."<sup>2</sup> There is no question, for a Platonist at least, of searching out similarities among men, of deleting and retaining certain predicates from our several ideas of individual men, in order to form an essence of man: the essence exists, as it were, pre-formed for us; and we need only to see it. Such, at any

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<sup>1</sup>Perhaps the difference between Locke and Plato on this point is illustrated by this story: "As Plato was conversing about Ideas, and using the nouns 'tablehood' and 'cuphood,' Diogenes the Dog said, 'Table and cup I see; but your tablehood and cuphood, Plato, I can nowise see.' 'That's readily accounted for,' said Plato, 'for you have the eyes to see the visible table and cup; but not the understanding by which ideal tablehood and cuphood are discerned.'" (R. Hicks, tr., Diogenes Laertius (Cambridge, Mass.: 1925), Vol. I, p. 55.)

<sup>2</sup>S. Deane, tr., St. Anselm: Basic Writings (La Salle, Illinois: 1966), pp. 56-57.

rate, is Plato's view. That is why, when we encounter individual men in the world, we recognize them as men, having previously learnt from the form of man what it is to be a man. Therefore, when we do encounter individual men, we are only reminded of what we previously learnt from the form--namely, the nature of man.

According to this view, the words we use are but labels for the various forms. The words must express what is contained in the form or essence, or else the words are somehow wrong.<sup>1</sup> That is why definition cannot be arbitrary, and why one cannot just re-define "dinosaur" in such a way as to imply existence even though there may be some words, like "God" and "soul," which do imply existence. Anselm, as the author of the ontological argument, of course, has a vested interest in maintaining this. But Plato too must maintain this in order to preserve his argument for the immortality of the soul without at the same time generating a whole class of arguments which purport to prove the immortality of all sorts of things. For, assuming that "existence" is a predicate, unless the meaning of "dinosaur" is determined unalterably by a form, we can change that meaning, making it like "soul" and arguing that, if the dinosaur exists at all, it is eternal.

But how specifically does Plato attempt to avoid the paradox that trapped Locke, granting that the argument from the Meno shows he was aware of the paradox? Locke's problem was one of selection: how can we select those features from a particular

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. St. Anselm: Basic Writings, pp. 56-57.

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which are essential to it as a representative of its kind, of a universal, given that the particular will have many features which are not essential to it as a representative of its kind? Plato sought to avoid this task of impossible selection, through which we were supposed to arrive at the bare essentials of a general concept, by postulating the existence of a realm of forms, of universals, where by the vision of conception we can behold perfect examples of our general ideas which contain only what is essential to those ideas, making selection unnecessary. My interpretation of Plato's theory of change makes this account credible, if that interpretation is correct. Forms, I said, are unchangeable, according to Plato; whereas, particulars are changeable because they have incidental natures. Plato links the possibility of change to non-essential properties, so that if the forms were to have non-essential properties, they too would be subject to change, which is contrary to his explicit statement. (Cf.: 78d, 102c, and 102e-103a) And in the Republic Plato distinguishes the form of beauty, which is always just beautiful, from beautiful things, which are both beautiful and non-beautiful. (Republic 479a-480a) It is the non-beautiful aspects of beautiful things that gave rise to Locke's difficulties, and in the Republic Plato is saying that the form of beauty does not have such aspects. Thus, having learnt our general ideas by seeing them represented in isolation, we can proceed to classify things on the level of ordinary experience. That, anyway, is how the theory is supposed to work.

4.3 Forms and Particulars. What, we may ask, is the connection between forms and particulars such that the sight

of a particular will tend to remind us of a form which, supposedly, we apprehended in the distant past? Particulars, he tells us, are "poor imitations" of their respective forms. Equal things, for example, strive "to be equal in the sense of absolute equality," but fall short and are never quite equal. Absolute beauty--the form of beauty--is truly beautiful, but beautiful particulars only approach being beautiful. This certainly seems to imply that forms are self-predicating (i.e., that forms have the properties of which they are the forms), but commentators have denied--and continue to deny--that this is an implication of Plato's theory of forms. There is a passage in the Protagoras which refutes such views, as follows:

Well, if someone asked you and me, 'Tell me, you two, this thing you mentioned a moment ago--justice--is it itself just or unjust?' I myself should answer that it was just. Which way would you vote?

The same as you, he said.

Then we would both answer that justice is of such a nature as to be just?

He agreed. (Protagoras 330c-e)

Particular things have their characters impressed upon them by the forms and are copies of the forms. Therefore, if justice were not itself just, how could anything fashioned in its image be just? A form is the perfect instance of that of which it is the form, whereas the other instances of the form, the copies, are imperfect and mixed with inessential properties. It is in virtue of the similarity of the particular to the form that we are able to recognize the particular as an instance of the form, according to Plato.

But what criteria can there be for similarity between particulars and forms? In other words, how do we join up this group of particulars with that form? Granting that the form is perfect and its copies imperfect, how much imperfection is tolerable before we must conclude that the copy is not after all of that kind? How do we form the boundaries of our classes? If someone holds up an example of a line, how are we to know whether it is a very good example of a crooked line or a very poor example of a straight line? Two answers are possible for Plato, but neither is satisfactory. First, Plato represents all the instances of a kind--save the form itself--as trying to be just like that one instance which is perfect, but failing at it. Thus, it seems, if we could determine whether a given line was trying to be straight and not crooked, we could classify it as straight. But it is difficult to determine the intentions of lines, and so this is not a useful classificatory procedure for lines. (In fact, in the case of man, where we can determine intentions with relative ease, we would be lead to classify all men as good, for, according to Plato, all men try to be good, but only a few are successful at it.) This suggestion as to a criterion must therefore be rejected. Second, particulars are held to belong to the classes which contain the forms on which they are causally dependent. Thus, if we could independently determine whether a given particular is causally dependent upon a given form, we would have a useful classificatory device for determining the kind of a given particular. But, unfortunately, this isn't the case. The only way we have of determining whether a given particular is caused by a given



form is by recognizing its likeness to the form, and this takes us in a circle. It is by beauty, Plato tells us, that beautiful things are made beautiful; this may be so, but it does not tell us which things are beautiful. Thus neither suggested criterion is effective, nor could one be. For Plato, in reifying the forms, in making them one in the class which they are supposed to determine, generated the same kind of difficulties which foredoomed Locke's theory; and both theories require us to refer to an unspecifiable similarity.

It is, of course, wrong to think of universals as perfect members in a class of particulars, since universals are not a kind of particular, whether perfect or imperfect. It is also wrong to think of particulars as trying to be like universals but failing at it: a crooked line is a perfectly good instance of a crooked line; it is not trying to be straight. Plato's theory of forms is therefore false.

4.4 Why the Theory of Forms Fails. Locke suggests that the reason we need general terms in our languages is that human memory cannot retain all the various ideas which particulars present to us--as if there might someday be a race of men with prodigious memories who never needed to use general terms and so developed a language without them. Leibniz suggests quite a different account of the role of general terms in language:

General principles enter into our thought, of which they form the soul and the connection. They are as necessary thereto as the muscles and sinews are to walking, although we do not think of them. The mind leans upon these principles every moment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Langley, tr., New Essays Concerning Human Understanding (La Salle, Illinois: 1949), p. 74.

Here it is suggested that general terms arise, not as an expedient to compensate for man's poor memory, but as a part of the very basis of rational thought and language. Locke did not consider this possibility because he thought that he could reduce our general ideas to particular ideas, calling general ideas "partial" because they were supposed to be like particular ideas except less full.

It is interesting to speculate on why Locke held general ideas to be less full than particular ideas. When we abstract, he says, we begin with the idea of a particular and this idea is given to us simply by observation; we observe that some object,  $O_1$ , has some set of characteristics, say,  $A_1, \dots, A_n$ . Then we observe a second object,  $O_2$ , which happens to be similar to  $O_1$ , noticing this time, not merely another set of characteristics, say,  $B_1, \dots, B_m$ , but also an overlapping of the two sets because, since  $O_1$  and  $O_2$  are similar, some of the characteristics in  $A_1, \dots, A_n$  recur in  $B_1, \dots, B_m$ . Now, according to Locke, begins the abstraction. We delete from our description of  $O_1$  those characteristics which are peculiar to  $O_1$ , producing a new description consisting only of those characteristics which both  $O_1$  and  $O_2$  possess. Our first two descriptions, supposedly, are not abstract because they each uniquely determine some one object--namely  $O_1$  and  $O_2$ , respectively. Whereas, this new description, the product of our abstraction, is abstract; for (1) no object exists which has all and only those characteristics listed in the description, and (2) more than one object answers to the description. Moreover, the only difference between the first description,  $A_1, \dots, A_n$ , and this description

is that it says less than  $A_1, \dots, A_n$  says; and hence is less full.

Locke offers this as an account of how we move from a particular to a universal, of how we move from individuals to species. But, he says, if we delete even more characteristics from our description, even more objects will answer to the description; and so in this way we move from species to genus. Any theory, however, which licenses the passage from individuals to species in precisely the same way that it licenses the passage from species to genus must be subjected to serious scrutiny. For perhaps something very different is going on in the transition from the particular to the abstract--different, that is, from the transition from one abstract, or general, idea to another such idea. And, in fact, it turns out that Locke's account of abstraction does not apply to what is not already abstract. For a description,  $A_1, \dots, A_n$ , which is supposed to list a set of characteristics already is abstract regardless of how many objects answer to that description. When we delete elements in a description, all we do is broaden the extension of the class defined by our description; which is to say all we've done is move from something already abstract to something even more abstract. Thus a knowledge of the description  $A_1, \dots, A_n$  is a knowledge of the kind of thing which is defined by  $A_1, \dots, A_n$ ; and such knowledge is abstract, and so cannot serve as the non-abstract beginnings of abstraction. If there were some species of animal which was becoming extinct, the definition of that species would not cease to be abstract when it happened that there was only one animal left which answered to that definition.

Given that descriptions are abstract, whether they describe one or many objects, in the process of producing a description we must employ the very thing Locke seeks to explain--namely, our ability to abstract. But Locke was searching for some antecedent process of thought which would serve as a basis for explaining all human abstraction and which would mark the transition from non-abstract thinking to abstract thinking. As Leibniz suggests, however, "the mind leans upon [abstract] principles every moment," implying that abstraction is embedded within the fabric of all our reasoning, so that there is no antecedent process of thought which will account for it.

Plato, like Locke, was searching for an antecedent process of thought which would account for our ability to employ general terms correctly. And his effort, like Locke's, was doomed from the start, for there is no antecedent process of thought which will comprehensively account for this ability. Accordingly, we find that both Plato's theory and Locke's presuppose our ability to abstract, and so don't really explain it. Plato's assumption of a pre-existing soul and a realm of forms has no explanatory value. For, unless Plato also assumes that we can make such discriminations as that between the just and the non-just, for example, he can have no basis for saying that we can recognize the form of justice as being itself just: and yet it is precisely our recognition of the form of justice as being something supremely just that is supposed to account for our ability to discriminate the just from the non-just. But, if that very ability must be presupposed in order for his theory to work, then the theory has no explanatory value.

## THE THEORY OF CHANGE

5.1 Introduction. Plato's motive in offering his theory of change, I am supposing, was to account for the possibility of limited change, given the Heraclitean belief that change is unlimited and the Parmenidean belief that all change is impossible. It is appropriate, therefore, to ask whether he has in fact produced a theory which will do this--whether, that is to say, his theory accounts for the possibility of change without as the same time requiring that everything be in a state of total, constant change. One suspects that his theory fails, if only because the very illustrations he employs are not illustrations of real change, suggesting that he is unclear on what the nature of change is. He talks of how Socrates' height changes according to whether he is being compared to a tall or a short man; but in this case we should say that no real change has taken place in Socrates; only the description appropriate to Socrates changes. In fact, when he talks of death, which seems a drastic change to me, his aim is to persuade us that we do not really change with death--Socrates hasn't changed after taking the hemlock; only his place of residence, as it were, has changed. Or so Plato would have us believe. One wonders, therefore, whether Plato is guilty merely of having chosen bad examples or whether the theory he develops requires such examples because examples of real change are not examples of what the theory explains. Here I argue for the second of these alternatives: genuine change cannot be accounted for by the theory.

5.2 The Scope of Plato's Theory of Change. There is, first, a minor point to be made against the theory. Plato wants his theory to account for all changes, not just those involving certain special properties--e.g.: bigger/smaller. One is inclined to agree with Plato when he says that, "when a thing becomes bigger, it must have been smaller before it became bigger." (70e) One is not inclined to agree with him when he says that, when a thing becomes beautiful, it must have been ugly before it became beautiful. We should say simply that, when a thing becomes beautiful, it must not have been beautiful before it became beautiful. There is an intermediate between beautiful and ugly; there is not one between bigger and smaller. Plato might reply, however, by limiting the scope of his theory to those properties which are of the same type as bigger/smaller. Whereas, I hold that the theory is inapplicable to anything one might rightly call an example of a change. I can not, however, on the strength of this objection justify this strong of a claim, and so I will not pursue this line of attack.

5.3 Incidental and Essential Nature. The distinction for Plato between incidental and essential nature is absolute. And, given his views, he cannot interpret it otherwise. For temporal things are supposed to have an unchangeable essence which gives them their identity and an incidental nature which permits them to change without loss of identity, since the change never affects the essence. Whereas, the forms, having no incidental natures, are unchangeable. Temporal things have their essences impressed directly upon them by the forms, and that is supposed to account for why essences are just so and not otherwise.

But a problem arises when we consider how temporal things get their incidental natures. For, in general, according to Plato, when something has a property, it is in virtue of the Form of the property that the thing in question can be said to have the property. It is by beauty, Plato says, that beautiful things are made beautiful; he does not say that only those things which are essentially beautiful are made so by beauty. Thus, not merely essential properties, but incidental properties as well arise through the action of the forms. Suppose that something has three properties and that two of these are essential to it. Now, presumably, the first property was caused by its respective form, the second by its, and the third by its, so that it would seem that they are all related to the forms in precisely the same way. Yet it is supposed to be the relation of a property to its form that determines whether the property is essential. Wherein then can the difference between incidental and essential nature reside? Plato could try to work his way out of this difficulty by arguing that the forms act jointly to produce essences but independently to produce incidental natures, that the properties which essentially make up a man are somehow already co-ordinated in the form of Man, whereas the remaining properties of men have their origin in the random action of the forms. But the forms are not supposed to act randomly. And yet, if the forms must always function in logically determined ways, then the incidental natures they impress upon particulars must be logically determined: and one could deduce what something's incidental nature is, which seems a contradiction.

Looking now for ways to help Plato make out his distinction, I suggest that, if the difference between an essential and an incidental property cannot reside in the relation of the properties to the forms, perhaps it resides in a difference between the properties considered in themselves. Malcolm, it seems, works out a distinction along these lines when he distinguishes between the first and second ontological arguments which he thinks he finds in the Proslogion. The first ontological argument, he says, treats "existence" as a predicate and so is invalid, whereas the second treats "necessary existence" as a predicate, so that the invalidity of the first argument does not entail the invalidity of the second. But consider how he makes out this distinction between "existence" and "necessary existence":

It may be helpful to express ourselves in the following way: to say, not that omnipotence is a property of God, but rather that necessary omnipotence is; and to say, not that omniscience is a property of God, but rather that necessary omniscience is. We have criteria for determining that a man knows this and that and can do this and that, for determining that one man has greater knowledge and abilities in certain subjects than another. We could think of various tests to give them. But there is nothing we should wish to describe seriously and literally as "testing" God's knowledge and powers. That God is omniscient and omnipotent has not been determined by the application of criteria: rather these are requirements of our conception of him. They are internal properties of the concept, although they are also rightly said to be properties of God. Necessary existence is a property of God in the same sense that necessary omnipotence and necessary omniscience are his properties.<sup>1</sup>

I agree that we do not determine essential properties by the

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<sup>1</sup>N. Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments." Contained in: J. Hick & A. McGill, ed's, The Many-faced Argument (New York: 1967), pp. 309-310.



application of criteria. It is not necessary, as Malcolm says, to apply criteria in order to determine whether a Christian God is omnipotent: if something is to count as a Christian God, it must be omnipotent. It is, of course, nevertheless necessary to apply criteria in order to determine whether some given individual is a Christian God, and among these criteria will be a criterion of omnipotence.

But I do not see in this a reason to distinguish two different kinds of properties, necessary and contingent. I do not, for example, think that triangles have the special property of necessary three-sidedness, whereas other figures which merely happen to have three sides have the contingent variety of three-sidedness. (In fact, this whole way of speaking seems wrong to me.)

It is acceptable, however--though a bit odd--to say that necessary omnipotence is a property of God, provided all we mean by this is that the property of omnipotence is necessary to our concept of God. That is to say, the proposition, "God is omnipotent," is necessary; but the property of omnipotence is not. Malcolm, however, cannot simply mean this. For he says, "Necessary existence is a property of God in the same sense that necessary omnipotence and necessary omniscience are his properties." If necessary existence is a property of God in the same sense that necessary omnipotence is, then, if we can express the connection between God and necessary omnipotence by saying "the proposition, 'God is omnipotent,' is necessary," we can also express the connection between God and necessary existence by saying "the proposition, 'God exists' is necessary." But, because Malcolm

holds that "existence" is not a predicate, he cannot hold that the proposition, "God exists," is necessary. Therefore, in order to prevent the two ontological arguments from coalescing, Malcolm must hold that properties as well as propositions can be necessary, that there are two kinds of properties, necessary and contingent.

If Malcolm is right in this, property-terms are systematically ambiguous according to whether they occur in contingent or necessary statements. Thus "God is omnipotent" translates into "God has necessary omnipotence," whereas "Mr. Jones is omnipotent" translates into "Mr. Jones has contingent omnipotence." The two kinds of omnipotence must be different, it seems, because we can question Mr. Jones's variety of omnipotence; we cannot question God's. But consider this argument, which is clearly valid:

1. If something has three sides, it is a triangle.
2. This figure has three sides.
3. Therefore, this figure is a triangle.

The first statement is necessary, and so translates into "If something has the property of necessary three-sidedness, it is a triangle." The second statement is contingent, and so translates into "This figure has the property of contingent three-sidedness." The premises, when translated into Malcolm's way of speaking, therefore, no longer imply the conclusion, which proves his translations do not preserve meaning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I have throughout been speaking of Malcolm's views as represented in the article I cited; whether he still holds these views I do not know.

Therefore, from the claim that omnipotence is necessary to God, one can derive that the proposition, "God is omnipotent," is necessary. But one cannot derive that there is a special kind of property--namely, necessary omnipotence--which God has. Properties are not necessary; only propositions are. There is no correct way in which to view the distinction between incidental and essential nature such that this distinction implies that some properties are necessary and others not. Consequently, essences are always relative to definitions; definitions are not relative to essences. We can define "God" as an omnipotent being. But we cannot rightly infer from this that, if there is something which has omnipotence and the other characteristics stipulated in our definition, this something must keep omnipotence and the other characteristics because these characteristics are somehow necessary to it. We cannot argue that this something cannot lose these characteristics because, if it did, it would no longer be appropriate to describe it as a God. Rather, we must argue that, if it does lose these characteristics, it is no longer appropriate to describe it as a God. Thus things in the world do not have unchangeable essences.

This completely refutes Plato's theory of change. For, according to it, things are supposed to have a core of necessary properties which are absolutely unchangeable in the things themselves and a surrounding shell of contingent properties which are in a state of constant change, and the definitions of the things are supposed to be relative to these cores of necessary properties. Whereas, in fact the necessity never reaches the level of things and their properties, but remains on the level of

propositions.

From 102c to 107a Plato argues that (1) the reason Socrates can change his height is that height is only incidental to him, (2) a change in height actually takes place in Socrates when, after being compared to a shorter man, he is compared to a taller man, and (3) because life is necessary to the soul, the soul cannot lose this property. Note that Plato does not add to (3) "and remain describable as a soul." One can grant, however, that life is essential to the soul, so that the proposition, "the soul is alive," is necessary, without at the same time granting that, if there is something in the world which has this property, it cannot lose it. For, assuming that having life is a necessary condition of being a soul, if there is something in us which has the property of life and, if that something should lose this property, then we should simply cease describing it as a soul. Consequently, the distinction between incidental and essential nature governs, not what changes can take place in things, but rather what descriptions are appropriate after a change has taken place: it is not appropriate to describe something as a soul, for example, if it has changed in such a way as to no longer have the property of life. But our descriptions and definitions will not keep things as they are, restricting the flow of change; and so far as logic is concerned a thing can change or lose any property.

Plato's theory of change, therefore, will not do the work he would like it to do, because it will not isolate an unchangeable core of essential properties which things must have and keep.

5.4 Conclusion. In the Phaedo Plato, despite his efforts, proceeds from purely Parmenidean premises so far as reality is concerned, and this is a source of trouble to him. He confines change to the material realm, which he thinks is somehow unreal, making change itself somehow unreal. The only things we can really know, he says, are unchanging--the forms: reality itself is changeless. But, in fact, change and changing things are real, and so his theory proceeds from false premises. In time Plato himself seems to have realized this. For in the Sophist, after saying that knowing is a process, he adds that the philosopher, therefore,

who values knowledge...must refuse to accept from the champions of the one ∟ i.e., Parmenides, I think / or of the many forms ∟ i.e., the Plato of the Middle Dialogues, I think / the doctrine that all reality is changeless, and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represent reality as everywhere changing." (Sophist 248d-249d)

In the Phaedo it is held that reality is knowable, that whatever is knowable is unchanging, and, therefore, that reality is unchanging. In the Sophist this argument is questioned. But, whatever his later views on these issues were, Plato is clearly wrong in the Phaedo.

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