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Philosophy by the Pint

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Philosophy by the Pint

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

Raised in an Irish Catholic household, I am tempted to claim that my love for Guinness was inevitable. I remember, as well as still experience, frequenting one of the two local pubs in which there was guaranteed to be a familiar and friendly face always smiling and often laughing, glad to be a witness to your walking through the door, ready to forget about the day's failures and successes and ready to reach some semblance of calm that was not achievable through any other medium.

It was never my intention to begin drinking Guinness or any alcohol. From a young age, I promised myself that I would never touch the stuff that made individuals slightly more stupid than they already were. There were other activities that could clear one's mind, foster community, and create fun without having to spend a paycheck's worth in one night and without having to alter one's state of mind, which creates a brief illusion of happiness filled with boorish laughter and wonder at the simplest of events. In the mind of a child, the problem with adults and their solution to it was simple: they lived the entirety of their lives working jobs they resented. The solution was to seek refuge in the bar and in the bottle where a phantasmagoria was created for a few hours a night.

But like a critic who listens to an album and judges the music without having created music themselves, I had judged the role of alcohol as a frivolous escape for sorrowful adults who sacrificed taste for happiness. However, my thoughts changed when one night my family and I went to one of the pubs and my brother ordered a Guinness. I nervously asked him for a sip. As I took that sip, I felt a rush of milk and coffee and barley and wheat and it was a surprise to find that something that I had sworn off of before ever having experienced it could taste creamy and bitter

and smooth and relaxing. Although I have tried many others since, I have not loved another beer the way I love a pint of Guinness.

Perhaps not strangely, my love for Guinness rivals my love for philosophy. Raised as a Catholic, I took my faith seriously. Ideas such as the Trinity, Jesus' resurrection, miracles, parables, and the Apostles were introduced at a young age and have not left. Those romantic images of one individual sacrificing himself to save you from eternal damnation and being baptized while the sky opens and the dove flies overhead are difficult to drive out of the imagination. They offer a complete, objective, and perfect view of the world that refuses to be disrupted. As a child, I was pleased with this structure of the world and threw myself into those beliefs.

As a sophomore in high school, I held beliefs rooted in Catholicism that were not yet scrutinized, and at the time my literature class began to read Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, works that I found to be closely compatible with Catholicism. Whether it was the explication of why one should never break a just or unjust law or the theory of the Forms, Plato's arguments and conclusions sat comfortably within the framework of Catholicism, which I took to be a form of essentialism, or deriving rules from a higher reason or deity and applying them to every particular circumstance without exception. It was this philosophical framework in which I thought through up until recently.

I could continue to map out the trajectory of my through, but I hope to accomplish something of that sort throughout this work. More than before, I am beginning to realize that each of these chapters represent a period of my life where I subscribed to the doctrine that each philosopher put forward. Although I no longer subscribe to the tenants of Platonism, I still feel a

yearning for it to be true for if it were, the mental perturbations would cease and an irrefutable system would be put into place. It is a selfish desire, and one that would put my mind at rest.

This project, however, could not have come to fruition had it not been for the drastically different flavors of Guinness found not just in Ireland and America, but within Ireland itself. From the Ring of Kerry to the St. James' Gate Brewery, each pint had its own unique sweet and savory taste. All had the taste of Guinness, but all did not have the same taste. This was not a problem requiring an immediate solution. However, this topic on the effects of geographical differences on the taste of Guinness could be considered a pressing philosophical problem.

Upon landing in Dublin with my siblings, we were met by our chauffeur, a friendly and mild-mannered man from Kerry named Jack. Less than an hour in, while we were riding down the highway, Jack went around the car and took a keen interest in what we did for a living. I replied I was studying philosophy and was quick to add that Irish philosophers were almost non-existent, to which Jack replied in a dry tone, "Well then, you haven't hung around the pub late at night. There are plenty of men here who philosophize."

And he was not wrong. There seems to be a great amount of nuance in any given object whether or not one is willing to dedicate the amount of time that is necessary to adequately examine the seemingly endless amount of directions one small and quiet thought can take.

So it was the case with that first sip of Guinness in that glass room atop St. James' Gate Brewery overlooking Dublin. I knew from that first sip that I had never tasted a pint so creamy and milky and divine, and I knew I would never taste something like it again. If such a thing as a perfect pint of Guinness were to exist, a Platonic Form made sensible, then it would be found atop that brewery. Then my mind began to whirl since this was not as crazy a thought as ones I have

had before, and so my idea of placing a pint of Guinness in front of different philosophers and having them describe how we begin to know it came about.

This project integrates my love for Guinness and philosophy. Using a pint of Guinness as my foundation, I will examine how Plato, Aristotle, and Ludwig Wittgenstein would describe it in regards to epistemology. How does it relate to its more general class, namely beer? Can Guinness taste different in different countries and still bear the same name? Is there such a thing as the perfect pint of Guinness? Moving through Platonic idealism, Aristotelian essentialism, and Wittgenstein's method, I will claim that Wittgenstein has the most comprehensive view of how a pint of Guinness can be described and known. I hope you enjoy this work, and I recommend a new pint for each chapter.

Chapter I: Plato

Introduction

As time passes, our ideas and knowledge advance and grow. It may appear that our new notions are more accurate than the old. Science has found a method to answer almost any question and academic departments have become rooted in new ideas since ancient philosophy. As a result, one is able to make a judgment on the worth of a work based on the period in which it was written. Now that these other disciplines have developed, it may appear that the wisdom of old is no more use. It was rather a stepping stone that guided us toward what we currently know.

Whether or not his views can still be considered seriously, Plato's philosophy has left an indelible mark on the history of human thought. First, Plato was an influential thinker who put forward a view of how the world works and how humans obtain knowledge of it, but he also scrutinized, questioned, and interrogated various other views that individuals held and held against him. His ideas cover a wide array of topics, but they are comprehensive and categorical. When one uses the word "Platonic" to describe a view another holds, that word carries significant connotations. Whether it be banishing all artists, always following the rule prescribed by a city, or the theory of the Forms, Platonic ideas are found in most strains of thought. Endless contrasts could be made between Platonism and Christianity, but there are also similarities between the two. The notion of the tripartite soul and an absolute moral code can harken to images of Christian theology. Critical and interpretive questions surrounding Plato's philosophy are still debated between those who dedicate their lives to philosophy, but Platonic views can be held by those in government, education, and in the neighborhood pub. Because Platonic ideas are still held by individuals throughout various fields, it is necessary that one is able to tolerate and to think critically through the questions Plato raises since those questions and have never dissipated.

Second, posterity can be viewed as responding to the questions raised by Plato. This is not to claim that all philosophers or philosophical problems are directly addressing or consciously interacting with the issues that Plato addresses throughout his work. Although philosophy has developed and taken new perspectives on ancient problems, those developments may be seen as a long thread connecting Plato and his concerns with the current state of philosophy. This thread, however, cannot be seen as the same strand connecting all philosophers. Rather there are various strands of different colored thread all tied at different points with some being longer than others and some being thicker. These various strands are distinct, and one would be able to choose any particular strand and adequately describe its color, width, and length as if it were on its own, unbounded and untied and free from any prohibitions. While able to describe this strand as if it were in isolation, however, one cannot ignore the bright colors and various lengths of the others surrounding it. This strand would then be placed within its context, compared and contrasted with the rest of its environment, able to stand alone and yet forced to partake in a greater community.

It is in this way that philosophers following Plato will be scrutinized and interrogated for their arguments and conclusions. It is possible for one to read a work and treat it on its own terms. Each philosopher has a unique style, some more meticulous than others, and their arguments and conclusions can be taken on their own without reference to other works. Their work, however, is simultaneously placed within a tradition that has been practiced for centuries, and it is unreasonable to believe that one's work will not be compared and challenged by others participating in that same tradition. As a result, one lense in which Plato can be viewed is as a catalyst who was the first prominent philosopher to raise a plethora of problems that are still currently debated in the prominent fields of metaphysics, aesthetics, and epistemology. Whether it be Aristotle or Wittgenstein, most philosophers since Plato have grappled with, and have

seemingly failed to solve, the problems raised by Plato. Since his questions continue to permeate many aspects of our lives and his thought was a catalyst for later thinkers, it is imperative that Plato continues to be considered and discussed as a philosopher whose ideas still affect individual's views. His ideas deserve our attention and scrutiny.

Throughout this chapter, we will focus our attention on Plato's views as addressed in the last Socratic dialogue, *Phaedo*. There will be special attention given to Plato's arguments for his theory of the Forms. First we will examine Plato's view of the role that philosophy plays in an individual's life. Following that, we will recount two arguments given in favor for the existence of an immortal soul, namely those from the opposites and recollection. Finally, we will consider the arguments that Plato gives for the Forms and how those arguments can affect our perception of our pint of Guinness.

The Role of Philosophy for Plato

When the *Phaedo* begins, Socrates is waiting for the ship to return from Delos in order that he may be able to drink the hemlock. In the meantime he is surrounded by his interlocutors and the conversation naturally turns to death, what awaits individuals after death, and the purpose of philosophy. Socrates does not fear death since there is "good hope that some future awaits men after death, as we have been told for years, a much better future for the good than for the wicked."¹ Death is nothing to cower from since it has been tradition to believe that the good shall be rewarded after it while the evil shall be punished. If this is the case, then why should one be invested in pursuing philosophy? Tradition alone should be able to cure such a fear.

¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2002), 63c.

Plato claims that any individual who pursues philosophy ought to be of good cheer when confronted by death. People do not realize that “the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death.”² The practice of philosophy is a preparation for the separation of life and death, coming to the realization of what that separation is, and nurturing that distinction so that death, and what succeeds it, is not daunting. Living one’s life in order to prepare for death allows one to value death as a thing greater than life.

The role of philosophy for Plato is that it helps one to understand what death is and how to conquer the fear of it. But what exactly is death? Socrates and his interlocutors agree that death is merely that “the body comes to be separated by itself apart from the soul, and the soul comes to be separated by itself apart from the body”.³ The dichotomy between the body and the soul, or the material and the immaterial, has been created and agreed upon. With this communally agreed upon definition of death and the two aspects of living, namely that of the material and immaterial, Plato quickly dismisses the view that the body and other material possessions have any inherent value. The true philosopher despises the “acquisition of distinguished clothes and shoes and the other bodily ornaments”,⁴ and those things required for bodily nourishment, namely food and drink. The philosopher will only partake in these physical pleasures as much as it is required to nourish and maintain the body. The purpose of philosophy is to turn away from the sensations of the body and to turn toward the reasoning found in the soul. The soul is able to reason best when

² Ibid., 64a.

³ Ibid., 64c.

⁴ Ibid., 64d.

“none of these senses troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor pleasure, but when it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality”.⁵

The separation between the body and the soul is made definite. Although the body and the soul must interact with one another since the soul is trapped within a body that is required to use its senses and be nourished, the soul must continually strive to separate itself from the sensible influence of the body so that it can reason clearly and distinctly. It is clear that the body is unable to acquire any truth or wisdom for these things are immaterial. The immateriality of truth and wisdom must be acquired by the immateriality of the soul and not by the materiality of the body.

Plato’s philosophical program begins with the claim that philosophy’s aim is to help one understand and accept that death is nothing to be feared for it is just the separation between the body and the soul. This separation should be accepted and not feared since the body is bounded to the senses and to material desires while the soul is immaterial and is able to gain access to truth and wisdom. The body can never gain access to the immateriality of truth and wisdom because it is material and susceptible to experiencing pain and pleasure alongside other physical sensations. Death is the separation of the body and the soul. Therefore, the soul will continue to exist and will be able to gain what it desires, namely truth and wisdom, while the body will degrade. Philosophy is the preparation for death through the practice of separating one’s soulful desires from one’s bodily desires and attempting to prepare the soul for the truth and wisdom to be encountered after death.

Such an assertion does not bode well for our pint of Guinness. Plato, in his dismissal of the excess of material desires, prohibits all unnecessary bodily pleasures. To maintain a human body

⁵ Ibid., 65c.

one needs water for hydration and food for vitamins, proteins, and other nutrients. Any kind of alcoholic beverage would be prohibited since it offers no nutritional value to the body, only bodily pleasure. Plato's claim, however, is more ethical than epistemological since it describes what a philosopher ought to do to prepare for the next life and not how one can begin to observe, describe, and know a pint of Guinness. It is only known that if philosophy is to be taken seriously, then one ought to exclude all excess bodily pleasures. We will investigate in the following section how Plato justifies his claim that the immaterial soul is simultaneously immortal, for this begins his argument for the Forms.

Argument from Opposites

In the previous section the division between the body and the soul, or the material and the immaterial, was introduced. Plato raises this distinction because while the body is deterred by the senses, the soul reaches beyond experience, which is in constant fluctuation, to grasp truth and knowledge, which are immaterial. This distinction naturally leads to another distinction that Plato makes, namely that of appearance and reality. To draw out this distinction Plato writes of brave warriors who run into battle ready to forfeit their lives in order for a greater virtue, perhaps their country or family. It seems as though these individuals are fearless in the face of death. However, "fear and terror that make all men brave, except the philosophers. Yet it is illogical to be brave through fear and cowardice."⁶ Warriors are motivated by their fear of fates worse than death, and that is why it appears as though they are fearless of death, but they are merely trading one fear for another.

It is the same fear that controls those who are moderate in their pleasure seeking. Those who are moderate are simply sacrificing one pleasure for another since they

⁶ Ibid., 68d.

“fear to be deprived of other pleasures which they desire, so they keep away from some pleasures because they are overcome by others. Now to be mastered by pleasure is what they call licentiousness, but what happens to them is that they master certain pleasures because they are mastered by others.”⁷

Those who are moderate are afraid to give up certain pleasures that they know and love, and instead of being moderate they decide what pleasures are more worthwhile partaking in than others. Unlike the philosopher who realizes and seeks to further understand the necessary conscious action of separating the soul from the body, others merely trade one sensation for another in the name of virtue and wisdom without realizing that they are chasing an illusion. Such an exchanging of these various pains and pleasures without wisdom is an “illusory appearance of virtue; it is in fact fit for slaves, without soundness or truth, whereas, in truth, moderation and courage and justice are a purging away of all such things”.⁸ The individual who attempts to find virtue by exchanging certain pains and pleasures for others will not find it. Virtue, wisdom, moderation, courage, and justice are not connected to bodily sensations but are rather immaterial. To find such attributes one must be willing to minimize and deny any superfluous bodily ornaments. Only through that realization and development can true virtue be achieved.

If one accepts that truth and wisdom are immaterial and eternal and can only be achieved through the immaterial soul, then there must be a sufficient proof that the soul itself is eternal for it has already been proven that it is immaterial. So far there is just as much reason to believe that the soul ceases to exist after the body dies. First, Plato again appeals to tradition and recalls the often heard theory that souls return to the underworld after their respective body dies and then

⁷ Ibid., 68e.

⁸ Ibid., 69b.

travel back to a new body from the underworld. If it is true that the “living come back from the dead, then surely our souls must exist there, for they could not come back if they did not exist”.⁹ By beginning with the premise of a commonly told theory in his community, Plato is now prepared to offer his argument from opposites.

The argument from opposites follows a simple formula. Plato lists a quality that a sensible object may have and lists its corresponding opposite. Following this formula, it is easy to understand that “when something comes to be larger it must necessarily become larger from having been smaller before”,¹⁰ and that if something smaller exists then it necessarily comes from something having been larger before. Plato continues to exhaust attributes and their opposites, including the weaker coming from the stronger, the swifter from the slower, and the just from the unjust, and so it is in this way that all things come from their opposites. There is also the process from going to one from the other and then going back to the other again. There can be no intermediary points between the two opposites, and so Guinness is either hot or cold, big or small, and so on. These extreme attributes give rise to one another, and objects can only take on one or the other.

With this model in place, it is not difficult to prove that living gives rise to death and that death gives rise to living. Just as “sleeping is the opposite of being awake”,¹¹ the opposite of living is being dead. If opposites give rise to one another and living is the opposite of being dead, then “living creatures and things come to be from the dead”.¹² It is a sufficient proof that souls exist in the underworld beyond their bodily prisons. It is agreed upon between Socrates and his

⁹ Ibid., 70d.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70e.

¹¹ Ibid., 71c.

¹² Ibid., 71d.

interlocutors that the “living come from the dead in this way no less than the dead from the living, and, if that is so, it seems to be a sufficient proof that the souls of the dead must be somewhere whence they can come back again.”¹³ Souls are proven to be immaterial and eternal for if they were not, then it would be impossible for new life to inhabit earth. It would be as if one fell asleep and were never to awake again. Such an event would stop the process of life, but those who sleep do awake again. Those souls that part from their bodies travel to the underworld and return to inhabit a new body so that the cyclical process of living and being dead never ceases. If the soul were never to return then everything that is now living would eventually die and there would be nothing living, but there will always be something living since living comes to be through death. Coming to life again is necessary since the living come from the dead. This is possible because souls exist after their departure from the body.

Argument from Recollection

It has been claimed that the soul is immaterial and eternal. The argument from opposites has laid the groundwork to begin describing and scrutinizing Plato’s view of epistemology, and this begins for us at the argument from recollection.

The argument from recollection ties in with the argument from opposites. If the soul is constantly travelling between physical bodies and the underworld then the soul contains knowledge that it has received before combining with a physical body. Learning in this case would be nothing but “recollection. According to this, we must at some previous time have learned what we now recollect. This is possible only if our soul existed somewhere before it took on this human shape.”¹⁴ Learning could then be described as slowly remembering what one once knew before

¹³ Ibid., 72a.

¹⁴ Ibid., 72e.

taking on a human form. It is a reacquisition of something lost. Knowledge is eternally present and is waiting to be rediscovered by the soul that once knew it so intimately like a lover whenever they see a “lyre, a garment, or anything else that their beloved is accustomed to use, they know the lyre, and the image of the boy to whom it belongs comes into their mind.”¹⁵ Using this metaphor of lovers who connect certain objects and garments to their beloved, Plato equates the soul and knowledge as lovers who are currently separated. The soul, trapped within the cage of impure bodily desires, constantly seeks to be reunited with knowledge.

The soul is able to glimpse its lost knowledge whenever sensible objects aid it in recalling the knowledge learned in the underworld. Plato presents the example of objects being equal to one another. When things are equal he does not mean a “stick equal to a stick or a stone to a stone, or anything of that kind, but something else beyond all these, the Equal itself”,¹⁶ a veiled reference to the unexplained Forms. The “Equal”, however, can be understood as a category that unites all particular instances of two or more objects being equal that was comprehended by the soul before combining with the body. Although two objects may appear to be the same to one individual, to another individual those objects may appear to be dissimilar. The body and its senses are not an objective measure of judgement making. It is not the objects that are at fault when two different judgments are made but rather human perception.

When one views two objects as equal, another could see them as unequal, but there is always a distinction to be made between Equality and Inequality. These two concepts are distinct from one another and can never be interchangeable even if two individuals use these two terms to describe the same two objects of comparison. Even if this incident occurs, it is still agreed upon

¹⁵ Ibid., 73d.

¹⁶ Ibid., 74a.

that “equal things and the Equal itself are therefore not the same”.¹⁷ The process is itself clear. When one encounters two objects and applies either the term “equal” or “unequal” to them, that individual associates those two objects with another idea, namely that of the Equal. Objects aid one in recalling the Form learned in the underworld.

The attribute attached to the sensible object cannot be of the same reality as the attribute itself but can only help the perceiver recall the attribute itself. If one were to encounter two pints of Guinness side by side, they might be inclined to claim that those two pints of Guinness were equal whether it be in size, color, texture, and so on. When the individual uses the term “equal” to describe the two pints, the one who uses that term “must have prior knowledge of that to which he says it is like, but deficiently so”.¹⁸ The concept of Equal must have been known to the individual, but it must have been buried since the time the soul combined with the body. In the underworld the soul is freed from the impure desires of the body and is able to partake in the immaterial and eternal knowledge without bodily distractions. Such knowledge becomes an inherent part of the soul. Once in the body, its ability to recognize earlier learned concepts significantly diminishes, and so the soul is only able to glimpse its past knowledge through particular sensible instances. The two seemingly equal pints of Guinness allow one’s soul to momentarily glimpse the knowledge it once had full access to. It is in this way that the soul cannot fully recall the knowledge it once had. The soul is buried underneath the material desires of the body, and sensible content only allows the soul a glimpse of something similar to what it is familiar with. It is a deficient knowledge since the body only desires decadence for itself while the soul strives to reach the knowledge that makes it free.

¹⁷ Ibid., 74c.

¹⁸ Ibid., 74e.

Knowledge is contradictorily stored within the soul while the senses help it to slowly recall what it cannot remember. The sensation of seeing two pints of Guinness informs us that our “sense perceptions must surely make us realize that all that we perceive through them is striving to reach that which is Equal but falls short of it”.¹⁹ The ability of the senses to observe two equal objects informs the soul that sensible reality is attempting to replicate the perfection of the Form, however deficient it may be. The two pints of Guinness can never reach the Form of the Equal, but they allow one to realize that the Equal must exist and must be strived for, for the Form of the Equal resides within their soul and is calling to be let out.

While it is important to realize that the senses are slowly delivering knowledge to the soul, it is simultaneously important to understand that knowledge does not begin with the senses. The senses merely deliver information to the soul, and the soul is able to process the information delivered by the senses. When it has departed from the body, the soul returns to the underworld and the Forms, and it is united with knowledge. When it returns to the body the soul is blinded by the body’s material desires, and it is fighting against them. However, the senses are able to aid the soul in retrieving glimpses of the knowledge that the soul has lost. When the senses observe the two pints of Guinness and claim that they are equal, the soul is able to momentarily glimpse the knowledge of the Equal. Since the soul is able to minimally apply the knowledge it once had to the objects of the senses, we must, before having the possibility to perceive in general have had “possessed knowledge of the Equal itself if we were about to refer our sense perceptions of equal objects to it, and realized that all of them were eager to be like it, but were inferior.”²⁰ The objects

¹⁹ Ibid., 75b.

²⁰ Ibid., 75b.

observed by the senses are not able to achieve the clarity and distinctness that the soul is able to achieve with true, immaterial knowledge.

The soul must be immortal and exist before one is born so that learning is recollection. Not only are ideas such as the Equal imprinted on the soul before combining with the body, but also imprinted on it are ideas such as the Good and the Just. Once the soul enters the body this knowledge is forgotten, and sense perception continually jolts and awakens the knowledge the soul once had. One begins to realize that the reality of sense perception, which contains ideas such as being good, just, equal, and so forth, was predated by the reality of the soul, which has corresponding ideas of the Good, Just, and Equal. Then we “compare these things with it, then, just as they exist, so our soul must exist before we are born.”²¹ There is a continual conversation between sense perception and the soul, and the corresponding ideas between the two are constantly being related to one another. The instances observed through sensible perception are included under the corresponding idea. As a result, the particular instances of the equal relate to the idea of the Equal. One’s idea of the Equal is known prior to the particular instance of the equal. That is why when one sees two pints of Guinness next to one another they can claim that they are equal, whether it be in height, texture, color, or some other quality, for the knowledge of the Equal had once been conscious to the soul whereas it is now diminished upon combining with the body. Having the foundation of the Equal sets a standard for all objects that may be called equal, and although the particular instances of objects being equal can never achieve the standard set by the Equal, it is the act of the soul having that faint memory of the Equal that allows learning to be recollection.

²¹ Ibid., 76e.

Before moving forward it is important to recognize that the soul does not rely upon the body in the slightest. Simmias raises the concern that the soul can be equated to the harmony produced by a lyre. When the lyre is destroyed, the harmony is destroyed. Therefore, it is argued that when the body is “relaxed or stretched without due measure by diseases and other evils, the soul must immediately be destroyed, even if it be most divine”.²² This, however, cannot be the case since harmony does not exist before the lyre whereas the soul does exist before the body. The soul combines with the body, but it is the soul that first has possession of knowledge. The harmony cannot exist before the lyre is played. It is dependent upon the wood and the strings, but the soul is independent and can exist without the flesh of the body. The soul is an entity separate from the body and is the only substance that can achieve and understand the Forms.

The Theory of the Forms

So far we have granted Plato the existence of the Forms without questioning the role they serve when thinking about the immaterial and immortal soul. We understand that the soul has access to some greater truth than the body does and that the senses are merely a means for the soul to recall the lost knowledge once had in the underworld. The soul is of greater importance than the body, and it should be the one ruling over the body. The Forms, however, are of greater importance than the soul since it is these that the soul is trying to reach. It is now important that we understand the role of the Forms in relation to the soul.

Plato rejects the notion that causation is physical. One may attempt to claim that one takes action because their body consists of “bones and sinews, because the bones are hard and are separated by joints,”²³ and continuous anatomical explanations. For Plato, however, material

²² Ibid., 86c.

²³ Ibid., 98c.

explanations insufficiently explain why the body moves. Anatomical explanations explain how the body moves but not why it moves. Sensible explanations are therefore inadequate.

Plato begins with the assumption that the Forms exist, assuming the existence of a “Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest.”²⁴ The Forms are an immaterial class and all particular empirical cases are subsumed under it. Looking at a pint of Guinness, one could think that the white foam sitting atop the opaque black liquor is an object of not only delicious taste, but also of exquisite beauty. This pint is not beautiful unto itself however. Rather, “it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything.”²⁵ The beauty of the object does not reside in the color, shape, texture, or any other material quality. An object is only beautiful because it partakes in the Form of the Beautiful. Beauty is not material, but rather it is immaterial and is part of a Form greater than itself. A pint of Guinness may be seen as a beautiful object, but the physical beauty only helps the soul to recall the Beautiful, which was fully known to it in the underworld. The pint is beautiful not because of any of its sensible qualities but because it partakes in the Form of the Beautiful.

The Forms are the cause of all sensible objects. Plato’s epistemology can be described as travelling from top to bottom because all objects partake in their respective Form. The Forms precede all particulars, and all objects attempt to perfect their Form but can never do so. An object’s qualities do not exist unto themselves but participate in their Form. If it is the case that Simmias is taller than Socrates, it is not because “he is Simmias but because of the tallness he happens to have”.²⁶ In the same way, Socrates is not short because he is Socrates but because of the shortness he partakes in. Objects cannot be self-referential. Instead they have to receive their

²⁴ Ibid., 100b.

²⁵ Ibid., 100c.

²⁶ Ibid., 102c.

qualities from the Forms in which they partake. Sensible qualities are merely deficient replicants of their Forms. Since the Forms are immaterial and sensible qualities can only be material, sensible qualities can never be their Form. Sensible qualities, although never able to reach their Forms, are caused by them.

Forms can never interact with their opposite Forms. The Forms, like the soul, are eternal and immutable. They are stable and fixed structures that cannot change. A pint of Guinness partaking in the Beautiful cannot partake in the Ugly for these are two different Forms and an object cannot admit two different qualities at the same time. It is not the case that a pint of Guinness will be more or less than one eighth of a gallon just as five will never “admit the form of the Even, nor will ten, its double, admit the form of the Odd.”²⁷ The Forms are stable and will never waver from themselves. A pint of Guinness may at one time be cold and at another hot, but the Form of the Cold will never become or interact with the Form of the Hot. Where sensible objects continually change, the Forms are immutable foundations that allow sensible objects to exist. The Forms set the standard for what objects can and cannot be. Without the prior idea of the Beautiful, the Just, or the Cold, we would not be able to judge and describe objects. If the Forms began to interact with one another we would not have a secure foundation for describing our experiences. Neither in experience nor in the Forms can an opposite admit its opposite. They exist separately.

The Forms and the soul cannot cease to exist. The soul is the force that brings life to the body for “whatever the soul occupies, it always brings life to it”.²⁸ The soul’s purpose is to bring life to whatever it inhabits. Since opposites will never admit of one another, the soul will “never admit the opposite of that which it brings along”,²⁹ namely death. When the body and soul separate

²⁷ Ibid., 105a.

²⁸ Ibid., 105d.

²⁹ Ibid., 105d.

it is because the body is ailed with material diseases that cause it to deteriorate while the soul continues to exist. Just as a pint will not admit of being anything else other than one eighth of a gallon, the soul will not admit of being dead. The immaterial, “the Form of life itself, and anything that is deathless, are never destroyed.”³⁰ The Forms are separate from sensible objects yet simultaneously cause their existence and are the standard to which we hold all objects. The soul’s essential attribute is that it brings life to whatever object it may inhabit. Therefore, the Forms and the soul must always exist.

All things contain one essence. The soul’s essence is life as it makes animate any object it combines with. A human’s essence is being human. No matter the differences found in the body, all humans partake in the Form of the Human. A pint of Guinness partakes in the Form of the Beautiful. A pint can be consumed in Ireland, England, the United States, and so on, but all particular cases of it are subsumed under the Beautiful. Our language and other sensible observations are insufficient in describing and understanding the Forms. Whether a Guinness is bought in Ireland or in England, the same name is prescribed to it. Even if it tastes different in different countries, the same name is given to the object. Therefore, all particular objects that share a name are subsumed under the same Form, which also cause the objects existence.

Conclusion

Plato’s epistemology is comprehensive but also contains flaws and contradictions. In this section, we will examine why the argument from opposites causes logical contradictions amongst the Forms, which are supposed to be immutable foundations for all knowledge, both sensible immaterial. Once the Forms are shown to be inadequate pillars for knowledge, then Plato’s philosophical project will need to be salvaged and we will need to search for new wisdom.

³⁰ Ibid., 106d.

The argument from opposites does not adequately describe the complexity found in particular objects. Plato claims that qualities arise from their opposites. If something became cold, it necessarily became cold from something hotter, the faster from the slower, and so forth. The opposites that Plato exhausts consist of two extremities, such as hot and cold and beautiful and ugly. Many sensible objects, however, would not be placed at the extremities. Regarding the opposites hot and cold, many objects would fit somewhere in between, and we have sufficient variety in our language to begin to make such distinctions. A glass of water can be described as lukewarm or warm, the weather as chilly or brisk, and a room as toasty or freezing. There are a list of words amongst the two extremities that Plato has not exhausted. It would also be improbable that words such as “lukewarm” and “brisk” have opposites since they lie in between hot and cold. If asked to describe the meaning of lukewarm, one could explain that it is moderately warm but not hot. The same explanation could be given for “chilly”. It is a word that describes the weather and may suggest to somebody that they should wear a light jacket. Cold, however, could have a connotation that a heavier jacket is needed if going outside. Again, it seems that there is no opposite word for chilly. It could be described as being nearer to cold than to hot, but it is its own word with its own connotations. It implies what the cold cannot. Both words have their respective usages, and it is not common to interchange them for they both convey different meanings in different contexts. Objects do not travel from one extremity to the other. They instead travel in between those extremities. The argument from opposites fails to address the complexity that objects experience.

Sensible objects are always changing and cannot be caused by their Forms. The previous paragraph showed that objects tend to travel in between the two extremities but not necessarily to the extremities themselves. The Forms are supposed to cause their objects. A pint of Guinness is

beautiful because it partakes in the Form of the Beautiful. Simmias is tall because he partakes in the Form of the Tall. Objects belong to their Forms because there is a single essence connecting each particular object. A pint of Guinness' essential quality is that it is beautiful and Simmias' essential quality is that he is tall. All objects with the same essential quality are subsumed under their respective Form.

A pint of Guinness will be called beautiful when it is poured and sits within the pint glass. Now what if that pint glass fell off of the bar and shattered on the floor? Would that spilt Guinness still be considered beautiful? Its sensible form is now different. First the liquor was placed within a pint glass but now it has spread over the floor. One must decide whether the liquor itself is beautiful or whether the pint glass was beautiful. Now consider what would happen if Guinness was poured in a glass that was either less or more than pint. Would it still contain that same beauty that it had while it was in the pint glass? With these various situations, it is difficult to point at the essence a pint of Guinness has. It is not clear how it belongs to the Form of the Beautiful since its sensible form is constantly changing.

Now consider Simmias in relation to Socrates. Simmias is said to be taller than Socrates because Simmias partakes in the form of the Tall whereas Socrates partakes in the Short. Simmias and Socrates, who are both sensible objects, contain an essence and partake in a Form. Simmias partakes in the Tall because he is taller than Socrates. Now what if a person taller than Simmias was to stand next to him? Would Simmias then partake in the Form of the Short? It was established that Simmias partakes in the Tall, but it would be undeniable to say that Simmias was taller than a person who was actually taller than him. Simmias would then partake in two Forms, both the Short and the Tall. However, one partakes in a Form because of an essential quality they possess. It is a contradiction, then, that Simmias simultaneously partakes in the Forms of the Tall and Short

since it is necessary that each object has one essential quality. The Forms are unable to sufficiently subsume their own objects. At times one Form is better able to subsume an object while at another time another Form is better at subsuming it. Simmias is sometimes tall and sometimes short. A pint of Guinness is sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly. Objects in constant change cannot always be subsumed under one Form. They shift from one to the other, and even if one Form caused their existence, that same Form cannot subsume the same object throughout that object's existence.

If an object constantly changes Forms, then that object cannot possess an essential quality. Simmias is at one time tall and at another time short. Simmias, however, already partakes in the Form of the Human just by being one, and so he cannot partake in another Form since each particular object contains one essence and this essence is caused by the Form from which the object came. If Simmias is both human and tall, then which of these attributes is to be the cause of Simmias? The Forms for each do not interact with one another and both cause different objects. Because of this separation between the two, both cannot simultaneously cause Simmias. It must be one or the other. One is then forced to choose whether it is more essential that Simmias is human or tall. One may say that it is more important that Simmias is human than he is tall. However, if that is claimed, then it must be shown how tallness is also part of Simmias since the Forms of Human and Tall are separate entities. Both could not have caused Simmias.

One could respond that sensible objects are deficient replicants of their Forms. They cannot accurately represent the Forms from which they were caused. Sensible qualities only approximate their Forms. Therefore, Simmias could still be either essentially human or tall, but we are unable to determine which he belongs to since our sensory experience prohibits the soul from achieving knowledge. We are confusing the Forms because they are immaterial, eternal, and immutable,

qualities that are not applicable to sensible objects. Objects are constantly changing and because of this we cannot locate the essence. The essence can only be known after the soul has separated from the body. The knowledge is there to be grasped, and yet we are unable to access it.

The Forms, however, make no distinctions between objects themselves and the qualities they possess. Why would Simmias either be essentially human or tall? Why would a pint of Guinness only be either beautiful or black? These objects contain both of the listed qualities. Being human and being tall are two different descriptions that can apply to the same thing. Humans are a species, a generalized group consisting of thousands of particular individuals, each with their own qualities. An individual can be white or black, tall or short, skinny or fat, and so on, and there are numerous variations between the qualities listed above. Qualities are attached to and rely on some particular object whereas the Forms do not demarcate between linguistic divisions. This lack of linguistic demarcation, however, does not correspond to how language is used. Before the terms “white” and “tall” can be used, there must be some object present that is being described. Guinness can be described as being black, but without that pint in front of us, such a description would make no sense. Something is black, but black itself is not an object. Therefore, it is unreasonable that an object’s essence would be a quality it possesses, such as tallness or blackness.

Plato’s theory of the Forms fails to observe the complexity found in sensible objects and in language. Nouns, such as humans, animals, and other objects, and their qualities are not separated by the Forms. There is a Form for everything, and this makes it difficult to determine what an object’s essence is, if it even possesses one. Before a quality can exist, an object must be present to which it attaches itself. Language makes distinctions between objects and their qualities, and this is the way in which one thinks. The Forms, however, attempt to extrapolate from experience and then abandon it. As a result, there is a miscommunication between our ordinary

language and the way in which the Forms function. The Forms cannot be causes of sensible objects since objects have qualities attached to them whereas the Forms have no such distinctions and treat all parts of speech equally. This lack of demarcation between types of speech, however, merely leads to an untenable view that all particular objects share an essence that is derived from the Forms.

The Forms lead to confusion and inconsistencies. When all objects and attributes have a corresponding Form, it is untenable to claim that each object has one essence. There must be some distinction between objects, qualities, numbers, and so forth. Plato's theories have failed to capture the complexity found in particular objects and language. We must set sail again and continue searching for an epistemological theory that captures the complexity found in a pint of Guinness and in other objects. We must search for attention given to particulars and linguistic demarcations.

Chapter II: Aristotle

Introduction

Although a student of Plato, Aristotle, who is concerned with similar questions regarding epistemology, provides a new method that claims sensible objects are the causes of their universal classes. Present day readers can liken his method to something more scientific as it involves observing, dissecting, and categorizing objects in an attempt to create a coherent account of how the world functions. He begins with the object itself, not considering what causes it but rather what it causes us to claim about it. If the object is taken as a whole, then one can begin to dissect what belongs to it, what can be taken from it, and what is necessary for it to be as it is, all without referring to separate entities that explain why and how it is here. There are other, more natural explanations as to why objects exist and what can be said about them.

Part of Aristotle's method relies on a linguistic investigation of how we describe objects and their qualities, an investigation ignored by Plato. The Forms precede sensible objects and language, making them inaccessible to any of us. Plato's theory posits the existence of souls, the only entities capable of gaining knowledge, and that knowledge is placed in the Forms, entities that are unexplainable and yet somehow cause the existence of objects. Plato's epistemology can be summarized as travelling from top to bottom, or general to specific. Ontological priority is given to universal classes, and they cause particular cases. The class "Beer" must exist before Guinness, or any other type of beer, can exist.

Aristotle's method, however, gives ontological priority to particular cases that then create universal classes. He does not argue from the presupposition that knowledge is immaterial and that must be grasped by something else immaterial. Rather, knowledge is gained through examining how we describe objects. Through this examination, we will find that language makes natural

distinctions amongst itself, allowing us to create categories and have a systematic approach to describing any object.

In this chapter, we will briefly examine two prevailing arguments against Aristotle's thought. Then we will examine how Aristotle defines his terms and how he argues that language has natural demarcations that inform us what can and cannot be said about objects, and this will allow him to refute the two arguments made in opposition to him. We will further inquire into his essential philosophical project, namely that of substance, before searching for inadequacies in his thought.

“All Things Are One”

The first argument Aristotle recounts is the claim that “all things *are* one”.³¹ This doctrine was held by various thinkers, most prominently Melissus and Parmenides, but its exact meaning was disputed between most of them. Such a general statement, however, is bound to become confused and misinterpreted. The first question that arises is what is meant by “one”? “One” could signify one of the four elements, namely earth, water, fire, or air. “One” could also signify indivisibility. Can it not be separated from itself or is it able to exist after the putting together of many miniscule pieces? Or can it consist of a single color? There is no end for continuous speculation over the statement's undefined and vague terms. Such a sentence may be rewritten as “All things are x”, where “x” is replaced with any noun or adjective of one's choosing. The lack of categorization and definition allows this statement to be true without a convincing argument. There is no metaphysical grounding for any claim, and since there is no standard, any claim is acceptable.

The Theory of the Forms

The Forms are a solution to the impermanence and instability of sensible objects. No matter how different each may be, all particular objects belonging to a class are categorized under the

³¹ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 1.2.185a21.

same name. Consider what may be called a beer. Most beers are brewed from water, starch, and barley; the color could be either opaque, translucent, or somewhat muddied; the texture could be smooth, bitter, or uneven, and so on. Through a short investigation of numerous beers, one may conclude that there are no prerequisite features that must be part of a beer so that it may be called a “beer”. Instead, it seems the possible qualities of a beer are endless, ultimately rendering the term futile.

If this is the case, then what allows individuals to apply the name “beer” to a beverage which is bitter, amber, dry, light, and unpleasant from another beer that is at first creamy then roasty, opaque, heavy, and pleasant? Such particular objects are constantly changing, and yet the same word is applied to all of them, but it appears that there is no grounding for why the same term is used. Plato, then, holds that the problem applies “not to sensible things but to entities of another kind.”³² Whereas the definitions of empirical concepts are constantly changing, the Forms will remove this difficulty as Plato claims all sensible objects participate and are caused by the ontologically prior Forms.

The Forms reach beyond the sensible world into one that influences it, but the Forms themselves are immutable and eternal. All sensible objects are derived from the Forms and are therefore only approximations to the Forms themselves. An individual partakes in the Form “Human”, but that individual can never fully realize and complete the Form. Objects are some derivation of the Form, and they are produced and caused by its immutability and eternity. For each object “there answers an entity which has the same name and exists apart from the substances”.³³ This entity unites and rules over the various particularities found throughout

³² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W.D. Ross (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 1.6.987b5-6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1.8.990b7-8.

experience. All individuals will partake in the Form “Human”, but none will be able to fully participate in it. The Form, therefore, is separate from the particular object although it is also a part of each. The Forms are metaphysical entities, ones which do not rely on any physical manifestation and yet are present in each particular object.

If one accepts the theory of the Forms, then one accepts that the direction of knowledge is one of ontology informing epistemology, or universality preceding particularity. One of Plato’s critical distinctions is between appearance and reality, where empirical reality is appearance and the Forms are reality. Knowledge may begin at the level of the five senses. One becomes acquainted with an object through an investigation of its color, smell, length, and so on. Alongside that investigation, one is taught and given a language to describe the objects that are seen. It appears that knowledge is gained through the senses. From there, knowledge gained from the senses is organized, and only then can something significant be said regarding what actually exists.

The Forms reverse this process so that sensible objects and their qualities are derived from and informed by their Forms. The Forms exist separately from sensible objects. As a result, Forms are the causes of all things. Such a claim assumes that the Forms hold the form of a sensible object, and that form exhibits itself in the matter. If all sensible objects are mere recreations and images of their Forms, then the form may only be recreated in matter, which is inherently a sensible object. The form would then be separate from the matter. Forms, then, exist prior to the matter they partake in. One would become acquainted with the forms through sensible objects, but to clear the problem of why the same term may be applied to objects that do not closely resemble one another, the Forms provide a unity for all sensible objects under a certain class. Witnessing multiple sensible objects allows one to glimpse the Form of that category.

Aristotle's Method

Throughout the *Categories*, Aristotle establishes a method that relies upon the ordinary meanings and uses of words to discredit the two previously stated arguments. In his opening remarks Aristotle states, "Things are said to be named 'equivocally' when, though they have a common name, the definition corresponding with the name differs for each".³⁴ This definition is stated as a matter of fact, indicating the use of language must have been commonplace since Aristotle is not demarcating this definition as his own. Instead, he is observing that things are said to be a certain way since that is how people describe the situation. This form of speech is still prevalent. An "equivocal" word is a homonym, or a word that sounds like another but has a different meaning, such as "there," "their," and "they're." By relying on the ways in which words are commonly used, Aristotle is able to counteract the other claims.

Aristotle begins by organizing and categorizing various types of words. With his category and definition of "substance", he will give ontological priority, or grant prior existence, to individual members of a class rather than to universal classes: "Substance, in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse".³⁵ Substance, or the individual subject, is the starting point. Substance may not be predicated of anything and neither is it present in any thing. However, other categories are able to be predicated from it and are present in it.

Certain categories, mainly secondary substances, are able to be predicated from substance. The individual man is a part of the species "[hu]man", and the genus to which the species belongs is 'animal.'³⁶ Likewise, Guinness is labelled as a "stout" and a stout is part of the category "beer".

³⁴ Aristotle, *Categories*, trans. E.M. Edghill (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 1.1a1-3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.2a11-13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.2a16-18.

These are termed “secondary substances”. These immaterial and universal classes could not have existed without the external standard of primary substances. If one were to think of the secondary substance “stout” without reference to any particular Guinness, how could one speak of such a concept? If there are multiple pints of Guinness present and being observed, then one would be able to describe characteristics such as height, color, position, taste, and others that would give credit to the secondary substance “stout”. “Stout” is not a universal class consisting of immutable characteristics. It is rather transient since one pint may be darker or smoother than the other. “Stout” is unable to capture the specificity found in primary substances. Substance cannot be predicated from universal classes, but rather universal classes must have reference to substance in order for them to obtain their characteristics.

Other categories, such as quality, are present in a subject. Quality is defined “in virtue of which people are said to be such and such”.³⁷ This would include things such as habit, disposition, and affection. These categories are “incapable of existence apart from the said subject.”³⁸ If some quality is present in a subject, neither “their name nor their definition is predicable of that in which they are present”,³⁹ but the same word is used to describe the quality. For example, an individual may be characterized as being “white.” In one sense being “white” is an inherent characteristic of the primary substance. It could not exist without it, and therefore it is present in the subject. However, one would not state that “white” is “predicable of the body”⁴⁰ since “white” is a material characteristic relying on the presence of a primary substance. It could not exist without it.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Categories*, 8.8b25-26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.1a23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.2a29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.2a33-34.

Whereas “human” and “stout” are abstract concepts relying on material subjects, being white is a material characteristic relying on material subjects. White cannot be extracted from the body, and it can never be predicable of the body. Since it requires a body to inhabit, white must be present in a subject. “Whiteness,” similar to “human” and “stout,” requires multiple examples of primary substances. An individual may be said to be “white”, but that same individual cannot be said to exhibit “whiteness” as that is an abstract concept without reference to a particular substance. The idea of “whiteness” could arise from various primary substances, including an individual’s skin color or the foam topping of a pint. Therefore, it is shown that a primary substance is necessary for something to be predicable of it or present in it.

The last category that is pertinent to Aristotle’s method against the two previously stated arguments is that of quantity. Quantities are defined as being either discrete or continuous, but most importantly, they “have no contraries”.⁴¹ Quantities are able to be predicated from a substance. For example, it may be predicated that a table is two or three cubits long. These measurements are unable to exist independently of a substance. Such measurements are also unable to have contraries for what would be the contrary to three cubits long? When two primary substances are compared, one may be said to be bigger or smaller than the other. Substances, however, are not “great or small absolutely,” but “they are so called rather as the result of an act of comparison”.⁴² Substances cannot be relative. Whereas a substance’s color or measurement are in the substance, “greater” and “smaller” are not. These terms may only be applied when two or more substances are being compared. The categories especially those of substance, quality, and

⁴¹ Ibid., 6.5b11.

⁴² Ibid., 6.5b16-17.

quantity, are logically set in place by the ordinary use of language. By observing the ways in which words are normally used, Aristotle has set his argument against the previous two claims in motion.

Aristotle's Refutation

Returning to the first argument, that “all things *are* one”,⁴³ one is able to refute it with the aid of Aristotle's categorization of words since the word “one” is able to be dissected through a new lense. As has been explained, words can be categorized. Being unable to explicitly define what is meant by “one” leaves this statement to be fulfilled by mere self-satisfaction. One can claim that anything is one. However, Aristotle forces the speaker of the statement to choose whether all things “‘are’ *substance* or *quantities* or *qualities*”.⁴⁴ If substance, is the “one” a horse, a human, a table, or a Guinness? If the one is white or infinite, then the statement is incomprehensible since both of these categories rely upon a substance to be present in. Measurements and colors cannot exist independently of some particular object since both necessarily belong to a substance. The statement that “all things *are* one,” is shown to be a statement of incompetence since it ignores all of the categories language naturally holds. Therefore, this argument has no pertinent logical force.

Relying on the linguistic method, Aristotle is able to discredit Plato's theory of the Forms. Consider the opening sentence of the *Categories* again: “Things are said to be named ‘equivocally’ when, though they have a common name, the definition corresponding with the name differs for each”.⁴⁵ Now consider three instances of a pint of Guinness: the Form “Beer”, the sensible Guinness in this world, and a pint seen in a painting. Even though one is intuitively able to tell the difference and predicate different qualities and quantities from the sensible Guinness and the

⁴³ Aristotle, *Physics*, 1.2.185a21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.2.185a23.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Categories*, 1.1a1-3..

Guinness in the picture, Plato's theory of the Forms makes no distinction between these two. No words are "equivocal", but there are only variations that attempt to be as similar as possible with the Form. Under the Forms, there should be something common between the sensible Guinness and the Guinness in the picture. However, there might be nothing. The Forms have no way to compensate for this difference unless one claims that the picture is a more deficient form of the sensible object, which itself is a more deficient form of the Form. Again, all particularity and categorization found in language are abandoned.

Further, without the Forms accounting for any differences between categories, a substance will partake in numerous Forms. The claim that "Socrates is short" proves to be a troubling issue for the Forms. Socrates is undeniably a human. Therefore, he partakes in the Form "Human". However, since there are Forms for all things, qualities and quantities included, Socrates is also a part of the Form "Short". The Forms are separate from and cannot relate to one another, and yet Socrates is able to belong to two, and more, Forms. Everything is predicable from the Forms, but the Forms exist apart from this world and its various substances. If this is the case, then how can these two concepts relate in an intimate way? They have no contact with one another, and yet one rules over the other. As a Form, "Short" is treated as a substance even though it is not treated that way in ordinary language. It is not possible to say that one human or horse exhibits "shortness", but it is merely said to be short. Short is a quality and not a substance. Aristotle's linguistic method discredits Plato's theory that does not account for linguistic categories.

Most importantly, Plato does not give an account as to how the Forms are themselves the causes of sensible objects. He repeatedly describes the Forms as existing separate from sensible objects, and one is left to wonder how this is possible. Where it is necessary for substances to be

moved and changed, the Forms are immutable and eternal, and they “cause neither movement nor change in them [substance].”⁴⁶ It is impossible for the Forms to cause change within substance.

Furthermore, the Forms do not account for any further knowledge regarding substance. The Forms are not substances themselves, and they are not present in the particulars they claim to rule over. They cannot be proven to cause anything in the substance especially since there are other adequate explanations as to why things become and become undone. The things that supposedly share in the Forms “do not come into being, unless there is something to originate movement”.⁴⁷ Instead, natural causes allow some material to become a chair or a house. It is not as if the Forms create sensible objects and then place them throughout the world. Instead, natural materials are said to be assembled and cause the formation of an object. Wood nailed together will make a table. Bricks and cement laid together will make a house. Both of these are done through individuals enacting some change upon the matter. Since simpler explanations can be offered as to why certain materials are able to make an object, it is an unsound claim that the substance and that of which it is the substance of should exist apart.

Further Inquiry into Substance

One could argue that if the secondary substance “stout” is made up of individual beers that are different heights, colors, and other qualities, then there would be no unifying cause between all of them. If there is no unifying cause, then Plato’s theory of the Forms may not seem so ludicrous as it attempts to clearly demarcate various categories, even if the reasons for those demarcations may not be clear and distinct. However, one might also argue that if one were to approach the class of “stout” with Aristotle’s technique, then one would have to begin creating

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.8.990b6-8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.9.991b5-6.

categories based on characteristics such as taste and color, and this would lead to great division between individual members of supposedly unified class. Aristotle's method to unite individual members into a single class would be futile.

Aristotle will redefine "form" alongside matter so that all individual humans may partake in the secondary substance "Human" without the need for separate entities, such as the Forms, to exist. Throughout the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is concerned with what may or may not be called substance. By Book VIII, he seems to have grasped some part of the definition of what constitutes substance. He claims,

sensible substances all have matter. The substratum is substance, and this is in one sense the matter (and by matter I mean that which, not being a 'this' actually, is potentially a 'this'), and in another sense the formula or shape (that which being a 'this' can be separately formulated), and thirdly the complex of these two, which alone is generated and destroyed, and is, without qualification, capable of separate existence.⁴⁸

Although a verbose paragraph, Aristotle has designated three specific uses for substance, the first of which is matter.

Matter, in certain circumstances according to Aristotle, has yet to be formed into something definitive, and that is why it is potentially a 'this'. It has not yet become a substance of which things may be said to be predicable of it and present in it. If one were to make a pint of Guinness, they would have to begin with the various matter: water, barley, malt, hops, and yeast. There would be no way for those ingredients to already be formed into a pint of Guinness. There must be a primary mover who causes the unformed matter to take some form, whether that form be a human or a Guinness. Substance relies heavily upon matter, "for in all the opposite changes that occur

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 8.1.1042a25-31.

there is something which underlies the changes, e.g. in respect of place that which is now here and again elsewhere”.⁴⁹ A substance is constantly experiencing changes, whether they be in size, color, or disposition, and these changes require the presence of a substratum. Matter fulfills the role of substance needing to change for when an individual becomes taller, it is not the numbers that are said to be changing. Rather, it is the substance undergoing these changes that is described. Happiness did not change into sadness, but this individual’s happiness changed into sadness.

The form is the state into which matter is brought. Although he appears hesitant to claim that the matter and the form can always be thought separated, Aristotle repeatedly speaks in the fashion that one can separate the two when discussing substance. The form is actuality since the matter has been arranged in a certain pattern for a specific reason. One who defines a “house as stones, bricks, and timbers are speaking of the potential house”⁵⁰ since they are merely listing the potential matter. However, those who speak of “a receptacle to shelter chattels and living beings’, or something of the sort, speak of the actuality”,⁵¹ or form. Aristotle’s form has a recognizable purpose, and that purpose appears to exist separate from the matter. The form, then, has a fixed purpose regarding substance for “no one makes or begets the form, but it is the individual that is made”.⁵² Whereas the matter is waiting to be manipulated, the form is ever present, waiting for new substances to partake in it. These new substances do not need to conform in their matter. A house can be constructed from stones, bricks, wood, and countless other materials. However, all of these substances fall under the name “house”.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8.1.1042a32-34.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.2.1043a14-15.

⁵¹ Ibid., 8.2.1043a16-19.

⁵² Ibid., 8.3.1043b18-19.

Substances are found out through particular instances for it is the potential matter that becomes the actual form. Before the matter and the form are unified, there can be no substance. Since the “whole is something besides the parts”,⁵³ there must be a cause to unite the matter and the form into substance. In terms of the house or the Guinness, there must have been a moving cause that united the materials and the form. Although these are spoken of separately, “in a formula there is always an element of matter as well as one of actuality”,⁵⁴ and so a sense of unity is already present between the two. The unformed matter has the potential to exhibit the form, so “proximate matter and the form are one and the same thing”.⁵⁵ In Aristotle’s view, the form is residing within the matter, and the matter has simply yet to take the form. Therefore, it seems unbecoming to separate the two.

Conclusion

Aristotle successfully refutes Plato’s Theory of the Forms while complicating the way in which we understand and describe objects. Substance, qualities, and quantities are intimately related but also are distinct from one another. Qualities and quantities rely on a substance to be present in it, but it would be impossible for a substance to lack qualities or quantities. A pint of Guinness without the black body and the white head and being one-eighth of a gallon is unthinkable. If these traits were not contained in the substance of a Guinness, then Guinness would have to contain some other definitive and consistent traits or else various substances sharing a common name would serve no purpose. Substances that share classes do so because they share characteristics. No matter where it is poured, a pint of Guinness will have a similar look, taste, and texture to other pints throughout the world. There are distinctive qualities that separate substances

⁵³ Ibid., 8.6.1045a9-10.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.6.1045a34-35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 8.6.1045b18-19.

from one another, and that is why second substances can be predicated from them. There are qualities that naturally belong to substances, and we begin our journey of knowledge by observing these individual substances and then creating more general classes.

Language naturally demarcates itself into the way the categories are organized. Colors, textures, tastes, and so on must be present in some object and not by themselves. “Whiteness” cannot exist alone but must be predicated from substances such as clouds, skin color, curtains, and Guinness. Although substances, qualities, and quantities depend on one another, they are not equal. Whereas substances exist by themselves, qualities and quantities depend on the existence of a substance. This hierarchy of what can and cannot be said is natural in our language. One can see a pint of Guinness, but one cannot see blackness. One cannot say that black is Guinness, but one can say that Guinness is black, and if one attempts to speak of “blackness”, they can only speak of such a concept if various substances have been observed. The idea of “blackness” does not exist independently of substance. Rather, it is substance that gives rise to abstract concepts. Substances are the foundation of our knowledge. From them we can notice and describe their causes, form, and so on.

Despite his advancement from the Forms, however, Aristotle still holds essentialistic views. Substance is a concept that can be divided into matter and form, but those two elements require one another for a substance to exist. The definite form is inherent in the potential matter. The matter is merely waiting for a primary mover to act on it. Recall the example of the house. Aristotle claims that a house defined as its material objects, namely stones, bricks, or timbers, represents the potential house. The form of a house, however, is its function to shelter living things. The purpose and function of an object exists separately from the matter that actualizes that purpose. Matter and form are already united and cannot be separated because both require the other to create

a substance. The form exists without the matter and the primary mover needs to move the matter in such a way so that its form is complete. The form of Guinness is that it is opaque with a white head, tastes creamy and roasty, and helps one get drunk. The matter of water, barley, malt, hops, and yeast must then be combined in such a way to create that product. A substance's form is immutable. Matter needs to be moved to fulfill its form. If matter is moved to shelter living things, then it has fulfilled its role as being a house. If matter is moved to get people drunk, then it has fulfilled its role as being alcohol. Therefore, matter has an essential purpose, namely of fulfilling its form. Certain types of matter are used for certain forms, such as bricks and stones for houses and water and food for nourishment. The form precedes the matter and matter is required to fulfill its form.

One could argue that matter does not have an essential form. Our knowledge begins at the level of substance. It is through particular cases that general classes are created. One could not have a conception of the form of a house without first seeing multiple houses nor of a human without first seeing multiple humans. The form and essence of an object can only be constructed after observing various instances of that object. Through our language, we can construct whether or not an essence is contained in a class of objects, but that essence cannot precede objects. Matter is malleable and is not required to take any particular form.

Aristotle claims, however, that primary substances have no cause and contain in them more general categories. Although he grounds his method in linguistic investigation, Aristotle draws out the more general secondary substances from abstracting from the primary ones, intentionally searching for a common trait within all members of a class. When searching for common traits between humans, one may find that all are two-footed, which is "predicated of the species

‘[hu]man’, but not present in it.”⁵⁶ The form of a human must have this trait for it to be considered a human. The form has naturally been put into place, and it is necessary for the matter of flesh and bones to take on this form. A species and genus must share qualities before we are able to classify them for each has an essence. The human essence is reason, a natural characteristic found in all particular cases of a human, and without it one cannot be considered one. This form is set before the matter is able to manifest it. Aristotle begins by searching for the essence of each object, continuing to differentiate and abstract more characteristics until the broadest is reached. For a human, it might begin with being two-footed, but it ends with reason. Aristotle seeks an essence connecting all particular objects while ignoring the differences between the particular members found within that universal class.

I am uncertain if such an essence exists. When claiming to have found the essence of all members belonging to a class, one is purposefully ignoring the nuance contained in the particular, a nuance that makes the particular what it is. It is easy to claim that all persons are classified under the term “human”. Perhaps that term unites all persons inhabiting this planet, but it cannot tell us the skin color, eye color, education, ethnicity, thoughts, routines, and other things that are intimately intertwined with any particular individual. By applying a general term to all particular instances, one risks erasing the individual characteristics that helped to create the term. The general term, then, becomes a vague expression disguised as knowledge.

The previous two systems of philosophy have failed to capture the nuance found in everyday experience. Attempting to find an essence between objects forces one to be less attentive to the characteristics that separate objects of the same name. Coors Light, Heineken, Blue Moon, and Guinness all share the name “beer”, but that name fails to sufficiently describe the variety of

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Categories*, 1.5.3a24-5.

textures, tastes, sweetness, and delicacy found within them. If anything, these qualities separate them more than they unite them. If one were presented with a Coors Light and a Guinness and were told that both were beers, they would have no knowledge other than that both beverages were alcoholic. They could have an expectation of taste, but after tasting both, they would likely be surprised that both shared a common name. The same result would ensue if particular objects from another universal class were to be observed.

We must not look for another system of philosophy. The search for essences in objects, whether it was in Platonic idealism or Aristotelian essentialism, causes one to ignore the complexity found in particulars. A new starting point must be found. Instead of looking for essences in particulars, we need to begin to question why past philosophers have insisted in searching for essences. We must question whether essences can be found, and if not, then we must reexamine the goal of philosophy.

Chapter III: Wittgenstein

Introduction

Systems of philosophy, those doctrines put forward by Plato and Aristotle that force one to think in one direction and conclude one thing about all objects, consider particulars from a distance. Those systems prefer to abstract from particularities so that a coherent and simple view of the world can be constructed. Plato's Forms make a general category of all words that are used to describe objects and their qualities and quantities. Although first dealing with particular objects and their characteristics, Aristotle forsakes his linguistic investigation so that he can find an essence for all objects sharing a secondary substance. In both systems, there is a presupposed truth that exists independently of us, and the goal of philosophy is to discover this truth whether it be through the preparation of death or the outlining of various differentia.

Ludwig Wittgenstein disrupts those systems that seek a presupposed essence, urging one to quietly observe the way things are without attempting to unify or explain them. He does not propose a system but rather a method. There is no goal that is waiting to be fulfilled. There are only connections to be noticed. Philosophy has had the tradition of proposing grand questions and supplying grand solutions without observing the infinite complexity found in language. We have a tendency to generalize and to willingly ignore the complexity right before our eyes. It is now the philosopher's duty to observe and correct one's speech when they attempt to simplify a situation.

This chapter will be messy and incomplete, and this is the result of being unable to limit the claims made within Wittgenstein's method. The method is continuous, and there is no goal to be reached in the end. However, after observing and applying the method, we will see that the search for an essence in all things was simply an illusion found in our grammar that was to be overcome.

The Essentialist Question

Systems that suppose an essence for objects ask the question, “What is x?”, where x is a variable for any object. One could ask, “What is Guinness?”, and this question can be answered in various ways. One could reply that Guinness is creamy, roasty, opaque, white, smooth, and so on. These characteristics serve different purposes, and it is difficult to know which characteristic is the essential one that defines it. Perhaps it is the creamy texture that is essential, but it could also be the mixture of water, barley, malt, hops, and yeast, the bare elements of what creates that creamy and smooth texture, that is the definition of what a Guinness is. The question itself of what a Guinness is provides many divergences in one’s thought, all of which appear to be true but when questioned, force one to step back to the original divergence.

A similar mental cramp is produced when the question “What is a pencil?” is asked. There are various ways to describe a pencil. It is a writing utensil, it is made of wood, it contains lead, it can be yellow, it can be mechanical, it puts thoughts on a paper, and so forth. After all these qualities have been listed, one can become unsettled at the variety of ways a pencil can be described. If one quality were to be chosen as its essence, how could one begin to decide what it would be? One could claim that its essential quality is wood and lead, but this would merely point at the physical aspect of a pencil while ignoring its purpose and use in everyday experience. The essential quality would be the unformed matter, but that matter does not necessarily have to become a pencil. The wood can be used to make a chair and the lead can be used for a car battery. Unformed matter does not have a teleology to become a specific form. Matter has the possibility to be formed into various objects.

Whereas the definitions given so far have been verbal, definitions of objects can also be ostensive. The attributes of a Guinness and pencil listed above have not answered the meaning of what it is to be a Guinness or pencil, but they have answered the question of what it means to have an ““explanation of meaning””, which will cure one’s “temptation to look about you for some object which you might call ‘the meaning’.”⁵⁷ The meaning of an object cannot be found within, meaning there can be no essence attached to it or hidden somewhere in it. Our verbal definitions have tricked us into believing that such an essence can be found. Ostensive definitions, however, allow for greater flexibility in interpretation. When asked what a Guinness is, one can point to a pint of it and say, “This is Guinness.” The ostensive definition was the act of pointing to the pint of Guinness, but what exactly was pointed at? From that gesture, the questioner can think that Guinness is liquid, black, partially white, one, and so on. All of these characteristics are included in the gesture.

One must already have had a conception of those characteristics before understanding that they were present in the ostensive definition. If one asks what the color black is while sitting in front of a Guinness, the other individual can point to the body of the Guinness and claim, “This is called ‘black’.” It is clearer in this example what is being pointed to. A characteristic of an object is singled out from the rest as an example of the quality in question. In pointing out its quality, however, it is not the object that is alive but rather the use of the word black that is alive. Before asking such a question about color, one must already have a clear idea of what color is. The concept of color must already be in use for one to ask a question about it, but the concept does not exist separately from any particular object or mechanism of thought. It is a way for individuals to

⁵⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the ‘Philosophical Investigations’* (United States: Harper Perennial, 1960), 1.

communicate and achieve their desires within communication. The meaning of our words does not rely upon an external object. The problem is that we look “for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object *co-existing* with the sign.”⁵⁸ Objects do not have inherent signs attached to them that we must think our way into, and they neither do they inform us as to what must be said about them. These signs are instead used amongst themselves in a system of signs used by us.

One can argue that even if language’s meaning and value are derived from being used amongst itself, it does not follow that objects cannot have an essence. Both Plato and Aristotle begin by using a system of signs similar to Wittgenstein’s. They begin by describing objects, noting their differences and similarities, and then find their language to be inadequate to describe how the world actually functions. Essences are beyond the scope of our language, and we must be willing to forsake our language when we find it fails us when we search for an object’s essence.

Our language is one that cannot have an essence existing apart from it whether in space or in the mind, but the life of our language comes from its use. Words in a language do not have one use, but a single word can take on various meanings. One can think of “tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails, and screws. - The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects.”⁵⁹ The word “wood” is used throughout various cases. It can be used to describe a tree trunk, firewood, the matter of a chair or table, a barrel, a pencil, and so on. Wood is not fixed to any one object or meaning. We use the word in various ways and for different reasons. If a wood can be formed for purposes such as storing whiskey for decades and allowing one to write their thoughts on a page, then it is impossible to pin down the one use that this word is supposed to have because it does not have one use. The

⁵⁸ Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 5.

⁵⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 9e.

word is not fixed to any one object or meaning, but it is used in a variety of contexts to describe various objects.

Consider the meaning of the word “game”. This word is applied to a plethora of different activities, including “board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic games, and so on. What is common to them all?”⁶⁰ The final question forces one to try and find an essence connecting all activities called games. What does chess have in common with basketball? Both require skill. However, even those unskillful can play these games to relax. Perhaps games are relaxing, but at the same time chess can be an excruciating mental exercise. One can continue on, ceaselessly searching for an essence that is supposed to connect all particular cases because they share a common name. One can look at the “difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of singing and dancing game; here we have the element of entertainment, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared!”⁶¹ Dancing and chess seem to be miles apart, and yet both share a common name. In all these games there are varying levels of luck, competition, relaxation, skill, and so forth. These levels even change just within the game of chess. The amount of skill and competition exhibited will differ between two college students playing in their dorm and two finalists playing a championship. It is impossible to find one thing that connects all particulars belonging to a class. Instead, there is overlapping between individual members of a class. An essence cannot be found with or without language because our use of language and our actions alongside it do not have one. Similarities can be expounded, but one thing connecting all cases equally does not exist.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 36e.

⁶¹ Ibid., 36e.

Family Resemblances and Language-Games

One can raise a worry that does concern us. If there is no one common element between all members of a class, then what allows those members to share a name? Perhaps an aspect of playing tennis on the weekends is that it is relaxing. However, watching television or reading a book may also be relaxing. Therefore, one can claim that television and books are game even though that seems wrong. The individual claiming it can argue that there is a common characteristic between tennis, television, and reading, and so each of these activities should bear a common name. Language is nothing but the ability to organize words and experiences according to one's will. There are no rules that should apply to everyone using it.

Although there is not one common thread, there are still similarities connecting all members of a class. When considering the various types of games listed above, there was a complicated system of similarities and differences that were continually criss-crossing, overlapping, leaving then coming back again, and so on. There is not a common essence, but like the thread connecting all philosophers from Plato until now, a linkage made from various strands tied together consisting of various lengths, games share multiple characteristics while not others. These similarities Wittgenstein calls “‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family - build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth - overlap and criss-cross in the same way. - And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.”⁶² A family shares a name and certain other characteristics, whether physical or temperamentally, but there also differences, subtle and noticeable, that separate them. In the same way, games create a web of connection, a family so to speak, that share a common name and sometimes a common

⁶² Ibid., 36e.

purpose, but they are also independent, existing on their own and able to be enjoyed in their own way.

Rigid boundaries for a concept can be given for certain instances. In gym class the boundary for a game might be that it has a ball. Such games would include football, basketball, baseball, handball, and so on. Games requiring physical activity naturally exclude games like chess, poker, and video games. In such a context, the boundary for what a game may be is limited to games that include physical movement. This is one instance in which a boundary is set up within a concept. The instructor has a goal for the class, and they want their students to become physically active. However, the instructor could not claim that only physical activities are games. How everyone else applies the concept of a game is not restricted by the use of the gym instructor's use. In this sense, the concept of a game still does not have a boundary except in this circumstance where only one aspect of the concept is being examined. This circumstance, however, is not the only representation of the concept. For specific purposes, a concept may be bounded, but the boundaries cannot be drawn for the concept outside of those purposes.

The idea of family resemblances is used when someone asks what an object or concept is. If one asks what a game is, we may be tempted by this essentialistic question to look for the essence of the concept game. We can avoid this search, however, by beginning to explain and describe games themselves. We could start by explaining the premise of tennis, namely of having a net, a ball, two rackets, and hitting the ball within the designated lines. Next, we can explain poker and other card games and then claim, ““This *and similar things* are called ‘games’”.”⁶³ This might be the extent of our knowledge regarding games as a concept, but this is not to say that our knowledge of games stops here. The question asked does not call for boundaries to be drawn, and we are

⁶³ Ibid., 37e.

merely offering the individual examples of what a game can be, not what it must be. If after hearing our description of what a game is the individual asked for more games similar to tennis, namely games that include balls, we could then demarcate sports and make that the boundary for our explanation. Our knowledge continues, but if we are not given a boundary, it might be difficult to begin to explain what a concept is. However, a boundary is not necessary for a concept to be used, for when we are done explaining the concept of a game bounded by the presence of balls, we will in a sense need to start over when we begin explaining games that are bounded by the use of cards, chess pieces, and other objects. This shows the family resemblances games have amongst themselves, and we are allowed to create finite boundaries within the concept when the need arises. A concept is malleable to the use we need it to have. We need only to be aware of the boundaries we set up within the concept and understand the concept may not be as simple as we make it out to be.

Language is also used alongside thoughts, facial expressions, gestures, and movements, creating a comprehensive form of life that takes into account motives, actions, and uses of words. The term “language-game” indicates the diverse uses of words and separates them into their contexts. Language is not an entity that somehow exists separately from the rest of our lives, but the “*speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life.”⁶⁴ There are various language-games to be so-called “played”, including giving orders and acting on them, reporting an event, acting, reciting a story, telling jokes, solving riddles, and so on. These individual instances are not just accompanied by words, but one can imagine intonation, hand gestures, the crunching of the face, the lighting up of the eyes, and so forth. Imagine sitting at a bar and listening to another individual tell you about their day. They might be gripping the pint glass or taking sips of beer

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15e.

after every few sentences or staring into their drink and looking at their reflection as they speak while mumbling or getting excited about something they saw or talking casually about the baseball game. The possibilities of how those words are delivered have no end, and they are simultaneously accompanied by glances and gestures. The words alone offer a fragment of the situation unfolding. One will have a better picture of what those words meant when they also observe the movements of the speaker. Language is not the beginning of thought, but it is merely another mode of communication.

For a clearer picture, Wittgenstein uses the simple language-game between the builder and the assistant. The builder has four materials, block, pillar, slab, and beam, and when he wants one of the materials to be brought over, he calls out the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab”, and “beam” to the assistant, who proceeds to bring them to the builder.⁶⁵ These calling out of names can be accompanied by pointing to the object and then pointing to where it should lay. This is a language-game. These two individuals have a language that serves their purpose of building, and it is a language-game of giving orders and obeying them. We can “clearly survey the purpose and functioning of the words”⁶⁶, and we can conceive of this being the complete language between the builder and the assistant. These words function so that when the builder calls the name of the object or points at it, the assistant is taught to obey the command and retrieve the object. The assistant then looks to where the builder is pointing at when they say “here”, and the assistant proceeds to bring the object to that spot. The assistant does not speak, and yet they partake in this language-game. They have been taught to understand what needs to be done when certain words are spoken

⁶⁵ Ibid., 7e.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 7e.

and gestures are made. Upon hearing these words, they act, and this acting is partaking in the established language-game.

One could argue that this language is incomplete. While it has a certain function, it does not include the essential human activities of eating, drinking, reasoning, and so on. The words in the language also correlate to some object. There are words attached to the blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. Words are used to label objects, and language is the combining of these labels to create coherent thoughts. This language signifies something, but it is not complete since it has not yet grasped everything that can be signified.

One would be right in claiming that the words are used as labels and are attached to the objects, but their usage includes more than just naming. If the builder were only to say the word “slab” with a plain tone and no gestures, the assistant would be confused as to what to do for they have not been taught what “slab” means. The builder will have to first point to the object and perhaps repeat the word “slab” until the assistant points and also says the word. This will let the builder know that the assistant understands what the object is to be called. The naming is “something like attaching a name tag to a thing. One can call this a preparation for the use of word.”⁶⁷ The builder may then have to point to the slab and point to where it has to go. Either the assistant will understand what they are supposed to do or the builder will have to move the slab themselves the first few times to show the assistant what to do. Eventually the assistant will understand what they are supposed to do, and they will begin to follow the orders given by the builder’s words and gestures although they themselves do not speak. Neither of these individuals necessarily think that “slab” is an essential signifier for the object. Rather, the word is part of a greater process of moving an object and building upon it. The goal is not to find the essence of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 16e.

object or a definition of what the object is, but naming the object helps the builder to easier communicate what materials they want and when they want it.

If the language between the builder and the assistant allows them to achieve their intended goals, then there language cannot be said to be incomplete. Language is use, but it is not just the words being spoken. Language consists of gestures, bodily expressions, tone of voice, and so on. The builder is able to accomplish what they want with their gestures and four word orders. One can claim that such a language-game is primitive and incomplete, but then one should examine whether “our own language is complete – whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in to it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language.”⁶⁸ Do we feel a yearning for new expressions when we cannot describe what we are feeling? When we first taste a pint of Guinness or when we experience our first break up, we may be unable to express in words what we are experiencing. It is a new experience that we have never given thought to. It is not necessarily that our current words are not applicable to our feelings, but rather we have yet to give sufficient thought to the feelings. Our language serves our purposes, and so we utilize it for different reasons in different contexts.

Grammar as Our Form of Life

As the Wittgensteinian method does not propose a system that is to be followed, we do not search for an essence or rule that is derived from some higher reason beyond our experience. Our language grows as we see fit, and we hold each other to the standards of public understanding and agreement. Grammar, which is usually taken to consist of the rules of syntax and semantic usage, becomes a wider and more tangled term in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Grammar expands itself to include what linguistic move is allowed in a certain language-game. It does not need to solely be

⁶⁸ Ibid., 11e.

pure logic and correct usages. Grammar is used to justify and criticize our particular utterances in certain situations. These usages and situations are not described in books of proper grammar, and they do not exist as an external system that must be adhered to. Neither are they articulated in any specific formulation, but they are employed to clarify linguistic confusions that lead us to philosophical illusions.

Situating grammar within language-games emphasizes the regular activities in which language is woven in to. Language rests upon forms of life, and these forms are given prior to language. There must not only be agreement amongst “definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language.”⁶⁹ Language does not precede thought, and there must be agreement through perception, purpose, and so on if individuals are to begin communicating through language. This agreement may be expressed more directly through language, but there must an agreement to communicate and work together before a language can develop. Truth and falsity are found in what “human begins *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life.”⁷⁰ While this could be read as a defense of relativism, it could also be read as treating humankind as a universal form of life in which it is necessary that we agree before we communicate through language.

The Role of Philosophy for Wittgenstein

Philosophy is not for one to put forward a system that attempts to explain all things and neither is it for providing explanations for why things are the way they are. A philosopher is a guard who is attentive to the various uses and meanings of words within particular language-

⁶⁹ Ibid., 94e.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 94e.

games. Philosophy can be likened to therapy as it finds individuals in problems and attempts to show them a way out. However, there is “not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were.”⁷¹ How a philosopher is to show an individual out of a problem depends on what particular language-game they are in. It might be that the individual is looking for an essence connecting all games or beers and so forth. Perhaps one individual is attempting to formulate and find general *a priori* laws that all things are subjected to. As we have seen, however, such an attempt to put forward a universal system ignores the complexity and nuance found in particular objects. Philosophy “puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain.”⁷² This search for an essence is what lures individuals to speak generally about objects, but the philosopher is able to contextualize and examine language in relation to a form of life, which has a more varied purpose than looking for the essence of an object. The evidence lies before us. It is not our responsibility to go beyond it, but we must make connections between what is put in front of us and make certain that what is claimed is sensible for our form of life.

Grammar and Our Pint of Guinness

To draw a conclusion from Wittgenstein’s philosophy would be to violate the purpose of his writing. There is no rule one can follow to ensure the meaning of a word and an action fit with a given concept, language-game, or form of life. As individuals sharing in a form of life, we are all responsible to correct ourselves and others when we are deceived to generalize and ignore the nuance in particular language-games. When one speaks of an essence within a concept, others must be cautious of such generalizations and place the uses of the words in their respective games. With

⁷¹ Ibid., 57e.

⁷² Ibid., 55e.

this process, we will broaden the use and functions of words while deterring others from deceiving themselves into believing an essence can be found.

So what is a pint of Guinness? It can be labeled as a type of beer, or more specifically a stout, but there is little to be found in such a generalization. It tells us nothing of the taste, texture, size, and other qualities it possesses. Perhaps it is the mixture of the water, barley, malt, hops, and yeast processed at St. James' Gate Brewery that best describes what a Guinness is, and this would be getting at an aspect of Guinness. We have located the ingredients that make the liquor, but that is not the only interaction one has with a Guinness. Not everyone knows where Guinness is brewed, and the brewery ships it all over the world. Some will never drink, others will drink it and hate, and still others claim it is their favorite beer.

Although it is brewed in one place, Guinness tastes different everywhere. Whether it be in a can, bottle, or pint, Guinness consists of the same five ingredients. However, there are significantly noticeable differences between all three of those containers. All of them contain that creamy, coffee roasted flavor and thick texture, but those qualities are enhanced and diminished depending on where the Guinness sits. The difference between a can and a pint of Guinness poured from the tap is near inexplicable. It almost seems unreasonable that one should give them the same name. To look for an essence in the word "Guinness" and then correlate that to its related objects would be unfathomable.

So what is a pint of Guinness and is there such a thing as the perfect pint? If one were to ask this question, we could try to provide a verbal explanation of what it was. Such words as "alcoholic beverage", "creamy, then roasty", "heavy", "dark", "white on top", and various others could be used to begin to give the individual a picture of what it is. However, we could also bring this person to a bar, order a pint of it, watch the bartender pour it, and point to it and claim, "That

is Guinness.” One could look at it and know the physical features of a Guinness and then drink it and begin to see why those words were used to describe it. The individual who asked the question would get a clearer picture of what a Guinness is. This picture would change, however, if they drank it from a can or a bottle. Those same qualities could be present but in varying degrees. All of them could be diminished, and others, including the creamy taste, could be absent in other containers. The individual’s reference for Guinness would continue to grow, and they could discuss with others the tastes they experience. They are initiated in a new language-game.

Conclusion

The best pint of Guinness I have had was atop St. James' Gate Brewery in Dublin. I experienced all the qualities of a Guinness at their prime. It was room temperature and the creamy, coffee roasted flavor was the strongest and cleanest I had tasted. It was as if it was what every other Guinness was trying to be. So was this the perfect pint?

It is tempting to answer this question. Applying in the affirmative assumes that this is the pinnacle Guinness, the one that all others are trying to emulate but cannot. In that way, it would be like a sensible Form. That pint would be the cause of all others but could never be compared to. It is easy to claim this and then discredit the tastes of other pints. However, they all contain the same ingredients and are all brewed in the same place. What alters the taste is the bottle, the can, the shipping, the storage in the supermarket, and so forth. Those pints of Guinness experience different things and that allows for their various tastes. There are threads common to all pints while each pint has its own characteristics. We have sufficient words to describe each pint we drink. We use the same name for the substance residing in the different containers because they have enough in common to bear that name, but they are different enough to treat them on their own.

We are in control of our language-games, and we have to keep ourselves and others speaking sense depending on which game is being played. In all games, however, searching for the Form, the one, and the essence will offer one little comfort and will only deprive them of various experiences. While there may be a best pint of Guinness, it depends on the individual and the qualities they are searching for. Searching for the essence of Guinness is a futile search for each pint, bottle, and can offer something different. There are qualities between them all, but the differences are outstanding. The experiences of Guinness can add up, but there can never be one experience. The language-game will constantly be changing, like the sensible objects that Plato

and Aristotle sought to have an explanation for. However, there is no ultimate explanation. There are merely various paths one can take and become lost on. If you feel as if you are lost and are unsure of your way around, there is a community of speakers like yourself struggling and guarding against the temptation of finding an essence in grammar.

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