

Thesis Abstract From causes to Forms: the *Phaedo* & the foundations of Platonic metaphysics

Plato's metaphysics is distinguished by its recognition of Forms. Plato also believed, notoriously, that Forms were causes – viz., the causes of ordinary objects' features. ("All beautiful things are beautiful by the Form of the Beautiful", as the slogan goes.) Philosophers since Aristotle have criticized this claim, arguing that Forms cannot be causes in any legitimate sense, and that their alleged causal role can be performed by other things. Correspondingly, philosophers interested in elucidating Plato's metaphysics have tended to downplay the Forms' causal status. Here I oppose this tendency. I show that there is a legitimate sense in which Forms are causes; that this sort of causality is fundamental to what Forms are; and that this understanding of the Forms' status as causes offers new insights into their other contentious features.

I begin with a new account of the kind of cause that Forms are meant to be, based on the argument at *Phaedo* 96–107. I propose that Plato is here seeking the "mereological" or "ingredient" cause, defined thus: the mereological cause of an object's being *F* is that which has been added to it, such that it is now *F*. (For example, the mereological cause of this coffee's being sweet is the sugar that was added to it.) This interpretation, unlike its alternatives in the scholarly literature, can account for all of the text's peculiar causal principles, including the elusive principle that a cause of *F*-ness cannot itself be un-*F*. Furthermore, by relating this model of causation to the models of Plato's predecessors, I challenge the conventional assumption that Plato is here introducing Forms as a new kind of cause; rather, he is adopting an established conception of causation and refining it.

In addition to clarifying the kind of cause Forms are, I demonstrate that mereological causality is fundamental to what Forms are. First, I show that mereological causality is an essential part of Plato's conception of various "proto-Forms" (e.g., Socratic definitions, objects of knowledge). Second, I show that the *Phaedo*, in all its arguments, starts from a minimal conception of Forms as mereological causes, and nothing stronger.

This new conception of Forms illuminates their other controversial features. Self-Predication, for instance – the thesis that each Form of *F*-ness "is *F*" – is a direct consequence of the Forms' being causes, since *any* mereological cause of *F*-ness must itself be *F*. Yet Plato does not believe that a cause of *F*-ness "is *F*" in the same way that an ordinary *F* object "is *F*". Rather, I show that the *Phaedo* sets forth a distinction between two ways in which a property can be truly predicated of a subject: a cause of *F*-ness "is *F*" in that the definition of *F*-ness is true of it, and an ordinary *F* object "is *F*" in that there is something added to it that is *F* in the first sense. This interpretation challenges the common view that Plato did not develop such a distinction until late in his career, and offers a new account of what his later semantic innovations actually were.

The Forms' status as causes also explains why they are separate. This is surprising: mereological causes are "added to" objects, and this would seem at odds with the claim that Forms are "separate" from their participants. However, as I show, in the *Phaedo* to be separate is rather to be purely what one is (e.g., the Form of the Beautiful is purely beautiful). Thus, separation is not incompatible with mereological causality; for the Form of the Beautiful to be added to an object is just for there to be "some beauty" in that object (even if that beauty also exists in some more determinate form, e.g., as a beautiful shape or sound). Indeed, Forms must be separate to be of ultimate causal importance: what makes *all and only* beautiful objects beautiful is simply there being some beauty in them. This also explains why other mereological causes are not separate: what makes a *particular* beautiful object beautiful allows for more determinate specification.