

## Topic: The Form of Equality

The Form of Equality is the abstract idea of equality. It is the essence, the true and uncompromising idea behind the notion of equality. Being abstract this Form is eternal and indestructible. Along with all other Forms it constitutes what is truth and makes up the “world of being”. In this world everything is eternal and divine as opposed to the “world of becoming”, aka reality. Particulars of equality reside in the world of becoming. They are concrete expressions of the Form. They are examples of it, situations or instances in which the notion of equality appears. Employees in a factory doing the same amount of work in the same amount of time and hence receiving the same salary, for example, are an instance of equality. Particulars of equality are hence worldly phenomenon and are consequently by nature evanescent. They are imperfect embodiments of the Form of equality. As Socrates describes it they are that which “wants to be like some other reality but falls short and cannot be like that other since it is inferior”( Phaedo, p. 25, l. 74e).

According to Socrates knowledge of all Forms is within us from birth on. A good example is a baby sorting equal blocks together. Although not yet old enough to have been taught or to have learned about equality, it displays a clear knowledge of it. Another

“argument”, Socrates’ own, is that when people are thoroughly questioned about something they at the present time have no knowledge of, they end up giving the right answer of their own accord (as seen in Meno).

Both these examples are proof that the soul must have acquired its knowledge at some earlier point, before birth. It must have existed separate from the body, before taking on a human form. Hence what we call “learning” is merely a form of “recollecting”. Aided by our perception senses, we gradually recover the knowledge within us.

In his explanation of human beings’ understanding and knowledge of things, Socrates offers a metaphysical theory about the existence of a complete body of knowledge within every person. Based on the notion of the soul’s immortality, this theory explains that learning is just a process of recollecting this knowledge. But in light of modern science and technology what Socrates calls “recollection” can be (at least partly) accounted for by developmental psychology. The soul’s gradually increasing awareness of its innate knowledge is hence really due to the biological and cognitive developments of the human brain. As a baby gets older, neurons in its brain grow in increasingly dense connections, enabling faster and more efficient message transmission. Its awareness of the world progresses through immediate sensorimotor experiences to mental representations of events. Eventually their ability to understand logical principle develops and their use of language becomes more analytical. Even as grown-ups people’s brains continue to change as new synapses are formed with every new piece of knowledge they acquire (“Discovering Psychology”).

Furthermore, in constructing his theory of innate knowledge, Socrates completely dismisses the role of reason. Meno's slave, who allegedly "recollects" that the square on the diameter of a square is double the original square, is really just using logic. He made observations, thought about them and came up with a conclusion. Most learning, in fact, follows that same pattern.

But even if we were convinced of the existence of an innate body of knowledge and of the pre-existence of the soul, there would be some inconsistencies in Socrates' theory. Firstly, if the soul possesses absolute knowledge from a past lifetime, what caused it to forget this knowledge, necessitating people to recollect it?

Secondly, how would one explain somebody's inability to understand or grasp something? If the knowledge of it is within us and just needs to be remembered, why do some students for example have trouble solving certain math problems or understanding some of the more intricate academic concepts?

Moreover, as brought up by Cebes in Phaedo, while the argument from recollection proves that our souls existed before we were born, it does not necessarily prove its continued existence.

Alas, while Socrates' theory of recollection at first sight seems like a valid explanation for the process of learning, it shows some inconsistencies upon further examination and secondly can be replaced by more scientific and pragmatic explanations, like biological processes in the brain and the use of logic.