**FINAL EXAM**

**How does Socrates employ the argument of opposites (e.g. hot and cold) in the Phaedo in order to prove the imperishability of the forms? How does this support the claim that the soul is immortal? How might one argue against Socrates?**

The argument of opposites is that everything that comes into being does so from its opposite. For example, if something cold exists, then at some point it must have been warmer, because you cannot have cooled something down if it was not at some point warmer. If something can be near to me that means that it must have at some point been further away from me, otherwise I would have no reference to describe near. Light cannot exist without emerging from the presence of darkness in the same way that truth cannot exist without emerging from the presence of lies.

Socrates employs this argument to the imperishability of the forms by acknowledging that since things can be equal size and or shape, then this property of “equal-ness” must come from somewhere. If this property of equal-ness exists, then it must have come from its opposite, therefore, a property of “unequal-ness” must exist. In the same way, if we can say anything is big or small, then properties of “bigness” and “smallness” must also exist. Since these things stem from one another, they can never be vanquished. Since “equal-ness” is a property between two kinds of objects, it can never be eradicated. If all things in the world were altered so that no two things were equal in any way, then equal-ness would cease to exist correct? No, rather, everything being unequal would in fact *prove* the existence of equal-ness. Since unequal-ness exists, as it is seen in everything in this world we have created, therefore it must come from its opposite, a property of equal-ness. Thus, the ideal forms of things are imperishable by nature.

This idea supports the claim that the soul is immortal in that it considers life and death to be opposites. Just as one is either awake, or asleep, one is either alive, or dead. They originate from their opposites just as near and far do. In the same way that a state of sleep comes from a person waking, death comes from a person living. Since a waking state comes from its opposite, sleep, then it follows that life must come from its opposite, death. This is the idea that since life exists, it must come from death, since nothing can originate other than from its opposite. And since us living things die, our souls exist in death no less than they do in life. And if they exist in death, then they will at some point originate again from death back into life, and thus supports the idea of the immortality of the soul. Our souls are caught in a never-ending cycle of eternity where we are given life from a state of death, and death from a state of life.

One may argue against Socrates by pointing out that if all things that come into being do so from their opposites, that the human soul must have some sort of opposite, some sort of “non-soul.” This is a different idea than what happens to our souls in the underworld. According to Socrates, the human soul is immortal, and it traverses existence by going from a state of living in the physical world, to a state of death in the underworld, and back and forth forever. But, at no point does Socrates point out that our souls stop existing, or that our souls change in some way, but rather, he believes that our souls are inherently immortal, can never stop existing, and only change in the fact that they exist in life or death. If everything comes from opposites, where does the human soul come from? This is one possible way to argue against Socrates.

Another possible to argue against Socrates can only be done with the aid of modern discoveries of science, the likes of which would not have been possible in Socrates’ time. But if one understood the scientific account of things such as light and darkness, they would say that it is not the case that darkness only comes from light, or that light only ever comes from darkness. Rather, they might say that darkness is merely the absence of light, and that light does not ever come from darkness. Rather, light is all that there is, and either you are in the presence of light, or you are experiencing its absence. Scientific realizations such as this coupled with something such as the combination of atoms, molecules, and organisms inside the human body to create new life, may call question to Socrates’s novel but basic idea that all things originate from their opposites.

**Who is Thrasymachus and why is he characterized as a beast? What is his definition of justice, as it appears in Republic Book I? How does Socrates counter this definition? Is Socrates’ argument convincing? Why or why not?**

Thrasymachus is a character from book I of Plato’s *Republic*, and is Socrates*’*s “interlocuter” or primary conversation holder for the majority of book I. Thrasymachus is a friend of Lysias, Lysias is one of the sons of Cephalus, and Cephalus’s house is where the events of the Republic take place. Thrasymachus’s name translates to mean “rash fighter,” and he lives up to his name by being a Professional Sophist. The Sophists were a class of rhetoricians in Ancient Greece who were arguers for hire, and were extremely skilled at eristic discourse. They were verbal Kung-Fu masters, and would out-argue anyone you’d like if you payed them. The Sophists were also Moral Relativists, and believed that there is no such thing as “absolute right and wrong,” but rather that one’s moral code is determined by their environment. *When in Rome, do as the Romans do.*

Thrasymachus demeaner all throughout book I of the republic is just as his name foreshadows, he is argumentative and angry. In fact, in the same passage where Thrasymachus is characterized as a beast, Plato’s character Socrates describes how argumentative Thrasymachus is: “Now, while we were speaking, Thrasymachus had tried many times to take over the discussion but was restrained by those sitting near him, who wanted to hear our argument to the end.” (Republic, 336b) The reason that Thrasymachus is characterized as a beast has to do with his incredibly argumentative nature. When a beast engages in any sort of combat, it simply has one goal, win. I believe that one of, if not the, primary reasons Thrasymachus is characterized as a beast is that just like a beast, he Is not interested in listening to his counterparts and searching for truth, he simply wants to get into an argument and win, as is his profession. Winning an argument against such a highly esteemed philosopher as Socrates would also bring Thrasymachus much pride and even glory. So when Thrasymachus, who has been restrained from speaking by his friends the whole time, gets a chance to speak, he bursts into argument in a way that can be described as nothing else but like the unleashing of a beast about to tear its prey to shreds.

Another possible reason for Thrasymachus’s characterization of a beast is related to Plato’s tripartite division of the soul. Plato believes that the soul is split into three parts, Appetite, Spirit, and Reason. In a healthy soul, Plato says, Reason rules over Appetite and Spirit like a charioteer ruling over two horses, in order to make good and virtuous decisions. So one possibility is that Plato, being the author of the Republic, characterizes Thrasymachus as a beast as a metaphor to describe that Thrasymachus is so filled with his Appetite and Spirit that he is behaving just like a beast, acting independent of reason and virtue. This is an incredible insult, as it implies that Thrasymachus’s soul is so out of balance that he is better defined as a lowly animal than as a man.

Thrasymachus’s initial definition of justice is that “Justice is nothing other than what is advantageous for the stronger.” (Republic, 338b) Justice is just whatever the strongest person or ruler says it is. This is unsurprising as Thrasymachus is a Sophist.

Socrates counters this argument first by trying to show that since a ruler makes error, he can sometimes make laws that is advantageous to himself and at the same make laws that are disadvantageous to himself. So if justice is whatever the ruler says, then justice can be something that is both advantageous and disadvantageous to the ruler. Socrates reduces this argument to an “ad absurdum,” and proves that the argument itself is invalid and worthless. This *would’ve* been a good counter to Thrasymachus’s argument, except that Socrates misunderstood it. As pointed out by Clitophon, what Thrasymachus meant is that Justice is whatever the stronger *believes* to be advantageous to him, not what *is* advantageous to him.

Socrates counters this argument by turning to crafts. In every craft, there is an agent of the craft, who ‘rules’ something, and a subject of the craft, which is subject to its ‘ruler’. For example, a doctor is a ‘ruler’ of bodies, and a ship’s captain is a ‘ruler’ of sailors (Republic 341d). Socrates points out that a doctor doesn’t concern himself with what is good for the doctor, but rather what is good for his subject, or in this case, the body that he is ‘ruler’ of. In the same way, nor does a captain concern himself with what is good for him, only what is good for his sailors. Socrates then concludes, since all crafts and their rulers aim towards what is advantageous of their subjects, in this same way a ruler never does anything that is advantageous for him, rather “It is to his subject and what is advantageous and proper for it he looks, and everything he says and does, he says and does for it.” (Republic 341e)

I believe this counterargument is utterly ridiculous, and I am surprised that a skilled sophist such as Thrasymachus would give up at this point and start insulting his opponent blatantly, as Thrasymachus did. The first problem I see with this argument is that the rulers that Socrates points out are all altruistic and unselfish. In other words, they are good doctors and good captains. A good doctor *of course* is going to worry about what is best for the patient and not about making money, but a bad doctor with a moral code that allows him to determine what is right and wrong may very well let his subject suffer if it meant an increase in his own bank account. In the same way, a bad or unvirtuous captain may very well let his crew die if it meant that he was to gain from it. Socrates equates altruistic and unselfish craftsmen doing their job virtuously with a selfish and by definition tyrannical ruler. This equivocation is faulty and carries no persuasion.

The other large thing I see wrong with this argument is that even if the ruler does what is advantageous for his subject(s), it could simply be because *that is what is most advantageous for the ruler*. If I were a doctor, and letting a sick patient die in front of me meant that I would gain $10,000, I may be tempted to let that person die. But, if letting that patient die meant that I would lose my $120,000+/yr salary and medical license which I spent 8+ years obtaining, then what would be advantageous to me would be to do my job well and save my patient, *especially* if doing my job well may result in some sort of promotion or other benefit down the road. In this situation what is advantageous to my subject *is* what is most advantageous to me, so Socrates’s argument crumbles when he says that I am doing what is advantageous to my subject and not to me, they can be one in the same thing. If a tyrannical ruler wishes to maintain power, then it is very possible that what is best for that ruler is to do what is best for their subjects. This way, the ruler’s subjects are happy with the ruler, and stay subject to him. The people get what is best for them and so does the ruler. Once again, Socrates’s argument seems weak.

**Describe the main schools of thought during the Hellenistic period? How do they compare? Which do you think is the best approach to philosophy? Which school best carries the torch for Socrates?**

The Four main schools of thought during the Hellenistic period were:

* The Peripatetics – Led by Aristotle
* The Skeptics – Led by Pyrrho
* The Stoics – Led by Zeno, other prominent leaders were Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Seneca
* The Epicureans – Led by Epicurus, another prominent leader was Lucretius

The four main schools of thought all present different philosophies aimed at the same goal, a life without pain and suffering, where we can be truly at peace, or “happy.” This happiness is the Greek word *Ataraxia*, which literally means “without disturbance” or “unperturbed.” All four schools of philosophy aimed at this goal, but the optimal way to reach them differed.

The Peripatetic, led by Aristotle, was a group of Greeks who believed that the way to reach Ataraxia was through something called *Eudamonia.* Eudamonia means “human flourishing” or “living in accordance with your life’s purpose.” Aristotle and his followers believed that the key to happiness was to practice virtue and virtuous actions so often that they became habits, or *hexis*. Only after we practice virtue in our in actions so much that they become second nature can we as humans be in a state where we flourish completely. It is in this state of flourishing, or eudemonia, that we can finally achieve true Ataraxia.

The Skeptics, Led by Pyrrho, believed that truly knowing anything was impossible, and that the way to Ataraxia was through Epoche. Epoche is when one withholds judgement from things that are not self-evident or incredibly obvious about the world so that one can have a serene state of calmness, or Ataraxia. *We determine nothing* was their mantra. A good story to describe the Skeptic approach to achieving Ataraxia via Epoche is from a passage of Diogenes Laertius’s *On Pyhrro*. In the passage, Diogenes L. describes a man on a ship in the midst of a storm. All of the passengers on the ship were panicking in the midst of crisis, but the man stood calmly. He pointed to a pig on the ship that, even though a storm was raging, kept on eating. He told his fellow passengers “such was the unperturbed state in which the wise man should keep himself.” (On Pyrrho, 9.68) This is the Skeptic lifestyle, by not believing anything to be good or bad, but by simply withholding judgement about the world so one can achieve a calm like state, one will find Ataraxia.

The “Stoa” or the Stoics was originally founded by Zeno, but its main leaders were Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Seneca, who were all Roman thinkers. For the Stoics, Apatheia is the road to Ataraxia. Apatheia literally means “without emotion” or “without passion.” Stoics believed that the mind was wholly rational, and that the entire world is outside of our control. Ultimately, all that we can control is our own thoughts and actions, and if anyone tries to control something they cannot, they will fail and be unhappy. The stoics believed that the world was organized by a cosmic order, or some may say Fate. The stoics believed that because everything is determined by this order, nothing in the world can happen that is inherently bad or good, rather it is only our judgements about things that cause them to be bad or good. So, the stoics believed that the path to Ataraxia was to recognize that when things happen, that they are out of your control and are neither by nature good or bad. This way, you can relax and know that you have freedom from pain in that you fully control what you can, yourself, and you do not have any misconceptions about things that are bad or good.

The Epicureans, led by and named for Epicurus believed that the way to Ataraxia was through Hedone, which translates to “pleasure” or “being pleased.” The Epicureans were pleasure seekers, and encouraged a life where we sought out pleasure. Pleasure for the epicureans, however, was not as hedonistic as one might initially think. The Epicureans believed that there were two kinds of pleasure, Dynamic pleasure and Static pleasure. Dynamic pleasure is the kind of pleasure that is fun and wild, but only lasts temporarily, and often leaves the agent in a state worse than when they experienced the pleasure. A great example of Dynamic pleasure would be sex or drugs. Both are incredibly pleasurable, but temporary, and the best effect they can have on the agent afterwards is they leave the agent in a state unchanged then when he started, but more commonly that can incite disease, addiction, or maybe even an 18 year burden in the form of an unexpected pregnancy. Static pleasure is the kind of pleasure that one gains from doing philosophy, or from having a good meal or conversation with a friend, it is the kind of pleasure that may not feel as awesome or intense as a sexual encounter, but is far more sustainable for long term Ataraxia. Simple and static pleasures may include, friends, freedom (especially the freedom that comes from self-sufficiency), and self-reflection.

I believe that the best approach to philosophy lies in a mixture of the Stoics and the Epicureans. The Stoics having the best approach overall to philosophy, while the Epicureans also have a great deal to add. I think that the realization that all one has control over is themselves and their actions is an incredibly freeing event. So many of our, and especially my own, internal problems and even external problems originate from a feeling of wanting to control something that is utterly out of our control. “I didn’t get the job,” or “I broke my leg,” or even “this person doesn’t love me back,” are all problems that we create for ourselves because we are trying to control either external forces, or the emotions and actions of other people, it is when we fail to do these things, or when things don’t go the way that we want that we feel saddened and upset. If we realize that things just happen in the world, and we don’t try to control them but also do not let them control us, we can finally reach Ataraxia. In addition to these truths of Stoicism, I also think that the realization that some pleasures are good for you and promote happiness (static) and some seem good, but ultimately just cause problems (dynamic) is an incredibly novel and powerful idea that if introduced into our everyday lives, could yield incredibly positive results.

The philosophical school that best carries the torch for Socrates is probably the Peripatetic or the Skeptics. Socrates himself was the wisest man alive simply because he knew that he did not know anything, and nearly all of his dialogues end in puzzlement, with no answer about any of the questions that have been asked, it is in this way that the Skeptics reflect Socrates. However, the Peripatetics also reflect Socrates in that they are trying to promote a state of human flourishing and growth that seems to be very close to the heart of Socratic Elenchus and Dialectic. Our way to happiness is a never ending effort to act virtuously so that when virtuous actions become habit, we may flourish and have Ataraxia. This Aristotelian idea is very close to the Socratic idea that we should never stop searching for the forms, and that it is the never ending journey itself that promotes constant growth, and in that growth, Ataraxia. Between the two, the Peripatetics hold the torch more in terms of representing the heart of Socrates.