Socrates’ First Voyage in the Phaedo

Abstract: Many scholars have assumed that the aim of Socrates’ first voyage (97b8–99d3) is to determine features of each object in the world by considering what features are good for it. Against this I argue that it is rather to determine what the good is by considering why each object has its features as it does. I shall then show that this interpretation sheds new light on his second voyage (99d4–100a3), which I argue lies in the alternative method of using the theory of Forms not for explaining things but for discovering the teleological cause of the good.

At Phaedo 95e9–96a1, Socrates responds to Cebes’ worry that our soul, even if it can survive many bodies, may perish in the end after wearing out this current body of ours, by saying: ‘What you’re seeking is no small matter, Cebes: we must study thoroughly and as a whole the cause (τὴν αἰτίαν) of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be.’ With these words, in preparation for his final defence of the soul’s immortality, Socrates steers the discussion to the three types of cause he has explored in his life: material conditions and processes (96b2–97b7), intelligence or the good (97b8–99d3) and Forms (100c3–102a10). The investigation of causation exhibited here has become one of the most renowned and momentous passages in Plato’s dialogues, and an object of fierce scholarly debate in the literature. In comparison with a considerable amount of work on material causes and formal causes, however, much less research has been done on the remaining, teleological cause. But it seems to me that scholars’ common account of the point about his inquiry into this cause—Socrates’ first voyage—contains a problem that merits closer examination.

Many scholars have explicitly or implicitly assumed that what Socrates aimed to achieve in his first voyage is to infer features of each object in the world from

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1 All translations of the Phaedo passages in this paper are from Sedley and Long 2011. But they are on occasion modified when necessary for clarity of my argument.

2 In the passage in question Socrates does not seem to distinguish intelligence and the good, so I shall use the word ‘teleology’ for both of them.
considering what features are good for it.\(^3\) For example, he tried to determine whether the earth is flat or round by considering what shape should be the best for the earth. Against such a widespread assumption, I argue in this paper that it is rather to infer what the good is from considering why each object in the world has its features as it does. For example, he wished to learn the nature of the good by surmising the reason why the earth is round, why it is in the centre, why the celestial bodies move as they do, and so on. The point of my argument is therefore that he is not attempting to supersede scientific inquiries with teleological ones, but to employ the results of scientific research for discovering the teleological cause of the world. I suggest that attention should thus be drawn to the difference between the following two processes: one is what I call the analytic process, in which we inductively infer cause from effect; the other is what I call the synthetic process, in which we deductively infer effect from cause.\(^4\) The previous research has taken Socrates’ first voyage to be primarily concerned with the synthetic process, taking no notice of the analytic process or obfuscating the difference between the two processes. My claim, in contrast, is that Socrates’ first voyage is primarily concerned with the analytic process.

I believe that this methodological consideration will shed fresh light on the motivation and procedure of Socrates’ second voyage. The literature has often discussed


\(^4\) My distinction between the analytic and synthetic processes derives from the geometrical method of analysis, which consists of the analytic process of inferring from a given proposition the premises by means of which it is proved, and the synthetic, opposite process of inferring the given proposition from those inferred premises. While in geometry the inferences in both processes are deductive, I am characterising the analytic process here as inductive; but this difference is not important for our present purposes, because we are concerned only with the direction of each process.

It should be reasonable enough to suppose that Plato was well aware of the analysis-synthesis distinction when writing the *Phaedo*, because he is highly likely to have applied such a geometrical method of analysis to his own method of hypothesis in the *Meno*, which predates the *Phaedo* (cf. 72e1–73a3). Although it is certainly controversial whether he maintains the same geometrical method for the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo*, the fact that he emphasizes the importance of distinguishing the discussion of positing a (higher) hypothesis and that of inferring a conclusion from it at 101d6–e3 shows that he at least has in mind the contrast between the two different directions of inference in the *Phaedo* too. Also, it is true that Socrates’ first voyage comes before his second voyage, only the latter of which employs the method of hypothesis. But there is no reason why we should think that Plato depicts Socrates here as confused about the distinction in question, because that specific point is not part of his failure in the first voyage.
the question of whether he is intended to give teleological accounts of phenomena by appeal to Forms in his second voyage. But it has not seriously considered the following possibility my analytic interpretation genuinely opens up: that, while the theory that Forms are the causes of things does not involve teleological explanation, it is nevertheless introduced in the process of discovering the teleological cause. The paper thus suggests that the reason why Socrates’ first voyage ended with failure was that his attempt to discover the nature of goodness relied upon observing features of the celestial bodies by the senses. For, although those objects have relatively stable and unvarying features, they cannot avoid change as long as they are sensible. The point is therefore that the search of what the good is needs to be conducted via intelligible Forms, which are not subject to any form of change, and that the second voyage is in this sense indirect and more laborious, but is by no means an inferior method for achieving knowledge of the good. I briefly suggest in conclusion that this reflection of Plato’s methodology in the second voyage is likely to form the basis for his upward path to the Form of the Good in the Republic, where knowledge of that first principle can be achieved only by examining other Forms.

The structure of argument in the paper is as follows. In the first half, I critically examine the synthetic interpretation, according to which Socrates’ first voyage is to determine features of the world from a teleological point of view, and then defend the analytic interpretation, according to which it is to determine what is good by interpreting celestial phenomena (Section I). The second half of the paper is devoted to considering the methodological relationship between the first and second voyages, arguing that his failure to discover the good in the first voyage was due to the sensible nature of heavenly bodies, on which his inquiry into the teleological cause was based, and that his motivation behind the introduction of the theory of Forms is still in the context of discovering the good (section II). In the light of these observations, finally, I make some concluding remarks as to the relation of Socrates’ second voyage to Plato’s upward path to the Form of the Good in the Republic (Section III).
At *Phaedo* 97b8–c6 Socrates reports in retrospect that, having been dissatisfied with material causes, he was delighted to find one day that Anaxagoras was advocating intelligence as a cause in his book, because, if intelligence is the cause of everything, it orders everything and arranges each thing in whatever way is best. Socrates then makes a methodological point about how our inquiry into this teleological cause should proceed. His claim here is of great importance for our purposes and therefore worth close examination.

So, I thought, should someone want to discover the cause of each thing, how it comes to be, perishes, or is, this is what he must find out about it: how it is best for it either to be, or to do or to have done to it anything else whatsoever. (97c6–d1, tr. modified5)

εἰ οὖν τις βούλοιτο τὴν αἰτίαν εὑρεῖν περὶ ἕκαστου ὅπῃ γίγνεται ἢ ἀπόλλυται ἢ ἔστι, τούτο δεῖν περὶ αὐτοῦ εὑρεῖν, ὅπῃ βέλτιστον αὐτῷ ἔστιν ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἄλλο ὑποῦν πᾶσχειν ἢ ποιεῖν.

What does Socrates say a learner of the teleological cause needs to do? Many scholars have taken his point to be that one has to find out what are best for each thing, to determine its features.6 For example, if one wants to know what shape the earth has, one needs to consider what shape is best for it. If one figures it out, judging that it is best for the earth to be, say, spherical, one can decide that the earth is actually spherical. The underlying idea is that Socrates is interested in the deductive inference from cause (what is best for the earth) to effect(s) (e.g. its shape being spherical). Based on this

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5 For other literal translations of the cited passage above, see Ebert 2004; Gallop 1975; Hackforth 1955; Tredennick and Tarrant 1993.

6 Crombie 1962, vol. 2 167–8: ‘he [Socrates] expected Anaxagoras to decide whether the earth was in the middle of the universe by demonstrating whether it was better for it to be there’; Guthrie 1962, vol. 4, 333: ‘Mind would certainly have ordered things for the best, so if one wanted find out, e.g. the shape and situation of the earth, one would simply have to ask how and where it was best for it to be’; Loriaux 1969, vol. 2, 79: ‘Dès lors (...), si, pour une réalité donnée, nous déterminons cette disposition—autrement dit; cette manière d’être, de subir ou d’agir qui, pour elle, est, en fait, la meilleure (...)—nous sommes assurés d’atteindre, par la même occasion, la cause qui, pour cette réalité concrète, détermine sa naissance, sa mort et son être’; Vlastos 1975, 30: ‘he [Socrates] reproaches them [natural philosophers] for deciding such a question as whether the earth is flat or round without first asking which of the two would be the “better” and ‘it would be better, more beautiful, if things were thus and so; ergo, they are thus and so’. Many of the existing translations are also based on the synthetic interpretation (Bluck 1955; Grube in Cooper 1997; Dixsaut 1991; Fowler 1914; Vicaire 1983).
presupposition, some (e.g. Vlastos) say that one needs to answer which shape is best for the earth (cause) before deciding that it is spherical (effect), but others (e.g. Crombie, Guthrie and Loriaux) say that one can grasp cause and effect at the same time simply by working out what shape is best for the earth. Although there is thus some difference between these two explanations, they basically share the same assumption that Socrates’ expectation is to determine features of the world by considering what are best for each object in it. This is what I call the *synthetic* interpretation.

In this section, I argue against the synthetic interpretation in favour of what I call the analytic interpretation, according to which Socrates’ point in the cited passage is that one needs to find out in what sense each feature of the world is best, to discover its cause. For example, if one wants to discover the cause of the earth’s being spherical, one should consider the question of why its sphericity is best for it. If one solves the question, one will have a better understanding of what is good. The idea is that Socrates is interested in the inductive inference from effect(s) (e.g. the earth’s being spherical) to cause (why its sphericity is best for it). This indicates that one needs to grasp effects somehow before investigating them for their cause—the order of inquiry is the opposite to the order based on the synthetic interpretation. Socrates’ expectation is therefore to infer inductively the nature of goodness from the facts of the world one can identify independently of teleological grounds.

There are linguistic and contextual reasons for adopting the analytic interpretation in place of the synthetic one. I start with the linguistic reason. The synthetic interpretation derives from a wrong reading of the cited passage above, in which Socrates says that what one has to find out about each thing is: ‘how it is best for it either to be, or to do or to have done to it anything else whatsoever’ (ὅπῃ βέλτιστον αὐτῷ ἐστιν ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἄλλο ὁτιοῦν πάσχειν ἢ ποιεῖν). This is a literal translation of the ὅπῃ-clause. It is clear that the synthetic interpreter reads ‘how’ (ὅπῃ) with the three infinitives—‘to be’ (εἶναι), ‘to do’ (ποιεῖν), and ‘have done to it’ (πάσχειν)—rather than with ‘is best for it’ (βέλτιστον αὐτῷ ἐστιν), and thus construes the question in the clause as meaning ‘what kind of existence is best for it, or what it is best that it should do or have done to it’. This cannot be correct, however. If ‘how’ (ὅπῃ), as the synthetic interpreter supposes, goes

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7 See those translators mentioned in the previous note (Bluck 1955; Grube in Cooper 1997; Dixsaut 1991; Fowler 1914; Vicaire 1983).
with the infinitive verbs, it should go equally with all of them; but, even if ὅπῃ … ἐἶναι can be read as ‘what kind of existence is best for it’, it is impossible to read ὅπῃ … πάσχειν ἢ ποιεῖν as ‘what it is best that it should do or have done to it’, because ὅπῃ is not an interrogative pronoun but an interrogative adverb. The object of these two verbs is also given as ἄλλο ὅτιον, which is not an interrogative but an indefinite noun, translated as ‘anything (else)’. The right reading, in contrast, should be to take ‘how’ (ὅπη) with ‘is best for it’ (ἐστι βέλτιστον ἄλλο ὅτιον), which makes the clause ask the question of how (or in what sense) each thing’s state or active or passive effect is best for it. The passage does not therefore suggest that features of an object should be determined by considering which available options are best for it. It rather presupposes that we have somehow identified those features of the object in question, and suggests that we should consider why it is good for them to be as they are, to discover their teleological cause.

Next, the context that follows the above passage also supports the analytic interpretation. See how Socrates expected Anaxagoras to teach him about goodness as a cause:

I supposed that he would tell me first (πρῶτον μὲν) whether the earth was flat or round, and, when he had done so (ἐπειδὴ δὲ φράσειν), would also explain (ἐπεκδιηγήσεσθαι) the cause that necessitated it, saying what was better—namely that it was better for the earth to be like this. And if he said

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8 Bluck and Grube omit ἄλλο ὅτιον from their translations presumably because they take ὅπῃ to be asking what something should do or have done to it and therefore think that the phrase is redundant. This omission can be seen in Hackforth’s translation as well, which might suggest that his understanding is the same as theirs, although he adopts a literal translation. Fowler, Vicaire and Dixsaut translate (ἄλλο) ὅτιον, but understand the clause in the same synthetic way as Bluck and Grube. Strictly speaking, ἄλλο is omitted from most translations because it is unnatural to think that a thing’s existence is a kind of ποιεῖν and πάσχειν, but this point can be ignored for our purposes. Cf. Gallop 1975, n. 59 and Rowe 1993, ad locum.

9 It is helpful to see the sentence at 98a5–7, which has almost the same structure as we are discussing: ‘how it is better for each of them [the celestial bodies] to do and have done to it whatever it may be’ (πῇ ποτὲ ταῦτ’ ἄμειν ἐστὶν ἕκαστον καὶ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν ἂν πάσχει). Most translators adopt a literal translation of this passage. The only exception is Hackforth, who adopts a translation that clearly endorses the synthetic interpretation: ‘which is the better way for these bodies to act or be acted upon’. The presence of ‘whatever it may be’ (ἂν πάσχει), however, suggests that ‘how’ (πῇ) should be read with ‘is better for each of them’ (ταῦτ’ ἄμειν ἐστὶν ἕκαστον) rather than with ‘to do’ (ποιεῖν) and ‘to have done to it’ (πάσχειν). (Strictly speaking, Plato does not add ἂν ποιεῖ after ποιεῖν, but it is safe enough to think that the object of ποιεῖν is similarly assumed.) Grube, although he adopts a literal translation, nevertheless omits ἂν πάσχει, which may indicate that his translation is also motivated by the synthetic interpretation.
Socrates’ remark does not square with the order of inquiry the synthetic interpretation advocates, in which one can determine an effect at the same time as, or after, discovering its teleological cause by considering what is best for the thing in question. On the contrary, he emphasises the following order of explanation: the first is about the shape of the earth, and the second is about its cause, that is, how it is better for the earth to have that particular shape. This emphasis strongly indicates his supposition that features of the world should be identified, as a first step, independently of teleological grounds, and that those pre-identified features are then used as stepping stones for analysing their teleological cause, on the latter of which his stress is clearly placed.\textsuperscript{10} It is true that one will ultimately need to reassess the initially identified features of the world from a teleological point of view, after grasping their teleological cause. Socrates’ primary concern is, however, with the discovery of what is good, rather than with the determination of features of the world itself. This view is also supported by his remark at 98b4–5 that what he wanted to learn from Anaxagoras’ book was what was best and what was worse, but not how each thing exists, acts, and is acted upon.

I have shown that the analytic interpretation offers the more plausible reading of Socrates’ first voyage. The gist of the passage is thus the following. If intelligence, as Anaxagoras insists, ordered this world, it must have put everything in the best possible order. The world around us is thus the best result of such an intellectual organization. If so, from the viewpoint of an inquirer, one will be able to have a better understanding of the divine purpose (the good) by investigating each feature of the world in the way of considering why it should be as it is, because it reflects goodness in some way. One therefore needs to identify states of affairs somehow before starting such an analytic inquiry into their teleological cause.

The chief reason why the synthetic interpretation is prevailing would be that the \textit{Timaeus} displays some examples of determining features of the universe by deducing them from the teleological principle that the demiurge produced it for the best or most

\textsuperscript{10} Sedley 1990, 374 rightly points out that the above order of explanation makes it explicit that ‘[t]he \textit{Phaedo}, unlike the \textit{Timaeus}, contains no hint that any feature of the world might be ascertained \textit{a priori} on general teleological grounds.’ Cf. Lennox 1985, 200, n. 15.
beautiful (\textit{Timaeus} 29d7–30c1).\footnote{Cf. Vlastos 1975, 29–30.} Timaeus alleges, for example, that the universe must be one, because it was crafted so that it looks like the model that is complete or the most beautiful (31a–b), that the universe must be spherical, because the sphere is the most uniform of all solid figures, and uniformity is immeasurably more beautiful than its opposite (33b), and so on. We should, however, notice the peculiarity of the universe taken up here as the subject matter. For it appears impossible to identify the number of the universe, its shape, and so on by appeal to some empirical evidence available; in this case, there would be no option but to derive these features by means of deductive inferences from one’s hypothesis. The celestial bodies, in contrast, which are under consideration in the \textit{Phaedo}, are not those objects whose features cannot be explored at all by means of observation. Even if the shape and position of the earth were objects of dispute at that time,\footnote{Socrates says later in the \textit{Phaedo} (108e4–109a6) that he was convinced that the earth is spherical and stationary in the middle of the universe. Sedley 1990, 374 points out that these are not features that were determined teleologically.} it would be very strange if Socrates seriously meant, as the synthetic interpretation suggests, that features of the sun, the moon and other celestial bodies—their relative speed, turning, and so on—are to be determined by speculating what they should be, despite the obvious fact that they are directly observable. Even in the \textit{Timaeus} the discussion of the celestial bodies (38c–40d) does not contain the idea that their observable features are distorted to conform to the teleological principle.

It is notable that the \textit{Timaeus} also expresses the same opinion about inquiry into the cause as I am arguing the \textit{Phaedo} does. Having discussed the mechanism of our sight (45b2–46c6), Timaeus claims at 46c7–e6 that that discussion concerns only its material arrangements and processes, and that these ‘auxiliary causes’ (\textit{συναίτια}) of sight differ from its real cause:

As my account has it, our sight has indeed proved to be a source of supreme benefit to us, in that none of our present statements about the universe could ever have been made if we had never seen any stars, sun or heaven. As it is, however, our ability to see the periods of day-and-night, of months and of years, of equinoxes and solstices, has led to the invention of number, and has given us the idea of time and opened the path to inquiry into the nature of the universe. These pursuits have given us philosophy, a
gift from the gods to the mortal race whose value neither has been nor ever will be surpassed. (47a1–b2\textsuperscript{13})

According to Timaeus, the real cause of our being endowed by the gods with sight is to observe celestial bodies so that we can invent number, acquire the notion of time, inquire into the nature of the universe, and then do philosophy. He makes it clear that astronomical observation is a necessary means of access to the nature of the universe. This suggests that his earlier derivation of the features of the universe (its number, shape, and so on) is not from an entirely speculative teleological principle, but ultimately from our (not necessarily his own) observing celestial bodies and thus developing an idea about the mathematical order and unity that govern the world. This process of learning can therefore be considered to be that of inductively inferring a teleological principle, which is then followed by using it to determine unobservable features of the universe by deducing them from it.

Later in the dialogue, Timaeus more explicitly makes the same point in a general form:

That is why we must distinguish two forms of cause, the divine and the necessary. First, the divine, for which we must search in all things if we are to gain a life of happiness to the extent that our nature allows, and second, the necessary, for which we must search for the sake of the divine. Our reason is that without the necessary, those other objects, about which we are serious, cannot on their own be discerned, and hence cannot be comprehended or partaken of in any other way. (68e6–69a5)

It is safe to suppose that the divine and necessary causes respectively correspond to the real and auxiliary causes he distinguished earlier. The idea here is that we need to examine necessary causes, not for their own sake, but for the sake of grasping divine ones, since the latter are not directly accessible. We can see that necessary and divine causes are not supposed to be mutually exclusive, but the study of the former rather constitutes a stepping-stone to that of the latter. Thus the Timaeus, which displays a large-scale teleological speculation of cosmological features, nonetheless reminds

\textsuperscript{13} The translations of the Timaeus passages are by Zeyl in Cooper 1997.
readers that behind that synthetic process there is an analytic process from initially investigating observable features of the world to ultimately discovering their real cause.

The distinction between the real and auxiliary causes in the *Timaeus* originally derives from our very passage of the *Phaedo*. At 98b7–99c6, Socrates recalls that he went on reading Anaxagoras’ book with a wish to learn the teleological cause, only to find that the book does not use it at all, but assigns the cause of each astronomical feature to air, aether, water and such other material conditions. He claims that Anaxagoras carelessly fails to distinguish between the real cause and that without which that cause could never be a cause. In the same vein, he also criticizes other natural philosophers for explaining the earth’s equilibrium by appealing to the cosmic vortex that surrounds it, or to its flat shape that props itself up with air (99b6–c1). What should be noticed is that his critical attitude towards them is not due to the fact that they are examining what material arrangements or processes prevent the earth from falling down, but to the fact that, since they consider those necessary conditions to be genuinely the causes, they do not seek the real cause that positioned those materials in the best possible way that they are now (99c1–6). Socrates’ criticism thus lies in the point that their cosmological research is not aimed at pursuing the divine purpose (or the good) that designed this world. In this sense, what Socrates advocates in his first voyage does not necessarily conflict with scientific inquiry into the nature of things. He rather appreciates its usefulness for discovering the real cause, so long as it is properly directed at that ultimate objective.

II

If my analytic interpretation of Socrates’ first voyage is correct, it has some important implications for understanding the objective and method of his second voyage. It has been widely thought that the novelty of the second voyage lies in explaining things by means of Forms rather than by means of the teleological principle, which was the object of the first voyage; and that this new causal explanation by Forms involves use of λόγοι14, excluding use of the senses, on which Anaxagoras and other natural philosophers...

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14 This word has been translated variously as ‘theories’, ‘arguments’, ‘propositions’ and ‘definitions’, but any rendering has some problems. I have therefore left it untranslated, and it is enough for our purposes just to note that it is contrasted with the senses.
philosophers relied for causal explanation by material conditions and processes. My claim, in contrast, is that the second voyage is still aimed at discovering the same teleological cause as the first voyage, but involves the indirect process via Forms rather than the direct one from sensible objects. In this section I shall defend this reading by exploring some consequences of my analytic interpretation in relation to the second voyage. However, it is beyond the scope of the paper to discuss in detail the method of hypothesis and the theory of Forms as causes, a sufficient analysis of which requires a separate paper.

After Socrates details why he was disappointed with Anaxagoras’ treatment of the teleological cause, he goes on to state that, despite his efforts, he could neither find it by himself nor learn it from any other person. But he offers to explain to Cebes, instead, how he has therefore pursued ‘the second voyage in search of the cause’ (τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν, 99c9–d1). This proverbial phrase, ‘second voyage’, originally meant that someone takes to the oars in the absence of a fair wind. Plato’s use of the phrase elsewhere (Statesman 300c2 and Philebus 19c2–3) and Aristotle’s (Nicomachean Ethics II.1109a34–35 and Politics III.1284b19) indicate that the second voyage is supposed to aim at the same destination as the first voyage, but to involve a different, inferior method to the one used in the first. It has been disputed how we should understand this metaphor in relation to Socrates’ actual inquiries. However, the majority of scholars have taken the view that the contrast between his first and second voyages lies in the point that in search of the cause of things, the first explores the good and the second does Forms (100b3–c8), and that the former, teleological explanation is superior to the latter, formal explanation.\footnote{Benson 2015, 102–12; Byrd 2007, 147–8; Gallop 1975, 176; Murphy 1936, 40–3; Murphy 1951, 145–8; Rose 1966, 464–73; Sharma 2009, 141–3; Vlastos 1969, 297–8 n. 15. Some other scholars identify the second voyage with the method that employs λόγοι and/or the method of hypothesis, but seem to take the view insofar as the method leads to causal explanation by Forms, which is inferior to that by the good. See Gentzler 1991, 266 n. 4; Kanayama 2000, 88–9; Robinson 1953, 110, 142–4.} The idea underlying their reading is that both voyages are directed at the same destination—namely that of explaining why each thing comes to be, ceases to be, or is as it is—but involve different methods—the first by means of the good and the second by means of Forms. To the question why this flower is beautiful, for example, the first voyage would answer that it is best for it to be
beautiful; on the other hand, the second would answer that it is because of the Form of Beauty.

However, this interpretation is at least doubtful as a plausible reading of the metaphor. Socrates says that the second voyage is ‘in search of the cause’ (ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν, 99d1), with the clear implication that the destination of both voyages is the discovery of the cause. But if the first and second voyages ascribe different items (the good and Forms respectively) to the cause in question, shouldn’t we rather say that they involve not only different methods but also different destinations? The more faithful presentation of this view is that Socrates gave up reaching the primary destination, so that he is setting out for a different one.\(^\text{16}\) But it is not consistent with the metaphor, whose point is that the second voyage aims at the same destination. One might object that if we take Socrates’ primary concern to be with the discovery of the explanation of why each thing comes to be, ceases to be, or is as it is, then we might still say that both voyages aim at the same destination, even though the good is a different cause from Forms. From their having the same destination, however, it follows that the contrast between them lies in the point that the good and Forms are different methods by which one offers causal explanation. But, as we shall see just below, the methodological contrast he makes in the ensuing passage (99d4–100a3) does not match the contrast between the good and Forms. The point there is that he was blinded by the method that employs the senses, so that he instead adopts the method that appeals to λόγοι. Although we may be able to say that the Forms by means of which one offers causal explanation are objects of λόγοι, it is difficult to think that the good by means of which one does so is an object of the senses. (Even if the good here is not conceived to be the Forms of the Good, it is not something we can identify by our senses, and which thereby blinds us.) This construal of the methodological contrast, therefore, does not fit with the context.

I suggest that the better reading of the metaphor should be that the second voyage is in search of the same cause as the first, which is the teleological cause, and involves a different method for reaching that destination. I do not pretend to be the first to put forth

\(^{16}\) For this reason, Murphy 1951, 146 suggests that both voyages should not steer for the same destination. For a criticism of his view, see Kanayama 2000, 89–90.
this overall interpretation of the passage, but shall argue that my analytic interpretation of the first voyage offers a renewed and substantial defence of the view, which, as far as I can see, has been only briefly suggested or insufficiently defended in the literature (so that it has not been accepted widely). Let us start by considering Socrates’ following explanation of the second voyage:

‘Well then,’ said Socrates, ‘I decided after that, when I’d given up looking into things (τὰ ὄντα), that I must make sure I didn’t suffer the fate of those who view and study the sun in an eclipse. For some of them ruin their eyes, I believe, if they don’t study its image in water or something of the kind. I too had that sort of thought, and I started to worry that I might be utterly blinded in my soul through observing things (τὰ πράγματα) with my eyes and seeking to get hold of them with each of my senses. So I decided that I should take refuge in theories and arguments (λόγους) and look into the truth of things in them. Now maybe in a way it does not resemble what I’m comparing it to. For I don’t at all accept that someone who, when studying things (τὰ ὄντα), does so in λόγοις, is looking into them in images any more than someone who does so in facts (ἔργοις).’ (99d4–100a3, tr. modified)

This passage comes immediately after his remark at 99c9–d2 that he will explain how he has pursued the second voyage in search of the cause. What is clear is that the focus of his explanation here is placed on the comparison of the two different methods by which he has undertaken the search in question: the method that examines things (τὰ ὄντα) directly with the senses and the method that does them indirectly in λόγοι. (I shall deal with 100b3–4 below, which is often taken to mean that the second voyage searches for a different cause, and with the question why he appears to treat the second voyage as involving an inferior method.) Since he soon goes on to introduce the method of hypothesis (100a3–8), the latter, λόγοι method seems to be closely connected to the method of hypothesis, if not identical with it. But the question to ask is: what method is the former, which Socrates is replacing with this λόγοι method? It has been widely thought that he is rejecting the material kind of causal explanation natural philosophers

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17 This view has been suggested by Archer-Hind 1894, 187–92; Bedu-Addo 1979, 104–7; Byrd 2007, 149; Dancy 2004, 293–4; Rowe 1993, 238–9; Taylor 1969, 53–4. Cf. Gallop 1975, 176–7. Among them, Archer-Hind and Bedu-Addo give some arguments for the view. But their defences totally differ from mine below.

were said at 96b–97b to employ, and which Anaxagoras, who failed to offer the teleological cause, was said at 98b–99c to actually adopt along with those natural philosophers. The underlying assumption would be that Socrates’ concern is all the time with the problems with material causes raised at 96b–97b, with his hope for a workable teleological theory aside, and that, since that hope was foiled, he now returns to the main theme. Some scholars therefore explicitly say that his story about the teleological cause is a digression and does not contribute to the content of the second voyage. This is puzzling, however, given that the second voyage is introduced just after his unsuccessful search of the teleological cause, to which he devotes a substantial amount of discussion, and that, before discussing this first voyage, he already declares that he no longer adopts causal explanation by material processes and conditions (97b7). The natural inference from the context should therefore be that the present explanation of the second voyage specifically reflects his own failed experience of inquiring into the good in the first voyage.

Why, then, have many scholars resisted this more natural reading of the passage? The question will be answered by considering the following objection often made to the view that the second voyage involves a different method in search of the same, teleological cause: that Socrates does not offer any explanation of the method by which he attempted to conduct the search in the first voyage. The idea is that, since we cannot find any method in the first voyage that corresponds to the one he is now replacing with the λόγοι method, his explanation should rather be concerned with material causes, which are objects of the senses. To that objection, however, my analytic interpretation can offer a plausible solution. I argued above that the aim of the first voyage is to find out the nature of the good by considering how it is reflected in features of the world, such as the shape and position of the earth and the movements of the other celestial bodies, rather than to determine those features by speculating what they should be. Here we can clearly see what method is employed in the first voyage for the search

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19 For example, see Benson 2015, 108, 190; Burnet 1911, 108; Gallop 1975, 177; Rowe 1993, 239; Sedley 2004, 108; Sharma 2015, 406; Sharma 2009, 141–2.
20 Goodrich 1903, 382; Murphy 1936, 42, n. 1.
21 Benson 2015, 106; Murphy 1936, 42; Vlastos 1969, 297–298, n. 15.
22 Bedu-Addo 1979, 107 claims that the method used in the first voyage consists in learning the teleological cause from others including Anaxagoras. But this is clearly insufficient, since Socrates explicitly says that he himself also attempted to discover this cause (99c8–9).
of the teleological cause: it consists in first determining such physical phenomena by scientific observations and then considering why they are as they are. Construed as such, the method certainly involves use of the senses, which is under his present criticism. What emerges from the analytic interpretation of the first voyage is therefore that he is now reflecting on the previous assumption that he could reach the nature of the good directly from observing sensible objects, which leads to the conclusion that he first needs to find out their truths by means of λόγοι instead of astronomical observations that rely on the senses, with the hope that he will thereby be able to discover what the good really is, via the non-sensible truth of things that can only be revealed in λόγοι.

Thus, I submit, his second voyage, which employs the λόγοι method, is still in search of the teleological cause.

Now I shall explain how, on this view, we can understand the passage cited above. At the beginning Socrates says, ‘I’d given up looking into things (τὰ ὀντα)’ (99d4–5). Many scholars have taken it, as I said earlier, that what he has given up is the material kind of causal explanation of things natural philosophers pursued. My reading, in contrast, is that it is his previous method that relies on observations for discovering the good, but not his search for that teleological cause itself. We can find only one reference to ‘things’ (τὰ ὀντα) earlier in the autobiography, at 97d7, where he is said to have been delighted to find in Anaxagoras a teacher of ‘the cause of things’ (τῆς αἰτίας περὶ τῶν ὄντων), namely the teleological cause. The point there, if my earlier argument is correct, is likewise that he expected Anaxagoras to have investigated things like the earth and other celestial bodies to discover the nature of the good. Then, he goes on to say that he has given up considering those sensible things (to discover the good) because they may blind him just as the sun blinds those who view and study it in an eclipse. The metaphor might remind readers of his previous claim at 96c5–6 that he was utterly blinded by his scientific studies. However, the reference to blindness in the present passage does not necessarily mean his former studies described at 96b–97b. For my analytic interpretation has made it clear that the first voyage also involves use of the

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23 Burnet 1911, ad locum suggests that the two passages are in parallel (pace Guthrie 1962, vol. 4 334 n. 1). There should be no doubt, pace Archer-Hind 1894, ad locum, that τὰ ὀντα at 99d5 does not refer to ontologically superior things such as Forms, realities, or the teleological cause itself.
senses although it is directed at a goal quite different from the one of those earlier scientific studies.

Next, the alternative method Socrates has adopted is said to ‘take refuge in λόγοι and look into the truth of things in them’ just as one studies the image of the sun in water or something of the kind. Although he does not explain here what this λόγοι method amounts to, it surely anticipates the method of hypothesis (100a3–7), especially its specific application to the theory of Forms as the most robust hypothesis (100b1–c8). For the context makes it clear that scientific observations do not constitute the λόγοι method, even though they are somehow concerned with λόγοι. (Even a natural scientist may well describe the result of his observations, for example, with the λόγος that the earth is spherical.) The point of the λόγοι method should therefore be that the λόγοι in question comprehend what the senses cannot in principle do, which Socrates is going to identify with intelligible Forms. By ‘the truth of things’ (τῶν ὀντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν, 99e6) he is thus likely to imply their non-sensible realities or corresponding Forms, which can only be captured by means of λόγοι. What follows from the discussion so far is that he is shifting from the method of considering those sensible aspects of things that can be grasped by means of observation to that of considering their non-sensible realities or Forms that can be grasped only by means of λόγοι, and that both methods are directed at the same goal of discovering the teleological cause. I therefore suggest that his second voyage is a new device to explore the nature of the good indirectly, via the non-sensible truth of things or intelligible Forms, although that goal is not pursued in the dialogue due to his present task of proving the immortality of the soul. The point that Socrates has the contrast between sensible particulars and the relevant Forms in mind here is borne out by his last remark of the passage, ‘I don’t at all accept that someone who, when studying things (τὰ ὀντα), does so in λόγοις, is looking into them in images any more than someone who does so in facts (ἔργοις)’. Here he is modifying the earlier analogy to the sun, which may give the impression that the λόγοι method deals with images of the originals with which the alternative method deals. His intention is clearly to claim that, although the λόγοι method studies things in λόγοι or images in which their realities or corresponding Forms are manifested, the other method does not study them in their original form either because those sensible particulars in which it studies them are also images of their corresponding Forms.
The overall idea underlying the second voyage, I submit, is that, given that the ultimate teleological principle of the good is reflected in sensible objects and they are only images of their corresponding Forms, that principle is more accurately and clearly reflected in the Forms, through which we can get closer to the discovery of the nature of the good. My interpretation should not be conflated with the view often discussed in the literature: that, despite his failure to discover the good in the first voyage, he is giving teleological explanation in the second voyage by means of formal causes. The point of this prevalent view is that, since the other Forms ultimately particulates in the Form of the Good, things are also explained teleologically by means of their corresponding Forms. I am arguing, in contrast, that Forms are introduced here as the stepping-stones for approaching knowledge of the good, but not that they are used to explain things teleologically, namely why they should be as they are. These two interpretations are essentially different.

Lastly, I need to deal with two possible objections to my interpretation. The first would be that, given that Socrates introduces the theory of Forms by saying at 100b3–4 ‘I’ll set about giving you a demonstration of the sort of cause which I’ve pursued (τῆς αἰτίας το εἴδος ὁ πεπραγμάτευμαι),’ his claim at 99c9–d2 that he will give Cebes a demonstration of ‘how I’ve pursued my second voyage in search of the cause (τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν ᾧ πεπραγμάτευμαι)’ may well mean that the cause in question is Forms. To this I answer that the qualification ‘the sort of cause’ at 100b3–4 should rather denote its difference to the cause at 99d1, which I have taken as the teleological cause. The context, on my interpretation, is that, having failed to discover the good by appeal to astronomical observations, Socrates determines to search for it by using the renewed, λόγοι method that deals with the non-sensible realities of things, avoiding their sensible aspects, and that this search is still halfway but has resulted in the theory of Forms and its application to causal explanation. This formal cause is the sort of cause he has pursued because it shares with the teleological cause the

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24 This view is most explicitly developed by Wiggins 1986, 2–5 and 11–16. See also a criticism of it by Sharma 2009, 142–3.
25 Sharma 2015, 393–401 argues that the phrase ἔρχομαι ἐπιχειρῶν σοι ἐπιδείξασθαι should be translated as ‘I am proceeding onward in my attempt to demonstrate to you’, which entails the idea that ‘Socrates is already in the midst of his proposed ἐπίδειξις’. This reading supports my claim below that he reached the causal theory of Forms in the course of his attempt to discover the teleological cause by the λόγοι method, although Sharma himself does not share such a view.
The virtue of being able to overcome the problems posed by studying material cause. (The question of exactly what those problems are, however, is highly disputed and cannot be discussed here.) The implication of the qualification is thus that the cause he has ended up discovering is not exactly the same as the one he initially attempted to discover but is nonetheless placed in the same category (in comparison to material cause). Construed in this way, the remark at 100b3–4 does not exclude my interpretation.

The second objection would be that, although the metaphor of the second voyage indicates that the alternative method used there is inferior to that used in the first voyage, my interpretation entails that Socrates considers the former to be superior to the latter. My answer to this is that he uses the metaphorical phrase ironically and therefore does not seriously mean the inferiority of the former to the latter. This is supported by the fact that some irony is also involved in his ensuing analogy to observing an image of a solar eclipse in water or something of that sort, which implies that those who study things in λόγοι study them in an indirect and inferior way in comparison with those who study them directly by means of the senses. His irony thus continues until he corrects this analogy by saying that the latter look into them in images no less than the former. Therefore, his expression of the second voyage does not necessarily indicate his belief that his new inquiry into the good via Forms is inferior to the older one from astronomical observations.

III

This paper first argued for the analytic interpretation of Socrates’ first voyage, according to which it attempts to discover the nature of the good by considering why features of the celestial bodies are as they are found by observation to be. It then explored some implications of the analytic interpretation for considering the relation of the first voyage to the second. Its main outcome is to have shown that his failure in the first voyage lies in his reliance on astronomical observations by the senses, and that the second voyage thus introduces that new method for the discovery of the same teleological cause which employs the λόγοι only in which the non-sensible realities of things or their corresponding Forms are manifested.

The overall idea underlying Socrates’ move from the first voyage to the second seems to be that, even though the celestial bodies show the nature of stability in comparison with other sensible objects, as long as they are sensible, they cannot display perfect order and invariability in principle (cf. 78d10–79a2), and therefore that the nature of the good needs to be explored by examining such perfectly ordered and invariable entities, namely Forms. This is in fact the main message Plato gives about the upward path to the Form of the Good in the Republic. At 528e–530c, where astronomy is introduced as the fourth subject the prospective philosopher-rulers need to learn, Socrates claims that to get closer to the realities they should study it in a different way from the current way that focuses on observation by the senses. This is because, he continues, although the celestial bodies are the most beautiful (κάλλιστα) and most exact (ἀκριβέστατα) of visible things, their visible motions fall far short of the true ones which can be grasped only by λόγος and thought (διανοίᾳ). Furthermore, astronomy and the other mathematical subjects are revealed to be mere preliminaries to the main subject of dialectic. At 532a he remarks that the future rulers must move on to that philosophical dialectic which excludes any use of the senses and is done only through λόγος, to acquire knowledge of other Forms and lastly the Form of the Good. Given the simile of the sun (508a–509b), which established that the Form of the Good is the cause of all other Forms, but not directly that of sensible objects, whose direct cause is the sun, the point is likely that the nature of the good is not fully reflected in the sensible world of particulars but fully only in the intelligible world of Forms, through examination of which we may therefore be able to know the Form of the Good at the end of our inquiry. How, then, do the other Forms reflect or share in the Form of the Good? What is it like to use some understanding of those other Forms to acquire the most fundamental knowledge of the Form of the Good? These are important questions for understanding Plato’s bottom-up approach to the first principle but cannot be dealt with here for reasons of space. However, this paper has at least shown, I hope, that Socrates’ second voyage in the Phaedo forms the theoretical basis for Plato’s upward path in the Republic.

[Bibliography]


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