

GP L4: Puzzles about Particulars 2: Forms as Explanations

1. Key Greek terms involved: aition & aitia

- English translations: 'cause', 'explanation', 'reason why', 'that in virtue of which'
- Core sense of word: the thing responsible; in legal context, the person to blame.

2. Three models for identifying what's responsible

- (1) The Materialist or Mechanist Model: identifies material conditions or processes as being responsible for way things are. This model is rejected.
- (2) The Teleological Model: identifies Intelligence as responsible for way things are, where Intelligence is taken to arrange things in way that is best. This model remains on the table, but is not elaborated.
- (3) The Formal Model (Socrates' 'Second Sailing'): identifies Forms as safest answer to questions about what's responsible. This model is elaborated.

3. The Formal Model in Outline, T5

- sample answer: 'it is because of the beautiful that beautiful things are beautiful'
- likely charges: is this just tautologous? vacuous?

4. Rejected Answers vs Safe Answers, T2 & T6

- James is a head taller than John. What's responsible?

rejected answer:

safe answer:

- Ten is more than eight. What's responsible?

rejected answer:

safe answer:

- One is added to one, giving two. What's responsible?

rejected answer:

safe answer:

- One is divided, giving two. What's responsible?

rejected answer:

safe answer:

5. Constraints on candidates for causal responsibility

- (1) If A is responsible for something being F, A cannot also be responsible for anything being the opposite of F.
- (2) If A is responsible for something being F, A cannot itself be characterised by the opposite of F. (Perhaps: A must itself be F.)
- (3) If A is responsible for something being F, the opposite of A cannot also be responsible for anything being F.
- (4) If A is responsible for something being F, then A should be such as to be capable of being responsible for anything which is F being F.

6. T3 & T4: the discussion of Anaxagoras

- **T4's** discussion of bones & sinews confirms constraints (1)-(3), causal relevance principles.
- **T3** emphasises Socrates' expectation that answers to questions about what's responsible should provide a direction for inquiry & so contribute to understanding.

7. Socrates' Formal Model: Assessing the Simple-Minded Answer

- Claim about understanding: if you want to know what makes a sunset beautiful, investigate not colours, but beauty.
- Why not colours? Appeal to colours of sunset (a) fails the causal relevance constraints; (b) fails the generality requirement. And hence fails to offer means to understand the beauty of the sunset.
- Is Socrates answer tautologous? No, because appeals to something distinct from that which it is to help us understand. The form of beauty is distinct from the beauty of the sunset.
- Is Socrates' answer vacuous? No, because need not suppose that answer is complete when appeal to the beautiful. Full version of simple-minded answer would require full answer to the question, what is beauty?

TEXTS

Socrates' initial inquiries into nature

[T1] (Soc.) In my youth, Cebes, I was tremendously enthusiastic about this wisdom they call inquiry into nature. For it seemed to me a splendid thing to know the causes of each thing: why each thing comes to be, why each perishes and why it is. And I often went back and forth, considering, firstly, matters like these: is it, as some say, when hot and cold give rise to some kind of putrefaction that living things are assembled? And is it because of blood that we think, or air, or fire? Or is it none of these? Is it rather the brain that provides us with the senses of hearing, sight and smell, and is it from these that memory and judgement arise, and from memory and judgement that knowledge arises in the same way, once they have acquired stability? And in turn I

considered the destruction of these things, and events in heaven and on earth, until finally I came to the view that I was totally and absolutely unsuited for this kind of investigation. And I can give you sufficient proof of this. As a result of this inquiry I became blind even to things both I and others thought I knew clearly beforehand, and so unlearnt even things I formerly thought I knew...

[*Phd.* 96a6-c6]

Socrates' subsequent puzzlement: some particular cases

[T2] (Soc.) I used to think it was sufficient to think that a large person standing beside a small person was bigger by a head, and likewise in the case of horses. And even more clearly than these cases, I used to think that ten were more than eight because two were added, and that two cubits were greater than one cubit because they exceed by half themselves again. (Cebes) And what do you think about these matters now? said Cebes. (Soc.) Well, he said, I'm very far from thinking I know the cause of these matters, I who won't even allow myself to agree that, when one is added to one, it is the one to which it is added that has become two; or the one added; or that both the one added and the one to which it was added because of the addition of one to the other. For I should be amazed if, at the point when each was apart from the other, at that point each was one and they were not two; but when they came to be next to each other, this then became a cause of their becoming two, their being placed in juxtaposition with each other. Nor indeed can I any longer be persuaded that, if someone divides one, this - the division - has become a cause of there coming to be two. For this is the opposite of what then was the cause of there being two. For then it was because they were brought next to each other and one was added to the other; now, however, it is because they are drawn apart and one is separated from the other. Indeed, I can't

even persuade myself anymore that I know the reason why one comes to be, nor, in short, why anything comes to be or perishes or is, on this way of approaching things. Instead I myself have cobbled together at random a different method and don't accept that one at all. [*Phd.* 96d8-97b7]

Socrates' initial enthusiasm for Anaxagoras

[T3] One day, he said, I heard someone reading from a book by Anaxagoras and saying that it is intelligence that orders and is responsible for everything; and I was pleased by this cause and it seemed to me somehow right that intelligence be responsible for everything. And I thought that, if that were so, then intelligence, in ordering, would order everything and position each thing in whatever way was best. If, therefore, someone wanted to discover for each thing what was the cause of the way in which it comes to be, perishes, or is, this is what they would need to discover about it: how it is best for it to be, or to be affected, or to act in whatever way. And on the basis of this argument, the right thing for a person to do in their inquiry into this thing, or anything else, would be to investigate nothing other than what is best. [*Phd.* 97b8-d3]

Socrates' subsequent disappointment in Anaxagoras

[T4] Well, my friend, I was robbed of my great hope when, on carrying on with my reading, I saw a man making no use of his intelligence at all, nor ascribing any responsibility to it for the ordering of things; instead he took air and aether and water to be responsible and many other

absurdities like that. And it struck me that what had happened was exactly as if someone who says that Socrates does everything he does because of intelligence and who then attempts to state the cause [or, explanation] of everything I'm doing, were to say that the reason I'm now sitting here is that my body is composed of bones and sinews; and that the bones are solid and have joints which separate them from each other, while the sinews stretch and relax in such a way as to surround the bones, together with the flesh and skin which holds them together; and so, when the bones are suspended in the joints, the sinews slacken and extend and somehow make it possible for me now to bend my limbs; and that it is for this reason that I have bent myself in and am sitting here. Or again, it is as if this person were to state other causes of a similar kind regarding my conversation with you: putting the responsibility on sound and air and hearing and countless other things of that sort, having omitted to state the real cause: that since the Athenians judged it better to condemn me, it is for this reason that I in turn have judged it better for me sit here, and judged it more just to remain and submit to the sentence they have ordered. For I swear that these same bones and sinews would have been somewhere in Megara or Boeotia long ago, carried by a judgement as to what is best, unless I considered it better and more just to submit to the penalty the city proposed, rather than running away into exile. [*Phd.* 98b7-99a4]

Socrates' 'safe' cause/explanation

[T5] (Soc.) What I mean, he said, is this; nothing new, but just what I'm always saying, have never stopped saying, both on other occasions and in the preceding discussion. I'm going to attempt to demonstrate to you the kind of cause I'm concerned with, and I turn again to those much discussed entities, and I begin from these, proposing that there is something which is beautiful just by itself and something good and something large and all the rest. And if you grant me this and agree that there are these things, then I hope on the basis of these to be able to give you an account of causation and to reveal that the soul is immortal. Well, said Cebes, since I grant you this, you needn't delay in drawing your conclusion. (Soc.) Then consider, he said, if you agree with me on what follows from these. For it seems to me that if anything is beautiful other than the beautiful itself then it is so for no other reason than because it has a share of that beautiful; and I take the same to apply to them all. Do you admit this kind of cause? I do, he said.

(Soc.) Then I no longer understand, nor am capable of recognising, these other clever causes.

Rather, if someone says to me that there is some other reason why something is beautiful - be it its having a lovely colour, shape, or anything else of that sort - I ignore all these other things, for I get confused among them all, and, for myself, I simply, straightforwardly and possibly simply-mindedly hold just to this: that nothing makes the thing beautiful except the presence or association of that beautiful, whatever is the manner of its coming to be so related to it. For this latter I wouldn't make any great fuss about [sc. the nature of the relation]; but simply that it is

because of the beautiful that all beautiful things come to be beautiful. For this seems to me the safest answer to give myself or another, and if I hold on to this I think I'll never fall; rather it is safe both for me or anyone else to answer that it is because of the beautiful that beautiful things are beautiful. [*Phd.* 100b1-e3]

Some particular cases revisited

[T6] (Soc.) Then you wouldn't accept it if someone were to say that one person is larger than another in virtue of a head and that the smaller is smaller in virtue of the very same thing? Rather you would protest that you maintain that anything that is larger than anything else is so in virtue of nothing other than largeness, that is, it is because of this, largeness, that it is large; and what is smaller is smaller in virtue of nothing other than smallness, that is, it is because of this, smallness, that it is smaller. You would be afraid, I suppose, that someone would present you with an opposing argument, if you say that something is larger and smaller in virtue of a head: first, that the larger is larger and the smaller smaller in virtue of the very same thing, and, second, that the larger is larger in virtue of a head, which is small, and that this is monstrous - for something to be large because of something small. Wouldn't you be afraid of this? And Cebes, laughing, said, I would.

(Soc.) Then, he said, you would be afraid to say that ten is more than eight in virtue of two, and that this is the reason for its exceeding, rather than being in virtue of numerosity and because of numerosity? Or again, that two cubits is larger than one cubit in virtue of a half, instead of in virtue of largeness? The fear is the same. Certainly, he said.

(Soc.) And what about this? If one is added to one, you wouldn't be prepared to say that addition

is the cause of there coming to be two, or, if one thing is divided, that division is the cause of being two, would you? You would loudly proclaim that you know of no other means by which something comes to be other than by having a share of the specific being it comes to have a share of; in these examples, that you have no other explanation of two coming to be other than participation in duality [the dyad], and that anything that is going to be two must participate in this, and anything that is going to be one must participate in unity [the monad]; and you set aside all these divisions and additions and all these subtle things like that, leaving those to the answers of people cleverer than yourself. Whereas you, frightened, as they say, of your own shadow, and of your lack of experience, you hold on to that safe supposition and answer accordingly. [*Phd.* 100e8-101d2]

Applying the safe answer to a complex case

[T7] (Phaedo, the narrator) As I recall, when these points had been accepted and it was agreed that each of the forms was something and that other things that have a share of them are named after them, he next asked:

(Soc.) If you say this is how things are, then when you say that Simmias is larger than Socrates, but smaller than Phaedo, you mean, don't you, that both are in Simmias, largeness and smallness?

(Cebes) Yes. (Soc.) But do you agree, he said, that the way in which the words 'Simmias exceeds Socrates' suggest he does so isn't accurate? For Simmias doesn't exceed Socrates because of this, being Simmias, but rather because of the largeness he happens to have; nor conversely does he exceed Socrates because Socrates is Socrates, but rather because Socrates has smallness relative to his largeness. Isn't that right? (Cebes) It is. (Soc.) And it's not that he is exceeded by Phaedo

because Phaedo is Phaedo, but because Phaedo has largeness relative to Simmias' smallness?

(Cebes) That's so. (Soc.) And so in this way Simmias comes to be called both small and large, being in the middle of both, submitting his smallness to be exceeded by the largeness of one and providing largeness to exceed the smallness of the other. (Phaedo) And he immediately smiled, and said (Soc.) I seem to be talking like a book; but things are surely as I say. He (Cebes) agreed. (Soc.) I say this because I want you to think as I do. For it seems to me that not only is the largeness itself never willing to be at once both large and small, but also the largeness in us never admits the small nor is willing to be exceeded; rather one of two things happens: either it retreats and gets out of the way whenever the opposite, small, approaches, or, when that approaches, it perishes. What it isn't willing to do is to stay and admit smallness, and so be other than just what it was. In this way, I myself, having received and maintained smallness, am still just what I am, this same small person. But that, being large, wouldn't dare to be small. And likewise the smallness in us isn't ever willing to become or be big; nor is any of the other opposites willing, while still being just what it was, both to become and be its opposite at the same time; instead it either retreats or perishes in the event of this experience. That's certainly how it seems to me, said Cebes. [*Phd.*

102a10-103a3]