

THE COMPRESENCE OF OPPOSITES IN *PHAEDO* 102

In Cornford's opinion, the theory of Forms as put forward in the *Parmenides* is identical with the theory as stated in the *Phaedo*—both of them expressing the view that concrete things are the bearers, simultaneously, of contrary characters. Christopher Kirwan has recently denied this identity, in a paper which, if his thesis is accepted, will upset many traditions and greatly alter our understanding of the middle dialogues. (Cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London, 1939), pp. 70–80, and Christopher Kirwan, 'Plato and Relativity', *Phronesis* 19 (1974), 112–29.)

Kirwan, I believe, is wrong in this denial, and my purpose here is to defend the view put forward by Cornford. In doing this, I shall limit myself to an examination of *Phaedo* 102; for, while this passage is not the only one discussed by Kirwan, it is the one, I believe, where the issue of the compresence of opposites needs most to be decided. This is because the argument of *Phaedo* 102 is so closely, and intentionally, tied to Plato's whole theory of Forms.

Phaedo 102 falls in that part of the dialogue where Socrates puts forward his final argument for the immortality of the soul. The question of the compresence of opposites ('contraries' in Kirwan's terminology) is first raised at 102 a 10 ff. Here, Socrates refers to the fact that Simmias is said to be at once larger than Socrates and smaller than Phaedo, and then goes on to explain how this is related to what he had said in expounding his theory of Forms. What I want to do in this paper is to look at some of the detail of Socrates' assertions, offering comment as I go along on what Kirwan has to say about them. But before I can profitably do this, there is need, I think, to draw attention to what precedes this passage: in particular to focus on Socrates' exposition of his theory of Forms.

If we look back to 95 e, we will recall that Socrates set out there to show that not only is the soul strong and godlike: it is immortal and indestructible. But, he said, in order to succeed in this, he needed to make a thorough inquiry into the explanation (*αἰτίαν*) of why things come-to-be and how they perish. (It soon became obvious, however, that the inquiry was to be not merely into why things come-to-be and perish, but also into why things actually *are*—καὶ διὰ τί ἔστι (96 a 8–10).)

After saying for what reasons he ceased to look for explanations in terms of physical things or events (96 a–97 b), and why he gave up the attempt to explain things in terms of what was good, or better, and so on (97 b–99 c), Socrates turned finally to putting forward his method of hypothesis and his own account of why things come-to-be, perish, or are (99 c–102 a).

The main tenets of that account were:

a. There are Forms—a beautiful itself by itself, a good itself, a large, and 'all the others'.

b. Anything else that is beautiful, besides the beautiful (and the same sort of thing for the good, the large, and so forth), is beautiful because it has a share in that beautiful (*μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ*), because of the presence (*παρουσία*)

or communion (κοινωνία) of that beautiful—or whatever the relation may be that obtains between the beautiful and its particulars.

There is, indeed, no certainty about the nature of this relation, says Socrates; but, by contrast, there is certainty about the following:

(i) All beautiful things *come-to-be* beautiful owing to the beautiful itself: τῷ καλῷ πάντα τὰ καλὰ γίγνεται (MS. Tb) καλὰ.

(ii) All beautiful things *are* beautiful owing to the beautiful itself: τῷ καλῷ τὰ καλὰ καλὰ.

c. It follows from the above, says Socrates, that things which are larger are larger owing to largeness (μεγέθει, διὰ τὸ μέγεθος), and that things that are smaller are smaller owing to smallness (σμικρότητι, διὰ τὴν σμικρότητα). Again, if one number is greater than another, this is due to greatness, or numerousness (πλήθει καὶ διὰ τὸ πλήθος).

Now it is important to notice several things concerning this last point.

(a) To Socrates it is obvious that the explanation, or part-explanation, of a thing's possessing a *comparative* property is its prior possession of the corresponding *positive* property.

(β) Perhaps precisely because it does seem obvious to him, Socrates does not explain why he holds this: why he holds, for example, that if something is *smaller* than another, this is due to the presence of *smallness* in it. But surely no unusual degree of sympathy is required of us in order to grasp why this should have seemed obvious. For if, to take an example, one patch of wallpaper is redder than another, the foundations for this fact are the properties of redness that each patch of wallpaper possesses, independently and to a precise degree. For similar reasons, then, it is not totally naïve to suppose that if something is smaller than another, the foundations for this fact also are the properties which the two severally and independently possess. (The error, no doubt, is to suppose that these properties are smallness and largeness respectively; rather than properties of an absolute and 'primary' nature.)

(γ) The explanation that Socrates gives of: *x* is smaller than *y*—namely: *x* is smaller than *y* owing to smallness (σμικρότητι)—is of the same kind, *and is meant to be of the same kind*, as the explanation given of: *x* is beautiful; or: *x* is good. It is of the same kind because in each case it rests on the relation between a Form and a particular. But if the explanation is of the same kind, then the different expressions Socrates uses to convey that explanation must equally apply in each case. Thus, if *x* is smaller than *y*, this is not only 'due to smallness', but also 'because *x* has a share in smallness itself'; 'because of the presence of smallness <in, or to, *x*>'; and 'because of the communion of smallness <with *x*>'.¹

(δ) If *x* is smaller than *y* because it shares *not* in smaller-ness but in smallness, then in its own right it is entitled to be called 'small', just as fully as a beautiful thing is entitled to be called 'beautiful' on the grounds that it shares in beauty. And just as what shares in the Form of beauty is not only called 'beautiful', but *is* beautiful, so what shares in the Form of smallness is not only called 'small', but *is* small.

With the theory of Forms in mind, and its bearing on the possession of comparative properties by particulars, we can now turn to an examination of the passage in which Socrates brings up the question of the compresence of opposites. Some detail will be needed.

1. 102 a 10—b 2: Here, Phaedo briefly recapitulates what has been said, and agreed on, concerning the theory of Forms. This was, he says, that:

a. Each Form is real.

b. The rest of things (particulars) have a share in the Forms (this time the verb *μεταλαμβάνειν* is used).

c. Because particulars have a share in the Forms, they take on the same 'name' as the Forms: they carry their 'eponym' (*ἑπωνυμίαν*).

Now in fact, the theory of Forms as presented by Socrates, and outlined above, did not employ the expression 'eponym'; but the doctrine behind that term was certainly included there: if it is true (to speak in the material mode) that beautiful things are beautiful owing to their sharing in the Form of beauty, it is also true (to change to the formal mode) that the 'name' beautiful may be predicated of whatever referents there are which share in that Form of beauty.

2. 102 b 3–6: Socrates now says (italics, of course, mine): '*If this is how you say things are*, then when you say that Simmias is larger than Socrates, but smaller than Phaedo, you mean, don't you, that there are both things in Simmias: largeness and smallness?' The answer is: Yes.

Comment: (i) Nothing hangs on the fact that Socrates refers to what Cebes (or anyone else) means when he (merely) *says* that Simmias is larger than Socrates etc. For it is clear that Socrates believes that what Cebes means follows from his own (Socrates') theory; and that was a theory concerned not with ways of speaking (only), but with how things are.

(ii) If we ask why it is thought to follow from the theory of Forms that if Simmias is said to be larger than Socrates and smaller than Phaedo, then smallness and largeness are in him, the answer in outline is not difficult to provide. For Socrates, in putting forward his theory, went out of his way, we saw, to explain (and repeat three times (100 e 5–6; 101 a 1–2; 101 a 2)) that if something is larger, this is due to largeness; and the same kind of explanation for a thing's being smaller. But while the outline is straightforward, the same is not true of the detail. For it is much a matter of debate how we are to take the 'largeness' (and 'smallness') that is said to be 'in' Simmias. There are two ways of taking it, and each has some justification. First, we might take it as being the Form itself. For, according to Socrates, it is due to the presence of the Form of largeness that a particular is large, and it is not unnatural to interpret the 'presence of largeness' as being, in some (metaphorical) sense, the 'presence of largeness *in*' the particular. On the other hand, we would be equally justified, I think, in understanding the largeness in Simmias to be not the Form of largeness, but the characteristic or property of largeness. For, first, given that particulars are said to share in the Forms, we can reasonably assume that they have (in some not too crude sense of the word) 'shares' of the Forms in them. And, secondly, since Socrates is shortly to distinguish explicitly between the Form of largeness and largeness-in-us (*τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν μέγεθος* (102 d 7)), there is some justification for taking him to have held to this distinction from the start.

But whatever the correct understanding, it would seem undeniable both from Socrates' exposition of his theory of Forms, and from what he again says here, that if Simmias (or any other particular) is called larger than a second and smaller than a third, this is because there is a compresence in him of opposites, largeness and smallness.

It may be felt that this point is being laboured. And indeed this would be the case, were it not for the fact that Kirwan denies Plato to have held or even to have been committed to the compresence of largeness and smallness in Simmias (cf. p.126, *ad fin.*).

(iii) Kirwan denies that Socrates (Plato) allows the compresence of *positive* opposites in particulars, but he is readily prepared to concede (cf. p.127, *init.*) that Socrates allows the compresence of *comparative* opposites. And in the face of this, it is worth looking closely at Socrates' words. He asks: 'Whenever you say ($\phi\eta\varsigma$) that Simmias is larger than Socrates, but smaller than Phaedo, do you not mean ($\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota\varsigma$) that both largeness and smallness are in Simmias?'

It is evident that the sense of ' $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ ' cannot be other than: 'what you *mean* . . .'; or: 'what you are *really* saying . . .'; for Socrates could hardly be suggesting something so straightforwardly contradictory as that when a man says ' x is larger', he does not say ' x is larger', but says 'largeness is in x '. But, if this is so, we are led to ask what the contrast is that Socrates is pointing to.

It is, I would suggest, twofold. First, a contrast between ' x 's being larger', and 'largeness's being in x ' (or ' x 's *having* largeness in it'): a contrast, in short, between being and having. Second, between ' x 's being said to be larger', and 'having *largeness* (not *larger*-ness) in it'. But this second contrast brings out that what Socrates holds is the exact reverse of what Kirwan would have us believe. For while Kirwan wants Socrates to deny the compresence of positive opposites, while affirming that of comparatives, what Socrates does in fact is to assert that things are only *said* to have comparative opposites, while the truth of the matter is that they have no more than positive opposites. In other words, Socrates' position is that comparative *predicates* are correctly ascribed to this or that subject or referent, but that the properties singled out by those predicates will be seen on analysis (provided by the theory of Forms) to be the same as those singled out by predicates of the positive degree: there is no such property in Plato's scheme of things as 'largeness'; there is only 'largeness'.

3. 102 b 8—d 1: Socrates now continues, saying: Indeed <you ought to hold that in such a case smallness and largeness are both in Simmias>; *for* (all this, surely, is the sense of $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$) you must agree that Simmias' overtopping of Socrates is not expressed in those words: it is not by nature that Simmias overtops him, in virtue of his being Simmias, but in virtue of the largeness that he happens to have. Nor does he overtop Socrates because Socrates is Socrates, but because of the smallness that Socrates has in relation to (or: holds out towards, $\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota$. . . $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$) his largeness.

Socrates finally goes on to say (102 c 10 ff.) that it is for this reason ($\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\alpha$) that Simmias is said, by way of eponym, to be both small and large—he offers his smallness to the largeness of Phaedo to be overtopped, and his largeness to overtop Socrates' smallness.

Comment: (i) These lines are meant to explain why we ought to say that if 'Simmias is larger than Socrates and smaller than Phaedo', it is because Simmias *has smallness and largeness in him*. (No commentator, to my knowledge, has explained in what other way $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ might connect this section (102 b 8—d 1) with its predecessor.) But what is the explanation provided?

It is this. If we did not hold that Simmias *had smallness in him*, we would be obliged to say that he is smaller because of what he *is* (by nature). But this is obviously false: it is not by virtue of what Simmias *is* (essentially) that he is smaller than Phaedo.

The point, then, of the distinction here is not—or at any rate not first and foremost—to contrast essential and accidental features, but to contrast what something is with what it has or possesses.

(ii) Socrates gives us two (allied) analyses of propositions like: Simmias is smaller than Phaedo.

The first comes to this: Phaedo has (or: holds, ἔχει) largeness *πρός* (in relation to, or : towards) Simmias' smallness, while Simmias has (or: holds) smallness *πρός* Phaedo's largeness.

The second is: Simmias submits (ὕπείχει) his smallness to Phaedo's largeness to be overtopped, and Phaedo puts forward (παρέχει) his largeness to Simmias' smallness to overtop it.

Even if Socrates had not brought out previously that he thought Simmias to be in possession simultaneously of smallness and largeness, it would appear from these analyses that this is what he thought. But these are the very lines on which Kirwan bases his main argument against such a view.

Kirwan argues (or, more accurately, suggests) that:

- When Simmias 'submits smallness to
be surpassed by someone's bigness',
he has in him (according to Plato)
- a. not necessarily smallness, but
 - b. some instance of smallness-in-relation-to- x ;
 - c. in this case smallness-in-relation to Phaedo.

(Cf. p.126, *ad fin.*)

This argument I find unsatisfactory. For,

a. (*ad a.* above): I am not sure what importance Kirwan attaches to 'necessarily'. It seems open to two interpretations: either that Plato did not necessarily mean what Kirwan suggests he means, or that Plato held indifferently that smallness *or* smallness-in-relation-to- x is in Simmias. On both interpretations, however, Kirwan's case is oddly weakened; especially when we consider that it was no more than a suggestion in the first place.

β. (*ad c.* above): Kirwan says that, according to Plato, Simmias has in him (*italics mine*): smallness-in-relation-to-*Phaedo*. But of course Plato did not say, nor could he have said, anything of the kind. For his comparison is not between the smallness of Simmias and *Phaedo*, but between the smallness of Simmias and the *largeness* of Phaedo.

My point is not, I believe, a mere piece of tiresome pedantry. For, Kirwan's way of relating Simmias' smallness to Phaedo, instead of to the latter's largeness, conceals the implausibility of his whole case. The reason for this, I hope, will be clear. If (as Kirwan wants) Simmias does not have smallness (but smallness-in-relation-to- x) in him, then *pari ratione* Phaedo does not have largeness in him either. Thus, what Plato in fact says will have to be analysed—if Kirwan's thesis is accepted—in a totally circular way. Something like: Simmias has in him smallness-in-relation-to-Phaedo's-largeness-in-relation-to . . . *ad infinitum*.

I can see no reason to think that Plato had anything like this in mind.

γ. (*ad b.* above): The principal purpose for which Socrates introduced the theory of Forms was to provide an analysis, not logical but metaphysical, of all propositions of the type: x is F . Part of the theory was that: x is F , if and only if, x participates in Φ . And this of course entails that whatever a given F in final analysis turns out to be, there exists a Φ which corresponds to it.

If my arguments have been correct, and the true Platonic analysis of a proposition like: x is smaller . . . , is: x has smallness in it (or simply: x is small), then the Φ corresponding to the F in this case is the Form of smallness—the existence

of which Socrates explicitly acknowledges. If, on the other hand, Kirwan is right, then the Φ must be the Form of smallness-in-relation-to- x . But there is no such Form in Plato's ontology. There are not even such Forms as the Form of smaller-ness.

δ . (also *ad b.* above): Kirwan's (corrected) analysis of ' x is smaller than y '—namely: ' x has smallness-in-relation-to- y 's largeness'—destroys the *separateness* of smallness and largeness which Plato's analysis both uses and requires.

In Plato's mind there is one item— x 's smallness—which is brought up to another item— y 's largeness—and the former is overtopped by the latter. (A bit like a child placing a small brick side by side with a large one; the one is overtopped by the other.) And, of course, the model Plato has in mind depends very much on the separateness of the two items.

Furthermore, as we have seen, this analysis is what Plato needs to fit in with the range of Forms that he thinks there are. He is working not towards complex properties but to simple ones; *for there are only simple Forms*.

In fact, I think Plato believed that in working with this model of one thing's being brought up against another, he had successfully analysed comparative properties away. And would he not have succeeded—if he had provided a similar reduction of 'overtopping'?

The last question that needs to be considered in this section (102 b 8–d 1) is that of particulars' having the eponym of the Forms in which they participate. Socrates says (102 c 10–d 1) that it is because Simmias has smallness in him which he submits to the largeness in Phaedo, and largeness in him which he brings against the smallness in Socrates, that he has 'the eponym to be small and large'.

Now since Kirwan denies the compresence of smallness and largeness in Simmias, he is obliged to suggest, by way of corollary, that there are two quite distinct ways, in Plato's opinion, in which something may have the eponym 'small'.

a. By in fact being small.

b. By being *not* small, but smaller (cf. p.127, *init.*).

There are many reasons for rejecting Kirwan's suggestion here—most of them already referred to, in one way or another.

(i) Plato says many times that smallness is in Simmias; he says moreover that it is due to this smallness in him (when submitted to Phaedo's largeness etc.) that he is called 'small'. The simplest solution is to assume that Plato means what he says.

(ii) The suggestion that Plato held us sometimes to call things 'small' in spite of the fact that they are not small—to call them 'small' directly, so to speak, because they are *smaller*—makes no sense of his attempts to explain that things are smaller in virtue of smallness in them.

If it is claimed that Plato was not attempting any such sort of reduction, the question then is: What *was* he doing?

(iii) If my earlier arguments are correct, Plato did not believe in the existence of comparative properties. He could not, then, have believed that things are called by positive 'names' on the grounds that they have comparative properties.

(iv) Plato held that: for any F , a particular x is F , if, and only if, x participates in the Form Φ . So, if he believed the F in Simmias' case to be not really 'small', but 'smaller', he would have been committed to a range of Forms, the existence of which he nowhere acknowledges.

(v) If we call things 'small' when they are not small, what is the explanation of this eccentricity? Plato gives us no answer.

(vi) Kirwan's suggestion involves the following. Plato thought that we call things 'small' because they are smaller; that calling them 'small', therefore, does not reflect the true state of affairs, and that strictly speaking we ought not to call them 'small' at all. But this, surely, is unsatisfactory. We (people in general) do *not* call things 'small' when and because they are 'smaller'. Indeed, the only people likely to do so are those who accept the kind of analysis which reduces smallness to smallness.

The point that I wish to make is this. Plato says that Simmias has the eponym to be large and small; and, further, he speaks as if this is perfectly proper. But if we ask, Who gives Simmias such an eponym?, there seem to be only two answers in the running. Either: people in general; or: the philosopher who analyses comparatives in terms of their corresponding positives. But the first alternative is ruled out on the grounds that it is not common practice at all to call things 'small' when, and because, they are smaller. The only explanation left, then, is that Plato thinks Simmias is (quite properly) given the eponym to be small and large, because he thinks the reduction of smallness to smallness (and 'smaller' to 'small') is correct.

4. 102 d 5–103 a 2: Socrates now comes to the purpose of what he has been saying. He has wanted, he tells us, to bring out the point that neither the Form of largeness nor the largeness-in-us can simultaneously be small and large. The latter, when its opposite approaches, either perishes or retreats. Then, referring to himself, Socrates says: 'I, having admitted and endured smallness, and still remaining who [or: what] I am, I, the same person, am small; it is not the largeness in me (*ἐκείνο*) which has endured [translators do not always bring out the point of the perfect tense here], being large, to be also small'.

Comment: (i) If we ask how it is to be thought that everything said so far has been leading up to the present point—that largeness (in us) cannot simultaneously be large and small—there are two possible answers.

a. Socrates introduced, for the purely general purpose of classification, a distinction between three things: Forms, particulars, characteristics. He now goes on to discuss in detail the only one that really interests him: characteristics.

β. Socrates introduced his distinctions not (merely) to classify, but sharply to contrast Forms and characteristics (and especially the latter) with particulars. This second answer seems the more likely to be correct, because it explains both the attention that Socrates gave to the case of Simmias, and also the fact that he at once turns to another example of a particular—himself.

(ii) This example of himself that Socrates turns to *could* be taken, if considered in isolation, as an example of a particular's being able *successively* to be large and small. But the general context, I believe, is against such an interpretation, for the following reason. Socrates' purpose is undeniably to contrast a particular (himself) with a characteristic (largeness). But the feature of the characteristic that he singles out to be the point of contrast is its inability to be, not *successively*, but *simultaneously* the bearer of opposites. (*οὐ μόνον αὐτὸ τὸ μέγεθος οὐδέ ποτ' ἐθέλειν ἅμα μέγα καὶ σμικρὸν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν μέγεθος, κτλ.*) If, then, the contrast is to be symmetrical, the corresponding feature in the particular must be the ability of that particular to be simultaneously the bearer of opposites.

The advantage of this interpretation, besides guarding that symmetry of

Socrates' contrast, is that it lends sense to the introduction (in the previous section) of Simmias, and his possession of opposite properties. We can now see what Socrates was then up to—as indeed he said we should now be able to see.

(iii) Kirwan asks (p.125): If Socrates' claim that largeness 'will never admit the small' is not to be understood as forbidding the compresence of largeness and smallness, what is its purpose in the passage?

Kirwan's question is not difficult to answer, I believe, provided that we bear in mind the over-all structure of Socrates' final argument. However, since there is some disagreement about this, I can do no more here than set out the argument as I see it—though in fact I believe the answer will be the same on other interpretations.

Socrates' argument, then in outline is this:

- a. There are particulars, and there are characteristics (explained in terms of the presence of Forms in the particulars).
- b. Particulars possess some of their characteristics accidentally: in such a way that the opposites of those characteristics can simultaneously be present in them.
- c. By contrast, some characteristics are possessed by particulars in virtue of what the latter are essentially: in such a way that the opposites of those characteristics *cannot* simultaneously be present.
- d. The soul is a particular which possesses life essentially; therefore death cannot be present in it. It is immortal.
- e. What is immortal is indestructible. The soul, therefore, is both immortal and indestructible.

Now, in the light of this general outline, Kirwan's question may be answered in the following way. When largeness and smallness are properties possessed accidentally by a particular, they can simultaneously be present. This is what Socrates asserted. This is the case of Simmias' largeness and smallness. When, however, largeness (and smallness, *mutatis mutandis*) is possessed essentially, smallness cannot also be present.

Socrates' argument shows no more than an awkwardness of transition at this point. He had been speaking of the compresence of *accidental* 'smallness and largeness', and then, with too eager an eye on what is to come, he shifts rather too rapidly to the impossibility of the compresence of *essential* properties. Unfortunately, but with no very serious consequences, the first example he gives of the impossibility of the compresence of certain (namely, essential) properties, is the same example that he has already used to show the possibility of the compresence of certain other (accidental) properties. 'Unfortunately', because one might be confused; 'with no serious consequences', because from that point on there is no difficulty in grasping what Socrates is about.

(It would be a source of pleasant speculation to guess what sort of particulars Plato might have thought of as possessing smallness *essentially*. The number *one*, I suspect, would be a near-candidate—thought of as a Pythagorean point.)

(iv) Kirwan argues that a theory which permitted the compresence of largeness and smallness would make no contribution, except by contrast, towards establishing that death and a soul cannot be compresent in a man. But, he continues (p.126, *med.*),

- a. Plato does not contrast the two cases.
- b. On the contrary, he uses 'almost exactly the words of 102 e 1 when, in giving his verdict for withdrawal rather than perishing,

he says "it is impossible for the soul, when death comes upon it, to perish (106 b 2–3)".'

To the first point. As I hope is now clear, Plato does draw a contrast, an important one, between smallness and largeness in Simmias on the one hand, and (the impossible) aliveness and death in a soul on the other.

To the second point. I suspect something here is amiss; I have not been able to find the parallel referred to.

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