

Essay Guideline: Aristotle's Objections to Plato's Theory of Forms

(This essay question is not in the textbook. It is due Nov. 8.) Assignment: Present and explain Aristotle's Third Person Argument against Plato's theory of forms.

Begin by reading the presentation of this argument in your textbook. You'll find it near the beginning of the Aristotle chapter.

Outline:

- I. Brief outline of Plato's theory of forms.
 - a. Forms are real; the material world is not.
 - b. Forms are abstract, eternal, perfect, and unchanging.
 - c. Each form has its associated characteristic.
 - d. The forms are supposed to answer these questions:
 - i. Why do objects have their properties?
 - ii. How should objects be classified?
 - iii. What makes an object good of its kind?
- II. Present the Third Person argument.
 - a. Explain that it is intended to attack Plato's claim that the forms can explain how objects are classified.
 - b. Two people are in the same category because they both participate in the form of personhood.
 - c. Because each form has its associated characteristic, the form of personhood is a person.
 - d. There are thus three people all in this category: The two flesh-and-blood ones we began with, and the form.
 - e. These three people are all in the same category because there is an additional thing – another form of personhood – in which they all participate.
 - f. This new form of personhood is also another person, so we have four people whose classification needs to be explained (two flesh-and-blood people and two forms).
 - g. To explain the classification of these four people, Plato's theory says we need to introduce yet another thing – another form of personhood – in which they all participate.
 - h. This process continues without end. Plato's theory does not give an adequate answer to our questions about classification. Instead, it produces an infinite sequence of new classification questions.