

## PLATO ON FORMS AND CONFLICTING APPEARANCES: THE ARGUMENT OF *PHAEDO* 74A9–C6

In *Phaedo* 73c1 Socrates commences his recollection argument; he had claimed (72e5–6) that ἡ μάθησις οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀνάμνησις τυγχάνει οὔσα ('learning happens to be nothing other than recollection'). There are two different sorts of recollection; things can occasion recollection of similar and dissimilar things (74a2–3). In the case of the recollection of similar things, Socrates asks (74a5–7), ἀρ' οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον τόδε προσπάσχειν, ἐννοεῖν εἴτε τι ἐλλείπει τοῦτο κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα εἴτε μὴ ἐκείνου οὐδ' ἀνεμνήσθῃ; ('is it not necessary to experience this in addition: to consider whether or not this lacks something in similarity to that which is recollected?'). The argument that follows, in 74a9–c6, often called the argument from imperfection, is an attempt to explain what a thing that occasions recollection lacks in comparison with the thing recollected.

In this argument Plato then introduces Forms. The argument is not intended to establish that there are Forms; their existence is explicitly assumed. Plato maintains that we recollect Forms by observing sensible objects. This intellectual process is made possible by the fact that these two kinds of things are different. So, assuming Forms exist, they must be different from ordinary objects of experience. The argument is meant to explain this difference and its significance, namely that we must already have knowledge of Forms before we perceive ordinary objects, which being different from them prompt our recollection of them (74e9–75d2).

But it is controversial in what way Plato takes the two kinds of things to be different, for a crucial sentence of the argument can be understood in different ways (grammatically and philosophically). The sentence in question (74b7–9) is: ἀρ' οὐ λίθοι μὲν ἴσοι καὶ ξύλα ἐνίοτε ταῦτα ὄντα τῷ μὲν ἴσα φαίνεται, τῷ δ' οὐ; ('Do not equal stones and sticks sometimes, being the same, appear equal to one but not to another?') Does Plato mean that a pair of stones can appear equal to one person and not to another, or that a stone is evidently equal to one stone and not to another? The orthodox view has for some time been that the latter option is correct; Plato is not talking about conflicting appearances. I shall argue for the first option, and in fact claim that Plato leaves little room for doubt. I shall also suggest what significance Plato attaches to the difference between Forms and sensibles, and why it makes sense to take the sentence quoted to refer to the conflict of appearances. The feature that differentiates Forms from sensibles is what makes Forms knowable in a way that ordinary objects of experience are not: while a pair of stones may appear equal or unequal, the equal itself, the Form of equality, invariably appears equal. It is this invariability that, according to Plato, makes the equal itself knowable as being equal. Thus, the conclusion of the argument is that, assuming that the equal itself exists, it can be known that it is equal. Paraphrased the argument looks like this, on my reading:

- (1) Plato assumes that there are two kinds of things that are said to be equal, ordinary objects of experience like equal sticks and stones and the equal itself.

- (2) He then claims that we *know* that the equal itself is equal.
- (3) He argues: when we experience sensible equals we come to think of the equal itself. Since the latter is different from the former, the conditions for recollection (set in 73c6–d1) are met.
- (4) Sensible equals and the equal itself are different in that the sensibles variously appear equal and unequal, while the equal itself invariably appears equal.
- (5) It is this property of the equal itself (that of invariably appearing equal) that distinguishes it from ordinary objects of experience and grounds our knowledge that the equal itself is equal.
- (6) He concludes: If the equal itself exists, it is different from sensibles in that it is knowable as equal through invariably appearing as equal.

The same claim, I then submit, is stated in the *Hippias major*.

### THE PHAEDO PASSAGE

*Phaedo* 74a9–c6 is probably the first instance of an explicit argument for Forms being distinct entities. In order to elucidate in which way an item occasioning recollection is different from the recollected item itself, Socrates asks Simmias (74a9–12):

φαμέν πού τι εἶναι ἴσον, οὐ ξύλον λέγω ξύλῳ οὐδὲ λίθον λίθῳ οὐδ' ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ ταῦτα πάντα ἕτερόν τι, αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον·

We say, I suppose, that something is equal. I don't mean a stick [equal] to a stick or a stone [equal] to a stone or anything else of that sort, but something different beyond all these things, the equal itself.

Socrates suggests that the equal itself is distinct from sensible things that are equal. Further, Plato seems to be saying that *the equal itself is equal*. The predicate 'is equal', then, can apply to a pair of stones and to the equal itself. The distinction between the non-sensible equal itself and stones is explicable by their being equal in different ways.<sup>1</sup>

Although it is generally held that Socrates here distinguishes between sensible equals and the equal itself, the passage has not been read (as far as I can see) as claiming that the equal itself is equal. The reason is hardly that such a claim would fit Socrates badly, for there are enough examples of self-predication in Plato's works, and unmistakably in the *Phaedo* itself (100c4–5, cf. 65d4–6). Further, if one translates the sentence *φαμέν πού τι εἶναι ἴσον* as 'We say, I suppose, that something is equal', it is quite reasonable to interpret Plato as claiming that the equal itself is equal. There is no grammatical reason for objecting to the translation above and in fact it is a natural translation.<sup>2</sup>

How has the sentence been translated? Assuming that *τι* is the grammatical subject of the subordinate sentence, the adjective *ἴσον* can be understood as predicative or attributive. In the first case, the verb *εἶναι* is copulative: (A) 'something is equal'; such

<sup>1</sup> In a different context (65d4–e5) Simmias had already agreed, without argument, that something is just by itself (65d4–6), and the implication is that this is justice. In that same context, Socrates stressed that we do not grasp what is just by itself through the senses but rather through intellect, a claim he will shortly repeat.

<sup>2</sup> R. Loriaux, *Le Phédon de Platon*. Volume 1 (Namur, 1981 [1969]), 137, comments: 'Si l'on prend la proposition isolément et si on la traite d'un point de vue grammatical, il semble difficile de traduire autrement', i.e. otherwise than '[q]ue quelque chose est égal'.

is my translation. In the latter case, the verb expresses existence: (B) ‘something equal exists’.<sup>3</sup> The difference reflects the ambiguity of the verb *εἶναι*.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have opted for different versions of reading (B).<sup>5</sup> No grammatical consideration rules out either translation.<sup>6</sup> But there is good reason to prefer (A) to (B). Not only does it introduce self-predication (which to my mind recommends it),<sup>7</sup> but Socrates will also immediately and unambiguously state the assumption that the equal itself exists (74a12–b1), i.e. (B):

φωμέν τι εἶναι ἢ μηδέν; Φῶμεν μέντοι νῆ Δί', ἔφη ὁ Σιμμίας, θαυμαστῶς γε.

Should we say that it [the equal itself] is something or nothing? – Indeed we should say [that it is something], said Simmias, by Zeus, most definitely.

Why take such care to make the statement twice? Further, the ensuing explanation of what Socrates means is puzzling if one opts for reading (B), for when he turns to sensibles, ‘equal’ is clearly predicatively used of them.<sup>8</sup> And, lastly, Socrates will in

<sup>3</sup> Option (B) is taken from C. Rowe, *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1993), 167, 140, who says that line 65d7 ‘seems to confirm that *τι* and *δίκαιον* are to be taken together’ (ad loc.), namely, presumably, that the adjective is attributive. I read no confirmation either way from 65d7. He translates (B) slightly differently, or ‘we say, I suppose, that there is [exists] something equal’ (ad loc.).

<sup>4</sup> The same options apply to the aforementioned passage of 65d4–5.

<sup>5</sup> Rowe (n. 3) says: ‘there is [exists] something equal’. N. White, ‘Forms and sensibles: *Phaedo* 74B–C’, *Philosophical Topics* 15/2 (1987), 197–214, says at 197, ‘there is some equal’. D. Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford, 1975), 119, translates ‘there is something *equal*’ (his italics). G.M.A. Grube, ‘*Phaedo*’, in J. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1997), 50–100, translates thus. D. Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1986), 66, similarly says ‘there is something which is equal’. This seems to be the more common translation; cf. Loriaux (n. 2), 138, who mentions other examples. Even if some of the translations mentioned might be taken to imply self-predication, it is not clear that they do. A related and illuminating passage starts at 103c11, where Socrates asks Cebes: *θερμόν τι καλεῖς καὶ ψυχρόν*ε’ (‘You call something hot and cold?’). The tendency has been to translate this sentence as ‘There is something you call hot and something you call cold’ (Grube, above), although there is no reason to do so. Rowe (n. 3) translates and explains ad loc., ‘“Do you call something hot and cold?”, i.e. “Is there something you call “hot” and [something else you call] “cold”?”’

<sup>6</sup> Some translators have simply made *ἴσον*, and not *τι*, the grammatical subject of the sentence. Thus *φαμέν πού τι εἶναι ἴσον* has for example simply been translated ‘there is an *equal*’, i.e. ‘an equal exists’ (G.E.L. Owen, ‘Dialectic and eristic in the treatment of the Forms’, in G.E.L. Owen [ed.], *Aristotle on Dialectics: The Topics* [Oxford, 1968], 103–25 at 115, translates thus, italicizing ‘equal’). This translation excludes the possibility of taking ‘equal’ predicatively. This inclination is more conspicuous in other translations: ‘*equal* is something’ and ‘there is such a thing as equality’. The first translation (his italics) is by T. Penner, *The Ascent from Nominalism* (Dordrecht, 1987), 57, and the latter is H.N. Fowler’s Loeb version (Cambridge, MA, 1914), identical to that of R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1955). These three translations are not very accurate. They take Plato to be referring, by the word *ἴσον*, to an object, namely *the equal*.

<sup>7</sup> Understanding the passage as referring to the self-predication of a Form in no way diminishes the desirability of this reading; in fact it should enhance it, because that is what Forms do in Plato, they self-predicate. This much is even implied in 74d4–8, which is the conclusion of the argument. Plato does not seem to take this as a problematic assertion, and it is usually accepted without argument; cf. M. Frede, ‘Being and becoming in Plato’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, supplementary volume (1988), 37–52 at 51–2.

<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to see what motivates translating according to (B). Perhaps the reasoning is as follows: (i) *x* is equal, but (ii) *x* is not a sensible equal but rather (iii) the equal itself; hence (iv) *x* is the equal itself. But I find this a baffling reading of the passage. The ‘is’ involved, on this reading, has to be one of identity; this allows one to take ‘equal’ in (i) to be the subject of the sentence, and

fact proceed to argue for the claim that the equal itself invariably appears equal (74b7–c3), where ‘equal’ is without doubt predicative of ‘the equal itself’. Surely, then, the distinction he wants to draw here is between two ways these things are equal, the equal itself and sensibles. It is therefore justified, I submit, to translate as I suggest above, unless the assertion of the self-predication of the equal itself proves incoherent within the argument.

Socrates assumes, then, that the equal itself exists. This assumption is so explicit that Plato deems it fit to add shortly afterwards (76e4–5) that ‘if these entities do not exist, then this argument is futile’. It does not follow from this claim that the equal itself is distinct from sensibles, but just that, like sensibles, the equal itself exists, and it might for all we know be the same as sensibles.<sup>9</sup> Plato needs an argument to show up the difference, and that is what we get.

Having made this assumption, Socrates commences his argument and asks Simmias whether we actually *know* what the equal itself is (74b2–3):

*Ἡ καὶ ἐπιστάμεθα αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν [ἴσον];<sup>10</sup> Πάνυ γε, ἦ δ’ ὅς.*

Do we also know this [the equal itself], what it is? – Certainly, he said.

The phrase *αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν* can hardly refer to anything but the equal itself, and commentators have understood the reference thus: ‘do we know what the equal itself is?’ Socrates has already suggested that the equal itself is equal, and got Simmias’ agreement. Now he asks whether we *actually know* this.<sup>11</sup> Simmias answers positively.

Certainly, this is a possible reading of the passage. But it might be objected that Plato does not *plainly* say this; he does not say that what we know is that the equal itself is equal; he may have something altogether different in mind. He only asks whether we know what the equal itself is. Now, the context makes it clear (or so I have argued) that it is conceded that the equal itself is equal. Socrates has just elicited Simmias’ agreement that the equal itself is equal, and immediately embarks on a discussion of the predicate ‘equal’ as used of sensibles and Forms (in 74b7–c6). So, given the context, it is perfectly intelligible to interpret the question as I suggest. But most importantly, there is no other way of making sense of Simmias’ concession that we do indeed know what the equal itself is. For what could he be conceding to know concerning *what the equal itself is* if not that it is equal? And, anyway, this is precisely what Plato thinks he knows, that the equal itself is equal. I infer the following claim: *we know that the equal itself is equal*. Having elicited the reply that the equal itself is equal, Socrates immediately asks from where we acquire this knowledge (74b4). He will elucidate how we do this. Before we turn to Plato’s elucidation, consider his use of the verb *ἐπίστασθαι*.

Plato uses this verb, and then immediately refers to our *ἐπιστήμη* in 74b3, and again in 74c8. He qualifies neither verb nor noun in any way, or gives any indication that they refer to something different from what he usually calls knowledge. Yet he is

‘equal’ in (i) and ‘the equal itself’ in (iv) to be identical. So: ‘equal = the equal itself’ and ‘equal ≠ sensible equals’. But treating the ‘is’ as one of identity seems strange, and in fact precluded by these versions themselves, for they all understand the verb existentially.

<sup>9</sup> See White (n. 5), 198–9, 211, n. 2.

<sup>10</sup> W has this reading, also found in the margins of B and T. It makes no difference to the sense of the sentence whether we include it or not, but it is a marginal gloss.

<sup>11</sup> On the phrase *ἦ καί*, see J.D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford, 1978<sup>2</sup>), 285: ‘Sometimes *ἦ καί*, “inquires with a certain eagerness”: sometimes *καί* means “also”, and goes close with an individual word’. Cf. e.g. *Phd.* 94a12.

sometimes claimed to be referring not to knowing and knowledge, but something else. The reason for this claim is that Socrates remarks later that a knowing person would be able to give an account of what he knows, and not many people can do that (76b5–12).<sup>12</sup> Hence the ‘knowledge’ of our passage might be colloquially used in a humdrum sense; i.e. it is not really knowledge, but perhaps nothing more than understanding the meaning of the word ‘equal’.<sup>13</sup>

Such evasions are unnecessary at this juncture, and unsanctioned by the text; if Socrates has in mind by ‘knowledge’ the understanding of the meaning of the concept ‘equal’, we should infer that knowledge can include such an understanding rather than infer that Socrates does not have knowledge in mind at all. For the words he uses are *ἐπίστασθαι* and *ἐπιστήμη*. Socrates has told us what we know: that the equal itself is equal. Hence one need not expect him to ask *what* we know the equal itself to be, since he has already told us; and he does not ask this question.

But one might expect him to ask *from where* we have acquired the knowledge that the equal itself is equal. For if he can explain the source of that knowledge, he can pinpoint the difference between our knowledge of the equal itself and what he had previously called our knowledge of sensibles (73c6–8).<sup>14</sup> For that is the point of the argument: to explain the difference (cf. 74a5–7). In the present context Socrates does not indicate that we *know* that equal stones and sticks are equal, but only that we *perceive* them thus; the relation between knowledge and sensibles is left unclear.

The next question, then, is directed at the source of our knowledge of the Form (74b4–7):

*Πόθεν λαβόντες αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην; ἂρ’ οὐκ ἐξ ὧν νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν, ἢ ξύλα ἢ λίθους ἢ ἄλλα ἅττα ἰδόντες ἴσα, ἐκ τούτων ἐκείνο ἐνενοήσαμεν, ἕτερον ὃν τούτων;*

From where have we acquired knowledge of it? Is it not from the things we mentioned just now, seeing either sticks or stones or some other equal things, we come to think of this [the equal itself] from them, this [the equal itself] being different from them?

Socrates asks from where comes ‘our knowledge of it’, the equal itself. Since he has just specified the object of our knowledge as not simply the equal itself, but *αὐτὸ δὲ*

<sup>12</sup> The knowledge Plato discusses in this argument, and has Socrates claim to share with others, is that, for any F, the F itself is F. If this is indeed knowledge according to Plato – one might ask – how can this view be harmonized with what is said in 76b5–12, that the knowing person ought to be able to give an account of what he knows? In that passage Socrates is explaining that knowledge is recollection (in 75b4–76c13). Before our birth we did have knowledge of the equal itself. Then Socrates presents two possibilities. At our birth either we did not forget this knowledge but continued to possess it, or we lost it by forgetting it. If the latter is the case, we recover this lost knowledge of the equal itself by recollection, prompted by seeing sensible equals, i.e. we come to know that the equal itself is equal. Then Socrates asks Simmias to choose between the two possibilities, and helps him by offering an explanation. If the first possibility obtains, we always possessed knowledge, and everyone would then be able to give an account of what he knows. But this is clearly not the case. Hence we must choose the latter possibility, that knowledge is recollection, prompted by perceiving sensibles. Simmias graciously exclaims that the only possibility of the first option obtaining, i.e. that knowledge was not lost at birth, is in the case of Socrates (for a similar explanation, see L. Gerson, *Knowing Persons* [Oxford, 2003], 69, n. 17). I see no conflict between our passage and 76b5–12.

<sup>13</sup> As suggested by Bostock (n. 5), 67–9. The ‘we’ of 74b2 might then mean ‘people in general’ as opposed to the ‘we philosophers’, who can give an account.

<sup>14</sup> Already in 65d11–66a9 Socrates stresses that ‘what each thing essentially is’ is not the object of perception but of thought alone.

ἔστω, he must have in mind knowledge of what the equal itself is, i.e. that it is equal. Again, there appears to be no alternative.

Socrates answers the question from where we get knowledge of the equal itself by making two claims. First he suggests that, when we see equal sticks and stones we do in fact ‘come to think’ of the equal itself (cf. 73c8). Secondly, he claims that the equal itself, becoming thus the object of our thought, is in fact different from the sensibles, and presently turns to explain the difference. Thus, the conditions for recollection are met.

Before we consider Socrates’ explanation, it needs emphasizing that Socrates is answering the question ‘From where do we acquire *knowledge* of it [the equal itself]?’ It has been conceded that the equal itself exists, and it has been suggested that we come to think of it by perceiving sensible equals. But this does not explain what I take to be the *explanandum*, i.e. from where we *know* that the equal itself is equal: It is not because we come to think of the equal itself that we know what the equal itself is. Rather, the explanation of our knowledge is afforded by an account of the difference between the equal itself and sensible equals.

As expected Socrates explains in what way the equal itself and sensible equals are different, and thereby from where we actually acquire this knowledge of the Form (74b7–c6):

ἢ οὐχ ἑτερόν σοι φαίνεται; σκόπει δὲ καὶ τῇδε. ἄρ’ οὐ λίθοι μὲν ἴσοι καὶ ξύλα ἐνίοτε ταῦτα ὄντα τῷ μὲν ἴσα φαίνεται, τῷ δ’ οὐ; Πάνυ μὲν οὖν. Τί δέ; αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα ἔστιν ὅτε ἀνίσά σοι ἐφάνη, ἢ ἡ ἰσότης ἀνισότης; Οὐδεπώποτε γε, ὦ Σώκρατες. Οὐ ταῦτὸν ἄρα ἔστιν, ἢ δ’ ὅς, ταῦτά τε τὰ ἴσα καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον. Οὐδαμῶς μοι φαίνεται, ὦ Σώκρατες.

[Socrates:] Or does it [the equal itself] not appear to you different [from sensible equals]? Consider it also in this way. Do not equal stones and sticks sometimes, being the same, appear equal to one but not to another? – [Simmias:] Certainly. – [Socrates:] What then? Is it ever the case that the equals themselves have appeared to you unequal, or equality inequality? – [Simmias:] Never, Socrates. – [Socrates:] Then these things are not the same, he said, these equal things and the equal itself. – [Simmias:] They do not at all appear the same to me, Socrates.

This passage is evidently intended to explain the difference between sensible equals and the equal itself by claiming that sensible equals variably appear equal and unequal, but the equal itself invariably appears equal.<sup>15</sup>

Here, then, we have Plato concerned with conflicting appearances in the process of introducing Forms. *Prima facie* Socrates is referring to different perspectives of

<sup>15</sup> There are two apparent oddities in this passage. First, Socrates asks whether the equals themselves (in plural) have ever appeared unequal, and, secondly, whether equality has ever appeared as inequality. The plural of ‘the equals themselves’ is probably sufficiently explained as grammatically following the foregoing plural of ‘equal stones and sticks’, as Owen suggests (n. 6), 114–15. For the expressions ‘the equal itself’, ‘the equals themselves’ and ‘equality’ surely all refer to the same item, as White (n. 5), 204–5, maintains, and is generally accepted. For other explanations, see R.S. Bluck, *Plato’s Phaedo* (London, 1959), 5–11, countered by White (n. 5), 214, n. 25, P. Geach, ‘The Third Man again’, *Philosophical Review* 65 (1956), 72–8 at 76, reprinted in R.E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics* (London, 1965), 265–77, and Damascius’ commentary on the *Phaedo* (I.302 [Westerink]). The second issue need not be odd either: not only does equality never appear unequal, but it never appears as inequality either. Plato argues for a distinction between equality (or the equal itself) and sensible equals. If they were *not* distinct, and equality and sensible equals were identical, then, by the same reasoning, inequality and unequal sensibles would be identical. And since equal sensibles variously appear equal and unequal (as has already been granted), equality would variously appear as equality and inequality. For a discussion of the options advanced, see Gallop (n. 5), 123–5.



different individuals: sensibles yield conflicting appearances.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it happens that x appears F to one person and not-F to another person. The prevalent interpretation of the passage rejects this reading. For now I shall pursue my reading without argument.

Now we have additional claims. The Form is different from sensibles in that it never yields conflicting appearances: *The equal itself invariably appears equal and sensible equals variably appear equal and unequal*. Such is the difference between the equal itself and sensible equals; the equal itself has a certain property that sensible equals do not have, namely that of invariably appearing equal. This difference is supposed to explain from where we know the equal itself, i.e. (on my reading) that it is equal. That such is the *explanandum* is clear both because Socrates is still answering the question asked in the previous passage (i.e. from where we know what the equal itself is), and because he presently says (in 74c7–9): Ἀλλὰ μὴν ἐκ τούτων γ', ἔφη, τῶν ἴσων, ἐτέρων ὄντων Ἀκείνου τοῦ ἴσου, ὅμως αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἐννεονόκας τε καὶ ἐλλήφας; ('it is definitely from these equal things [sensible equals], being distinct from the equal [itself], that you have nevertheless derived and grasped the knowledge of it [the equal itself]?') So: *We know that the equal itself is equal because, unlike sensible equals, it invariably appears equal*. In answer to the question asked in 74b4 (πόθεν λαβόντες αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην;), Plato claims the equal itself invariably appears equal. Plato has argued that the equal itself is different from sensible equals, explained in what way they are different, and that we know that the equal itself is equal.

There are two issues that call for an elucidation in this account. First, what sort of a claim is Plato making when he says that the equal itself never appears unequal, or as he later says, that we always experience (πάσχομεν 74d4) the equal itself as equal? Is he claiming that it is a necessary truth that the F itself appears as F? In *Protagoras* 330c2–e2 Socrates clearly implies that one cannot think of the F itself as being anything but F and exclaims (330d7–e1): Εὐφήμει, ὦ ἄνθρωπεῖ σχολῇ μεντᾶν τι ἄλλο ὅσιον εἶη, εἰ μὴ αὐτὴ γε ἡ ὁσιότης ὅσιον ἔσται. ('Quiet man! How could anything else be pious if piety itself is not?'). Nowhere is there any hesitation in affirming that the F itself is F. One is tempted to infer that the appearance of the F itself as F is invariable in that it is a self-evident truth that the F itself is F, 'a logical truth, in the Quinean sense', as Benson Mates put it.<sup>17</sup> Plato substantiates an adjective, which he then, as a matter of course, predicates of itself, thus both objectifying a property and hoisting the property on the object. Ross for one was unkindly disposed towards this procedure, and stated that 'the phrase "the x-itself" (αὐτὸ τό) ... treats the Idea of x as one x among others. The mistake occurs in its crudest form in *Prot.* 330c2–e2 ...',<sup>18</sup> the passage we were considering. In the *Phaedo* the invariable appearance of the F itself as F is not viewed as problematic.

The other question is this: How should one understand what I have called the *invariability* of an appearance? In the *Phaedo* passage (74c1–2), Plato's words are fairly general: αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα ἔστιν ὅτε ἀνισά σοι ἐφάνη, ἢ ἡ ἰσότης ἀνισότης; Οὐδεπώποτε γε, ὦ Σώκρατες. ('Is it ever the case that the equals themselves have

<sup>16</sup> See for instance White (n. 5), 202.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. B. Mates, 'Identity and predication in Plato', in S. Knuuttila and J. Hintikka (edd.), *The Logic of Being* (Dordrecht, 1986), 29–47 at 40: '... for any Greek such a sentence would be a logical truth, in the Quinean sense that (a) it is true, and (b) every result of substituting another adjective for its only non-logical constant is equally true. In short, such a sentence would be felt as obviously and trivially true'. Mates goes on to discuss critically the use Plato makes of this logical truth.

<sup>18</sup> D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), 88.

appeared to you unequal, or equality inequality? – Never, Socrates.’). It seems to me that the variability in question may be of various kinds. It may refer to circumstances in that, for example, a sensible *x* appears as *F* compared with *y* and as not-*F* compared with *z*, or it may appear *F* at time 1 and as not-*F* at time 2, while the *F* itself is not subject to such variability. Nevertheless, according to the interpretation adopted above, this passage of the *Phaedo* places weight on one kind of invariability: sensible things appear *F* to one person and not-*F* to another, while the *F* itself appears *F* to all. Perhaps this is only one way in which the invariable appearance of the *F* itself is contrasted with the variable appearance of sensibles; nothing seems to preclude the possibility of subsuming all cases of such invariability under this heading. In the *Phaedo* an object of ordinary experience displays its contrary features in a situation where it appears to different observers to have a contrary feature. To compare, consider Plato’s characterization of the beautiful itself in *Symposium* 210e–212e. There, Diotima offers an account of the ontological status of the beautiful: it is ungenerated, imperishable and immutable; it is in every way, at all times, in relation to all things, and everywhere beautiful, which it would not be (211a4–7) *ὥς τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ αἰσχροῦν οὐδ’ αὖ φαντασθήσεται αὐτῷ τὸ καλὸν οἶον πρόσωπόν τι οὐδὲ χεῖρες οὐδὲ ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὄν σῶμα μετέχει ...* (‘if it were beautiful for some and ugly for others. Nor will the beautiful appear to him [the person who gazes at the Form of beauty] as some face or hands or anything that partakes of a body ...’).<sup>19</sup> Here, sensibles are clearly described as being beautiful dependently on observers and circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

I have suggested that Plato’s argument is intelligible as a reply to the argument from conflicting appearances. Further, it has the merit of explaining why Plato considered the claim that the *F* itself is *F* so important for the theory of Forms. But, to generalize, on this reading he holds that, if anything invariably appears *F*, then we know that it is *F*.

This reading has not been adopted by other scholars. In fact, a reading along these lines is considered by many to saddle Plato with a poor argument, and should therefore be avoided. The only convincing way of avoiding a reading along the lines above is to claim that Plato simply is not discussing the conflict of appearances. Hence, arguments for a different reading are mainly negative. The negative arguments are the following.

<sup>19</sup> The verb ‘appear’ is here used in its non-veridical sense, since there is no other explanation of the dative *αὐτῷ*.

<sup>20</sup> N. White, ‘Plato’s metaphysical epistemology’, in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, 1992), 277–310 at 289–92, discusses the relationship of viewpoint and circumstances in Plato’s characterization of the beautiful itself in greater depth. In addition it should be mentioned that White (n. 5), 200, (above), 280–5, and Penner (n. 6) both accept, as I do, that Plato is discussing the conflicting appearances of sensibles versus the invariable appearances of Forms. White (n. 5), 207–8, discusses possible implications of *designating* the equal itself differently and addresses them. Penner has termed the inability to confuse the appearances of Forms and sensibles ‘an incorrigible conceptual state’, and the whole argument ‘argument from incorrigible conceptual states’ (n. 6), 20–1. According to Penner, the Forms, in this argument, are ‘either meanings or things very like meanings’ (p. 33). As opposed to sensible equals, when equality ‘appears to us in the appropriate way (i.e. in pure thought), it is utterly stable: it never appears to be inequality’ (p. 185); he argues for this interpretation at length at pp. 95–121.



## OBJECTIONS AND REPLY

In 74b8–9, Plato writes τῶ μὲν ἴσα φαίνεται, τῶ δ' οὐ. This might mean, not (i) 'appears equal to one [person] but not to another', indicating conflict of appearances, but (ii) 'appears equal [relative] to one [thing] but not to another'.<sup>21</sup> It is alleged that, if we opt for the first reading, the argument is intolerably bad. In an influential footnote in his book on Plato's *Republic*, N.R. Murphy may have been the first to claim that Plato *must* have meant (ii). For (i) 'would seem pointless, since we could infer only that one of the two had made a mistake'.<sup>22</sup> This observation has been made many times since.<sup>23</sup> Nothing of any epistemological significance follows the observation that appearances conflict, it is claimed.<sup>24</sup> Murphy's reading of the Greek phrase is grammatical, but foists a strange view on Plato, as those agree who would want to read it thus. Consider two points.<sup>25</sup>

First, on this reading Plato asks whether 'equal stones and sticks *sometimes*, being the same, appear equal to one [thing] but not to another?' (74b7–9). Why would sensible things only *sometimes* appear equal or unequal to other sensible things? Would they not *always* appear either equal or unequal to other sensible things?<sup>26</sup> Secondly, according to Murphy's reading the distinction between sensible equals and the equal itself is that sensible things are equal (or unequal) to some other sensible thing, while the equal itself is just equal and not equal to anything. In the light of these objections, Bostock states, 'It thus seems that [Murphy's] interpretation ... leads only to nonsense. But for all that, I believe that [Murphy's] interpretation ... *is* probably the right one, and Plato's doctrine *is* indeed very peculiar'.<sup>27</sup> So, were we to accept Murphy's suggestion, we get a peculiar argument instead of a pointless one.

But whatever the merits of the interpretation of Murphy and Bostock, it cannot be foisted on Plato unless another assumption is made. Here we arrive at a point of

<sup>21</sup> There are in fact two other possibilities, usually and fairly dismissed. The first is 'appears equal in one respect but not in another', and the latter is 'appears equal at one time but not at another'. The first of these hardly captures the Greek; cf. Gallop (n. 5), 122, Bostock (n. 5), 74. The second is supported by a variant reading, τότε ... τότε, but this temporal qualification has already been indicated by ἐνίοτε, and is thus redundant, as pointed out by Gallop (n. 5), 122.

<sup>22</sup> N.R. Murphy, *The Interpretation of Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1951), 111, n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> It was taken up and developed by G.E.L. Owen, 'A proof in the *Peri Ideon*', *JHS* 1 (1957), 103–11, reprinted in R.E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London, 1965), 293–312, and again by G. Vlastos, 'Degrees of reality in Plato', in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1981 [1973]), 58–75, first published in R. Bambrough (ed.), *New Essays in Plato and Aristotle* (New York, 1965), 1–19. For further discussions sympathetic to this view, see for example Bostock (n. 5), 73–8, Rowe (n. 3), 169, Loriaux (n. 2), 139–43, and A. Nehamas, 'Plato on the imperfection of the sensible world', in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Oxford, 1999), 171–91 at 188–90, first published in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1975), 105–17. Cf. also the detailed discussion of Gallop (n. 5), 121–5, and of K.W. Mills, 'Plato's Phaedo 74b7–c5', *Phronesis* 2 (1957), 128–47, and 'Plato's Phaedo 74b7–c5, part 2', *Phronesis* 3 (1958), 40–58.

<sup>24</sup> So, most clearly, M. Burnyeat, 'Conflicting appearances', *PBA* 65 (1979), 69–111.

<sup>25</sup> Discussed by Gallop (n. 5), 122–3, and White (n. 5), 200.

<sup>26</sup> One could reply, as David Sedley has pointed out to me, that a sensible thing can be viewed only in relation to something equal to it, or only in relation to something unequal to it. In that sense it sometimes appears equal and sometimes unequal, as is perhaps suggested by *Phd.* 102d–e and *Tht.* 154b–c.

<sup>27</sup> Bostock (n. 5), 75. Likewise, T. Irwin, 'The theory of Forms', in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Oxford, 1999), 143–70 at 153, says that taking the equal itself as not equal to anything 'might well appear a nonsensical conception of an equal thing'. Owen defends this line by appeal to Aristotle's criticism of Plato. C. Kirwan, 'Plato and relativity', *Phronesis* 19 (1974), 112–29 at 116–17, is highly critical of it.

grammar. In order to make Murphy's interpretation work it is crucial that one seize on another ambiguous Greek phrase, that involving the verb φαίνεσθαι. If this verb means 'appears to be', then Murphy's suggestion will not hold. For, first, as Murphy's defenders concede, if such is the meaning of the verb, the datives τῷ μὲν ... τῷ δ' are best taken with the verb.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, Murphy's suggestion demands that sensible things *be* equal to one thing and unequal to another. Plato is not talking about appearances. His point here is, on this reading, that the equal itself is equal, unlike sensibles that are equal and unequal; this is the desired distinction. And why would Plato claim that sensible equals *appear to be* equal to one thing and unequal to another thing, if his point really is that they *are* equal to one thing and unequal to another? So, if we want to follow Murphy, we have to understand the verb φαίνεσθαι differently, namely so as to mean, not 'appear to be', but 'evidently be'. And this is what most interpreters have done, so that such is now the orthodox interpretation of the passage.<sup>29</sup>

The verb in question is ambiguous; if veridical, it is usually followed by a complementary participle, and the meaning is 'evidently is ...', while if non-veridical, it is as a rule followed by an infinitive, meaning 'appear to be ...'. The problem is that, in the argument, it is not followed by either.<sup>30</sup> We must take the verb to be veridical, Murphy demands, for otherwise Plato is offering a poor argument. Those who would want to read the argument in the way presented in the previous section will therefore not only have to make a case in favour of the non-veridical reading, but also show that the argument is not 'pointless', at least not in the alleged way.<sup>31</sup> Consider now the veridical reading, upon which Murphy's interpretation rests; we shall see that it is incorrect because the non-veridical reading is favoured by Plato himself in a summary explanation of his argument.

First, though, consider Murphy's charge that 'appears to one person [to be] equal and to another person [to be] unequal' only shows that someone is wrong, and not what Plato would want it to show, namely that there is actually a distinction between the equal itself and sensible equals, and this distinction is that sensible equals are both

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bostock (n. 5), 73–4.

<sup>29</sup> It makes for a shorter list to name those who are squarely against this reading, the most conspicuous of whom are White (n. 5), 200, (n. 20), 280–5, and Penner (n. 6). It should be noted that there are those who accept the translation of the verb as 'appear to be' but still treat the datives as belonging to 'equal', so that the translation becomes 'appear to be equal to one thing and unequal to another' (see e.g. L. Franklin, 'Recollection and philosophical reflection in Plato's *Phaedo*', *Phronesis* 50/4 (2005), 289–314 at 304, following A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence: A Study of Plato's Metaphysics* (Princeton, 2002), 52, 321, n. 8. This way of reading the Greek is to my mind less appealing than the one adopted in the main text. The dative τῷ close to a non-veridical φαίνεσθαι would (I submit) naturally be taken to depend on it. At least one would need a good reason to interpret the dative otherwise. Nevertheless, even if one were to take the datives to mean 'to one thing ... to another', or even 'in one respect ... in another', that would only change the kind of variability in question, but not that it is a variability of *appearances*. And as suggested in the main text (p. 67), Plato may have conceived the variable appearance of sensibles (and the invariable appearance of Forms) widely enough to encompass different kinds of appearances.

<sup>30</sup> Some have looked to the *Republic* 476–80 in order to find either construction there, to no avail, except Irwin (n. 27), 154, who does find a veridical use of the verb in *Rep.* 479b6–7 and in *Hipp. Ma.* 289b5–7. But the uses of the verb are grammatically ambiguous there in the same way as in the *Phaedo*; there is neither an infinitive nor a participle. Irwin does not mention *Hipp. Ma.* 294c5–e4, where the infinitives are clearly to be found, as I shall discuss below.

<sup>31</sup> Both Penner and White have done so, although differently from me.

equal and unequal while the equal itself is just equal. Hence one should translate (ii) ‘appears equal [relative] to one [thing] but not to another’.<sup>32</sup>

No one doubts that Plato wants to make a distinction between sensible equals and the equal itself. And a distinction is made on both readings. On my reading the distinction is that sensibles variably appear equal and unequal, while the equal itself invariably appears equal. On Murphy’s reading the distinction is that sensible equals evidently are both equal and unequal, while the equal itself evidently is equal.<sup>33</sup> But the first reading has the virtue of being an informative answer to the question *from where we acquire knowledge* of the equal itself, what it is, i.e. by the equal itself invariably appearing equal. When sticks and stones appear to us to be equal (or unequal), we may be in error. When the equal itself appears to us to be equal, we cannot be in error. That is the important distinction: our cognitive relation to these appearances is different, how we *experience* Forms and sensibles. Knowledge is the issue *at this point*, not the ontological status of Forms and sensibles, because, as I claim, Plato is answering the question how we know that the equal itself is equal. Murphy said that, if we read the passage thus, it is ‘pointless, since we could infer only that one of the two had made a mistake.’ But this is all we need to infer.<sup>34</sup>

But such philosophical reasons for accepting my reading are unnecessary, for it has gone unacknowledged that, even if an infinitive does not occur in the passage containing the argument, and thus simply settles the dispute, it actually does occur a few lines below it, where Socrates summarizes his argument, and thus settles the dispute. Let us pick up the dialogue where we left off. In 74c7–d3, Socrates reiterates the point that sensibles remind one of the Forms. Then he adds (74d4–7):

Τί δέ; ἡ δ’ ὅς· ἡ πάσχομέν τι τοιοῦτον περὶ τὰ ἐν τοῖς ξύλοις τε καὶ οἷς νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν τοῖς ἴσοις; ἄρα φαίνεται ἡμῖν οὕτως ἴσα εἶναι ὥσπερ αὐτὸ τὸ ὅ ἔστω, ἡ ἐνδεῖ τι ἐκείνου τῷ τοιοῦτον εἶναι οἷον τὸ ἴσον, ἡ οὐδέν;

Well then, he said. Do we experience something like this [the following]<sup>35</sup> in the case of equal sticks and the other equal objects we just mentioned? Do they [sensible equals] appear to us *to be* equal in the same way as the equal itself,<sup>36</sup> or is there some deficiency in their [the sensible equals] being such as the equal, or is there not?

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Bostock (n. 5), 73 and Rowe (n. 3).

<sup>33</sup> It is reasonable to read this view into the argument, because, apart from the fact that other passages and works indicate that Plato did indeed hold it, Plato implies as much in the present argument when he states that the equal itself actually is equal in a different way from sensible equals. But at the same time this reading obscures the immediate context of this particular argument, i.e. Socrates’ attempt to answer the question from where we acquire the knowledge that the equal itself is equal. The reading makes Socrates claim that we know that the equal itself is equal because we realize that the equal itself evidently is equal while sensible equals are not. This argument is not interesting, because it does not attempt to answer the question from where we know that p except by asserting that we know that p because it is true that p. What we would expect Socrates to offer is a linkage between our knowledge that the equal itself is equal and the fact that the equal itself is equal. And if he is talking about appearances, we do get this linkage; the invariability of appearances guarantees knowledge.

<sup>34</sup> Further, understanding the verb veridically is semantically strange, for in 74b8 the verb is apparently contrasted with the phrase *τὰ αὐτὰ ὄντα* (‘being the same’), so that the intended contrast would seem to be between how things are and how they appear to be, and not how they are and how they evidently are. White (n. 5), 201, has more to say on this issue.

<sup>35</sup> Socrates is probably referring forwards, as J. Burnett, *Plato’s Phaedo* (Oxford, 1911), 57, thinks and others who express a view on this. But even if Plato is referring backwards, to the process of recollection, my point is unaffected.

<sup>36</sup> The phrase *αὐτὸ τὸ ὅ ἔστω* may be rendered ‘what it is itself’ or ‘that which is, itself’, but in both cases one is left to supply ‘equal’, so that the reference is to the equal itself. Cf. Gallop (n. 5), 229, n. 24.

Socrates draws together the foregoing argument in order to explain in what way sensible things are inferior to Forms. The question Socrates has in mind is whether we experience sensibles as we experience the equal itself: do sensible equals appear to us invariably to be equal just like the equal itself? He asks quite clearly, and he uses the infinitive, whether this is our experience. He does not ask whether sensible equals evidently are equal just like the equal itself. Nor does he ask whether sensible equals *appear* to us to be equal just like the equal itself *is* equal. This is not surprising, for Socrates is asking about our *experience* of these things, not about how things are. The difference between the equal itself and sensible equals is manifested in the way we experience them.

Plato's use of the infinitive is quite clear; it is clear that he has appearances in mind in 74b7–c6. It might be objected that Socrates is not talking about the same thing here as in the original statement of the argument. For here he might just be asking whether there appeared to us to be a distinction between sensible equals and the equal itself.<sup>37</sup> But this objection will not do, for he actually spells out what the difference consists in. What he says is this: sensible equals do not appear to us to be equal in the same way as the equal itself appears to us to be equal, and *in this way* our experience of the two kinds of things is different. Then Socrates finishes his question:

... ἢ ἐνδεῖ τι ἐκείνου τῷ τοιοῦτον εἶναι οἶον τὸ ἴσον, ἢ οὐδέν; Καὶ πολὺ γὰρ, ἔφη, ἐνδεῖ.

... or is there some deficiency in their [the sensible equals] being such as the equal, or is there not? – A considerable deficiency, he [Simmias] said.

It should be clear what the sensible equals lack. They lack invariably appearing to be equal. Such is the imperfection of the sensible world; *it lacks epistemic consistency*.<sup>38</sup>

Plato has set down the necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge of what is equal: a thing must invariably appear equal. The only thing that fulfils this condition is a Form, the 'it itself'; the only thing that invariably appears to be equal is the equal itself, equality. And this holds good for other 'themselves', like (75c11–d2) καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ὁσίου καί, ὅπερ λέγω, περὶ ἀπάντων οἷς ἐπισφραγιζόμεθα τὸ 'αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι' ('the beautiful itself, the good itself, the just, the pious and, as I say, about all those things to which we can attach the word 'itself' ...').<sup>39</sup>

Sensibles, unlike Forms, suffer conflicting appearances; this is their deficiency. Since the invariability of Forms' appearances grounds our knowledge of Forms, does not the variability of sensibles' appearances imply that we cannot have knowledge of them, or at least not the same kind of knowledge? When explaining recollection (in 73c4–d1), Plato does mention *knowledge* of sensible things. But having introduced Forms with the argument of 74a9–c6, however, he contrasts the *knowledge* of Forms, which we are born with and recollect, with the *perception* of sensibles, which prompts the recollection (74e9–75e7). It is the Forms that are the objects of knowledge, and

<sup>37</sup> Such seems to be the understanding of Mills (n. 23), 132.

<sup>38</sup> Plato makes his argument no easier to read when he flanks his question about the difference between the appearances of Forms and sensibles with the question 'does it not appear to you different', and with 'they do not appear the same to me'. Here, undisputedly as far as I can see, Plato uses the verb 'appear' non-veridically, although there is no infinitive in sight.

<sup>39</sup> The invariability of appearances as a condition for knowledge is not confined to Plato. It seems to be most conspicuously used in the Pyrrhonian tradition; see R. Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents and His Legacy* (Oxford, 2000) and S.H. Svavarsson, 'Pyrrho's undecidable nature', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004), 249–95.

sensibles are pointers (75e5–6): ἀρ' οὐχ ὁ καλοῦμεν μανθάνειν οἰκείαν ἂν ἐπιστήμην ἀναλαμβάνειν εἶη; ('would not what we call learning be recovering our own knowledge?'). If this is correct, the implication of the argument is: we do not have *knowledge* about what sensible things are (equal or unequal), because sensible equals do not invariably appear equal. This implication of the epistemic status of sensibles, as opposed to that of the Forms, is only implicit in the *Phaedo*. It is explicit in the *Hippias major*, to which I now turn.<sup>40</sup>

Socrates and Hippias look for the definition of beauty or the beautiful itself. Having given up on Hippias' suggestions, Socrates suggests that the beautiful itself is the appropriate. Socrates now asks Hippias (293e11–294a2):

Ὅρα τοῖνυν τὸ πρέπον ἄρα τοῦτο λέγομεν, ὃ παραγενόμενον ποιεῖ ἕκαστα φαίνεσθαι καλὰ τούτων οἷς ἂν παρή, ἢ ὃ εἶναι ποιεῖ, ἢ οὐδέτερα τούτων;

See here, then. What do we say about the appropriate: Is it what makes – by coming to be present – each thing to which it is present *appear* beautiful, or *be* beautiful, or neither?

Hippias gets into trouble. First he chooses the first option: the appropriate is that which makes things appear beautiful. But Socrates rejects this, since he is looking for what makes things be beautiful. So Hippias suggests (294c3–e4):

[III.] Ἀλλὰ τὸ πρέπον, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ εἶναι καὶ φαίνεσθαι ποιεῖ καλὰ παρόν. [ΣΩ.] Ἀδύνατον ἄρα τῷ ὄντι καλὰ ὄντα μὴ φαίνεσθαι καλὰ εἶναι, παρόντος γε τοῦ ποιούντος φαίνεσθαι; [III.] Ἀδύνατον. [ΣΩ.] Ὁμολογήσομεν οὖν τοῦτο, ὦ Ἰππία, πάντα τὰ τῷ ὄντι καλὰ καὶ νόμιμα καὶ ἐπιτηδεύματα καὶ δοξάζεσθαι καλὰ εἶναι καὶ φαίνεσθαι αἰεὶ πᾶσιν, ἢ πᾶν τοῦναντίον ἀγνοεῖσθαι καὶ πάντων μάλιστα ἔριν καὶ μάχην περὶ αὐτῶν εἶναι καὶ ἰδία ἑκάστοις καὶ δημοσίᾳ ταῖς πόλεσιν; [III.] Οὕτω μᾶλλον, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀγνοεῖσθαι. [ΣΩ.] Οὐκ ἂν, εἴ γέ που τὸ φαίνεσθαι αὐτοῖς προσήνι προσήν δ' ἂν, εἴπερ τὸ πρέπον καλὸν ἦν καὶ μὴ μόνον καλὰ ἐποίει εἶναι ἀλλὰ καὶ φαίνεσθαι. ὥστε τὸ πρέπον, εἰ μὲν τὸ καλὰ ποιοῦν ἐστὶν εἶναι, τὸ μὲν καλὸν ἂν εἶη, ὃ ἡμεῖς ζητοῦμεν, οὐ μέντοι τό γε ποιοῦν φαίνεσθαι εἰ δ' αὖ τὸ φαίνεσθαι ποιοῦν ἐστὶν τὸ πρέπον, οὐκ ἂν εἶη τὸ καλόν, ὃ ἡμεῖς ζητοῦμεν. εἶναι γὰρ ἐκεῖνό γε ποιεῖ, φαίνεσθαι δὲ καὶ [ποιεῖν] εἶναι οὐ μόνον καλὰ οὐκ ἂν ποτε δύνατο τὸ αὐτό, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἄλλο ὅτιοῦν.

But Socrates, the appropriate makes things both be beautiful and appear beautiful, when it is present. – [Socrates:] It is then impossible for things that are really beautiful *not to appear to be beautiful*, since what makes them appear so is present? – [Hippias:] Impossible. – [Socrates:] Then shall we agree to this, Hippias: that everything that is really beautiful (customs and activities) both *seems and appears to be beautiful always to all*? Or just the opposite: that they are *unknown*, and there is more strife and contention about them than about anything else, both in private between individuals and in public between states? – [Hippias:] More the latter, Socrates: they are *unknown*. – [Socrates:] They would not be so, if *the appearance of beauty* had been added to them. And that would have been added if the appropriate were beautiful and made things not only be beautiful but also to appear beautiful. So that the appropriate, if it is that which makes things be beautiful, would be the beautiful which we are looking for, but would not be that which makes things appear beautiful. Or, if the appropriate is that which makes things appear beautiful, it would not be the beautiful for which we are looking. For that makes things be beautiful, but by itself it could not make things both appear and be beautiful, nor could anything else.

This passage can be used to elucidate Plato's idea of the equal itself in the *Phaedo* passage. First, his use of the verb *φαίνεσθαι* is non-veridical, as the occurrence of the complementary infinitive confirms.<sup>41</sup> Secondly, people disagree about what is

<sup>40</sup> Surely an authentic dialogue; see P. Woodruff, *Plato: Hippias Major* (Oxford, 1982), 93–103.

<sup>41</sup> Woodruff (n. 40), 65, and Irwin (n. 27), 154, think otherwise

beautiful, and this is equivalent with things appearing beautiful to some and not to others. Thirdly, this disagreement shows that it is unknown what things are beautiful. But it would not be unknown *if the things always appeared beautiful*. It follows that, if a thing invariably appears beautiful, it is known that it is beautiful. This is the idea we found in the *Phaedo* argument.

Forms and sensibles have a different epistemic status: Plato claims, according to the above interpretation, that we know the Forms because they invariably appear in the same way, but we do not know sensibles because they yield conflicting appearances; Forms are knowable, while sensibles are not knowable. This distinction is epistemic and not ontological. In light of this interpretation of the *Phaedo* and *Hippias* passages I have a suggestion to make regarding a reading of a central passage in the *Republic*, where the epistemic difference between Forms and sensibles takes centre stage. In 476a9–480a13 Socrates attempts to persuade the lovers of sights that Forms exist, having distinguished between these people and true philosophers who do believe that there are Forms such as the beautiful itself distinct from sensibles. The sight-lovers, he says, opine and have opinion, while philosophers know and have knowledge. He then declares his conception of reality (477a3–4): τὸ μὲν παντελῶς ὄν παντελῶς γνωστόν, μὴ ὄν δὲ μηδαμῇ πάντῃ ἄγνωστον ('what is completely [F] is completely knowable [as F] and what is in no way [F] is completely unknowable [as F]').<sup>42</sup> The importance of knowability is complete; what is knowable is coextensive with what is real.<sup>43</sup>

Socrates ponders how he could convince the lover of sights, the nominalist, who does not believe that the beautiful itself is anything, but only that there are many beautiful things (479a5–b7). He again uses the verb φαίνεσθαι, here without infinitive or participle, leaving it grammatically unclear whether the verb is used veridically or not (which he did neither in the *Phaedo*, the *Hippias* nor the *Symposium*):

“Τούτων γὰρ δὴ, ὦ ἄριστε, φήσομεν, τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν μὴν τι ἔστιν ὃ οὐκ αἰσχροὺν φανήσεται; καὶ τῶν δικαίων, ὃ οὐκ ἄδικον; καὶ τῶν ὁσίων, ὃ οὐκ ἀνόσιον;” Οὐκ, ἀλλ’ ἀνάγκη, ἔφη, καὶ καλὰ πῶς αὐτὰ καὶ αἰσχροὶ φανῆναι, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐρωτᾷς. Τί δὲ τὰ πολλὰ διπλάσια; ἡττόν τι ἡμίσεα ἢ διπλάσια φαίνεται; Οὐδέν.

My dear fellow, we'll say, of all the many beautiful things, is there one that will not also appear ugly? Or is there one of those just things that will not also appear unjust? Or is there one of those pious things that will not also appear impious? – [Glaucón:] There isn't one, for it is necessary that they appear beautiful in a way and also ugly, and the same with the other things you asked about. – [Socrates:] What about the many doubles? Do they appear any the less halves than doubles? – [Glaucón:] Not one.

This φαίνεσθαι has been taken to be veridical. The reason is the same as in the case of the *Phaedo* passage: if it is used non-veridically, nothing can be inferred about the ontological status of sensibles. Nevertheless a non-veridical reading is grammatical and, as I will suggest, may be used to make an inference about the ontological status of sensibles. If read non-veridically, Plato says that the many beautiful things variously appear beautiful and ugly. Let us pursue this reading. In light of this epistemic

<sup>42</sup> For the legitimacy of inserting F, see Vlastos (n. 23), 62–3.

<sup>43</sup> Socrates explains the notion of opinion, how it differs from knowledge and ignorance (477a6–78e6). The cognitive faculties that are set over the knowable and unknowable are, respectively, knowledge and ignorance. It is not an innocent move to generalize the connection between these cognitive faculties and their assumed objects (cf. J. Hintikka, 'Knowledge and its objects in Plato', in J.M.E. Moravcsik (ed.), *Patterns in Plato's Thought* (Dordrecht, 1973), 1–30 at 9.



feature of the many beautiful things, Socrates asks about their ontological status: is *x* then any more *F* than not-*F*? (479b9–10). He gets his answer in epistemic terms (479b11–c5):

*Τοῖς ἐν ταῖς ἐστιάσεσιν, ἔφη, ἐπαμφοτερίζουσιν ἔοικεν... καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα ἐπαμφοτερίζειν, καὶ οὐτ' εἶναι οὔτε μὴ εἶναι οὐδὲν αὐτῶν δυνατόν παγίως νοῆσαι, οὔτε ἀμφότερα οὔτε οὐδέτερον.*

They are like the ambiguities one is entertained with at dinner parties ... for they are ambiguous, and one cannot understand them as fixedly being [*F*] or fixedly not being [*F*], or as both [*F* and not-*F*] or as neither [*F* nor not-*F*].

If we adopt the non-veridical reading, Plato claims that, *since* sensibles variously appear *F* and not-*F*, *they cannot be understood* as being either *F* or not-*F*. We recall the *Republic*'s claim, that the real is knowable and the unreal is not knowable: if something is not knowable as *F*, it is not really *F*. The opinable is not knowable, for it is impossible to understand it as exclusively *F* or as exclusively not-*F*. If *φαίνεσθαι* is read non-veridically, we are afforded a reason why the opinable is not knowable: it variously appears *F* and not-*F*. From our cognitive relationship with objects, on this reading, Socrates infers a truth about the objects' ontological status. The epistemic inadequacy of the opinable shows its ambivalent ontology. Grammar does not demand a non-veridical reading of *φαίνεσθαι* in this passage. But if Plato uses the verb non-veridically in the passages of the *Phaedo*, the *Hippias* and the *Symposium*, in the context of showing the significance of the conflict of appearances, such a reading of the verb in the *Republic* passage seems to be reasonable.<sup>44</sup>

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