

Plato: The Human as Soul

a. Life and Works of a Philosopher

The word philosophy is a compound the Greeks created from love (philia) and wisdom (sophia). Pericles used it in a general sense to describe the Athenians in his famous funeral oration: "We love beauty, but without extravagance; and we love wisdom, but without becoming soft." But the first Greek intellectuals, like the poets Homer and Hesiod, early scientists like Thales ("all things come from water"), and Parmenides the first metaphysician, were called sages (sophoi). Their approach to thought and life was aristocratic. With democracy appeared the sophists, who sought a wisdom useful for democratic politics. The sophist Gorgias was the first to use philosopher to designate a special group, those sophists committed to teaching the truth. Foremost among them was Socrates (+399), and he was called a philosopher first by the rhetorician Isocrates (436-338), then by Plato (429-347). Unfortunately, they disagreed about what Socrates said wisdom was. Isocrates thought philosophy should follow "the common opinions of the Greeks"; Plato said it should rise above opinions to a goal of true and certain knowledge.

Plato passed on the inspiration of Socrates, who had written nothing, in Socratic dramas, called dialogues, where the characters were real Greeks, and Socrates the hero. During the 390s, he wrote short dialogues showing the search for, but not the achievement of some ethical concept, a part of wisdom. The most important of these are set around Socrates' trial: Euthyphro (about piety); Apology, his speech in his own defense; Crito (justice). Other early dialogues are: Charmides (self-control), Lysis (friendship), Laches (courage), Ion (art).

In Sicily (387), Plato met Dion, who had the potential to be the true statesman Socrates envisioned. Back in Athens, Plato founded a school, the Academy (which lasted to 529 A.D.), to rival the one Isocrates had started, and wrote his middle dialogues. In one group Plato undercut Isocrates by having Socrates attack sophists and their students: Protagoras, Cratylus, Meno, Euthydemus, Gorgias, Menexenus, Phaedrus. The Athenians like Pericles who followed the sophists had built a city of possessions, not moral excellence: "With no regard for self-control or justice they stuffed our state with harbors and docks and walls and tribute money and all such nonsense." In the other middle dialogues, widely acknowledged to be his masterpieces, Plato shows Socrates "turning the souls" of his followers toward true reality, and uncovering genuine wisdom: Phaedo; Symposium, a drinking party where the guests offer speeches in praise of love; and Republic, about a truly just, utopian city-state. All three cover the broad range of Plato's philosophy, and Socrates attempts to induce in his companions a synoptic vision of the whole of reality which he, the fully wise philosopher, has.

Plato never lost the political inspiration for his work, so his last book, Laws, is devoted to founding a city which could actually exist. But his other later dialogues, all written for advanced students in his school, are detailed and argumentative treatments of the principles in various areas of philosophical research: Timaeus (cosmology), Parmenides (metaphysics), Philebus (pleasure), Theatetus (knowledge), and Sophist and Statesman (politics).

b. Outline of the Dialogue

All philosophy begins with wonder, and the Phaedo begins with Echechrates wondering why Socrates' death took such a long time. The reason was a religious commemoration of Theseus' mythical trip to Crete to save seven Athenian youths and seven maidens from the Minotaur, to whom they were to be sacrificed in the depths of the labyrinth. Theseus used the thread Ariadne gave him to find his way in, slay the monster, and lead everyone out again. After Socrates' wife Xanthippe is unceremoniously led away, there are fourteen of Socrates' followers left in his cell, not counting Phaedo, who is like Ariadne in offering us the thread of the dialogue. If they must be rescued from the Minotaur of death, and Socrates is Theseus, the labyrinth is the twists and turns of the long argument in the dialogue.

One way the Phaedo is labyrinthine concerns the way questions about the soul arise. It is not a systematic treatise. Socrates starts with what is uppermost in the minds of everyone, the immortality of his own soul. All present simply assume humans have souls. But there is good reason for this. Inanimate things like rocks act differently from animate things. A dog moves itself across the agora to sniff out Socrates; but he must throw a rock at the dog, it doesn't throw itself. There must be something in the dog, or Socrates, which is the internal source causing life activities. Its name in Greek is psyche (hence psychology), and in Latin anima (so English animate). Soul in this sense is an internal principle of life activity. While its nature is not obvious, the inference to its existence is as natural as that from visible smoke to unseen fire, and the same sort, proceeding from effect (visible life activities) to cause (soul). Roses, centipedes, and humans all have some internal principle of life, even if purely physical. The initial issue in the dialogue is whether the kind of internal principle humans do have lives on after death.

The Phaedo is also labyrinthine in the way its arguments are developed. Like the labyrinth's tunnels, the paths of argument cross and recross. Since Socrates has been putting Aesop's fables into verse, it is natural that the dialogue follow the structure of Greek poetry: strophe, correlative antistrophe, epode. Strophe and antistrophe begin and end with myth. Sandwiched between are increasingly sophisticated logoi: speeches, arguments, counter-arguments. Each step in the strophe progresses over the prior one, but also has two deficiencies, one pointing to the next section (e.g. S6 to S7), the other to the corresponding stage of the antistrophe (e.g. S6 to A6). Each step in the antistrophe answers the corresponding section of the strophe, and points to the next step in the antistrophe. Consequently ideas and theories are introduced, criticized, and refined, in dialectical development. The structure is as follows:

Strophe (S):

S1: Theseus myth (57a-60b)

S2: Socrates' speech defending philosophy (60b-69e)

S3: Cebes' wonder about immortality (69e-70b)

S4: Argument for immortality from opposites (70b-72e)

S5: Argument from recollection (72e-77b)

S6: Argument from corruptibility (77b-80b)

Antistrophe (A): S7/A7: Reincarnation myth (80c-84c)

A6: Simmias' counter-arg: harmony (84c-86e)
A5: Cebes' counter-arg: the weaver (87a-88c)
A4: Socrates to Sim: soul as cause (88c-95a)
A3: Socrates' wonder: true causes (95a-100b)
A2: Socrates to Ceb: soul and form of life (100b-107b)
A1: Cosmic myth (107b-115a)

Epode (E): E: Death of Socrates (115-end)

c. Analysis of the Parts of the Dialogue

S1: Theseus Myth

The myth of Theseus introduces Socrates' great theme. His followers will actually be rescued only by becoming convinced of the immortality of their own souls. So the opening points beyond itself:

At the level of poetry the more convincing story is the one which offers a larger vision. Consequently, Socrates the story-teller moves from an analogy with one mythic character--Theseus (S1), to a second story encompassing all reincarnated souls (S7A7), and ends with a picture placing souls within the whole cosmos (A1). His myths become progressively more convincing because set on a wider stage.

But poetry can only go so far; it must be supplemented by other ways of thinking. So Socrates moves from poetry to set speech like the sophists (S2), to philosophical arguments. Plato so carefully weaves together all three that it is virtually impossible fully to separate philosophy from the other two. The real argument is in the cumulative effect on the three persons who constitute Plato's main audience, the potential philosophers Cebes and Simmias, and the reader. The reader of a dialogue must link together all the modes of discourse and all the arguments, like the reader of a poem finds its meaning in the whole. Such active reading is necessary because this is how Plato teaches us to become philosophers like Socrates.

S2: Socrates' Speech (60b-69e)

Socrates likens this speech to his apology before the Athenians. He attempts to persuade this jury using assertions about the philosopher's way of life and death. He offers his theses as truth (and never denies them), but also as a test.

Since philosophy is "practice for death", Socrates begins by defining death as the "separation of soul from body", understood to mean that after death the soul and body exist apart from each other. >From this he deduces his theses. The philosopher must learn to despise the pleasures of the body, which is beneficial for knowledge and morality. The soul grasps knowledge of the natures of things through pure reasoning. So the philosopher's soul seeks to be "by itself"; and

death offers the positive attainment of knowledge. Morally, philosophy purifies the soul, which attains the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice.

Two problems arise because Socrates so clearly distinguishes principle from conclusion. Everything rests on his definition of death. Even if true, the definition simply assumes the soul and body exist separately from each other. But this is what needs proof. The definition is not a useful basis for deduction, and the speech is unconvincing for this reason. This problem engenders Cebes' wonder (S3). Second, deductive reasoning seems a good method of proving conclusions, if a stronger principle could be found. Socrates later finds stronger principles (A3). The sophistic deduction here foreshadows Socrates' philosophical deduction at A2. The speech pulls us into the dialogue's dialectic.

S3: Cebes' Wonder

Most in the room silently receive Socrates' theses as the master's final opinions. But what is the last word at the level of sophistry, is only the first for philosophy. Cebes breaks the silence, wondering about the soul, because people think it "is dispersed like breath or smoke" at death. In this way, Plato works into the very structure of the dialogue the proper method for philosophy. Opinions like those Socrates has just presented evoke wonder and a precise question in Cebes, who recognizes he needs "persuasion". This is achieved through argument and counter-argument, repeated, not indefinitely, but until certain truth is found. But how do we know when we have arrived at such truth? The structure of the dialogue reveals the answer: Cebes' intervention parallels Socrates recounting his own wonder (A3), which allowed him to understand the true causes of reality. Philosophical truth, therefore, can be attained when the dialectical interchange gives us insight into first causes, and the initial question is answered through them. This then is the order of philosophy: opinion, wonder, question, argument, counter-argument, first principles, certain truth.

S4: First argument: opposites

Life is the opposite of death, and dying is a process. Socrates looks to how nature in general works, opening up a deductive argument about the soul. He uncovers important general truths: Natural change is a transition from one opposite to another. The processes are different from the opposed states, and are determined by their terms; so diminution is the opposite of enlargement. Opposites coming from opposites must work in a circle, otherwise nature would come to a halt. >From these premisses, Socrates concludes that the human soul must be immortal, by arguing from the process all recognize (dying) to the opposite process (it could be called enlivening), understood as uniting the soul to a body. To complete the circle the soul must exist on both sides of bodily death, even "in the underworld".

Cebes gives a sophist's reply, "it seems likely", a sign something is amiss. First, the analysis of change is incomplete. The subject of change is a third factor, distinct from opposing properties and processes. In many changes the same subject is found on both sides of the transformation, as when Socrates grew larger in becoming an adult. But sometimes the subject disappears altogether. This is just the point about death. The argument simply assumes all changes are the first type, because the subject of the dying process is not yet clear. This

problem leads to recollection (S5), which will clarify the subject by focusing on an obviously psychic activity, knowledge.

Second, imprecision about the subject of change amounts to imprecision about the subject of the argument. The argument ought to be about the soul. If so, Socrates envisions a soul oscillating between life and death. But a dead soul looks like a contradiction in terms, if the soul is truly the cause of life. When the soul is 'dead', of course, it is really the body which is dead. The body clearly can exist in both states. But if the body, not the soul, is its subject, the argument has slipped completely from sight. It is not just deficient, it is non-existent, like Socrates' soul may shortly be. The argument has become a dilemma. If the body is its subject, the argument works, but proves nothing about the soul; if the soul is the subject, the argument simply doesn't work. What is needed is clarity about the causal relation between body and soul, which points ahead to A4.

S5: Knowledge is Recollection

Cebes reminds Socrates of his doctrine that learning is remembering ideas we already possess. If humans are born with the concepts they use, the soul possessing them previously existed, making immortality a side-effect of Socrates' theory of knowledge. But this theory is not obviously true; it needs proof.

Socrates' proof-strategy consists in finding something we readily accept, everyday remembering, and proceeds backwards, analyzing it by examining the presuppositions of such remembering. This analysis reveals an analogy between remembering and learning. Socrates takes us on an inner journey from nature to our cognitive processes, to the mind, and finally what the mind knows, Plato's famous forms.

When we see Simmias' cloak we remember Simmias himself. Everyday remembering involves: (a) present sensing, which is passive, (b) active remembering, (c) past sensing, which gives the content of what we remember, (d) the thing previously sensed, and (e) myself who unites past and present in the act of remembering. Socrates uses these to argue that intellectual learning has analogous features.

Remembering may seem to be a purely sensory activity, but it is not. We express our remembrances in universal language. So (a') intellectual knowledge has the very same starting point as remembering--sensory experience. But (b') knowledge involves making active intellectual judgments about our sensory experiences. Just as remembering involved reference to a standard (the previous experience we remember) so (c') intellectual judgments require a standard. Judging two sticks (or stones) are equal to each other requires us to use the concept of equality, "the equal itself".

Socrates picks "the equal" to show that universal concepts are an absolute pre-requisite for all mental life. Equality is a kind of unity. Now knowledge is formed in propositions, which unite a predicate with a subject. The verbal sign of this unity is the copula 'is'. Without this concept of unity one could never make any mental judgment. Are such concepts but another word for experiences? The "itself" in the phrase underscores how different they are. The concept of

equality is pure in a way equal sticks never can be, because it is our understanding of the very nature of equality, alone and by itself. Equality never changes, and is the foundation for necessary and universal truths, like one of the axioms of arithmetic: when equals are added to equals the results are equal.

At this point, Socrates appears to have hit a dead end in the labyrinth. Intellectual concepts are so primordial it seems impossible to draw them "from" sensation, yet Socrates says just this. But could we not have obtained intellectual concepts from a kind of prior experience, as we obtained the basis for remembering through a prior sensation? This experience would be purely intellectual. If so, I would get concepts "from" sensation only in the limited sense that a particular experience would trigger my intellectual memory of the concepts I already have appropriate for judging that experience, in a way analogous to how a sensation can trigger my memory of a prior sense experience.

The real payoff from the analogy, however, lies in its two final features: (d') There must exist some reality which provided me with my concepts. All humans are open to the same truths because they obtain them from the same things. These must possess the perfection, permanence, necessity, and unity found in my concepts, since concepts are but their mirrors. Socrates calls them forms. (e') Finally, just as in everyday remembering the 'I' had to encompass present and past sensations, intellectual remembering further expands the range of the 'I', which unites all my intellectual concepts with each other, as well as with my sense experiences and everyday recollections. This 'I' is the soul. If I cannot have received and forgotten concepts at the same time, my soul must have pre-existed.

Socrates' argument, therefore, uncovers five features of intellectual knowledge corresponding to the five features of everyday remembering: (a') present sensation, about which we make (b') intellectual judgments, which presuppose (c') possession of intellectual concepts, derived from (d') the forms illuminating (e') the soul prior to the present life.

Two criticisms of this theory of recollection lead the dialogue forward. Simmias notes that the pre-existence of the soul doesn't guarantee its post-existence, so they immediately proceed to S6. A deeper problem points ahead to A5. Suppose concepts are logically prior to sense, and the forms are the true causes of knowledge. Socrates' way out of the dilemma is to say the soul pre-exists. But this is not the only possible solution. One might equally well say knowledge comes to the soul by illumination during this life, rather than in a prior existence.

S6: Incorruptibility

Even adding the first two arguments together, as Socrates playfully suggests, is unconvincing. Perhaps a third will charm away the bogeyman of death. Socrates now focuses on how the soul might be destroyed, looking at destructibility as such first, then at the soul.

Things subject to destruction all have one thing in common. They are made up of parts, and destroying them means taking the parts apart. Destructibility and being made up of separable parts imply each other. This opens the way for an argument about the soul. If it does not have the kind of parts subject to such separation, then it will follow logically from the definition of

destructibility that the soul is indestructible. The argument, therefore, turns on whether the soul has parts, and Socrates offers two comparisons to try to convince Cebes that it does not.

First, the soul seems unlike the things which obviously are destructible, like physical objects. There is part of us which is quite like them; but this is the body, not the soul. So Socrates offers a comparison of the body with such things: The body is "mortal", we know it dies; "multiform", because its parts are different from each other; "unintelligible", because an individual thing; "soluble", because it falls apart. The reason for all this is that, as a physical object, it is "never consistently the same." In short, the body is "human". The soul, however, is the invisible ruler over the visible body. Should not the soul then have the opposite characteristics? This negative comparison is the first way Socrates leads us to the intuition that the soul lacks parts.

Drawing positive conclusions from negative comparisons, however, is risky. So Socrates offers a positive comparison. He likens the soul to the forms. This approach requires Socrates to clarify what the forms are like: They are "immortal", existing always; "intelligible", because they are the natures common to things; "uniform", because each form has one specific content; and "indissoluble" because without separable parts. The reason for all this is that each form is "always the same as itself." The forms, in short, are "divine," each of these points contrasting forms with participants like the human body. The basis for the contrast is unity. Forms are more fully one than participants in two ways: Internally, a form is always the same as itself. Consequently, it never changes, has no parts, and is eternal. Externally, the form causes whatever unity two participants might enjoy. Beauty itself unifies two beautiful objects in beauty.

Where does the soul fit? While not absolutely identical with either, Socrates says it is more "like" the forms. The reason is based on a contrast between soul and body. As invisible master of the body, the soul is the source of unity and personal identity for a human. This makes the soul more fully one than the body in ways analogous to the priority of form over participant. The body changes over the course of one's life. But it is still 'one's' life. So whatever unity over time is found in the body must be caused by something else--the soul, as the unity in participants is caused by the form. But the soul also must be internally unified, the same as itself, like a form is. Otherwise, it couldn't be the one master over the body, and the source of personal identity and responsibility. But if the soul is one in these ways, it, like a form, should not have parts, and should be indestructible and immortal, as are they.

Socrates gives an ambiguous summary: The soul is "altogether indissoluble, or nearly so." The last phrase does clarify the conclusion. The soul is only near the full reality of the forms. This puts it on the horizon, as it were, between the fully unified forms above, and the multiple participants below. Each soul is eternal like the forms; but a distinct individual within a species, like participants. Curiosity about what will happen to this horizon-being leads to the next section (S7A7). But "nearly so" is also deflating. We doubt whether the argument really succeeds. It has been based on two comparisons, soul to body, and forms to participants. Both relations are extrinsic to the very nature of the soul itself. What is lacking here is an answer to the question: What is that nature? This deficiency foreshadows the objects of A6/A5, which at long last will focus the dialogue on this central question.

S7A7: The Reincarnation Myth

The strophe is completed with Socrates' poetic vision of reincarnated souls. The picture of "inferior men" becoming asses and wolves is not appealing, even less so "moderate men" becoming bees and ants. But the story need not be literally true to be helpful.

Its off-putting message forces us to recognize the difference between literary truth, the moral contained within the story, and literal truth or falsity. As in Aesop, the moral is what is important.

The myth has two philosophical morals: If the soul is immortal, it must exist in some definite state after death, either separated from a body or united with one. In addition, there must be some rationale for the state the soul attains; and Socrates thinks it only just that the soul's state depend on the kind of life one has led. Virtue should be rewarded and vice punished, if the cosmos really is organized under the forms of the good and the beautiful.

Finally, the mixed signals this vision presents initiate the counter-arguments of the antistrophe, as much as being a climax for the strophe.

A6: Simmias' Harmony

Though swayed by Socrates, Simmias and Cebes are not yet convinced. Their perplexity and love of truth are genuine. So each takes up a premiss from the incorruptibility argument, offers a counter-argument admitting that premiss but denying Socrates' conclusion, and sums up the matter in a telling image. Simmias accepts the soul's invisibility. He likens the relation of body and soul to that of lyre and harmony. The harmony which comes from the instrument cannot be directly perceived. It is not the notes, which are heard; yet through hearing one becomes aware of harmony. Harmony is a real yet not directly perceptible quality of the instrument, making it like the imperceptible yet real soul. But the difficulty for immortality is that when the lyre is destroyed, so too is its harmony, which has no existence apart from the instrument. Neither should the soul survive the body.

Simmias' analogy is not merely a critique of Socrates. It drives the discussion to a deeper level by illustrating one view of the very nature of the soul. Whether harmonia means the 'attunement' of the lyre, a physical property in the strings, or 'melodiousness' which results from properly playing the strings, harmony is clearly a function of the physical make-up of the lyre. By analogy, the soul would be a property or function of the body. This conception of the soul is materialist, because if Simmias' analogy holds the principle of life and thought would be merely a part or aspect of our physical bodies.

A5: Cebes' Weaver

Cebes concentrates on the soul as master. The soul is stronger and more perfect, and he even grants that it sometimes survives death. The soul is like a weaver who produces many cloaks during a long life. No one would dispute that the weaver is better than his products, and outlives

most of them. But the last cloak survives him, the soul's mastery over the body being no guarantee of immortality.

Cebes' analogy presents a second view of the very nature of the soul. It is an entity in its own right. Only in this way can it control the body and order it to act against its physical inclinations, as the weaver forces the cloth out of its natural shape in making a cloak. Such an invisible master must be an immaterial entity. Immateriality and causal priority over the body, however, do not by themselves ensure immortality. Cebes' is an immaterial but mortal soul.

These counter-arguments are "depressing". Phaedo recollects that Socrates then "turned us around" by offering yet a third view, the soul as a fully spiritual, and consequently immortal, being. These three views can be called materialist, immaterialist, and spiritualist. If the strophe concentrated on the immediate problem of immortality, the antistrophe shows that the answer rests on the deeper issue of the nature of the soul. A properly philosophical treatment must consider all fundamental options. Plato sums them up in three images: Simmias' harmony, Cebes' weaver, and the living image of Socrates himself, a prisoner awaiting release from the prison of the body. The rest of the antistrophe is designed to show how the first two doctrines about the soul are wrong, only Socrates' is correct.

A4: Socrates to Simmias

Sensitive to the psychology of dashed hopes, Socrates notes the counter-arguments of Simmias and Cebes could lead to misology (hatred of argument), as wrongful behavior can lead to misanthropy. But both reactions would be wrong. The worst misanthropists are those who mouth the platitudes of concern, the worst misologists are trained arguers. Faced with the power of arguments to overturn each other, sophists despair of ever finding truth. But Socrates tries to engender hope in attaining truth. It depends on insight into human nature. While none of Socrates' points in the antistrophe ensures immortality by itself; each leads to that conclusion by turning us toward the form of humanity, for our hope lies there. In argument, as elsewhere, appearance differs from reality. The arguments of the strophe looked autonomous, but were constantly undercut; those of the antistrophe look merely critical, but build to a positive outcome.

Socrates begins with the central issue, causality. Simmias' lyre is clearly the cause of harmony, not the reverse. This is the reason why destroying the lyre destroys the harmony. But the body is under the control of the soul. The cause of physical action is mental decision; the cause of life in the body is the soul itself. Soul is cause, harmony effect. Since Simmias has reversed cause and effect, Socrates rejects the analogy. But he is not merely critical of this one example. Any account which reverses the causality between body and soul is wrong, and wrong-headed. This is how Socrates offers the wider insight that any materialist view of human nature, since it reduces the soul and psychic processes to effects of the body, must be wrong. The truth depends on understanding causality properly, to which he now turns.

A3: Socrates' Wonder

What looks like an aside is really central, because truth about the soul as cause requires

clarity about causality. There are two issues: What are the true causes? How do we know them? Socrates begins his explanation by turning autobiographical. When younger and less wise, he followed the method of the sages who investigated nature, and used their kinds of causes. This constituted his 'first voyage' toward the causes.

On this unsuccessful odyssey Socrates faced directly into the winds of nature, seeking to know the causes for the generation, destruction, and being of each thing. Direct inspection led him to conclude that all knowledge comes from sense through inductive generalization. Through unifying many sensations together, memories and opinions arise, then these develop into knowledge when they "become stable." He found two kinds of causes: "I thought before that it was obvious to anybody that men grow through eating and drinking, for food adds flesh to flesh and bones to bones." Food is matter out of which new physical bulk is constituted. Eating and drinking are activities which effectuate such changes. On his first voyage, therefore, Socrates used an empirical method to uncover material and efficient causes. All this seems eminently reasonable, even common-sensical; but it is wrong.

Socrates mentions two problems. The naturalists' method led to contradictions. In mathematics, for example, how is "two" generated? Sometimes "because of the addition of one to the other", at other times "division is the cause of its becoming two". This is perplexing: one effect, two opposite causes. Using himself as an example, Socrates shows the material and efficient factors only contribute to his sitting in the cell. The true causes are that "after the Athenians decided it was better to condemn me, for this reason it seemed best to me to sit here." Notions of good produce actions in a new way, by indicating the goal. In human action, a goal is an unchanging end. But it still stamps actions--which do change--with a certain character, because the actions are directed toward the goal. Walking to the agora becomes good when it helps Socrates realize his goal of philosophizing. Without itself changing, the goal imparts its own character on actions directed toward it, making them good.

These examples help Socrates draw conclusions about causality. Negatively, one must separate the factors responsible for things into two sorts: conditions and causes. Efficient and material factors are necessary conditions but not true causes. They change, where true causes do not; and they are subordinate to the true causes. Positively, the goal-oriented character of human actions presents an analogy which illuminates the nature of the true causes. Just as a goal is an unchanging end which imparts its own character on the means to it, making them good or bad based on its own goodness or badness, so a form is unchanging, but imparts its own formal character to the changing things which participate in it. The form, like a goal in human decision-making, acts as both final cause, drawing participants to act, and formal cause, bestowing its own nature on them.

Socrates can draw his conclusions because he has taken a "second" more successful "voyage" to the causes. On this one he looks only indirectly at reality, and so avoids being blinded, by inspecting arguments, as had the sophists. But unlike them, he uses arguments to draw insightful, certain knowledge about the causes. This voyage constitutes half of his own philosophical method, which he describes as one "I have mixed together." The mixture has two parts: the second voyage to the causes, and rational deductions from them, like Socrates will use at A2. Such deductions accomplish two things at once. They draw conclusions from

principles. But, since deductions are only as good as their principles; they also offer the best opportunity yet for insight into those principles. Since Socrates' method is a mix of deduction from the forms as first principles, and insight into the forms as true causes, the Phaedo exhibits all four ways of thinking identified in the Republic: The recollection argument had started with everyday remembering, an example of "image thinking" or associating one experience or idea with another. Analogies like Simmias and Cebes have offered trade on such associations. They are also instances of the generalizing from particulars which characterizes "belief", as was the inductive method of the naturalists. Socratic deduction is "reasoning". While these three ways of thinking are not equal, their ultimate value lies beyond themselves, and beyond argument altogether, in "noetic insight" into the natures, that is, the forms, of things.

No argument or combination of arguments can substitute for such insight. This is why Socrates never presents ex professo arguments for the forms. In the end, no argument will be completely convincing, and those who pin their hopes on argument alone become sophists. But Socrates has drawn attention to three sets of reasons which can lead the mind up to this insight, and uncover three different features of the forms. (a) The recollection argument uncovered the forms as true causes of knowledge, a conclusion independent of the pre-existence of the soul. Socrates' example of choosing to stay and be executed uncovers (b) the forms as final causes which are ends engendering activities, and (c) forms as formal causes, imparting their own perfected natures to imperfect participants. The particular arguments of the dialogue are designed to prepare us for these insights which go beyond the scope of the arguments themselves.

If the soul is truly a cause, should it not be like the true causes? Reflection on the forms should open up insight into the soul as well. Like the forms, the soul is not an efficient or material cause, but acts in the final and formal orders. As final cause, or end for the body, it should be unchanging and immortal, like the forms. This clarifies in causal terms how the soul is a horizon-being. As formal cause, the soul bestows its own life on the body. The consequences of this function Socrates takes up in A2.

A2: Socrates to Cebes

Socrates looks at the logic of the life bestowed by the soul on the body. Being alive is clearly opposed to being dead. Socrates uses some examples to draw the consequences for the soul. Heat and cold are opposed to each other. Fire is always hot, snow always cold. Fire is not susceptible of both hot and cold, as water is, because the very nature of fire requires it be hot. This kind of relation is that between something and a property which flows from its nature. The same is true of the number three and being odd. Consequently, though snow is not directly opposed to hot, it is opposed through its necessary property of being cold. The question at issue, then, is whether living is a necessary property of the soul, making it impossible for the soul to die.

Answering this question involves three terms, however, not just two: soul, body, life. So Socrates expands his examples. Fire is always hot, and is the proximate cause of heat in a physical body. So too a fever is the cause of sickness in a human body. Both are analogous to the individual soul in three ways: Fever causes sickness in its subject, the human body, as the

soul causes life in that body. This makes sickness a necessary property of fever, and is the reason why a fever is opposed to health. Socrates draws the analogous inferences about the soul: It also possesses life as its own property, and thereby is opposed to death.

Socrates has shown the soul in its own nature is un-dying or im-mortal. This conclusion, however, is not as strong as might first appear. Fever is un-healthy, but does not live on when health is regained. The fever 'dies'. Consequently, it is not yet clear whether the soul is opposed to death as an individual snowflake, which is destroyed by melting, is opposed to heat, or as the number three, which is forever and indestructibly odd, is opposed to even. For this reason, Socrates states his conclusion hypothetically: If the immortal is also indestructible, then the soul will live on.

This conclusion is disappointing, if we are looking for the argument fully to prove immortality. But it does complete Socrates' clarification of the nature of the soul: Soul as formal cause of life in the body is incompatible with death. Beyond that, Socrates appeals to that insight about immortality toward which all the arguments in the dialogue lead, but which none fully attain, because argument is no substitute for insight. The soul lives eternally because it is like "the god" and "the form of life itself", which Simmias and Cebes readily agree are both immortal and indestructible. Socrates has come round to the divine forms, where he started. The soul is "like" the forms in causality, so it should also be like them in eternity. Cebes' response is that he cannot doubt the argument. Simmias has some misgivings which Socrates says require further examination of the "first hypotheses", not because Socrates lacks insight into them, but because Simmias does.

A1: Cosmic Myth

The extension of this myth is designed to make it the most convincing of the three. It covers the whole cosmos, and contains two messages: If the human soul is an intermediate reality, a true myth would make the human habitat an in-between place. And so the story goes. Though we think of ourselves as living on the surface of the earth, in reality we live in a kind of middle earth. Death will free the pious to move up to the surface, and philosophers will go further, living unconnected to the earth, "altogether without a body." Socrates recognizes that no one "with insight" will believe this tale literally. Reading the myth rightly involves taking a risk, because there is always an interpretive step from what the story says to what it means. But the risk is a "fine" one, analogous to stepping from argument to insight. This makes stories and arguments similar. The last step in both is the always risky one of personal insight. Since Socrates cannot take that step for us, he ends the argumentative portion of the dialogue offering us this opportunity.

E: The Death of Socrates

Homeric heroes were excellent in word and deed. Socrates has exhibited his excellence in words. Now he shows that wisdom produces excellence in deeds. Like Achilles, he faces down death. But Achilles had to stifle real fear of evil death. Socrates tells Crito he owes a cock to Asclepius, the god of healing, not for any past favor, but for the present one. Wisdom has eliminated fear through understanding that death is not an evil, but a healing. So Socrates, the

new, philosophical hero, has surpassed Achilles. Socrates' courage is born of understanding, Achilles' had come from emotion. This is Plato's final lesson, and his last test for us, the would-be philosophers.

d. Critical Conclusion

While Plato's achievements in the Phaedo are as multifaceted as the dialogue itself, four stand out. First, Plato focuses the philosophical study of humans on the soul, not the body; and concludes that the human is the soul. Second, Plato shows the issue uppermost in our minds--immortality for Socrates--can be resolved only by looking to its universal cause, the very nature of soul as an individual spirit. Third, immortality should be thought of as a characteristic inevitably following upon that nature, but not identical with the nature itself, a property due to the causal relation between soul and body. The soul is an unchanging end for the body--the body is for the sake of the soul, not the reverse. And the soul causes the perfection of life in the body. Finally, Plato reflects on how he uses reason to draw these conclusions. Arguments open up the ontological space between eternal but abstract forms and particular but mortal participants. But the mental insight that the soul is 'on the horizon', a particular but eternal spirit, each mind must attain on its own. Insight surpasses story, speech, and argument.

Since the dialogue imbues the reader with the critical spirit of Socrates, Plato's conclusions should themselves be critiqued. There are problems in three areas: Plato's method, his conclusion, and his argument.

Plato clearly distinguishes the nature of the soul from its property of immortality. But the method he uses to establish these different things is fundamentally the same. Even where it looks like Socrates is employing straight deduction, its import lies beyond itself, because the only way to achieve certain knowledge is through insight into the forms.

Aristotle will criticize Plato on just this point. Different questions should be answered using distinct methods. While the natures of things must be seen intuitively, Aristotle will say inductive generalization, even more than mathematical deduction, is an adequate basis for this intuition. So separate forms are unnecessary. In addition, when demonstrative deduction had a solid foundation, it can determine the properties of a nature by itself. Plato's method, in short, fell short of his own insight that nature and property are different.

Concerning his conclusion, it looks as if Plato has proven too much. Based on its nature, all soul is immortal. But soul is present in plants and animals, as well as humans. It looks like Plato must say that individual souls of all three types are spiritual and live forever. This would make the reincarnation myth literally, not just literarily, true. This problem has given rise to very different solutions among Plato's followers.

Aristotle agreed that Plato was right to focus on the nature of the soul; but concluded that a proper understanding of its nature does not require immortality. So he will solve the problem by saying that humans and their souls are more like plants and animals than like the gods. The Platonic argument for immortality won't work for any kind of soul.

Plotinus will draw the opposite conclusion. Plato's insight is true. But this does not prove

that any individual soul is immortal, it only shows that soul as such, in its very nature, is immortal. There is immortality, but it is not personal. This is because when we distinguish soul in its own nature from the soul in some individual, we are not merely distinguishing two ways of thinking about soul, but two different ways in which soul actually exists. The two ways are existing in its own nature as one, unchanging, immortal, 'cosmic' soul, and existing in a multitude of individual, changing, and mortal living things-- including humans. There is no immortality for them, even while there is for it.

Finally, Thomas Aquinas, though he never even read the Phaedo, will concentrate on Plato's argument at A2, and develop yet a third conclusion. Aquinas will connect Plato's numerical example of three and oddness with his own metaphysical principles to conclude that the human soul, as the subsistent cause of being for the whole person, is personally immortal, though this is not true of the souls of other living creatures. Humans, not just their souls, will be the horizon-beings.

All three philosophers will take up Plato's doctrine of the soul in a Socratic spirit, just as Plato had wanted. And this, more than anything else, is his eternal legacy to philosophy.