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## PLATO'S ESSENTIALISM *Aporiai*, Essences, and Forms

University of Uppsala  
An intensive graduate and staff seminar  
Twelve seminars, Wednesday 19 April to Thursday 27 April, 2017

Wed 19 April 10-12 and 14-16; room K-2-1072  
Thu 20 April 10-12 and 14-16; room K-2-1072  
Mon 24 April 10-12 and 14-16; room K-2-1072  
Tue 25 April 10-12 and 14-16; room K-2-1072  
Wed 26 April 10-12 and 14-16; room K-2-1072  
Thu 27 April 10-12 and 14-16; room K-2-1072

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*Why does Plato believe in essences, and why does he conceive of essences as he does?*

*Why does he believe in Forms, and why does he conceive of Forms as the does?*

These are the two major questions that I want to consider in this seminar.

I have defended an answer to the first question, in *The Structure of Enquiry in Plato's Early Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2015). It says that Plato thinks we have reason to believe in the existence of essences, and that he conceives of essences as that which is designated by a general, unitary and explanatory account of what a thing is, because he thinks that in this way, and in this way only, can we properly engage with certain important and especially difficult questions: radical *aporiai*.

I want to use the first three, of these twelve seminars, to consider the first question and this attempt at answering it. The reading for this topic includes:

- Plato: *Euthyphro*, *Protagoras*, *Meno* and *Hippias Major*.
- Politis, *The Structure of Enquiry* (you may start with the Introduction and Chapter 8); and Politis 2012.

I want to use the remaining nine seminars to consider the second question. I am currently writing a manuscript on this question, in which I am defending the following thesis:

i. Plato's theory of Forms has a single essential core, which is the proposition that

0. Forms are essences;

essences, in the sense of: that which is designated by an adequate and true account of what a thing is; and an adequate account, in the sense of: an account that is *general, unitary, and explanatory*.

ii. On the basis of the supposition that Forms are essences, in conjunction with the need to resolve certain *aporiai*, the following propositions can be defended:

0'. There are essences and Forms;

1. Essences and Forms are simple and unitary;

2. Essences and Forms are changeless and eternal;

3. Essences and Forms are not perceptible by the senses, and they can be known only by reasoning;

4. All causation and explanation is based in essences and Forms, and essences and Forms are the causes of why physical things are as they are; and

5. Essences and Forms are separate from physical things.

iii. These *aporiai* include *aporiai* concerning concepts that are true of *all things*; in particular, the concept of *cause* (*aitia, to di' hoti*), which Plato focuses on in the *Phaedo*, and the concept of *unity* (*to hen*), which he fastens onto in the *Republic* and, of course, in the *Parmenides*.

I plan to have ready, and to distribute to all attendants by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, most of this manuscript. The manuscript, which we shall be reading together in the course of the seminar, includes numerous references to other critics and other accounts of Plato's theory of Forms. The reading for this topic includes:

- Plato: *Phaedo*, *Republic* (esp. book I; and books V-VII, esp. V.476-479 and VI.507-VII.534), *Parmenides* (up to 136), and *Cratylus*.
- Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A6.
- Fine, Gosling, Rickless and Ross from the bibliography below.

## Bibliography

Plato

*Euthyphro*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Hippias Major*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* (esp. book I; and books V-VII, esp. V.476-479 and VI.507-VII.534), *Parmenides* (up to 136), and *Cratylus*.

Aristotle: *Metaphysics* A6.

Fine, G. 1993. *On Ideas*. **Esp. Ch. 4**; and her analysis of Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A6.

Geach, P. 1966. *Plato's Euthyphro. A commentary and analysis*. Monist.

Gosling, J.C.B. 1973. *Plato*.

- Rickless, S. 2007. *Plato's Forms in Transition*. **Esp. Ch. 1.**
- Ross, D. 1951. *Plato's Theory of Ideas*.
- Politis, V. 2012. 'What do the arguments in the *Protagoras* amount to?', *Phronesis* 57: 1-31.
- Politis, V. 2015. *The Structure of Enquiry in Plato's Early Dialogues*. Cambridge.