

GP L3: Puzzles about Particulars 1: Recollecting Forms

1. The *Phaedo's* Recollection Argument in Outline: Three Stages

- (1) general features of recollection or of being reminded of one thing by another;
- (2) a case of perceptual judgement, involving judgements of equality; argues that such perceptual judgements are not sources of knowledge of equality; involve recollection of knowledge we already have.
- (3) argues from the conclusion that such perceptual judgements involve recollection (and so prior knowledge) to prenatal existence of soul.

2. Stage 1: What's involved in recollection?

- recollection entails prior knowledge
- **T2**: a general account of recollection
- mental triggers for recollection: things which are like or unlike thing recollected
- recollection from something like: being reminded of Simmias by his picture.

3. What's involved in being reminded of someone by their picture?

- Contrast: two people see Simmias' picture; one knows him & one does not.
- Contrast: two people who know Simmias look at his picture; one mistakenly thinks it is Simmias; one does not.
- Interpreting **T4**: additional experience when being reminded by something like.

4. Stage 2: Equal sticks & stones, an example of perceptual judgement

- arg. involves (i) perceptible examples of equality (two sticks equal in length) & (ii) the equal itself (the Form of Equal)
- the argument's main steps: (i) there is such a thing as the Equal & we know what it is; (ii) the Equal itself is different from perceptible equals; (iii) it's through perceiving perceptible equals that we think of the Equal itself; (iv) our doing so is a case of recollection
- **T5**: what's the difference between perceptible equals & the equal itself? the 'compresence of opposites'
- how does the compresence of opposites ground the claim that this case involves recollection?

5. Recognising Examples of Equality & the Picture Case

- what is involved in recognition of perceptible examples of equality? cf. **T5** & **T4**
- who engages in the recollection described here? (contrast Scott & Bostock)
- what can the argument thus far claim to have shown? (Read **T6** for remainder of argument: attempt to use this result to ground prenatal existence of soul)

TEXTS

Recalling the *Meno*

[T1] Besides, Socrates, put in Cebes, there's also that argument you often used to state, if it's true, that, for us, learning is in fact nothing but recollection; according to that argument too we must have learnt somewhere in some previous time what we now recollect. But this would be impossible unless our soul were somewhere before we were born in human form. Thus, in this

way too, it seems the soul is something immortal.

But Cebes, responded Simmias, would you provide the demonstrations of this? Remind me, for I don't well recall at present.

Well, said Cebes, to give one very fine argument: there's the fact that when people are questioned, if someone puts the questions well, they themselves say how everything is; and yet, unless the knowledge and the correct account were in fact present within them, they wouldn't have been able to do this. Then if someone takes them to geometrical figures or anything else of that kind, here one has the clearest possible indication that this is the case.

But if you're not persuaded in this way, Simmias, said Socrates, consider whether you agree if you think about it in the following way. (*Phd* 72e3-73b4)

What is it to recollect?

[T2] (Socrates speaks) We agree presumably that, if someone is to recollect something, they must have known that thing beforehand. Certainly, he (Simmias) said. (Soc.) Then do we also agree on this: that whenever knowledge comes to be present in this way, it is recollection? In what way do I mean? The following: if someone, on seeing or hearing or having some other sensation of one thing, not only recognises that thing, but also comes to think of something else, knowledge of which is not the same, but different, wouldn't we be right to say that he has recollected (or been reminded of) the thing of which he got hold of the thought? (Simm.) What do you mean? (Soc.)

As in the following examples. Knowledge of a lyre is surely different from knowledge of a man. (Simm.) Of course. (Soc.) And don't you know that lovers, whenever they see a lyre or a cloak or anything else their beloved is accustomed to using, have the following experience: they recognise

the lyre and also get in mind the image of the boy whose lyre it is? And this is recollection; just as a person seeing Simmias might often be reminded of Cebes; and there would be countless other such cases. Countless indeed, said Simmias. And, said Socrates, isn't this kind of thing a kind of recollection? Especially so, however, when a person has this experience in relation to things which are at the time forgotten whether through time or lack of attention? Certainly, he said. (*Phd* 73c1-e4)

Likes & Unlikes

(T3) What about this? he (Socrates) said. Is it possible on seeing a picture of a horse or a lyre to be reminded of a man, or on seeing a picture of Simmias to be reminded of Cebes? Certainly. And on seeing a picture of Simmias to be reminded of Simmias himself? It is, he said. Then doesn't it follow from all these examples that recollection may result from like things or unlike things? It follows. (*Phd* 73e5-74a4)

Recollection from things that are like

(T4) (Soc.) But whenever someone recollects something from like things, mustn't they have the following additional experience: to think whether it is in any way lacking or not in its likeness to the thing one recollects? Necessarily, he (Simmias) said. (*Phd* 74a5-8)

The Equal itself & equal sticks and stones

(T5) (Socrates speaks) Consider, he said, if this is how things are. We say that there is something equal, and I don't mean a stick to a stick or a stone to a stone or anything of that sort, but something different, over and above all of these, the equal itself. Do we say it is something or not? By God, said Simmias, we most certainly say it is. (Soc.) And do we know what it is?

(Simm.) Certainly.

(Soc.) And whence did we acquire this knowledge? Or wasn't it from the things I just mentioned - wasn't it from looking at equal sticks or stones or other such things that we came to think of it, it being different from these? Or doesn't it seem different to you? Consider the matter this way. Do equal sticks or stones sometimes seem equal to one, but not to another? (Simm.) Certainly. (Soc.)

Well, do the equals themselves ever seem to you unequal, or equality inequality? (Simm.) Never, Socrates. (Soc.) Then those equals and the equal itself are not the same. (Simm.) No, Socrates,

they are not at all the same in my view. (Soc.) Nonetheless, he said, it is from those equals, which are different from that equal, that you have come to think of and get hold of the knowledge of that? (Simm.) Very true, he said. (Soc.) It being either like or unlike them? (Simm.) Certainly.

(Soc.) It makes no difference, he said. For provided that, on seeing one thing, on the basis of this sight, you come to think of another, be it like or unlike, this must be recollection, he said. (Simm.) Certainly.

(Soc.) Well, then, he said. Don't we have this kind of experience regarding the equals in the sticks and the others I just mentioned? Do they seem to us to be equal in just the same way as the equal itself? Or do they fall somewhat short of it in respect of their being like the equal? (Simm.) They fall very far short, he said. (*Phd* 74a9-d8)

From Recollecting the Equal to Immortality (some key steps)

(T6) (Soc.) Then we must know the equal before that time at which we first, on looking at the equals, came to have the thought that these are all striving to be like the equal, but are deficient.

(Simm.) That's so. (Soc.) But then we also agree on this, that we neither have nor could have come to have the thought of it from anywhere other than from seeing or touching or using some other sense; I'm treating all of these as the same. (Simm.) And they are the same, Socrates, for the point the argument seeks to show. (Soc.) But it is from these very senses that one must come to have the thought that all the things in one's perceptions are striving for that which is 'what is equal', but are deficient in comparison to it. Isn't that what we say? (Simm.) It is. (Soc.) Then it was surely necessary that we had in fact taken hold of the knowledge of the equal, what it is, before we began to see or hear or use the other senses, if we are going to refer the equals from our perceptions to that, and say that they are all striving to be like it, but are inferior to it. (Simm.) That's necessary from what's been said before, Socrates. (Soc.) But the moment we were born, we saw and heard and used the other senses, didn't we? (Simm.) Certainly. (Soc.) And we say that we had to have got hold of the knowledge of the equal before [using] these? (Simm.) Yes. (Soc.) Then we had to have got hold of it before we born, it seems. (Simm.) It does. (*Phd* 74e9-75c6)

The scope of the discussion

[T7] The present argument doesn't only apply to the equal, but just as much to the beautiful itself, to the good itself, to the just, to the holy, and, what I would say, to all those things to which we give the mark 'just what is' in the questions we ask and the answers we give. (*Phd* 75c10-d3)