

### Immortality and Forms in the Phaedo

In the Phaedo, Plato offers a series of arguments for the immortality of the soul. In doing so, he also offers an introduction to his theory of Forms. As we shall see when we discuss the Republic, some of the claims Plato makes about the soul in the Phaedo he later rejects. The theory of Forms, however, remains central to his thought throughout the dialogues of the middle period, and it is only in the later dialogues that he begins to make significant revisions to it.

The arguments of the Phaedo can be separated as follows:

- I. The cyclical argument (69e6-72e1)
- II. The recollection argument (72e3-78b3)
- III. The affinity argument (78b4-84b8)
- IV. The reply to Simmias (soul as harmony) (88c1-95a3)
- V. The final argument (102a10-107b10)

#### I. THE CYCLICAL ARGUMENT

- a) Opposites come to be from opposites (71a), e.g., if something comes to be just, it comes to be just from having not been just; if something comes to be beautiful, it does so from having not been beautiful; if something comes to be large, it comes to be large from having been small.
- b) When opposites come to be from opposites, there is a process by which this occurs, (71a-b) e.g., shrinking, growing; waking, falling asleep, etc.
- c) Death is the opposite of life; and things come to be dead from having been alive. (71d)
- d) Opposite to dying there is a process of coming to life. (72a)
- e) If something comes to life, it must have existed before birth. (72a)  
[--the things that die come to life, and the things that come to life die.]
- [f] If the process is not cyclical, the same things being reborn as have died, then all things would end up dead. (72a-b)]
- g) So the souls of things must exist when not alive, and undergo the processes of dying and coming to life.

#### Points to note:

- Death here is something the soul may undergo without going out of existence. The soul dies and comes to life. It underlies such alteration.
- Death and birth are understood on the analogy of becoming tan and becoming pale. The thing which becomes pale may never become tan again, but it continues to exist.

#### Problems?

- 1) This only shows that there must be something before birth, not that the soul exists after death. Nothing comes from nothing rules out ex nihilo becoming, but not destruction...coming

to be is alteration, but must we say that ceasing to be is alteration?

2) We don't get any understanding of what the subject of change is like: why think it is anything like my (individual) soul?

## II. THE AFFINITY ARGUMENT

- a) The world consists of two sorts of things: the things which are divine, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, deathless (eternal), [invisible, incomposite] and the things that are not. (Are we supposed to get these conclusions from recollection argument?)
- b) The soul is more like the former in the following ways (this is seen especially if we consider the soul of the philosopher which has been purified of bodily influences):
  - i) it is invisible
  - ii) it is closer to unvarying than constantly varying
  - iii) it rules the body and so is more divine
- c) So the soul is plausibly one of the incomposite, indissoluble, deathless things.

### Problems?

1) The analogy is weak: we don't get obvious similarity of the soul in the crucial respects. In particular, there are things which are invisible and incorporeal (the harmony), and possibly incomposite (material elements?), which aren't among the divine class of things Socrates mentions. Why should we accept (a) or the inference? We surely shouldn't accept that because something is invisible and incorporeal, it is eternal (e.g., harmony). (Note reply to Simmias.)

## III. FINAL ARGUMENT

- a) An opposite (itself) will never become or be its opposite, while still being what it was; either it goes away or is destroyed when that happens. (103a) I.e., opposite FORMS themselves never admit their own opposites, but give way or perish. (Cold never admits hot; even never admits odd.)
- b) In addition to the opposite itself, there is something else which has the character of the Form, whenever it exists. (103e) (Snow and fire; two and three.)
- c) Those things which always contain the Form, are like the Form insofar as they too never admit the opposite of that Form, (but will either give way or perish). (104b) (Snow never admits hot; two never admits odd.)
- d) If something brings the Form into that which it occupies, it will not admit the opposite of the form. (105a)
- e) It is the soul in a body that makes the body alive. (105c)
- f) Whatever the soul occupies, it brings life to. (105d)
- g) The opposite of life is death. (105d)
- h) The soul will not admit death; if death approaches, the soul will give way or perish. (105d)
- i) If the soul will not admit death, it is deathless. (105e)
- j) If the deathless (deathlessness?) is indestructible, then the soul is too. (106b)
- k) The deathless is indestructible. (106c)

1) The soul is indestructible. (106c)

Points to note:

- Does Plato need to put forms in things which carry them in order to avoid the conclusion that there is one common soul, i.e. to get individual souls?

Problems?

- 1) Is the cold itself indestructible? Then why isn't snow, on the same principle?
- 2) He needs not only to show that the soul is deathless, but also that it is indestructible: it may be such as never to admit death, but by perishing when death approaches.