

Article

The Hypostasis of the Archons: Platonic Forms as Angels

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Abstract: The thesis of this paper is that Platonic Forms are angels. I make this identification by claiming that Platonic Forms have the characteristics of angels, in particular, that Platonic Forms are alive. I offer four arguments for this claim. First, it seems that engaging in self-directed action is a sufficient condition for being alive. The Forms are, as teleological activities, self-directed actions. Second, bodies receive their being from their Forms, and some bodies are essentially alive. Third, in the Good, all the types of goodness, including life, are identical. The Forms are appearances of the Good. Fourth, since the Good imparts as much goodness as it can, the Forms are alive unless there is some bar to their being alive. There are good reasons to think that there is no such bar. I then show that ethical vices do not give body to human forms, but give body to other forms—those that are evil angels. Lastly, I provide a survey of the relationships that various religious traditions posit between ethical vice and the demonic.

Keywords: angels; demons; philosophy of religion; Plato; platonic forms

1. Introduction

I identify Platonic Forms with angels. I do so by advancing four arguments for the claim that the Forms have the characteristics of angels, in particular, that they are alive: from the characteristics of the Forms, from the characteristics of the bodies that participate in the Forms, from the simplicity of the Good, and from the imparting nature of the Good. For those who believe in Platonic Forms, or take their existence as a serious theory, the paper functions as an argument for belief in angels. I then show how ethical vices are not a part of the human body because they do not participate in the Form of Man, but in Demonic Forms, evil angels, demons. Lastly, I survey the association between ethical vice and the demonic across a variety of religious traditions.

The paper assumes God's existence and some Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics.¹ These assumptions locate angels within a metaphysical scheme that would be broadly recognizable to most of the religious traditions that teach the existence of angels: to Greco-Roman paganism, Sassanian Manichaeism, Byzantine Christianity, medieval Catholicism, Safavid Shi'ism, or Hasidic Judaism. These religious traditions are all infused, in their philosophical expression, with the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle (Feibelman 1959, pp. 163–88).

Though the existence of angels is taught by many religious traditions, they are generally not a focus of authoritative theological pronouncements, allowing for much internal diversity within each tradition. I intend my account to be consistent with traditional Chalcedonian Christianity. To my knowledge, the closest precedent for my claims about the relationship between vice and the demonic comes from St Antony the Great: "You will not find their [the demon's] sins and iniquities revealed bodily, for they are not visible bodily. But you should know that we are their bodies, and that our soul receives their wickedness, and when it has received them, then it reveals them through the body in which we dwell" (Antony 1995, Ltr. 6, vv. 50–51).

My account avoids the dichotomy between demons as cryptids wandering the *res extensa* and demons as metaphors for human evil. On my account, demons are ontologically



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