

While Plato's treatment of beauty has received considerable attention in relation to his attitudes towards the arts (Janaway *et al.*) and love (e.g. Price), relatively little work has been done to analyze the nature of the form of beauty itself and to elucidate Plato's claim that the forms constitute a beautiful set of objects. However, understanding this is of critical importance in coming to terms with central features of Plato's philosophy. The beauty of the forms plays a key role in motivating intellectual enquiry; relatedly, the beauty of the forms prompts the philosopher to model himself upon them and become virtuous. Any attempt to explain the beauty of the forms faces the following challenge: to develop an interpretation which accords beauty to immaterial essences, and which provides a consistent sense of beauty for the entire range of objects which Plato considers beautiful, from the human body to laws, sciences and the forms. One response has been to de-aestheticize Platonic beauty, to claim that *kallos* does not mean beauty, but is rather a general term of commendation (Woodruff *et al.*). Against such interpretations, I argue that the real solution is to re-integrate beauty into Plato's metaphysics and epistemology.

The central claim of my paper is that, while beauty is an irreducible property for Plato, and hence not fully definable, an essential part of what makes objects beautiful is their being harmonious. This claim receives direct support from *Philebus* 64e, where Plato identifies measure and proportion with beauty; I also discuss passages from the *Timaeus* and *Republic*, where Plato claims that particulars are beautiful when harmoniously composed, and that the forms, collectively, constitute a harmonious set.

I then turn to three problems arising from my analysis of beauty in Plato. First, how does it apply to the claim that the forms are beautiful? I argue that we experience the beauty of the forms via their explanatory power. To see the forms order one another and reality is to see them as sources of harmony and order, and hence explanation. This operates on two levels: first, the forms constitute a harmonious and mutually explanatory system. Second, the forms are responsible for ordering the world; they make things what they are, and are thereby sources of harmony and order throughout spatio-temporal reality.

The second problem I address is whether my analysis of the beautiful entails that the beautiful self-predicates in a problematic way. I argue that the form of beauty must narrowly self-predicate: at *Symposium* 210e, Plato claims that the form itself is wondrously beautiful; more generally, the motivational scheme of the ascent-passage requires the beautiful to be a beautiful thing. However, I maintain that the self-predication of the beautiful is not problematic; while properties such as largeness cannot characterize immaterial objects, if beauty is understood in terms of harmoniousness and explanatory power, then it makes perfectly good sense for the form of beauty to be, itself, beautiful.

Finally, I examine whether my analysis renders the beautiful identical to the good. Many scholars have argued that the good is connected to harmony (e.g. Kraut); in that case, my treatment of beauty might appear to render beauty and goodness indistinguishable. In fact, many passages in the Platonic corpus do appear to entail that the beautiful is identical to the good (e.g. *H. Maj.* 297c). Against this, at *Republic* 517c, Plato states that the good is the cause of all that is beautiful, implying that the two forms are distinct. I resolve this difficulty by arguing that wherever Plato appears to state that the beautiful and the good are identical, he is only claiming that the two are co-extensive. While the beautiful and the good denote the same set of instances, they pick out these instances in different ways. I clarify this by adopting Santas' analysis of the good as what is responsible for the ideal attributes of forms. I

argue that a consequence of this analysis is that it allows for the beautiful and the good to be biconditionally related, while according primacy to the good as a formal cause of the beautiful.

## The Role of the Beautiful in Plato's Metaphysics and Epistemology

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