

## IS THE FORM OF THE GOOD A FINAL CAUSE FOR PLATO?

Elizabeth Jelinek

It is often assumed (see Ferejohn 2009, 155; Kraut 1992, 320; Penner 2003, 208–10; Reeve 1988, 91–96; Rowe 2007, 134; Santas 1985, 223–24; Teloh 1981, 137; White 1979, 43–49 and 2009, 371) that the Form of the Good plays the role of a final cause for Plato. For example, Teloh remarks, “The Good . . . is the final end towards which all things strive” (1981, 137). And Santas writes, “What conception of goodness did he have, which allowed him to think of the Form of the Good not only as the final cause of everything that we do” (1980, 374). The Form of the Good is described in the *Republic* as the end of all human action (505e), and, since this is undeniably a teleological notion, it might seem reasonable to conclude that explanations invoking the Form of the Good and teleological explanations are all of a piece for Plato.

I argue that, if one assumes *Plato's* conception of final causation, the claim that the Form of the Good is a final cause is untenable. Let me emphasize that I am not arguing against the idea that the Form of the Good is a final cause under *some* definition of final causation; my argument is that casting the Form of the Good in the role of a final cause in the *Platonic* sense is problematic. Let us call the assumption that the Form of the Good is a Platonic final cause “Assumption P.” In what follows I examine Plato's notion of final causation and his theory of the Form of the Good. Ultimately, I argue that Assumption P is inconsistent with the text.

### 1. WHAT IS A FINAL CAUSE FOR PLATO?

For the sake of clarity, from this point forward I will refer to Platonic final *aitiai* as “Platonic teleological explanations” so as to distinguish them from Aristotelian final causes.<sup>1</sup> We find one of Plato's accounts of teleological explanation in a familiar passage in the *Phaedo* (96a–99a).<sup>2</sup> Socrates begins by recounting his youthful attempts to learn about why

(*dia ti*) anything is generated (*gignetai*), destroyed (*apollutai*), or exists (*esti*) (96a5–10). He was excited to read the works of Anaxagoras because he had heard that Anaxagoras offered an account of the world in terms of Intelligence (*Nous*) (97b10–c1). Socrates had expected Anaxagoras to say that everything in the universe is the realization of *Nous's* goal to design the world in the best way possible. Such an account would explain, for example, that the cosmos is spherical because it is best for it to be so. Ultimately, this account would show that the whole universe functions in a way that maximizes the good for all (97d6–98b5).

To Socrates's disappointment, Anaxagoras fails to incorporate *Nous* properly as a causal entity in his cosmology; rather, he cites "air, aether and water and many other absurdities" as the cause for "the ordering of things" in nature (98c1, Gallop translation [Plato 1993]). Socrates says that this Anaxagorean explanation is entirely misguided—it is as absurd as saying that the "reason" Socrates is currently sitting in jail is that his bones and sinews are arranged in a seated position. He accepts that having bones and sinews is necessary, "that without which the reason could never be a reason" (99b3–4), but "to call such things [as bones and sinews] reasons is quite absurd" (99a5) because the very same bones and sinews that "caused" him to sit in jail could have just as easily carried him off to exile in Megara (99a1).

Throughout this passage, Socrates is searching for what he calls a "real" or "genuine" *aitia* (*tas hos alethos aitias*, 98e1), and the "bones and sinews" explanation fails to qualify. Sedley offers a compelling argument for understanding Socrates's genuine *aitia* as an entity that guarantees a particular effect by virtue of its essential properties (1998, 115–32).<sup>3</sup> For example, in the final argument of the *Phaedo*, the soul is a genuine *aitia*: the soul, by virtue of its essential nature (a bringer of life), guarantees a specific outcome (life in the body it inhabits). Bones and sinews are not genuine *aitiai* because there is nothing about the essential nature of bones and sinews that *guarantees* the particular effect of Socrates's sitting in jail; those same bones and sinews could have carried him off to Megara.

This explains one reason that Socrates is disappointed with Anaxagoras's account: "air and ether and water and many other absurdities" (98c1–3) fail to be genuine *aitiai* because there is nothing about their essential nature that guarantees, for example, the cosmos's position in the center (97e5). Indeed, "[t]hat's why one man makes the cosmos stay in position by means of the heaven, putting a whirl around it; while another presses down the air as a base, as if with a flat kneading trough" (99b6–9). The natural philosophers, thus, fail to provide adequate explanations because the *aitiai* they invoke do not guarantee the explanandum in question.

Notice that Socrates says

In fact he seemed to me to be . . . someone who said that *all Socrates' actions were performed with his intelligence*, and who *then* tried to give the reasons for each of my actions by saying first, that the reason why I'm sitting here is that my body consists of bones and sinews (93c1–7, italics mine).

He explicitly identifies the state of affairs to be explained: it is not merely his sitting in jail; rather, the state of affairs consists of a person *who performs all actions with intelligence* sitting in jail.

This is an important clue for understanding Plato's teleological explanations. According to Socrates, the essential nature of intelligence is such that intelligent agents will always do what they believe to be best. Intelligence is, thus, a genuine *aitia* because it guarantees the same outcome every time: the outcome the agent believes to be best. Thus, Socrates says, "Intelligence should be the reason for everything. . . . [I]f that's the case, then intelligence in ordering all things must order them . . . in the best way possible" (97c4–7). This highlights one of the distinguishing features of Platonic teleological explanations:

PTE 1: Regardless of the particular state of affairs being explained, every state of affairs is the same in the following respect: each is brought about because the agent believes it to be the best state of affairs.

Intelligence is a genuine *aitia* because it is its nature *always* to bring about what it judges to be best. This explains one reason that Socrates is disappointed with Anaxagoras's account: Anaxagoras failed to recognize that *Nous*, as an intelligent agent, will by its very nature *always* bring about what it believes to be best.

Since cosmic intelligences are supremely intelligent, what they *think* is best *actually is* best. Thus, in the *Republic*, since god is intrinsically good, he can only be the cause of good things (379b–c). Similarly, according to Timaeus, "[I]t wasn't permitted (nor is it now) that one who is supremely good should do anything but what is best" (30b1, Zeyl translation [Plato 2000]). This highlights another problem with Anaxagoras's account: not only did Anaxagoras fail to recognize that *Nous*, by its very nature, will always do what it believes to be best, he also overlooked the fact *Nous* is a *supreme* intelligence; thus, whatever *Nous thinks* is best, *is*, in fact, best.

Intelligent agents always do what they *believe* to be best, but, in the case of human agents, their beliefs might be erroneous. Notice that, in Socrates's teleological explanation of his incarceration, one of the reasons he cites is that the Athenians *judged it best* to condemn him (98e1–5).

The Athenians' belief about what is best is, in this case, wrong. Socrates contends that people do evil things only because they lack knowledge of the good; thus, what they *believe* to be best is not actually best (*Gorgias* 467a3–4; *Protagoras* 352a8–358d4).

From this, we can identify another feature of Platonic teleological explanations:

PTE 2: The degree to which the outcome is actually best is directly proportional to agent's intelligence: the more intelligent the agent, the closer his conception of what is best is to what is actually best (in some objective sense).

Consider the following Aristotelian teleological explanation: a spider builds a web for the purpose of trapping its prey. The spider does not have the *intention* of building the web for the purpose of trapping its prey, nor does it have the belief that building the web will accomplish this end; rather, it does so "by nature." According to Aristotle, every natural thing has some kind of "internal principle" such that each natural thing moves toward its own end without the conscious intention of doing so (*Physics* II 8).<sup>4</sup>

Contrast this with the Platonic teleological explanations given in the *Phaedo*. A genuine *aitia* is one that identifies the reason in terms of an *agent's* desire always to do what he thinks is best. This highlights one of several aspects of Platonic teleological explanations that distinguish them from Aristotelian final causes: while Aristotelian final causes need not invoke an agent with intentions, beliefs, and desires, it appears to be the case from the *Phaedo* passage that Platonic teleological explanations do.<sup>5</sup>

PTE 3: There is an intelligent agent with beliefs, intentions, and desires.

The fact that an agent is necessarily cited in a Platonic teleological explanation is significant. Intentional agency explains why the state of affairs obtains in the particular way that it does, at the particular time that it does, and in the particular place that it does. Thus,

PTE 4: The intelligent agent is also the efficient cause of the state of affairs.

We can summarize the Platonic teleological explanation as follows:

PTE (complete version): There is an agent who is the efficient cause of the state of affairs; that is, he brings it about at a particular moment in time and in a particular manner. Moreover, his desires, intentions, or beliefs constitute the *reason why* the state of affairs obtains. This "reason why" reflects the same motivation regardless of the agent or

the situation: the agent brought it about because he thought that the state of affairs was best. The degree to which the outcome is actually best is directly proportional to the agent's intelligence: the more intelligent the agent, the closer his conception of what is best is to what is actually best.

At this point, it may seem as though Plato's theory of the Form of the Good dovetails perfectly with Platonic teleological explanations. The following questions seem almost rhetorical:<sup>6</sup>

- (1) Isn't the best outcome "best" by virtue of participating in the Form of the Good?
- (2) Isn't what is "best" determined by a Form? For example, the Philosopher-King looks to the Forms to model his city, and the Demiurge uses the Form Living Thing as his model when crafting the cosmos. It seems that what is best is not determined by the agent's own judgment but, rather, by something external to the agent, namely, the Form.
- (3) Aren't agents motivated always to do what is best because of the Form of the Good?

It seems reasonable to assume that Platonic teleological explanations are the same as explanations invoking the Form of the Good or that Platonic teleological explanations at least presuppose the theory of the Form of the Good. However, as I will argue, the two types of explanation are fundamentally distinct, making it difficult to see how either is the case for Plato. I respond to the questions listed above as my argument unfolds.

## 2. FORM-OF-THE-GOOD EXPLANATIONS

My argument does not depend on any particular interpretation of the theory of the Form of the Good, but it does presuppose the rather uncontroversial thesis that the Form of the Good is not an efficient cause (see, for example, Vlastos 1969, 300, 309). For present purposes, I adopt Santas's widely accepted interpretation of the theory of the Form of the Good.

Santas interprets the theory of the Form of the Good as follows. Each Form's "proper attributes" are those attributes it has by virtue of being the particular Form that it is. For example, the Form Circle is circular, and the Form Beauty is beautiful. A Form's "ideal attributes" are those attributes a Form has by virtue of being a *Form*, rather than some other type of object. Santas says that, by virtue of its "Ideal 1" attributes, the Forms are perfect, eternal, ungenerated, and unchanging. We find examples of what Santas calls "Ideal 2" attributes in the *Symposium* (211a3–8): [The Form Beauty] is beautiful in every respect, regardless of

what it is being compared to and regardless of how it is being perceived. According to the principle of One over Many, given that all Forms share these ideal attributes (Ideal 1 and Ideal 2), there must be a Form by virtue of which they have these attributes. This Form is the Form of the Good (Santas 1980).

We can use the example of a circle to illustrate Santas's interpretation. A sensible circle is circular because it participates in the Form Circle; in this way, it resembles the proper attributes of the Form Circle. But it can't be the case that a sensible circle is *good* by virtue of its participation in the *proper* attributes of the Form Circle. Santas's rationale for this is that there is not necessarily any connection between the *proper* attributes of the Form Circle (that is, being circular) and the Form of the Good. Indeed, it would be absurd if the Form of the Good were the cause of all of the Forms' proper attributes, because then both circularity and noncircularity (which is presumably the proper attribute of the Form Square) would be good-making properties (1980, 391).

Santas concludes that a sensible circle is good insofar as it participates in the Form Circle's ideal attributes, by virtue of which the Form Circle is a perfect circle that is always circular, regardless of what it is being compared to and regardless of who is perceiving it. Indeed, it does seem to be the case that one sensible circle is, in fact, better than another sensible circle to the degree to which it is unchanging and always circular in all respects, independently of what it is being compared to or who is perceiving it.<sup>7</sup> If a figure appears to be circular to one person but ovalular to another person, then the figure is not a good instance of a circle.

### 3. EXAMPLE: THE COSMOS

To evaluate Assumption P, let us examine a teleological explanation and a Form-of-the-Good explanation of the same object, the cosmos. Consider Plato's account of the shape of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*:

And he gave it a shape appropriate to the kind of thing it was. The appropriate shape for that living thing that is to contain within itself all the living things would be the one which embraces within itself all the shapes there are. Hence he gave it a round shape, the form of a sphere, with its center equidistant from its extremes in all directions. This of all shapes is the most complete and most like itself, which he gave to it because he believed that likeness is incalculably more excellent than unlikeness (*Timaeus* 33b1-c1, Zeyl translation [Plato 2000]).

This passage offers the following Platonic teleological explanation of why the cosmos is spherical: the cosmos is spherical because a supremely intelligent agent, the Demiurge, gave the cosmos this shape, and he did

so because he thought that the sphere is the best shape for the cosmos given its function, which is to house all other living creatures. Because the agent in this case is supremely intelligent, what he judged to be best is actually best.

In section 1 above, it was clear that the Platonic teleological explanation in the *Phaedo* of Socrates's incarceration required an agent. While it is generally thought that the *Timaeus* account fulfills Socrates's wishes in the *Phaedo* for teleological explanation (for example, Gallop in Plato 1993, 95; Lennox 1985, 197–99; Sedley 1998, 114; Strange 1985, 26–27; Vlastos 1969, 297), it is less uncontroversial to assume that the teleological explanations of the *Timaeus* also require an agent, for this would require a literal interpretation of the Demiurge. As Zeyl remarks, “The controversy between a literal and a metaphorical reading of the *Timaeus* is almost as old as the dialogue itself” (Plato 2000, xxi). Here, along with Aristotle (*Physics* 251b14–26) and many others, I assume the literal reading.<sup>8</sup> I follow Broadie's lead when she says, “My approach . . . starts by accepting at face value the account Plato has given” (2012, 7).

Consistent with the literal interpretation are two theses that are relevant to my argument: (1) the Demiurge is an agent with intentions, desires, and beliefs; and (2) the Demiurge is external to his creation. As I will argue throughout this paper, thesis (1) is essential to the explanatory power of *Timaeus*'s account. *Timaeus* describes the cause of the cosmos as follows: “[B]eing free of jealousy, [the Demiurge] wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible. . . . The god wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad” (29e2–30a3, Zeyl translation [Plato 2000]).

It is precisely the Demiurge's desires that constitute the “real *aitia*” of the cosmos. As Johansen points out,

So *Timaeus* answers the question, “What is the *aitia* of the creation of the cosmos, and its order, and its soul?”, not by just saying, “this or that good,” but by saying “god's thinking and wanting that it should be good in such-and-such a way” (2004, 109).

In other words, the genuine *aitia* of the cosmos is the *god's wanting* to make everything as good as possible (29d7).

Thesis (2), that the Demiurge is external to his creation, highlights a feature that distinguishes Platonic teleological explanations from Aristotelian ones. Recall the Aristotelian explanation in which the spider builds its web without the conscious intention of doing so, but rather because of an internal principle moving the spider toward its *telos*. Based on such examples, we may characterize Aristotle's natural teleology as *internal*. Aristotle explains, “The best illustration is a doctor doctoring

himself; nature is like that" (*Physics* II.8 199b14–32). By contrast, in keeping with the literal interpretation, my argument assumes that Plato's teleology is external: the Demiurge is separate from his creation, just like a doctor doctoring a patient other than himself.

Thesis (2) is compelling in light of arguments showing that it is neither the case that teleology is inherent in the precosmos prior to the Demiurge's intervention, nor is it the case that intelligence is immanent in the cosmos.

It is clear from Timaeus's description that the precosmic materials lack intelligence and are, therefore, bereft of any internal teleological cause. Timaeus says, "The god . . . took over all that was visible—not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion—and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order" (30a2–6). He elaborates later:

[T]he four kinds all lacked proportion and measure. . . . They were indeed in the condition one would expect thoroughly god-forsaken things to be in. . . . The god fashioned these four kinds to be as perfect and excellent as possible, when they were not so before (53a9–b8).

Teleological causes are, by definition, purposeful. By contrast, the "disorder" of the precosmos and the lack of "proportion and measure" of the four kinds evidence the absence of any internal teleological principle at work. Since there clearly is no internal teleological principle directing the precosmos, we can conclude that the organizing principle that causes the orderliness of the cosmos must be external to the pre-existing universe (Broadie 2012, 8).

We can also rule out the possibility that intelligence is immanent in the cosmos. This is contrary to Cherniss's view, according to which *nous* is "a personification of the logical abstraction, 'intelligent causation' in general" (1944, 607). The idea that there is "intelligent causation' in general" in the cosmos allows for the possibility of there being intelligent causes operating on their own in the cosmos. An account of such a cosmos might claim that the intelligent cause of humans, for example, resulted in humans being structured in such a way that is best for their well-functioning and that the intelligent cause of the cosmos had the effect of its having features that were best for the well-functioning of the cosmos.

But this is not all that Plato is trying to explain in his teleological explanations. Recall Socrates's hopes in the *Phaedo*: "I suppose that in assigning the reason for each individual thing, he'd go on to expound what was best for the individual and *what was the common good for all*" (98b3–4, emphasis mine). Similarly, the Demiurge desires "[f]irst, that as a living thing it should be as whole and complete as possible and made



up of complete parts” (32d2–33a1). Thus, Plato’s teleological explanations seek to explain two things: why the features a particular has are best for that particular itself and why the features a particular has are best for the particular *qua* member of a harmoniously functioning system. If a whole is to have coordinated parts, it cannot be the case that each part has its own independently operating intelligent cause; there has to be an intelligent cause external to the whole that can coordinate these many parts (Menn 1995, 12).

The need for an external coordinator is consistent with Plato’s accounts of craftsmanship in other dialogues:

Take a look at painters for instance, if you would, or house-builders or shipwrights or any of the other craftsmen you like, and see how each one places what he does into a certain order [*taxis*], and compels one thing to be suited for another and to fit to it until the entire object is put together as an organized [*tetagmenon*] and orderly [*kekosmnon*] thing. (*Gorgias* 503d7–504a5)

If there were many intelligent causes acting independently to direct things in the universe, then Timaeus would not be able to explain why the cosmos is a coordinated, systematic, and integrated whole. Timaeus’s explanation thus requires that the Demiurge is separate from his creation.

Let us now compare the teleological explanation of why the cosmos is spherical with a Form-of-the-Good explanation of the same *explanandum*:

*Form-of-the-Good Explanation of the Cosmos:* By virtue of the cosmos’s participation in the Form Living Thing, the cosmos resembles the Form Living Thing; since the Form Living Thing is spherical, so too is the cosmos. The cosmos is *good* to the degree to which it participates in the ideal attributes of the Form Living Thing, namely, perfection and eternity.

There are important differences between the two explanations, and this poses a problem for Assumption P. The first difference is this: the Form-of-the-Good account answers the question, “Why is the cosmos spherical?” The teleological account of the cosmos answers the following *additional* question: “How did the cosmos *come to be* spherical?” In this case, the Platonic teleological explanation of the cosmos tells us that the intelligent agent *makes* the cosmos. Lennox makes a similar point: “Or, to put it in a manner Aristotle was fond of, given the theory of form-explanation in the *Phaedo*, we will still need a theory of why things come to have the features they do as and when they do” (1985, 203). The efficient component of the teleological explanation provides an answer as to how and why the cosmos came to be spherical at the particular

time that it did, in the particular place that it did, and in the particular way that it did, whereas the Form-of-the-Good explanation does not.

But this isn't enough to call into doubt Assumption P. Proponents of P could argue that teleological explanations are merely reducible to Form-of-the-Good explanations with efficient explanations attached. In other words, the agent is *merely* the efficient cause but contributes nothing in the way of teleology.

I argue that a Platonic teleological agent is *not* merely an efficient cause. This is because there is a second fundamental difference between the two explanations. Notice that both explanations account for the cosmos's spherical shape: on the teleological account, the cosmos is good as a direct result of the Demiurge's *judgment* about how to make the cosmos the best way possible; he engages in an "entire chain of reasoning" (34b1) about how to craft the cosmos. But, according to the Formal account, the cosmos has its spherical shape by virtue of participating in a Form. The problem is this: if the cosmos has its shape by virtue of participating in the Form Living Thing, then why does the Demiurge need to evaluate the situation in order to "reason" about which shape is best for cosmos's function? In other words, if the cosmos is already good by virtue of its participation in the Form of the Good, why does the Demiurge have to use his judgment *at all*? Why can't he thoughtlessly copy the cosmos's Formal goodness? Why did he have to, for example, think about whether the cosmos should have hands or feet, a smooth or rough surface, or whether it should be self-sufficient (33c1–34a1)?

According to the *Timaeus* account, the Demiurge's judgment is important: he uses it to figure out how to make the cosmos the best it can be *given sensible-world conditions*. On the Form-of-the-Good account, the cosmos is good by virtue of its resemblance to the Form Living Thing's ideal attributes. But this latter type of goodness is insensitive to the particular conditions of the sensible world in which the cosmos will exist. Thus, the Demiurge cannot thoughtlessly copy the cosmos's Formal goodness because the cosmos is not merely good in a formal sense (that is, it is not merely good insofar as its shape is as perfectly spherical as possible); rather, part of what makes the cosmos good is the particular sensible features it has that enable it to function in a particular sensible-world circumstance.

This highlights one way in which the Demiurge is faced with a more difficult challenge than many craftsmen: his model (the Form Living Thing) and his product (the sensible cosmos) occupy two different ontological categories. Johansen imagines that a parallel to this would be an artist attempting to turn a piece of music into prose (2004, 57). The Form occupies the ontological category of being; thus, it is eternal, un-

moving, and unchanging, while the cosmos is part of the ever-changing realm of becoming. Because of this fundamental difference, one cannot simply reproduce the properties of the Form onto the cosmos, just as one cannot thoughtlessly copy the melody of a song into a piece of prose (ibid., 316–19). Thus, as Johansen states, “You cannot simply read off the composition of the cosmos from the formal paradigm” (ibid. 57).

Instead, the Demiurge must use his reason to determine how to manifest Formal properties in a completely different medium—one that is always changing. One example of this is the Demiurge’s invention of time. It is impossible for the Demiurge to reproduce the Form Living Thing’s eternity in the cosmos. Using his reason, he concludes that the best way to manifest a Form’s eternity in the cosmos is by creating *time* (37c6–d7).

The ontological difference between the model and the product is not the only challenge the Demiurge confronts. The Demiurge must also contend with Necessity, the force at work in the cosmos that is responsible for brute facts about the physical world that may pose a constraint on the gods’ construction.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in addition to reasoning about how to manifest a changeless property in a changing medium, the Demiurge also has to figure out how to “persuade” Necessity—or compromise his crafting in light of its constraints—as he executes this task.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of an agent’s judgment in the *Timaeus* is consistent with Plato’s accounts of craftsmanship in other dialogues. For example, in the *Statesman* (293e–296a), Plato says that a king cannot rule effectively by thoughtlessly following a set of universal laws; he must use his judgment to determine how different laws apply to different circumstances in the sensible world. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that the “true” *technê* of rhetoric requires theoretical knowledge of souls and speeches (271a5–b5), as well as “the ability to discern each kind clearly as it occurs in the actions of real life” (271d7–272a8). In other words, the true rhetorician is able to use his judgment to determine how to apply his theoretical knowledge to situations as they arise in the sensible world.

Clearly, Platonic teleological agents are not merely copy machines; due to their judgment, the particular has features that the Form does not. The agent’s judgment is, thus, crucial to the explanation.

#### 4. EXAMPLE: HUMAN EYES

There is a further problem with Assumption P: Form-of-the-Good explanations and Platonic teleological explanations each account for different senses of goodness. To illustrate this, consider the teleological account of why humans have eyes (*Timaeus* 46e8–47a1). The *Timaeus* explains the creation of the cosmos in terms of the craftsmanship of the

Demiurge and his lesser gods. An explanation of why humans came to have eyes when they did, where they did, and in the way that they did can be given in terms of actions of the lesser gods, *qua* efficient causes: “The reason why humans have eyes is that the Demiurge (and his gods) think it is best that humans have eyes” (45b–47c).

Plato answers the question, “Why do humans have *eyes* rather than some other instrument?” in a discussion of optics that explains why eyes are the best instruments for seeing (45b2–46c8). Then Plato explains “their highest function for our benefit for the sake of which the god gave them to us” (47a). In other words, why is it best *for humans* that humans have eyes? He offers two reasons. First, having eyes allows humans to view the movements of the celestial bodies, which, in turn, allows humans to grasp the concept of time (47a1–b1). Second, having eyes allows humans to observe the heavens, and, from viewing the harmony of the heavens, humans will be compelled to order their own souls in a similarly harmonious way (47b2–c5). In this way, viewing the heavens will facilitate the development of a human’s virtue.

Let us pause here and note a significant feature of this Platonic teleological explanation: like the teleological explanation of the cosmos, the kind of goodness this account explains is a functional good (eyes are good because they are the best instruments for seeing). But this explanation also accounts for the goodness of humans’ having eyes (having eyes is good because it helps them become virtuous). I will revisit this later.

If Assumption P is right, we should now be able to make the case that a Form-of-the-Good explanation of human eyes is equivalent to the Platonic teleological explanation. At the very least, the account of the goodness of eyes according to the Platonic teleological explanation should be consistent with the account of the goodness of eyes given by the Form-of-the-Good explanation.

A Form-of-the-Good account of eyes would be as follows. Eyes participate in the Form Eye, which participates in the Form of the Good. Eyes are good to the degree to which they resemble the ideal attributes of the Form Eye: that is, unchanging, perfect, and always what it is regardless of time, location, respect, or perspective. Surely, an eye that is closer to being unchanging and perfect would function better than an eye that is not, and, in that sense, it is good in a way that an always-changing and less perfect eye is not.

Notice that this account of the goodness of eyes is fundamentally different from the Platonic teleological account I have sketched. In addition to accounting for the efficient cause of eyes and the functional goodness of eyes, the Platonic teleological explanation also explains why eyes are good *for humans*: having eyes offers humans a means to becoming more

virtuous. The Form-of-the-Good explanation of eyes only explains why the eye is a good object of its kind; it does not explain the goodness of eyes in terms of its benefit for humans' ethical development.

We have reason to believe that Plato would not have been satisfied with the Form-of-the-Good explanation of humans' having eyes. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates considers whether ship pilots are good (511b1–512d1). He claims that what makes any kind of craftsman—such as horse-breeder, a ship pilot, or a doctor, for instance—a good<sub>F</sub> (for “functionally good”) craftsman is the degree to which the craftsman performs his function well. Given that the pilot's function is to transport passengers safely from one place to another, we may conclude that a good<sub>F</sub> pilot is one who ensures that this goal is accomplished by saving his passengers from drowning.

But Socrates claims that an account of a craftsman's good<sub>F</sub>-ness is not enough. For example, a good<sub>F</sub> pilot would save his passengers from drowning. However, it is not the case that saving a man from drowning is necessarily good *for the pilot* or *for the passengers*. Socrates points out, “[The ship pilot] cannot tell which of his fellow-passengers he has benefitted, and which of them he has injured in not allowing them to be drowned” (512a9–b1, Zeyl translation [Plato 1997a]). The pilot knows what is good<sub>F</sub>; in other words, given what a pilot's specific function is, he knows what makes a pilot a good<sub>F</sub> pilot. But he does not know how to guide his actions according to what is good for a particular person or situation.

Surely we would expect that the Form of the Good explains goodness, but it is unclear as to how it explains goodness for the benefit of a specific sensible particular (that is, goodness *for humans* or goodness *for ship passengers*). Once again, the Platonic teleological explanation is superior to accounts invoking the Form of the Good, since the Platonic teleological explanation not only accounts for how humans came to have eyes and why the eye in particular is functionally good, but it also explains why having eyes can contribute to human virtue.

Let us revisit the seemingly rhetorical questions we raised in section 1 above: (1) “Isn't the best outcome ‘best’ by virtue of participating in the Form of the Good?” Perhaps the “best” outcome *does* participate in the Form of the Good, but the problem is that an explanation in terms of the Form of the Good cannot explain how it *came to participate* in the Form of the Good (efficient cause); nor can it explain why the outcome has the *particular* features it does. This is because its features are unique adaptations that the Demiurge has crafted to accommodate the ontological difference between the model (the Form) and the sensible particular. Along these lines, Lennox describes the inadequacy of Formal explanations as follows:

What can be explained about a thing by citing its participation in the Good itself on its own? Only this, that it happens to be good. But Socrates has much grander hopes for a theory which used *Nous* bringing about various arrangements because they were good. In each case, goodness out to account, not only for the *goodness* of a state of affairs, but *also* for that state of affairs itself—that is, we ought to be able to say, citing its goodness, why intelligence brought *that* about. . . . We may wonder, then, whether Plato ever considered form participation as an adequate account of why a particular or sort of particular can be said to have some feature or other (1985, 203–4).

In other words, an explanation in terms of the Form of the Good simply tells us that a particular is good, but it cannot explain why the particular has the features it does (that is, what makes it good). Participation in a Form is insufficient for explaining a particular's features, because the particular has features that the Form does not. It has these features thanks to the Demiurge, who used his judgment to figure out how best to manifest Formal goodness in the particular.

(2) “Isn't what is 'best' determined by a Form?” For example, the Philosopher-King looks to the Forms to model his city, and the Demiurge uses the Form Living Thing as his model when crafting the cosmos. It seems that what is best is not determined by the agent's own judgment but, rather, by something external to the agent, namely, the relevant Form. It is true that the Form determines what is good and that the Demiurge uses a Form as his model, but the Demiurge still has to figure out how best to approximate this good in a different ontological medium, the sensible world. The agent uses the Form as his model, but he needs to use his judgment about how to instantiate the good-making features of the model in the changing, visible world. Recall Johansen's analogy of the artist attempting to turn a piece of music into prose (2004, 57). The Form, like the music, provides the model, but, since the model is of a different ontological category from the product, it takes a craftsman's judgment to figure out how best to approximate the features of the model in the medium of a sensible particular. While the Form of the Good might account for a thing's goodness, it cannot account for the features it has that make it the best it can possibly be given sensible-world conditions. Thus, the Formal explanation is not a sufficient explanation of the state of affairs.

(3) “Aren't agents motivated always to do what is best because of the Form of the Good?” This seems like a reasonable assumption. However, once again, an explanation in terms of the Form of the Good is not sufficient. The agent's relationship with Form of the Good can explain why the agent desires the good, but it cannot explain what particular actions he has to take to fulfill this desire. In other words, an explanation in

terms of the Form of the Good can explain why an agent is motivated to bring about the good, but it can't explain what "bringing about the good" looks like in a specific sensible-world circumstance.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Let me reiterate that I am not arguing against the idea that the Form of the Good is a final cause on *some* definition of final cause; my argument is that, contrary to Assumption P, it cannot be the case that Form-of-the-Good explanations are equivalent Platonic teleological explanations because Platonic teleological explanations surpass what Form-of-the-Good explanations are capable of explaining. For example, both the Platonic teleological explanation of the cosmos and the Platonic teleological explanation of human eyes account for efficient causation, whereas Form-of-the-Good explanations cannot. Moreover, the Platonic teleological explanation of human eyes accounts for the goodness of eyes *for humans*, rather than merely their functional goodness.

One would expect that we could imagine a Platonic teleological explanation that lines up with an explanation in terms of the Form of the Good. But, as I have shown, any attempt at drawing this connection in a way that is consistent with the text encounters significant obstacles. One such obstacle is that the two explanations point to different sources dictating the good-making features of sensible objects. On the Form-of-the-Good explanation of the cosmos, for example, the cosmos is spherical because of its participation in the Form Living Thing. On the Platonic teleological explanation of the cosmos, the Demiurge must *deliberate* on how best to craft the cosmos. Clearly, this Platonic teleological explanation does not presuppose the Form-of-the-Good account because, if the Form-of-the-Good account were presupposed, then the cosmos would already *be* spherical and the Demiurge would not have to figure out what shape to make the cosmos or how to make the cosmos good. As we have seen, the Formal explanation cannot explain how Formal goodness is (albeit imperfectly) manifested in the sensible world.

What I have shown in this paper is that the assumption that the Form of the Good is a final cause for Plato is inconsistent with the accounts of final causation that Plato gives in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. Thus, Assumption P is unwarranted.

*Christopher Newport University*

Keywords: Plato, Form of the Good, teleology, *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, final cause, explanation.

## NOTES

1. I discuss a similar interpretation of Platonic teleological explanations in Jelinek 2015, but in that paper I focus on Plato's account of the goodness of *actions*; here, I focus on his account of the goodness of objects.
2. The ultimate purpose of the passage is to set the stage for Socrates's proof of the immortality of the soul, but the passage also lends insight into Plato's theory of explanation more generally (Ferejohn 2009, 154–58).
3. Much has been said about what we can conclude about Plato's theory of explanation from the *Phaedo* passage. See Lennox 1985, 199–200; Strange 1985, 26–27; Vlastos 1969.
4. This is not to say that Aristotle's teleology *excludes* an agent whose desires and actions are the *aitiai* for the particular end in question—he does offer teleological explanations of this type. The point is that Aristotle's teleology does not *require* a conscious, intelligent, and purposeful agent, whereas Plato's teleology does.
5. I address the question of whether the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* should be taken literally as an agent with beliefs, desires, and such in section 3.
6. I am grateful to both the editor and an anonymous reviewer for raising these questions.
7. In my previous work (Jelinek 2015), I claimed that the circle example illustrates a weakness in Santas's theory. I have since come to appreciate this example as one that is, in fact, consistent with the text.
8. For arguments in support of the literal interpretation, see Broadie 2012, 7–26; Hackforth 1965, 439–47; Johansen 2004, 48–68; Lennox 1985, 195–218; Menn 1995, 6–13; Robinson 1986, 103–19; Strange 1985, 25–39; Vlastos 1939, 71–83.
9. For a defense of this interpretation of Necessity, see Broadie 2012, 233–34; Jelinek 2011; Johansen 2004, 92–116.
10. For example, when crafting the human skull (74e7–75c10) the lesser gods that the Demiurge has enlisted for the task face a dilemma: either they use a thick material, in which case humans would live longer but be less intelligent, or they use a thin material, in which case humans would be more intelligent but have a shorter life span. Plato says that, because of Necessity, no combination of the four elements will yield a perfectly protective yet thin material. For an insightful discussion of Necessity, see Johansen 2004, 104–5.

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