

Wednesday, 6 December 2023

filmosofia at Rozz-Tox

Socrates (1971 Rossellini, dir.) & “Apology”, “Crito”, and “Phaedo”
(Plato 399BCE)

Agenda:

- pre-screening discussion starts 6:30pm
- film starts 7:00pm
- 10 minute break
- post-screening discussion of Plato reading selection and film from 9:10pm to 10:00pm

Pre-screening discussion (6:30pm)

- general remarks about filmesofia series:
 - each month (August through December), we screened a film, and pairing it with a famous philosophical text that examines themes related to that film
 - most selections will concern metaphysical topics, although some will concern value theory (axiology)
 - four main branches of philosophy:
 - metaphysics
 - epistemology
 - axiology
 - logic
 - stay tuned for updates about the 2024 filmesofia lineup and free print articles available here at Rozz-Tox

- general initial remarks about tonight's film screening and this month's reading selection:
 - this week's topic concerns the history of philosophy, and touches on three of the four main branches: ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology
 - I have a lot to say about Socrates, and I will probably not be able to stop myself, so I won't write about it all here: for a good primer, check out the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/socrates/>
 - After the film is over, I want to look at some of Socrates's arguments (via Plato) in more detail.
 - For the pre-screening discussion, I want to talk about the historical and cultural context, which I think Rossellini does a good job setting up in the first 10 minutes of the film:
 - Socrates was not a professional teacher, as some of his contemporaries (the Sophists Protagoras and Gorgias, e.g.) were: he in fact emphasized this during his trial.
 - By the time of his trial there was a strong anti-Sophist sentiment among the Athenians, and there were many suspicions about their affiliation with Sparta, to whom Athens recently lost in the Peloponnesian War.
 - Socrates insists that he has acquired his reputation because of a "divine mission" that he felt called to carry out because of his friend Chaerophon's visit to the Oracle at Delphi.
 - Plato was a young man around the time of Socrates's trial, and as a result started the Ἀκαδημία (Academy).

Post-screening discussion (9:00pm to 10:00pm)

Arguments from the readings, reconstructed in well-crafted (skeletal) form:

A. Death should not be feared. (“Apology”)

1. Either death is (a) the ceasing of all consciousness, or else it is (b) a relocation of the soul. (p35)
2. If (a), then it is the most pleasant sleep, and a blessing.
3. If (b), then it will be an opportunity to reunite with the great deceased, which is a blessing.
4. Therefore, death is a blessing.

B. The good-souled person is invincible. (“Apology”)

1. If one chooses to do bad things, then one disorders the state of one’s soul; one can preserve the proper order of one’s soul if and only if one chooses to do the right thing. (cf. the tripartite soul in Plato’s *Republic*)
2. Outside influences can be ignored, and if that’s true, then outside influences do not affect the state of one’s soul.
3. Thus, the only things that can affect the state of one’s soul are the choices one makes.
4. If the only things that can affect the state of one’s soul are one’s choices, then the good-souled person cannot be harmed by anyone else (i.e., “god’s laws do not allow the lesser man to harm the greater”). (p28)
5. Therefore, the good-souled person cannot be harmed by anyone else.
 - a. Athens or Meletus cannot harm Socrates, but by seeking his execution, they harm themselves.

C. It would be wrong to break out of prison. (“Crito”)

1. One must never do wrong (harm another, for it harms the wrongdoer--extreme pacifism!) (p43).
2. If one must never do wrong, one must not wrong someone else who does one wrong.
3. Socrates’ accusers do him wrong, and it would do them wrong to break out and flee.
4. Thus, Socrates should not flee.

D. The state is to the citizen as parent is to child. (“Crito”)

1. One has a duty to one’s parents--to endure anything they ask unless you can persuade otherwise (p44).
2. Community is like one’s parents: providing education, resources, upbringing, etc.
3. If that’s right, then one has at least as much (if not more) duty to listen to community than to one’s parents.
4. Athens has sentenced Socrates to death.
5. So, Socrates has an obligation to abide by this sentence.

E. The soul is non-composite and hence indestructible. (“Phaedo”)

1. There are two sorts of things: the composite (which vary and scatter over time) and the non-composite (p68).
2. If something is composite, it is perceptible by the senses; otherwise, it is non-composite.
 - a. Example: the Forms are not perceived by the senses, but the particulars of this world are.
3. The soul is not perceived by the senses.
4. Thus, the soul is non-composite, and cannot be varied or scatter over time.

F. Another argument that the soul is indestructible. (“Phaedo”)

1. The Forms explain the presence of properties in the particulars (a metaphysical thesis): they partake of the Form that is responsible for its property (p86-88)
2. Instance of Form x will not tolerate the presence of opposite Form y. (p89)
3. The soul brings life to whatever it inhabits. (p90)
4. If that’s right, the soul will not tolerate (admit of) death, in other words, it is deathless.
5. Everything that is deathless is indestructible.
6. So, the soul is deathless and indestructible.

G. Knowledge is recollection. (“Phaedo”)

1. One can get knowledge about x by knowledge of something different y (e.g., a friend and her property she left at your place (her guitar), p64).
2. Anytime something of one sort makes you think of another sort, that’s recollection.
3. One can get knowledge of the Equal from seeing two roughly equal sticks.
4. One has never encountered the Equal in this earthly life, since all sense perceptions fall short of ideals (p65).
5. Thus, one’s knowledge of the concept Equal comes from their soul’s existence before this earthly life.

H. Philosophy is preparation for death. (“Phaedo”)

1. True philosophers are solely concerned with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.
2. If that’s correct, then philosophers eschew anything that gets in the way of knowledge for its own sake.
3. Earthly pleasures (food, drink, sex, etc.) get in the way of the pursuit of knowledge.
4. So, philosophers eschew earthly pleasures.
5. If philosophers eschew earthly pleasures and are only concerned with knowledge for its own sake, then philosophers yearn for separation of their immortal souls from their earthly vessels (i.e., death) and philosophy is preparation for this. (p55)
6. Therefore, philosophy is preparation for death.