
One More Time: Plato's Conception of the Immortality of the Soul

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Abstract

This article discusses the immortality of the soul as Plato demonstrates it mainly in the final argument of his dialogue "Phaedo". Plato raises four different arguments for the immortality of the soul: The Argument from Opposites, the Theory of Recollection, the Argument from Affinity, and the Final Argument, given as a response to Cebes' objection. He does not seem to place equal weight on all four of these arguments. For instance, it is suggested that the Argument from Affinity by no means proves the immortality of the soul, but only shows that it is quite likely. The Theory of Recollection and the Final Argument seem to be given the greatest importance, as both of them follow directly from the Theory of Forms. But while the Theory of Recollection can only show that the soul existed before birth, and not that it will also exist after death, the Final Argument purports to fully establish the immortality of the soul, and is considered by Plato to be unobjectionable and certain. Like his third argument Plato's Final Argument addresses the question of what the relation is between the seemingly divine and immortal ideas and the soul. With reference to the Final argument's successful conclusion the soul must be shown to be immortal and indestructible as highlighted by the discussion of certain elements such as the distinction between partial immortality and full immortality, the redefinition of death, the promise to consider "coming-into-being and passing-away" and the alternative "withdraw or perish". The argument from opposite forms succeeds only in showing that the soul is immortal. The soul is characterized by life and the opposite of life is death. The soul therefore is immortal, in just the way in which fire is not-cold and three is not-even. Plato supposes that the only time when the soul could perish would be at the time of separation from the body. The argument from opposite forms and the distinction of accidental and essential predication shows that the soul always survives separation from the body. The soul

therefore is being always immortal and indestructible. Socrates argues that the soul is not merely similar to the immortal ideas but that the soul always possesses within itself the immortal idea of life. Consequently, he concludes that the soul is not merely "completely" or "almost so" but that "the soul is immortal".

I

The issue of immortality is indeed an ancient one and features prominently in the study fields of philosophy and spirituality. Human beings live on earth a number of years and then die, and probably from the very beginning of the human race men and women have marvelled if there is something beyond death. Philosophers have attempted to prove that immortality does or does not exist, with divergent results. Plato addresses the issue with a series of "proofs" argued by Phaedo and Socrates in the *Phaedo*. Plato in this dialogue addresses the question of immortality directly and attempts to prove that immortality is a truth that has to be accepted by reasoning human beings. Plato's spokesperson, Socrates, believes in the eternal life of the soul and guides the discussion toward indicating several reasons for this belief. Many of the reasons given are highly speculative in nature and involve a worldview including Plato's cosmogony and his concept of pre-existing Forms. The question of the immortality of the soul is tied up with the definition of just what death is. Death is defined by Socrates as being the separation of the body and the soul, and the arguments Socrates offers as proofs all begin with this separation. Death, or the freeing of the soul from the body, is seen by Socrates as being the ultimate philosophical quest for truth. With Socrates, a new conception of the soul enters the world: namely that the soul is no longer just the principle of life, but the most precious possession we have, the very centre of our being, harbouring the nature of our personality and the value of our character. The most important thing in the world, for Socrates, is the therapy of the soul. Connected with this new conception of the soul is the Socratic view that it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit one. Socrates was convinced that the gods are good, and that they look upon humanity with benevolence to such an extent that Socrates seemed unable and unwilling to interpret his conviction and execution as a tragic fate. The *Phaedo* stands alongside the *Republic* as the most philosophically dense dialogue of Plato's middle period. It contains the first extended discussion of the Theory of Forms, four arguments for the immortality of the soul, and strong arguments in favour of the philosophical life. It also contains Plato's moving account of Socrates' final hours and his compelling myth about the fate of the soul after death. More than most of Plato's other writings, the *Phaedo* is in constant dialogue with the Pre-

Socratic theories of the world and the soul, in particular those of Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and Heraclitus. The *Phaedo* is often treated as though its main objective were to provide an empirical demonstration of the immortality of the soul but it does not really profess to do this. The objective is to justify faith in immortality as a rational faith by showing that it follows naturally from a fundamental metaphysical doctrine - the ideal theory or doctrine of forms - which seems to afford a rational clue to the structure of the universe, though it is expressly said at the end of the whole discussion that this doctrine itself still requires further examination. At the same time, it is made fully clear that Plato accepts this metaphysical doctrine, with the reservation just mentioned, and is passionately sincere in the faith in "personal immortality" which he brings into connection with it. To be strictly accurate indeed, we ought to say that the faith to be defended goes beyond belief in immortality. What is being maintained is the divinity of the soul while its survival of death is a consequence of this inherent divinity.

II

The majority of the dialogues attributed to his middle period – especially the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic* – include explicit attempts to prove the soul's immortality. The *Phaedo* is devoted to this task almost single-mindedly and is structured as a series of such proofs. Most scholars classify them as follows:

The Cyclical or Opposites Argument 69e–72d. This argument is introduced by Socrates as his first argument for the immortality of the soul in order to alleviate Cebes' worry that the soul might perish at death. It supposes that the soul must be immortal since the living come from the dead. Socrates first lays out the argument when he says: "Now if this is true, if the living are born again (*πάλιν γίνεσθαι*) from the dead, then our souls must exist in the other world, for if not, how could they have been born again?" (*Phaedo*, 70c9). He goes on to show, using examples of relationships, such as asleep-awake and hot-cold, that things that have opposites come to be from their opposite. One falls asleep after having been awake. And after being asleep, he wakes up. Things that are hot can become cold and vice versa. In this way between every pair of opposites there must always be two processes of transformation, e.g. cooling down and warming up, falling asleep and waking up. Living and dead are evidently opposites, and one of the processes between them, namely dying, is evident to us. Socrates then gets Cebes to conclude that the dead are generated from the living, through death, and that the living are generated from the dead, through birth. Thus it is reasonable to suppose that this applies to the case of dying and coming to life, so that the dead return to

life, just as the living die. If this were not so, if the process of dying were not reversible, life would ultimately vanish from the universe. However this argument does not necessarily hold as it does not show that the soul continues to exist once a person has died.

Recollection Argument 73a–77e. According to this argument we may appeal to the doctrine that what we call “learning” is really “recollection”, being reminded of something. This certainly seems to be the case, for in all our science we are perpetually being put in mind of precise ideal standards, mathematical or moral, with which sense or experience never presents us. We must therefore have become acquainted with them before we were confined to our bodies, and therefore must have existed before our birth. These two considerations together would prove what we want to prove, the soul’s survival at death, though our fear of the dark makes us demand a more convincing argument. Our ability to give the right answers in abstract discussions shows that we possess a kind of knowledge (evidently of the Forms) that we must have acquired before birth. It means that our souls existed apart from the body before they took on human form. That they continue to exist after we die is said to follow by combining this proof with the “opposites argument” outlined above. The theory of recollection runs basically as it has been shown, that it is possible to draw a true answer out of a person who seems to not have any knowledge of the subject prior to his questioning, as this person must have gained this knowledge in a previous life, and now merely recalls it. Socrates states it as follows: “*We agree, I suppose, that if anyone is to remember anything, he must know it at some previous time*” (*Phaedo*, 73c1-2) He follows this statement with a longer one, defining recollection: “*If a man, when he has heard or seen or in any other way perceived a thing, knows not only that thing, but also has a perception of some other thing, the knowledge of which is not the same, but different, are we not right in saying that he recollects (ἀνεμνήσθη) the things of which he has the perception?*” Indeed, as he has now been able to answer correctly, it must be the case that his answer arose from recollection of knowledge gained during a previous life. Socrates presents this argument also to *Meno* and concludes it as follows: “*The soul, then, as being immortal and having been born again many times and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all.... all inquiry and all learning is but recollection*” (*Meno*, 81d)

Affinity, Resemblance or Likeness Argument 78b–84b. Socrates begins the third argument by laying out the program he will follow in considering the issue at hand as he asks “*Must we not ask ourselves some such question as this? What kind of thing naturally suffers dispersion, and for what kind of thing might we naturally fear it, and again what kind of thing is not liable to it? And after this must we not inquire to which class the soul belongs and*

base our hopes or fears for our our souls upon the answers to these questions?" (Phaedo, 78b4-9). The proof aims to consider the nature of the soul in order to determine whether it is the kind of thing that does not pass away. In order to exemplify such entities, Socrates refers to the unchanging intelligibles. The proof bears on that possibility raised at the end of the preceding proof concerning the existence or nonexistence of the unchanging intelligibles. Simmias was unprovoked by this possibility, but Cebes, with his characteristic willingness to follow the argument, asks Socrates to *"go back to the point where we left off"* (78a10-b1). Cebes again becomes Socrates' interlocutor for this proof which, like the first, investigates the availability of a certain and comprehensive account of the whole of nature. In a summarized version the third proof attempts to establish the harmony of the soul and the ultimate intelligibles by showing that they share the same composite nature. In its failure to make this case, it in fact lends support to the indications of the preceding failed proofs that the particular beings on the one hand, and the soul on the other must be considered to be in some way complex. This necessity makes elusive a certain and comprehensive account of the whole of nature, for it not clear that we can give a unified account of the whole of nature, for it is not clear that we can give a unified account of either a particular being or of the soul, much less an account of the unity of the soul and the whole of nature. Simmias and Cebes are clearly not at ease by this consequence and express their reservation with this argument. Socrates has indicated at the start of his defence that the ground of the true distinction between the philosopher and the nonphilosopher, contrary to the doctrine of reincarnation, lies precisely in the willingness to confront directly the issue of mortality. Forms and particulars differ systematically because Forms are invisible, unchanging, uniform and eternal, where particulars are visible, changeable, composite and perishable. The human soul is invisible too, and it investigates Forms without the aid of bodily senses. By ruling a particular body it resembles the divine which rules and leads. Thus the soul is "most like the divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, and indissoluble" (Stern, 1993: 74). Its uniformity and partlessness exempt it from the decomposition that destroys compounded bodies and for all these reasons we may conclude that it is immortal. And so, Socrates in presenting the affinity argument for the immortality of the soul he shows that the soul most resembles that which is invisible and divine, and the body that which is visible and mortal. From this, it is concluded that while the body may be seen to exist after death in the form of a corpse, as the body is the mortal of the two and the soul is the more divine, the soul must outlast the body. There is reason to be sceptical about this argument. But, as Simmias admits, not wishing to disturb Socrates during his final hours by unsettling his belief in the immortality of the soul, those present are reluctant to voice their

skepticism. Socrates grows aware of their doubt and assures his interlocutors that he does indeed believe in the soul's immortality, regardless of whether or not he has succeeded in showing it as yet. For this reason, he is not upset facing death and assures them that they ought to express their concerns regarding the arguments. (*Phaedo*, 84d).

III

The fourth argument is introduced after what may be considered as a long interlude dealing with the problem of the notion of cause or reason (95e-99d). This interlude has been motivated by Socrates' admission that in order to meet Cebes' criticism he would have to venture into an explanation of the cause of generation and destruction (95e/96a). This, however, Socrates felt himself unable to do because the notion of cause or reason presented such difficulties to him that he finally took refuge in what he calls the "second sailing", a second best way the things are the way they are (Frede, 1978: 28). Having given an explication for venturing on his second sailing to Cebes, Socrates claims that he is not advocating new things but instead about those things he has always discussed on previous occasions namely the beautiful itself, the good, the big, and the other things themselves or ideas. He proposes that his new mode to the examination of all things is based on the hypothesis which has been repeatedly raised throughout the dialogue, the hypothesis known as the doctrine of ideas, according to which the ideas are divine, immortal, and imperishable beings that exist apart from the world of senses. (65d4-e5, 76e7-77a5, 80a10-b6, 92d7-e3). Throughout the conversation that has preceded Socrates' chronicle of the second sailing, the question of whether or not there is an afterlife for humans has been identified with the question of whether or not souls are immortal. Nevertheless in the explanation of his second sailing Socrates indicates that this is not the proper way to approach the question of immortality. (Ahrens Dorf, 1995: 177). For he has explained that it is incorrect to understand things primarily in terms of their elements. He has maintained that, by trying to understand things in this way, one becomes unsighted to their full or whole character. Accordingly, he has suggested that in order to grasp, for example, the number two, one must try to understand the idea of two or the nature of two rather than break it up into its elements. Subsequently it would seem, that in order to understand human beings properly, one must understand them above all in terms of their whole character, in terms of their idea or nature as whole human beings rather than in terms of their bodies and souls. (72e7-73a2, 76c11-13, 92b4-7). Consequently, it would seem that, in order to address the question of the afterlife, one must focus on the question of what is human nature and

whether humans are by nature immortal rather than focus on the question of whether a part of the human soul is immortal. One needs to be continuously aware that the final argument in the Phaedo is by far the longest as well as the one Socrates' audience and Plato's readers are most ready to accept, and it is often regarded as the one argument in the Phaedo that Plato himself accepted. However, it is also the most obscure, elusive, and frustrating of the arguments, whose intention as well as validity is in continual dispute. (Dorter, 1982:141). Like his third argument Plato's final argument addresses the question of what the relation is between the seemingly divine and immortal ideas and the soul. (Compare 78c10-d9, 80a10-b5 with 100b3-9, 102a10-b2, 105b9-106d7). In examining the fourth and last argument which Archer-Hind (1894: 175) believes "*to evolve not a mere probability but a positive demonstration*", Socrates begins by enlarging upon the notion of formal cause; he states that what is beautiful, is so because of the presence or the communion with the beauty in itself and in whatever way it comes about; and so with the holy, the good, etc. In this respect it is interesting to note that Socrates treats the concepts of "greatness or bigness" and "smallness", and by implication all other such relative entities, not as relations but rather as "transitive adjectives". He suggests to Cebes that, if he agrees that each of the ideas exist and that the particulars participate in them by possessing their name, then when he says that Simmias is greater than Socrates but smaller than Phaedo, he is saying that there is both bigness and smallness in Simmias. Socrates, with all possible haste indicates, however, that it is not quite true to say that Simmias is bigger than Socrates. For it is not "by nature" or by virtue of being Simmias, that Simmias is bigger than Socrates, but rather by virtue or "by nature" of his happening to possess bigness in him. Likewise he is not greater than Socrates because Socrates is Socrates, but because Socrates has smallness relatively to his greatness (*σμικρότητα προς το εκείνου μέγεθος*) and then again he is not smaller than Phaedo because Phaedo is Phaedo, but because Phaedo has greatness relatively to Simmias's smallness (*μέγεθος έχει ο Φαίδων προς την Σιμμίου σμικρότητα*). Socrates seems to give directions to a way in which one can understand the question of immortality and more specifically to the enquiry whether humans continue to exist after death, in terms of the ideas. For he distinguishes here between ideas, such as bigness and smallness, which human beings need not possess in order to continue to be what they are by nature, and ideas which they should possess in order to continue to exist as human beings and hence in the absence of which they cannot exist. It would seem, then, that, in order to determine whether human beings may continue to exist after death, one must first determine what characteristics or ideas they must possess in order to continue to exist "by nature" and hence what characteristics or ideas are

essential to the human nature. And what also needs to be ascertained is whether it is possible for human beings to continue to possess those characteristics or ideas once they are dead or whether they fail to keep them.

Socrates continues to examine what causes any particular thing to lose its features or its ideas. Socrates tells Cebes that, in his opinion, it is not only "bigness itself" that is never willing to be both big and small but also "the bigness in us" that is never willing to accept the small. Consequently, when the idea of smallness approaches us, the idea of bigness in us either flees and withdraws or perishes. Socrates suggests here that two ideas that are opposite to one another, such as bigness and smallness, cannot exist in the same thing or person, as Simmias, at the same time (102a10-b2, 102d5-103a2; 103a4-c2). Consequently it would seem that in order to determine whether human beings continue to exist after death, one should determine first what ideas are essential to the nature of human beings, then what the opposite ideas are, and ultimately whether those ideas drive out of human beings or destroy, when they die, the ideas without which they cannot continue to be what they are. (Ahrens Dorf, 1995: 179)

He next goes on to insist that one opposite never passes over into another opposite, but that, on the contrary, it will refuse to receive it into itself, and will, on its approach, either go away or be destroyed. At this point the objection is made that this contention is directly opposed to that which formed the basis of the first argument, namely, that opposites are generated out of opposites. Socrates is correct in stating that the objection rests upon a confusion between particulars and the Forms in which they participate. A particular may at one time be characterized by a certain quality, and at another time by the opposite of that quality. For example, a stone which was hot, may become cold. But a Form maintains its self-identity; coldness never becomes heat, nor heat coldness. Socrates remarks that snow will never become hot, nor fire will become cold; either will go away or perish before it will admit the contrary of its own native characteristic. Here one recognises the notion of essence or nature; nothing can lose an essential characteristic and yet maintain its identity. It is the nature of snow to be cold; when heat comes near heat it will melt into water or pass into vapour, but it will not become hot snow. (Patterson, 1965:106-107).

In getting ready to explain his analysis of the soul, Socrates requests Cebes to imitate him as regards a new kind of safeness (*ασφάλεια*). *If you were to ask me what it is, by whose presence in a body, that body will be hot, I won't give you the safe but stupid answer (αμαθή απόκρισιν), and say that it is heat, but I can now give a more refined (κομψοτέραν) answer, that it is fire; and if you ask, what causes the body in which it is to be ill, I shall not say illness (νόσος) but fever (πυρετός); and if you ask what causes a*

number in which it is to be odd (*περιττός*), I shall not say oddness, but oneness (*μονάς*), and so forth (105b8-c2). The “old safe answer” refers to Plato’s description of the theory of forms in his introduction to the present argument. There he concluded that the only explanation that seemed to him thoroughly safe was that “by the beautiful all beautiful things are beautiful”. The present answer is to be in terms of things which are not opposites, but which are essentially characterized by the opposites (O’Brien, 1967: 223). Thus compared to his earlier disapproval of refinements or sophistications, Socrates calls his new answers, “more refined” (*κομψοτέραν*) and with these new answers, it becomes even more clear that he has distanced himself from the orthodox view of the separate Ideas. These more refined causes replicate once more the ambiguity in the argument leading up to them: will the soul be like fire or like fever? Fire imparts heat to bodies and is itself hot. Fever brings illness but is not itself ill. Will soul itself be thought to be alive? Or will it simply be the vehicle of life and not itself alive? Regarding the example of oneness, it expresses in itself this ambiguity because it is not clear whether oneness is itself odd or not.

Socrates repeats his question of soul and life in 105c9-e5: “*Now answer what causes the body (τι ἐγγένηται σώματι) in which it is to be alive? (ζων ἔσται;)* The soul, he replied. Is this always the case? Yes, of course he said. Then if the soul takes possession of anything it always brings life to it? She does indeed.” The question can be raised whether the soul here is Form or Particular. According to O’Brien (1967: 226) the phrase “what causes the body” brings to our thinking the process by which an already existing particular soul comes to a body and makes it alive. For the phrase “what causes the body” does not have the same implication when applied to soul as when applied to fire or fever. The form of fire can come to a body and make it fire. The form of soul cannot come to a body and make it soul. For Plato does not believe that a soul is bodily as Socrates reasons in the argument on the similarity of soul to forms (78b-81a). The form of soul comes to a body only indirectly. What directly comes to a body to make it alive is the particular soul. What this analysis brings to the fore is a distinction, probably intended between form and particular in the things that are characterized essentially by the opposites to some extent in both Plato’s major examples, fire and snow as well as two and three, and in the case of soul itself. In the numerical example the distinction between form and particular is expressed in a difference of language: “threeness - *τριάς*” or the “form of three - *ἡ τῶν τριῶν ἰδέα*” and “three - *τὰ τρία*”. Plato does not speak of the “form of fire” or “the form of the soul”. The ideal nature of fire and soul is suggested only by the context and thus the manner in which Plato speaks at times of fire and soul as equivalent in status and function in the form of three. Plato is cautious when dealing with the forms of what one

would call substances. This in all likelihood may explain the reason why soul and fire are not labelled as forms. It also seems likely that in the present argument there has been a certain development of thought and expression. The numerical example has probably helped to bring out the distinction of form and particular in the other two cases.

Thus Socrates now applies his new understanding to the case of life and soul. He first elicits from Cebes the notion of soul as efficient cause and follows this up with the deduction that soul makes bodies alive. But a few lines later Socrates implies a different conception of the causality of the souls. The opposite of life is death. Socrates argues that in being characterized by life the soul is essentially "not dead" or deathless. *"Is there anything that is the opposite of life? Yes he said. What? Death. Now the soul, as we have agreed before, will never admit the opposite of that which it brings with it. Decidedly not, said Cebes. Then what do we now call that which does not admit the idea of the even? Uneven, he said. And those which do not admit justice and music? Amusical,, he replied, and unjust. Well then what do we call that which does not admit death? Immortal (αθάνατος - deathless) he said. And the soul does not admit death? No. Then the soul is immortal. Yes. Very well, he said. Shall we say then that this proved? (αποδείχθαι). Yes, and very satisfactorily, Socrates. (105d6-e9).* Plato's argument should lead to the conclusion that the soul, while it is still soul, is not dead, in the sense that fire, whenever it exists, is not-cold, or that three, while it is still three, is not-even. But having arrived at the word *athanatos* (αθάνατος) Plato is alleged to have leapt to the conclusion that the soul is not at any time dead and so not-dead in the sense of the immortal. Implicit in this question is the conception of soul as itself alive, as the bearer of the Idea of life. With reference to the status of the soul as an intermediate entity, Socrates does not resolve the question of which of the two models best explains the activity of the soul in relation to life itself. By posing the question whether there is anything that is opposite to life Socrates expresses his reservation on this issue and does not commit himself to the notion that life and death are opposites. Stern (1993:159) elaborates as follows: *"If we recall what is involved in the alternative between explanation by opposites as opposed to non-opposites, we can see the bearing of the issue of opposites on the question of the reconcilability of the senses of being".* He points out that change of an essential or a substantial kind, cannot be explained by opposites because it involves changes which are not on the same ontic level because the elements involved in such change seem not to oppose one another but to be different from one another. In expressing uncertainty that life and death are opposites, Socrates proposes that life should be explained by heterogenous senses of being that can be traced to heterogenous causes and whose reconcilability is contestable.

Stern also (1993:159) maintains that the asymmetry between life and death becomes most apparent in the structure of the final argument as Socrates attempts in this particular context to delineate things by the privation of their opposites. By using belated examples such as the opposite of just is unjust and the opposite of musical is amusical he brings to the fore pairs of opposites that belong to that type of opposite which are not necessarily defined by the privation of their opposites. Indeed Socrates does not show here that either soul or human beings as whole do not merely perish when death approaches just as snow perishes when heat approaches or continue to exist once they have died. Henceforth Socrates by choosing to apply this procedure on the critical opposites of life and death and having defined soul as that which is deathless he must now venture into proving that soul is also imperishable. He attempts to prove this point which is viewed by many as the heart of the argument:

Well then Cebes, he said, if the odd (*αναρτίω*) were necessarily imperishable (*ανωλέθρω*), would not the number three (*τα τρία*) be imperishable? Of course. And if that which is without heat (*άθερμον*) were imperishable, would not snow go away whole and unmelted whenever heat was brought in conflict with snow? For it could not have been destroyed, nor could it have remained and admitted the heat. That is very true he replied. In the same way, I think, if that which is without cold were imperishable, whenever anything cold approached fire, it would never perish or be quenched, but would go away unharmed. Necessarily, he said. And must not the same be said of that which is immortal? If the immortal (*αθάνατον*) is also imperishable (*ανώλεθρον*), it is impossible for the soul to perish (*απόλλυσθαι*) when death comes against it. For, as our argument has shown, it will not admit death and will not be dead, just as the number three, we said, will not be even, and as the fire, and the heat in the fire, will not be cold. ... And so, too, in the case of the immortal; if it is conceded that the immortal is imperishable, the soul would be imperishable as well as immortal, but if not, further argument is needed. But, he said, it is not needed, so far as that is concerned; for surely nothing would escape destruction (*φθοράν*), if the immortal, which is everlasting, is perishable. All I think, said Socrates, would agree that God and the principle of life, and anything else that is immortal, (*και ει τι άλλο αθάνατον εστιν*) can never perish. All men would, certainly, said he, and still more, I fancy, the Gods. Since, then, the immortal is also indestructible (*αδιάφθορον*), would not the soul, if it is immortal (*αθάνατος*), be also imperishable (*ανώλεθρος*)? Necessarily. Then when death comes to a man, his mortal part it seems, dies, but the immortal part goes away unharmed and undestroyed, (*σών και αδιάφθορον*) withdrawing from death (*υπεκχωρήσαν τω θανάτω*). 105e10-107a1.

The earlier arguments show that the soul can survive separation from the body once or a number of times and this refers to partial immortality. Cebes insists that the soul should be shown never to admit destruction and in his

view this would be full immortality. The addition of “imperishable - *ανώλεθρος*” points to the distinction between partial immortality and full immortality. In the first argument “life” and “death” had been treated as equivalent to the soul’s being attached to the body and the soul’s being apart from the body. In effect Cebes’ objection should mean that life and death in this sense are now to be treated as one thing and opposed to the sheer non-existence of soul. The soul has been shown to be *αθάνατος* in the sense that it can survive the passage from life to death, in the old sense of death. The soul must now be shown to be *ανώλεθρος* in that it altogether excludes death in the new sense. Death in the new sense is *όλεθρος*, the destruction of the soul. The soul must now be shown to be also indestructible “*ανώλεθρος*”.

In order to answer Cebes’ objection Socrates promises to consider the whole issue of “coming-into-being and passing-away” - “*γενέσεως και φθοράς την αιτίαν διαπραγματεύσασθαι*”. This will include not simply death in the old sense, death as the separation in a living creature of soul and body. “Passing-away” will have a wider range namely the ceasing to be of anything. Therefore “passing-away” will include death in the new sense, death as “destruction of the soul”. Socrates’ argument will aim to prove that the soul resists *φθορά*, and so is *αδιάφθορος*. This is precisely one of the terms introduced in the final stages of the argument as a synonym for *ανώλεθρος*. (106e1 & 7). The terms of Socrates’ analysis of change at the beginning of the last argument is demonstrated by the redefinition of death and the promise to consider the whole question of “coming into being and passing away”. Yet the alternative which Socrates proposes has to be “withdraw or perish” and the use of this option determines in its turn the final stages of the argument. Socrates has to prove that there is something which cannot “perish” but can only “withdraw”, as it will be unsatisfactory to conclude that what is *αθάνατος* can only “withdraw”. Therefore, this is the essence of most of the final page of the argument namely what is *ανώλεθρος* cannot *απόλλυσθαι*, it can only withdraw. According to O’Brien (1968: 100) *ανώλεθρος* and *αδιάφθορος* follow from a continuous line of thought:

1. The distinction between partial immortality and full immortality, and Cebes’ request that the soul be proved to be fully immortal.
2. The consequent redefinition of death as the destruction of the soul (*ψυχής όλεθρος*).
3. Socrates’ promise to deal with the whole question of “coming-into-being-and- passing-away” “*περί γενέσεως και φθοράς*”.
4. Socrates’ consequent analysis of change in terms of the alternative “withdraw or perish”, “*υπεκχωρήσαν και απόλλυσθαι*”.

As a consequence of this kind of reasoning Socrates comes to the

conclusion that the soul is not only immortal, *αθάνατος* but also imperishable "*ανώλεθρος*" or "*αδιάφθορος*".

A possible suggestion as to Plato's reasons for extrapolating indestructibility from immortality is given in 106d4 where Socrates does not accept Cebes' consent that the immortal is indestructible but adds a reference to "God and the principle of life and anything else that is immortal - *Ο δε θεός και αυτό το της ζωής είδος και ει τι άλλο αθάνατον εστίν*" would be admitted by everybody that they could never perish. In Frede's (1978:31) view if this is not a pointless appeal, there must be something which God, the principle or form of life and anything else have in common. This common characteristic must be that they are all essentially alive. And in this case the law of opposites will find its legitimate application as it is explicitly referred to and its meaning and applicability are elucidated at the beginning of the last argument (103a4-c4). The criticism levelled at the law of opposites as a general law, does not apply to the way Plato utilizes it in the final argument. For in the case of life and death the reverse side is necessary, meaning that whenever something loses its life it must pass into death. Plato often points out that the validity of his argument depends on the condition that something which cannot die cannot be destroyed. For if destruction for a living being is its loss of life namely death, then immortality implies indestructibility. The crucial issue seems to be that Plato treats the soul as a substance with attributes of its own and life among them. But this is a presupposition about the nature of the soul which one may accept or reject. There are different accounts of the nature of the human soul and Plato's arguments in the *Phaedo* do not rule them out. In other words, Plato's argument would be acceptable to those who like him believe that a human being is really a composition of two entities namely the body which is the corporeal vessel and in it the immaterial soul which has essential qualities of its own. Thus, the body shares temporarily in the quality called "life" just as a stove which is heated by the fire inside it shares in the quality called "heat". So Plato's argument is valid as proof only if everybody had to accept the hypothesis that the soul is an entity like fire, an entity bringing along properties of its own. But if the soul were not a being with qualities but a quality itself - the energy of life - like the heat in fire or the cold in snow, then soul, the principle of life in the body, could simply run without admitting death itself at all (Frede, 1978:33).

A restriction or limitation as to the notion of the soul's indestructibility is expressed by Cebes when he reasons earlier as follows: "*One might not grant that it does not suffer by its many births and does not finally perish altogether in one of its deaths. But he might say that no one knows beforehand the particular death and the particular dissolution of the body which brings destruction to the soul, for none of us can perceive that. Now if*

this is the case, anyone who feels confident about death has a foolish confidence, unless he can show that the soul is altogether immortal and imperishable (παντάπασιν αθάνατόν τε και ανώλεθρον). Otherwise a man who is about to die must always fear that his soul will perish utterly in the impending dissolution of the body (88a8-b8). In order to address Cebes' objection Socrates has to consider destruction precisely in the terms of the existence and non-existence of the soul independently of its relation to the body. He has only to prove that the soul always survives death in the old sense, death as separation of soul from body. If the soul always survives separation from the body, it will survive that particular death namely that dissolution of the body, which brings destruction to the soul. In this way death in the new sense has not entirely replaced death in the old sense. The limitation or restriction on the redefinition of death has an all-important effect on Plato's use of life and death in this last argument. The question stated earlier from 105c9 *what causes the body (τι εγγένηται σώματι) in which it is to be alive? (ζων έσται;)* refers in part to the dependence of particular souls upon the soul as form. Therefore Plato's argument is intended to make us look at life as life of the souls, just as in terms of redefinition, death was to be destruction of the soul. The question "what causes the body" makes us consider a particular soul coming to a body and making it alive and to that extent Plato directs our thinking of life in the conventional sense to life as the life of the soul in the body. Plato has in the course of his argument effectively evaded the full treatment of death as destruction as Socrates has shown that the soul always survives separation from the body. Moreover the soul in being shown to endure an endless accumulation of deaths in the old sense, is also shown through Cebes's intervention, to resist death in the sense of the soul's destruction. Socrates' aim is to ultimately affirm that the soul at the time of separation from the body shows herself to be immortal and imperishable albeit in the restricted sense of Cebes' objection.

O'Brien (1968:103-104) provides an important reason why Plato has to evade a closer analysis of the concept of destruction (όλεθρος). By viewing the concept of "indestructible" (ανώλεθρος) in a certain sense as an outgrowth on the schema of opposite forms such as "hot/cold", "odd/even" used previously as "without warmth" (άθερμος) "uneven" (ανάρτιος) Plato can bring in "deathless" (αθάνατος) when formulating "life" and "death". The logical deduction is that what cannot perish (απόλλυσθαι) has to be imperishable (ανώλεθρος). Destruction (όλεθρος) will in a sense have to become an opposite form from which the indestructibility (ανώλεθρος) can be derived and can be considered to be a form above death and encompassing death. Based on Plato's argument, the soul would be immortal by being related to a form of being, bearing in mind the peculiar

relationship that Plato introduced between fire and heat or cold and snow, between three and odd or two and even. This ultimately may lead one to the concept of a necessary being such as the object of the known ontological argument for the existence of God. According to O'Brien the opposites that form the base for indestructibility are existence and non-existence and if the soul were in Plato's sense characterized by existence, it would exclude destruction not only at the time of separation from the body, but always. Therefore, on Plato's argument, soul would become a being that of its **nature** excluded non-existence and existed necessarily of itself. This is a vital stage in Plato's argument as the relevance of the ontological argument to the addition of indestructibility (*ανώλεθρος*) lies not so much in the close relationship it supposes between thought and reality, but in the example it provides of a being whose very **nature** is to exist. As Plato considers forms to be indestructible and juxtaposes the nature of souls to the nature forms one should not overstate in this respect the influence of the ontological argument. Nevertheless the soul is shown to be indestructible not because it is incomposite or changeless but because in the final analysis it is related in a distinctive way to existence.

IV

The question remains whether Plato is really entitled to assume that the soul is an entity which can be called "alive" in a non-metaphorical sense. That he assumes this is also demonstrated by a passage in Republic X, 608c where he suddenly asks Glaucon: *"Have you not perceived that our soul is immortal and never perishes?"* To Glaucon's amazement Socrates assures him that he, too, can understand the immortality of the soul, for it is not difficult (608c1-d10). Socrates points out that what saves and profits is the good whereas the bad is what destroys and corrupts. If there is anything that is not destroyed by its corresponding evil, nothing else can do so, for the good will certainly not destroy anything. If we then find something whose corresponding evil makes it bad but cannot destroy it, then we know that this thing is by nature incapable of destruction (608d13-609b8). Socrates applies this argument to the soul and assumes from the outset that the soul is separate from the body. Things that are bad for the soul such as injustice, cowardice and ignorance cannot dissolve and destroy the soul by separating it from the body. Since it is unreasonable (*άλογον*) to assume that what is not an evil of the soul can destroy it, the soul must be immortal, for it cannot be destroyed by those agents that destroy the body (609b9-610a4). This is the reason that Socrates never considers whether the dissolution of the body is not also the dissolution of the soul. Moreover, the evils of the souls listed by Glaucon and accepted by Socrates constitute evils of vice but not agents

of destruction, and this does not prove that the soul is immune from evils analogous to those of rot, rust, or disease. Socrates maintains that things disintegrate for various reasons that can be listed in the case of the body but cannot be listed with reference to the soul. According to Frede (1978: 38-39) the weakness of the argument is evident for there can be more than one specific evil - for example wood can rot or be burnt - and things can also be destroyed in an unnatural way. Thus Plato here viewed the soul as a substance with properties of its own, since he compares it with other natural things such as wood, bronze, iron, grain and the human body, which are all independent substances with properties and characteristic afflictions. This leads to the valid criticism that Plato leaves the nature of the soul undefined and in doing so violates the Socratic rule not to try to argue that a certain thing possesses a quality as long as one has not grasped the nature of the thing itself. However, proofs of immortality are very much like proofs of the existence of God. The immediate evidence of the physical world and indeed of human life, mitigates against immortality and God, but this evidence can always be turned aside with an appeal to the difference between the seen and the unseen, the testimony of faith, miracles, and so on. In Rosen's view (2005:379) the Socratic argument turns out to be easy, not because it is convincing but because it both oversimplifies and assumes what it intends to prove. The initial assumption that underlies Socrates' point is that if injustice kills, justice does not. However, Glaucon denies that injustice kills, and Socrates takes this as a confirmation of the thesis that the soul cannot be destroyed by its own evil, and thus is immortal (610c6-611a3).

The conclusion of Socrates' final argument in *Phaedo* leaves one wondering what is the connection between the question of the immortality of soul and the question of the imperishability of ideas. Socrates reaffirms his position with a note of certainty that his soul will not perish but rather survive, undestroyed, and depart to the gods in Hades. He also exhorts Simmias and Cebes to reexamine not only the argument for immortality as a whole but the hypothesis of the separate ideas in particular. In doing so he encourages them to reexamine their fundamental beliefs about the nature of philosophy and consider the possibility that the world of ideas, cannot in truth exist apart from the embodiments in the sensible world, that it is possible to know them through perception and thus attain true wisdom in this life.

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