

Plato: Phaedo

Jan. 31–Feb. 5, 2014

Quiz 1

- 1 Where does the discussion between Socrates and his students take place?
 - A. At Socrates's home.
 - B. In Plato's Academia.
 - C. In prison.
 - D. On a ship.

- 2 What happens to Socrates at the end of the dialogue?
 - A. He says goodbye to his wife.
 - B. He drinks the poison.
 - C. He tries to escape his fate.
 - D. He is beheaded.

- 3 Socrates thinks that the soul is immortal.
 - A. True.
 - B. False.

Overview I

Overview

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Summary

Overview: Body and Soul

- Most people would agree that humans consist of soul and body. The philosophical discipline that addresses this issue (what *is* soul and body, how they are related, etc.) is called **philosophy of mind**.
- 3 main theories in the philosophy of mind literature that we discuss:
 - ① **Substance dualism** — Plato, Descartes
 - ② Physicalism — especially in the 20th century
 - ③ Hylomorphism — Aristotle, Middle Ages

A Few Words about Plato



- 429?–347, BC, Athens (Greece)
- Student of Socrates
- Founded one of the first organized schools in Europe, the *Academy*.
- Teacher of Aristotle
- “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” (Whitehead, 20th c.)

Platonic Dialogues

Almost everything that Plato wrote is in the form of a dialogue.

- they are philosophical discussions or debates
- the interlocutors can often be identified as real historical figures, most importantly Socrates
- they often begin with a depiction of the setting of the discussion (when, where, on what occasion, etc.)

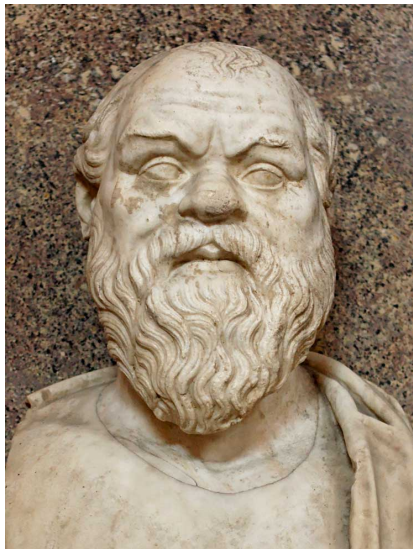
Problem: How should we read these dialogues?

- Should we abstract from the stage setting?
- Plato is never in them as an interlocutor — should we ascribe to him the position of Socrates?

Stephanus-numbers

We usually refer to a specific place in Plato by the so-called Stephanus-numbers, which are the page numbers of the 16th-century critical edition by Henry Stephanus.

Socrates



- Sources: Plato, Aristophanes, Xenophon — all different accounts
- Valued wisdom, education, arguments
- Very controversial; does not respect city-standards, wealth, etc.
- Imprisoned, sentenced to death; refuses to escape.
- **Socratic method:** exemplified in Plato's dialogues

The *Phaedo*

- One of Plato's middle dialogues; his views are (as far as we know) fully developed here
- Perhaps the most dramatic one in its setting
- Also interesting because this is the dialogue where Socrates talks about himself the most, and even his wife shows up (although for a short time)
- Other dialogues refer to it often, especially when they mention Socrates' death

Phaedo — General Outline

- Setting (57a–60a)
- Preliminary discussion about death (60b–69e)
- The nature of the soul
 - ① Argument from generation and corruption (70c–72e)
 - ② Argument from recollection (72e–77d)
 - ③ Argument from the nature of the soul (78b–84b)
- First interlude (84c–85b)
- Objections of Simmias and Cebes (85c–88c)
- Solution of the scientific difficulties (88e–102a)
 - ① Warning against misology (89a–91c)
 - ② Objection of Simmias removed (91c–95a)
 - ③ Difficulty of Cebes discussed (95a–102a)
- Second interlude (95e–102a)
- Final proof of immortality (102a–107b)
- The practical bearing of the discussion (107c–108c)
- Myth and Socrates' final minutes

The Setting

Double setting of the dialogue:

- 1 Echecrates and Phaedo are talking about Socrates' death; Phaedo tells the story that follows.
- 2 The dialogue itself:
 - Socrates in prison, his last day
 - Participants: Socrates (main interlocutor), Simmias, Cebes (most probably Pythagoreans)
 - Also appear on the scene: Socrates' other friends, Xanthippe (wife)
 - The dialogue takes place just before Socrates drinks the poison

Preliminary Discussion about Death

Paradox: How is it that (1) Suicide is not acceptable, but still, (2) the philosopher is preparing for death in his whole life?

① Explanation for (1):

This seems to me well expressed, that the gods are our guardians and that men are one of their possessions. (62b)

- We are in the possession of the gods
- Thus, we are not in our own possession
- We have no right to destroy what is not in our own possession
- Therefore, we have no right to destroy ourselves (= to commit suicide).

Preliminary Discussion about Death

- ② Arguments for (2); *The one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death.* (64a)
- Death = the separation of the soul from the body. Thus, the claim that needs to be shown: the philosopher is trying to separate his soul from his body throughout his life.
 - But this is obviously true:
 - ① The philosopher is not concerned with pleasures; on the contrary, he tries to be temperate, freeing his soul from the association with the body.
 - ② The philosopher primarily wants to acquire knowledge. But it is not the body but the soul that can acquire knowledge in the first place. — Example of equality, cf. also later.
 - ③ The philosopher seeks wisdom; this is how any virtue can be attained. But this, again, belongs to the soul.

Thus, we have established that the philosopher does indeed practice death in his life.

But how do we know that the soul is immortal, and does not perish after death?

Thesis:

The souls of men come here from the underworld, and when people die, go back there.

3 arguments offered for this thesis:

- 1 Argument from the nature of generation and corruption
- 2 Argument from recollection — important!
- 3 Argument from the nature of the soul

1. Argument from Generation and Corruption

The argument:

- P_1 All things come to exist from their opposites.
- P_2 The opposite of living is the dead.
- C_1 The living comes from the dead.
- P_3 If something comes from the dead, then the dead must exist.
- \therefore The dead exist.

Support for the premises:

- P_1 : Examples: a hot thing comes from a cold thing; the weak comes from the strong; the worse come to be from the better.
- P_2, P_3 : Self-evident.

Note: This argument only establishes that the dead existed *before* birth; says nothing of the afterlife (if any).

2. Argument from Recollection

The argument:

- P_1 "Learning is no other than recollection." (72e)
- P_2 If we remember something, we must have learned it sometime.
- P_3 But we could have only learned it before we were born.
- \therefore Therefore, we must have existed before we were born.

Support for the premises:

- P_1 : When we are interrogated in the right way, we always give the right answer. But we could not do this unless we already had the knowledge.
- P_2 : Self-evident.
- P_3 : We could not have learned it *after* we were born, nor at the time of our birth. (Example: the Equal.)

A few things about the theory of recollection:

- Also called theory of *anamnesis*. More fully explained in the *Meno*.
- The examples presuppose that things like “The Equal” exist (= Platonic forms, cf. later), and that we cannot know it by sense perception. (Other examples: Beauty, Goodness, Whiteness, etc.)
- Can we teach just by asking questions?
- The argument, if conclusive, only shows that the soul existed before birth; still does not say anything of the afterlife.

3. Argument from the Nature of the Soul

The argument:

- P_1 Decomposition or decay occurs only among composite things.
- P_2 The soul is not a composite thing, but simple.
- \therefore Therefore, there is no decomposition / decay of the soul.

Support for the premises:

- P_1 : Decay *is* decomposition, which, by definition, cannot occur in something that is not composed. In general, the more composed the thing is, the more liable it is to change. (E.g., The Equal itself or the Beautiful itself does not change, but equal and beautiful things do.)
- P_2 : Argument from analogy: the soul resembles more the things that are simple — it is invisible, resembles the divine.

Objections of Simmias and Cebes

1. Simmias's analogy — the musical instrument objection



- Against the third argument (from the nature of the soul): the body and the soul might be compared to a musical instrument and the melody it plays: the instrument is visible, tangible, the music itself is invisible, intangible, and divine.
- However, it is not true that the music can live on when we destroy the instrument — thus, it does not follow that the soul survives the death of the body.
- Source of the objection: Pythagoreans; today it is called *epiphenomenalism*.

Objections of Simmias and Cebes

2. Cebes's analogy — the weaver objection

- Only the preexistence of the soul has been shown so far; but from this, its survival after death does not follow.
- Analogy: the weaver, who makes and wears out several cloaks in his lifetime. However, when the weaver dies, he leaves the last cloak behind him, and so we cannot establish that he is alive just because a man lasts longer than a cloak. Similarly, it might be that although the soul lasts longer than the body, it dies with its last body.



Warning against Mysology

- Misologue = one who does not trust any argument.

“It is as when one who lacks skill in arguments puts his trust in an argument as being true, then shortly afterwards believes it to be false — as sometimes it is and sometimes it is not — and so with another argument and then another. You know how those in particular who spend their time studying contradiction in the end believe themselves to have become very wise and that they alone have understood that there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument, but that all that exists simply fluctuates up and down. . . This then is the first thing we should guard against. We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it; much rather we should believe that it is we who are not yet sound.” (90b–e)

Reply to Simmias

- 1 The objection of Simmias is incompatible with his own principles: he already accepted that knowledge is recollection.
- 2 Simmias's theory is also false on independent grounds:
 - Every melody is completely determined by its constituents; however, our soul constantly struggles with our body, and thus it cannot be completely determined by the body.
 - No melody admits of degrees; however, there are better and worse souls (differences of moral worth).

Interlude: The Origin of the Socratic Method

Autobiography of Socrates (probably not historically accurate)

- **Presocratic natural philosophy**; mechanistic (Milesians, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Pythagoreans, Zeno)
- **Anaxagoras**: “Mind” is the one cause of order everywhere. (Problem: he did not in fact make use of his principle.)



Anaxagoras of Clazomenae
(ca.500–428, BC)

“All other things have a portion of everything, but Mind is infinite and self-ruled. . . . Mind controls all things, both the greater and the smaller. . . all things are known by Mind.”

Interlude: The Origin of the Socratic Method

Main problem with the mechanical / materialistic explanations:

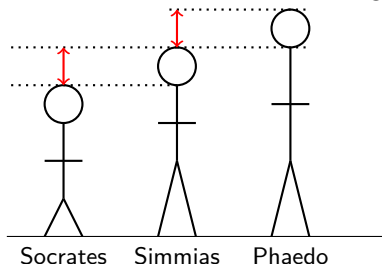
“That seemed to me much like saying that Socrates’ actions are all due to his mind, and then in trying to tell the causes of everything I do, to say that the reason that I am sitting here is because my body consists of bones and sinews, because the bones are hard and are separated by joints, that the sinews are such as to contract and relax, that they surround the bones along with flesh and skin which hold them together, then as the bones are hanging in their sockets, the relaxation and contraction of the sinews enable me to bend my limbs, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my limbs bent.” (98c–d)

- Even if they are true and legitimate in one context, they are not exhaustive, do not explain *everything*.

Interlude: The Origin of the Socratic Method

- The new method:
 - 1 finding postulates
 - 2 deducing their implications
 - 3 if these implications are in contradiction with a fact, then the postulate is false.
- **The postulate of Forms:**
 - Answers questions about universal characteristics of things.

The example of tallness: How is Simmias taller than Socrates yet shorter than Phaedo?



Final Proof for the Immortality of the Soul

The argument:

- P_1 Something that has a characteristic essentially, will not admit the contrary of that characteristic.
- P_2 The soul is essentially alive.
- P_3 The contrary of being alive is being dead.
- \therefore The soul will not admit death; it cannot die.

Support for the premises:

- P_1 : The example of fire: Since fire is essentially hot, it cannot combine with coldness (if the fire gets cold, it ceases to be a fire).
- P_2 : It is the soul that gives life to everything; life is a necessary concomitant of soul.
- P_3 : Self-evident.

Final Proof for the Immortality of the Soul

A few things about the argument:

- It presupposes the postulate that forms (or essential predicates) exist.
- When we say that the soul is essentially alive, does that beg the question against the skeptic?
- Does the fire analogy work?

The End of the Dialogue

- Practical bearing of the discussion: we must take proper care of the soul, as this is the most serious human interest.
- Myth of Socrates; guardian spirit = *daimon*

Summary: Human Nature according to Plato

- Soul and body are distinct entities
- The governing principle is the soul; this is what is strictly speaking identical to the person.
- We have knowledge by recollection (theory of *anamnesis*)
- The soul is immortal; the main argument for this claim rests on the postulate of forms.
- From the immortality of the soul, the immortality of the person follows.