

a human body was the start of its perishing, like a disease. On this view, the soul really suffers as it lives this life and eventually, in what is called “death”, it perishes. Now whether it enters a body once or many times makes no difference, you claim, at least as regards the fear each of us has. For anyone of any intelligence *should* be afraid, if they do not know that it is immortal and cannot offer an argument to show as much. This is the sort of thing, Cebes, that I think you’re saying. I’m deliberately going back over it repetitively to make sure nothing escapes us, and to let you add or take away something if you want.’

To which Cebes said: ‘No, I don’t want to take away or add anything now. That’s just what I’m saying.’

Now Socrates paused for quite some time and considered something by himself, and then said: ‘What you’re seeking is no small matter, Cebes; we must study thoroughly and as a whole the cause of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be. So, if you like, I’ll recount my experiences concerning them; then, if you see something useful in what I say, you’ll use it to convince yourself about the very points you raise.’

‘But of course I’d like that,’ said Cebes.

‘Then listen, because I’m going to tell you. Well, Cebes,’ he said, ‘when I was young I became incredibly eager for the sort of wisdom that they call research into nature. That used to strike me as quite sublime: to know the causes of each thing, why each one comes to be, why it perishes, and why it is. Time and again I would shift in different directions, considering first the following sort of questions. Is it when the hot and the cold start to decompose, as some people were saying, that living things grow into a unity? Is it because of blood that we think, or air, or fire? Or is it none of these, but is it rather the brain that supplies the senses of hearing, seeing and smelling, and do memory and opinion come to be from them, and when memory and opinion become stable, does knowledge come to be from them along these same lines? Next I considered the way in which these things cease to be, and the events that affect the heaven and the earth. And in the end I myself came to think that I was uniquely unqualified for this inquiry.’

‘I’ll give you ample evidence for this: I was so utterly blinded by that inquiry with regard to the very things that, at least as I and others supposed, I had previously known clearly that I unlearned those very things that earlier I had thought I knew, on many subjects, but in particular why a human being grows. Because earlier I thought it obvious to everyone

that it is on account of eating and drinking. For whenever portions of 96d
flesh have been added from food to other portions of flesh, and portions
of bone to portions of bone, and so too by the same principle stuff of their
own kind has been added to each of the other stuffs, it is then, I thought,
that that which was a small mass has gone on to become a big one; and
that is how the small person comes to be large. That's what I supposed
then. Reasonably enough, don't you think?'

'Yes, I do,' said Cebes.

'Then consider the following as well. I thought my belief satisfactory 96e
when a large person standing by a small one seemed to be larger because
of the head itself, and so likewise when one horse was compared with
another. Yes, and it seemed to me even more obvious that ten was more
numerous than eight on account of there being two added to it, and that
two cubits was larger than one on account of its exceeding the other
because of a half.'

'But now what do you think about them?' asked Cebes.

'That I'm no doubt a long way indeed from thinking that I know 97a
the cause of any of these. I don't allow myself to say even that, when
somebody adds one to one, either the one it was added to has become
two,⁴⁹ or the one that was added and the one it was added to became
two, on account of the addition of the first to the second. For I find it
astonishing that when each of them was apart from the other, each turned
out to be one, and they weren't two at that time, but when they came
near each other, this supposedly became a cause of their coming to be
two, namely the union that consisted in being put near each other. No,
nor can I still persuade myself that if somebody divides one, this, the
division, has now become a cause of its coming to be two. For then there
comes to be a cause of coming to be two that is the opposite of the earlier 97b
cause. Back then, you see, it was because they were brought together into
proximity with each other, and one was added to the other, but now it
is because they are brought apart, and one is separated from the other.
No, and I can no longer persuade myself that by using this approach I
know why one comes to be, nor, in short, why anything else comes to be,
or perishes, or is. Instead I throw together on impulse my own different
kind of approach, and I don't adopt this one at all.

⁴⁹ Omitting the words (ἢ τὸ προστεθέν) suggested at 96e9 by D. Wytttenbach, *Platonis Phaedon* (Leiden 1810 and Leipzig 1825). These words raise a further possibility: 'the one that was added' has become two.

97c 'However, one day I heard somebody reading from what he said was a book by Anaxagoras, and saying that it turns out to be intelligence that both orders things and is cause of everything. I was pleased with this cause, and it struck me that in a way it is good that intelligence should be cause of everything, and I supposed that, if this is the case, when intelligence is doing the ordering it orders everything and assigns each thing in whatever way is best. So, I thought, should someone want to discover the cause of how each thing comes to be, perishes, or is, this is
97d what he must find out about it: how it is best for it either to be, or to act or be acted upon in any other respect whatsoever. What is more, on this theory a human being should consider nothing other than what is optimal or best, concerning both that thing itself and everything else. The same person is bound to know the worse too, for it is the same knowledge that concerns them both. So by reasoning like this I thought to my delight that I had found in Anaxagoras a teacher of the cause of things who fitted my own intelligence. I supposed that he would tell me first whether the
97e earth was flat or round, and, when he had done so, would also explain the cause that necessitated it, saying what was better – better, that is, that the earth should be like this. And if he said that it was in the centre,
98a he would also explain, I thought, that it was better that it should be in the centre. If he showed me these things, I was ready to stop wishing for any other kind of cause. In particular, I was equally ready to learn about the sun in that way, and about the moon and the other celestial bodies, about their relative speed and turnings and the other things they underwent, namely how it is better that each of them should both act and be acted upon as it is. For given his claim that they have been ordered by intelligence, I never thought that he would introduce a cause for them
98b other than its being best that they should be as they are. So I supposed that when he assigned the cause to each of them and in common to them all, he would also explain what was best for each, and the good common to them all. And I wouldn't have signed away my hopes for a large sum, but I got hold of his books with real excitement and started reading them as quickly as I could, so that I might know as quickly as possible what was best and what was worse.

98c 'But then, my friend, I was swept away from my marvellous expectations, for as I went on reading it I saw the man making no use of his intelligence and not laying any causes at its door with regard to ordering things, but assigning the causality to air, aether, water and the like, as

well as many other oddities. And I came to think that what had happened to him was exactly as if someone said that it is because of intelligence that Socrates does everything that he does, but then, when he undertook to give the causes of each of my actions, were to say, first, that the cause of my now sitting here is because my body is composed of bones and sinews, and whereas the bones are rigid and have joints separating them from each other, the sinews can tauten and relax, and they surround the bones, together with the bits of flesh and the skin that keeps them together. Now while the bones are supported in their sockets, the sinews loosen and tauten and so, presumably, enable me to bend my limbs now, and on account of that cause I'm bent here in the sitting position. Next he'd give other such causes with regard to my conversing with you, assigning the causality to voices, airs and ears, and to countless other such things, and would have neglected to give the real causes, namely that, since the Athenians have decided that it was better to condemn me, on account of that I too have also decided that it is better to sit here, and more just to stay put and suffer whatever punishment they decree. For by the Dog, I think these sinews and bones would long have been in Megara or Boeotia, transported by an opinion as to what is best, if I didn't think it more just and honourable to suffer whatever punishment the city imposes, rather than to escape and run away.

'Now calling such things *causes* is extremely odd. But if someone said that without having such things – bones, sinews and whatever else I have – I wouldn't be able to do what I have decided, he'd be telling the truth. However, saying that it is on account of them that I do what I do, rather than because of my choice of what is best, despite the fact that I act because of intelligence – that would be a profoundly careless way to talk. Imagine not being able to make the distinction that the real cause is one thing, while that without which the cause could never be a cause is something else! That is just what most people seem to me to call a cause, fumbling in the dark, as it were, and using a name that belongs to something else. That is why one individual puts a vortex around the earth and thus makes the earth actually be kept stationary by the heaven, while another compares it to a flat kneading-trough and props it up with air. But as for these things' ability to be positioned now in the best possible way for them to be placed, they neither seek it nor suppose that it has any divine might; instead they believe that one day they might find an

Atlas⁵⁰ that is mightier and more immortal and keeps everything together more than this one does, and they do not suppose for a moment that what is good and binding truly does bind and keep anything together.

99d 'Now I would gladly become anyone's pupil to learn just what the truth is about that sort of cause. But since I was denied it and haven't been able either to find it myself or to learn it from someone else, would you like me to give you a demonstration, Cebes, of how I've pursued my second voyage in search of the cause?'

'I'd like that enormously,' he said.

99e 'Well then,' said Socrates, 'I decided after that, when I'd given up looking into things, that I must make sure I didn't suffer the fate of those who view and study the sun in an eclipse. For some of them ruin their eyes, I believe, if they don't study its image in water or something of the kind. I too had that sort of thought, and I started to worry that I might be utterly blinded in my soul through observing things with my eyes and seeking to get hold of them with each of my senses. So I decided that I should take refuge in theories and arguments⁵¹ and look into the truth
100a of things in them. Now maybe in a way it does not resemble what I'm comparing it to. For I don't at all accept that someone who, when studying things, does so in theories and arguments, is looking into them in images any more than someone who does so in facts. In any case, that is how I started out: on every occasion I hypothesize whatever theory I deem most robust, and then I set down as true whatever I think harmonizes with it – both about cause and about everything else – and as false whatever doesn't. I want, though, to tell you more clearly what I'm talking about. I think that at the moment you don't understand.'

'Indeed I don't' said Cebes, 'not altogether.'

100b 'This is what I'm talking about,' he said, 'nothing new, but what I've never stopped talking about, on any other occasion or in particular in the argument thus far. Well, I'll set about giving you a demonstration of the sort of cause which I've pursued. I'll go back to those things that have been our frequent refrain, and start from them, first hypothesizing that there are such things as a Beautiful alone by itself, and a Good, a Large and all the rest. If you grant me these and accept that they exist, I

⁵⁰ The fallen Titan Atlas, in Greek myth condemned to holding the heaven aloft, here symbolizes the force that keeps both earth and heaven in their places.

⁵¹ Here and in 100a 'theories and arguments' translates one Greek word (*logoi*) which can have either meaning. The singular (*logos*) is translated 'theory' in 100a.