

GP L6: Forms and Particulars 2: Understanding & the Good

1. Recall Role of Forms as Proper Objects of Understanding

- Forms, unlike particulars, don't suffer from compresence of opposites
- Forms provide stable/reliable basis for knowledge or understanding

2. *Rep VI*: Form of Good as Most Important Object of Study, T1

- Ontological claim: because of Good that just things come to be beneficial etc.
- Epistemological claim: knowledge of no benefit without knowledge of Good
- How surprising is this?

3. Knowledge of the Good and the Sun Analogy

- Epistemological claim about Good: as sun's light is medium for vision, Good provides medium for knowledge [T2c].
- Ontological claim about Good: as sun's light is responsible for generation & growth of visible objects, Good is responsible for being of things known [T2d]

4. What should we make of the analogy?

- Knowledge of Good not just another piece to add to pile; Good as medium for knowledge, suggests brings together & realises knowledge of other things.
- Place of knowledge of Good in understanding suggests value central to understanding.

How should we understand this? (Ontological claim may help.)

5. Systematicity of Knowledge & the Line analogy

- The line analogy distinguishes four cognitive states: (In the visible realm) distinguishes 'imagination' (or 'imaging') from 'belief'. (In intelligible realm) distinguishes 'thought' (or 'reason') from 'understanding'.
- Contrast between activity of mathematicians & activity of dialecticians in role of hypotheses [T3b] suggests knowledge of forms is systematic, anchored by knowledge of the Good (= the 'unhypothesised principle')

6. Two Morals of role of Good in Understanding

- (I) Systematicity of Knowledge/Understanding & Interconnection of Known
- (II) Privileging of Good as of central importance to knowledge & being.

7. Some Precedents?

- Systematicity of Knowledge & the Completion of Understanding; cf. *Meno*, T4.
- Interconnection of Known & role of Good therein; cf. *Phaedo* T5,6
- The Good, Understanding & Being; cf. *Phaedo* & *Rep* on facts & values.

TEXTS

Form of the Good as the Most Important Object of Study

[T1] [Adeimantus] You surely don't think, he said, that anyone is going to let you go without asking you what this most important object of study you mention is, and what it's about? [Soc.]

No, not at all, I said. Ask away. You've certainly heard it often enough, but at present you are either not thinking, or on the contrary you are thinking: how to make trouble for me by

interrupting. And I suspect it's rather the latter. Certainly you have often heard that it is the form of the good that is the most important object of study, and it is because of this that just things and the others come to be useful and beneficial. You surely knew that I was going to say this, and, further, that we don't have sufficient knowledge of it; and that, if we don't know this, then even the maximum possible knowledge of other things - without this - is of no benefit to us, just as it is of no benefit to have acquired anything without the good. Or do you think it worth something to have acquired every possession but no good, or to know everything else without the good and know nothing beautiful or good? [Ad.] Indeed I don't. [R 504e4-505b4]

Central components of the Sun Analogy

(Vision, the Visible & Light)

[T2a] [Soc.] First, I said, let's get agreement and remind you of things we said before and on many other occasions. [Glaucou] Such as? he said. [S] We say that there are many beautiful things, many good things and we distinguish each of them in speech in this way. [G] We do. [S] And beauty itself and good itself and likewise regarding all the things we then supposed many, supposing them in turn to be one in accordance with the single form of each, we call each 'what is'. [G] That's so. [S] And we say that the many can be seen, but not thought, whereas the forms can be thought, but not seen. [G] Absolutely. [S] With what part of ourselves do we see visible things? [G] With sight, he said. [S] And aren't audible things heard by hearing, and the other perceptibles with the other senses? [G] Yes. [S] Then have you considered how extravagant the maker of the senses was when fashioning this ability to see and be seen? [G] No, I haven't, he said. [S] Consider the matter in this way. Do hearing and sound stand in need of another kind of

thing to enable the one to hear and the other to be heard, some third thing without whose presence the one won't hear nor the other be heard? [G] No, none, he said. [S] Nor, I suppose, do many others, I said, stand in need of something else of this sort - not that I'm saying that none do. Or can you name one? [G] I cannot, he said. [S] Then you don't consider sight and the visible to stand in need? [G] How so? [S] Since sight may be in eyes and the one who has may attempt to use it, and colour may be in objects, but unless some third kind of thing comes to be present, one whose nature is adapted to this very end, know that sight will see nothing and colours will be unseen. [G] What kind of thing do you mean, he said? [S] What you call light, I said. [G] You're right, he said. [R 507a7-e5]

(The Sun & The Good)

[T2b] [S] Then the sense of sight and the power to be seen aren't yoked together by some trivial kind of thing, but are yoked together by something more to be revered than are other yoked things, since light is something to be revered. [G] And much to be so, he said. [S] Then which of the gods in heaven would you identify as being in charge of this, whose light causes our sight to see in the best way possible and visible things to be seen. [G] The one you would, he said, and the others; for it's clearly the sun you're asking about. [S] Then isn't sight naturally related to this god in the following way? [G] In what way? [S] Neither sight itself nor that in which sight comes to be - namely the eye - is the sun. [G] Of course not. [S] But it is, I suppose, the most sunlike of the organs of sense. [G] Certainly. [S] And hasn't it acquired the power it has from that as though

dispensed from a treasury? [G] Certainly. [S] Then the sun is not sight, but, being responsible for it, it is seen by it, is it not? [G] That's so. [S] Then this, I said, may be said to be what I called the offspring of the good and something which the good gives birth too as an analogue of itself, such that what the good is in the intelligible realm as regards intelligence and intelligibles, so this is in the visible realm as regards vision and visibles. [R 507e6-508c2]

(Epistemological aspect of analogy)

[T2c] [G] How? Explain to me further. [S] You know, don't you, I said, that whenever a person no longer turns their eyes upon objects whose colours present themselves to daylight, but to those whose colours stand in the light of night, the eyes grow dim and seem practically blind as though there were no clear vision in them? [G] Indeed, he said. [S] But whenever this person turns their eyes to things on which the sun shines, they see clearly and clear vision occurs in those very same eyes. [G] Yes. [S] Then consider this to hold for the soul too in the following way: whenever it fixes steadily on something on which truth and being shine, it both understands and knows it and it is evident that it has intelligence. However, whenever it fixes instead on what is mixed up with obscurity - on what both comes to be and perishes - then it both believes and its thought is clouded as it changes its beliefs back and forth, and it seems rather to have no intelligence within it. [G] It does. [S] Then what produces truth in things known and gives the power to know to the knower may be said to be the form of the good. Being responsible for knowledge and truth, it is itself an object of knowledge; but whereas knowledge and truth are both beautiful things, it would be rightly considered something different again, and still more beautiful; and just as light and sight may rightly be considered sunlike, whereas it wouldn't be right to think they were the sun, so

too knowledge and truth may both rightly be considered goodlike, but it wouldn't be right to think that either of them were the good; rather the condition of the good is still more to be revered. [R 508c3-509a5]

(Ontological aspect of analogy)

[T2d] [S] Consider its image still further in the following way. [G] How? [S] You will say, I suppose, that the sun not only provides visible things with the power of being seen, but also provides for genesis, growth and nurture, without itself being genesis. [G] Of course. [S] Then you should say also that not only do things that can be known come to be known by the agency of the good, but also their being and their substance is due to it, although the good is not being, but is beyond being in rank and exceeds it in power. [R 509a9-b10]

Central Components of the Line Analogy

(The Construction of the Line)

[T3a] [S] Understand, I said, that as we say there are these two, and that the one rules over the intelligible kind and place and the other over the visible - I don't say over the heaven lest I seem to you to be playing clever tricks with the name. But do you understand these two kinds: the visible and the intelligible? [G] I do. [S] Then, as though you were taking hold of a line divided into two

unequal section, divide each section again - that of the visible kind and that of the intelligible kind
- in the same ratio. What you have in terms of clarity and unclarity in relation to each other is this:
 first, in the visible section, one section has images - by images I mean, first, shadows, then images
 in water and in all things constructed so as to be dense, smooth and shiny and everything of that
 sort, if you understand. [G] I understand. [S] In the other section of the visible, place what that
other resembles: the animals around us, all plants and every kind of manufactured item. [G]
 Consider it done, he said. [S] And would you be willing to say truth and non-truth may be divided
 like this: as what is believed is to what is known, so what is likened is to what it is likened to? [G]
 I would indeed, he said. [S] Consider then how the intelligible section is to be divided. [G] How?
 [S] In one section the soul is compelled to inquire on the basis of hypotheses, using as images
those things which then were imitated, proceeding not to a principle but to a conclusion, whereas
in the other section, it proceeds to an unhypothesised principle, moving from a hypothesis but
without the images involved in the other section, making its investigation with and through the
forms themselves. [R 509d1-510b9]

(Geometrical Method vs Dialectic)

[T3b] [G] I don't sufficiently understand what you mean, he said. [S] Consider again, for you will understand more easily after these things have been said. For I suppose you know that those who study geometry, calculation and the like hypothesise the odd and the even, and shapes, and three kinds of angles, and things akin to these related to each branch of the investigation; they make these hypotheses as though these things were known and they don't consider it worthwhile to give an account of them either to themselves or to others, as though they were apparent to all. Beginning from these, they work through the rest to conclude in an agreed fashion about that which they set out to investigate. [G] I do indeed know this, he said. [S] Then you know too that they use visible figures and make arguments about them, but it's not these they are reasoning about but rather those things that these are like; they make their arguments for the sake of the square itself and its diameter, not about the one they draw, and the same goes for the others. These things which they mould and draw, of which shadows and reflections are images, they in turn use as images, in seeking to see those things which cannot be seen except by reason. [G] What you say is true, he said. [S] This then is what I called intelligible, but in which the soul is compelled to use hypotheses in its investigation, going not to a principle, since it cannot reach beyond its hypotheses, but using as images the very things that were imaged in the sections below and which, in comparison to things below them, seemed to be clear and were valued as such. [G] I

understand, he said, that you mean what happens in geometry and related sciences. [S] Then understand that the other section of the intelligible I referred to was that which reason itself grasps by the power of dialectic, which doesn't make its hypotheses principles, but genuine hypotheses, as points of departure so that it can proceed until it arrives at something unhypothesised, at the principle of everything; fastening onto this, it goes back on itself once more and arrives at a conclusion in this way, making no use at all of any visible thing, but using forms, it proceeds by means of forms, to forms, and concludes with forms. [R 510b10-511c2]

(The Four Cognitive States)

[T3c] [S] Consider my view to be that, corresponding to the four sections are four conditions of the soul: understanding (*noesis*) corresponding to the highest; thought (*dianoia*) to the second; belief (*pistis*) to the third; and imagination [or: imaging] (*eikasia*) to the fourth. Rank them in a ratio such that they are considered to have a share of clarity just to the extent that that to which they correspond has a share of truth. [R 511d7-e4]

Systematicity in the *Meno*?

[T4] (S) ... Since, then, the soul is immortal and has been born many times and has seen everything both here and in Hades, there is nothing it has not learnt. And thus it is no wonder that it can recollect what it knew before both about virtue and about other things. For since all nature is akin, and the soul has learnt all things, there is nothing to prevent a person who recollects just one thing - what men call 'learning' - from discovering everything else, if a person is courageous and doesn't tire of inquiry: for inquiry and learning are entirely recollection. So there's no need to succumb to that contentious argument: for that would make us lazy and it's music to the ears for those who are weak of will; whereas this one makes us energetic and keen to inquire. (*Meno* 81c5-e1)

The Good & Understanding in the *Phaedo*

(Anaxagoras-Inspired Teleology)

[T5] [S] 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. [*Phaedo* 97b8-d3]

(What Socrates says his predecessors failed to understand about the good)

[T6] ... truly they do not think that the good and the necessary bind and hold everything together. I therefore would be very pleased to become a student of anyone who could teach me about such a cause [or explanation] in whatever way. But since I was deprived of this and could neither discover it myself nor learn it from anyone else, do you want me, Cebes, to give you a demonstration of my second sailing in search of the cause? [*Phaedo* 99c5-d2]