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Source: *Phronesis*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2003), pp. 89-115

Published by: [Brill](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4182720>

Accessed: 15-02-2016 20:53 UTC

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Degrees of Separation in the Phaedo

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ABSTRACT

It can be shown that, if we assume ‘substance dualism’, or the real distinctness of the soul from the body, then the standard objections to the Cyclical Argument in the *Phaedo* fail. So charity would presumably require that we take substance dualism to be presupposed by that argument.

To do so would not beg any question, since substance dualism is a significantly weaker thesis than the immortality of the soul. Moreover, there is good textual evidence in favor of this presumption. A closer look at the immediately preceding passage, viz. “Socrates’ Defense”, reveals an argument for a real distinction between soul and body, not unlike Descartes’ famous argument, based on the identification of an activity in which the soul can in principle engage on its own, without assistance from the body.

The argumentative project of the *Phaedo*, on this reading, becomes: given that the soul is really distinct, show that it is immortal. And Plato aims to do this in two stages. The three initial arguments are meant to establish merely the minimal claim that the continued existence of the soul across cycles of reincarnation is the most plausible view to take, given substance dualism; and it is left to the Final Argument to argue for something that we might regard as immortality, that is, the imperishability of the soul, come what may.

The three initial arguments for immortality in the *Phaedo* – the Cyclical Argument (CA), the Recollection Argument (RA), and the Affinity Argument (AA) – are preceded by a passage in which Socrates, as if on trial, defends himself against the charge that he is being reckless in not resisting death (63a3–69e5). What is the function of this passage, typically called ‘Socrates’ Defense’ (SD)? A common view is that the passage is simply Socrates’ profession of ‘faith’ in life after death;¹ and, in the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates tries to give plausible reasons for this ‘faith’ – just perhaps succeeding in his final attempt. Another common view is that SD is of merely rhetorical or literary significance, and that

Accepted November 2002

¹ For instance: “To Cebes and Simmias it seems strange that a philosopher, or indeed any man of intelligence, should be well content to die . . . Socrates replies with a declaration of faith that after death life will still be under divine protection”, R. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 39.

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Phronesis XLVIII/2

the argumentation of the dialogue begins properly with *CA*.² I shall take a different approach. On my reading, the philosophical substance of the *Phaedo* begins properly with *SD*, which should be understood as offering an argument for a real distinction between soul and body, roughly analogous to the famous argument of Descartes. The arguments that follow upon *SD*, then, naturally enough take this distinction for granted. Yet when we read the dialogue in this way, we see that its successive arguments are cumulative and constructive: in Plato's intention, the *Phaedo* is not a dialogue of 'faith seeking reasons' so much as of reason strengthening and confirming itself. And Socrates' arguments in the end are problematic, not because they are in some crude way fallacious, but rather because they articulate and defend, with some power and success, a philosophical dualism which is deeply problematic.

I develop my interpretation by defending four claims: (I) on the assumption of substance dualism, *CA* is not evidently unsound; (II) substance dualism is asserted in *SD*; (III) *SD* argues for substance dualism; (IV) *SD* was intended by Plato to provide the context of the three initial arguments and therefore counts as the 'primary argument' of the *Phaedo*.

1. *On the assumption of substance dualism, CA is not evidently unsound.*

CA is not unfairly presented as follows:

1. Anything that comes to take on an attribute which has an opposite, previously had that opposite attribute.
2. Being dead and being alive are opposite attributes.
3. When something comes to be alive, it comes to take on the attribute of being alive.
4. Therefore, anything that comes to be alive previously had the attribute of being dead.
5. But everything that is dead was previously alive.
6. Therefore, anything that comes to be alive was previously alive.
7. Therefore, living things come from previously living things.
8. Therefore, living things will once again become living things.
9. Nothing comes to take on again, at a later time, an attribute that it now has, if it perishes in the process.

² David Gallop says that *CA* is the first in "... the series of arguments that form the core of the dialogue" (*Plato: Phaedo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 103. C.J.F. Williams refers to *CA* as "[t]he first solid bit of argumentation you get in Plato's *Phaedo*", in "On Dying", *Philosophy* 1969 (44) 217-30.

10. Thus, living things do not perish when they come to be dead, and in this sense they are immortal.

Plato's strategy is to connect this present life of a living thing with a *previous* life; that done, he draws the general conclusion that living things were previously alive; yet, he reasons, they could not have come alive again, if they did not endure in the interval between their previous life and their current one; and thus, as regards any living thing, we can have some confidence that it will continue to endure, in the interval *after* this current life and before its next life.

Thus stated, the argument is clearly unsound, because the first premise is in need of two familiar qualifications. That 'opposites come from opposites' is true only if: (i) we presume that we are not dealing with a case of simple generation, where something comes to be *F* only in coming to be *simpliciter*; and (ii) the opposites are 'contradictory', rather than mere 'contrary' opposites. But if premise 1. is qualified accordingly, premise 2. needs to be revised: being dead and being alive are not contradictory opposites, since there are things that are neither dead nor alive. Yet if we rewrite premise 2., so that it involves opposites that are properly contradictory, e.g. 'Being *not alive* and being *alive* are opposite attributes', then premise 5. needs to be changed accordingly, becoming: 'Everything that is not alive was previously alive' – which is evidently false.

It would be good to have a diagnosis of why the argument goes wrong, and for this purpose Gallop's commentary is particularly useful. Gallop correctly notes, for instance, that Plato in *CA* tends to speak as though it is the *soul* which comes to be alive, rather than the *animal*, but – Gallop objects – this "insinuates a view of 'birth' in which the soul's discarnate existence is already covertly assumed. And since that is precisely what the argument purports to prove, the very conception of incarnation can be seen to beg the essential question" (105). Again, Gallop wonders why we shouldn't understand 'being dead' (in our premise 2. above) to mean, simply, 'ceasing to exist', in which case, clearly, 'being alive' and 'being dead' could not be treated as opposing predicates, as *CA* requires, since one would, in that case, be treating existence as though it were a predicate. Speculating on why Plato might have resisted this identification, Gallop remarks that "a wedge might be driven between 'being dead' and 'ceasing to exist' by treating Socrates' soul as a separate subject, distinct from Socrates himself, and alternating between incarnate and discarnate states. But this would be, once again, to assume what has to be proved" (106). Again, objecting to (our) premise 3. above, Gallop remarks that "The sense of 'coming to be alive' required for the argument is not that in

which a living thing comes into being, but that in which a soul 'becomes incarnate' in a living body. Yet it cannot do this unless it already exists before birth or conception. And whether it does so or not is just what is at issue" (110).³

So Gallop maintains that *CA* goes awry because Plato begs the question, surreptitiously supposing that the soul is a distinct subject, independent of the body. (Call this view 'substance dualism', for short.)⁴

Yet because one man's begging the question is simply another man's tacit assumption, we might wonder how *CA* would fare, if we were to add new premises that made this assumption explicit.

Let us assume:

- I. Every living thing has a soul, which is a distinct substance from the body.
- II. Death is the complete separation of a soul from any body.⁵ That is, death and life are states of a soul, which we define as follow:
 1. To be dead = to be completely separated from any body.
 2. To be alive = to be joined to some body.

By these definitions, being alive and being dead are indeed contradictory opposites. Furthermore, the generation of a living thing becomes simply the combination, or coming together, of two elements, body and soul; and the destruction of a living thing would be their separation.

We may then restate the argument. First we introduce the necessary qualification in the first premise, making it explicit that the principle involves contradictory opposites:

1. Anything that comes to take on an attribute which has a contradictory opposite, previously had that opposite attribute.

We also rewrite the next two premises in accordance with our new assumptions:

³ He adds: "A thing cannot be said to 'come to life *again*' in the sense required by the argument, unless the persistence of an independent subject, 'the soul', is already assumed. Yet this is just what has to be proved" (110).

⁴ We should not take this phrase as implying that, according to Plato, the body of a living thing, and perhaps even a corpse, is a substance as well as the soul (this Plato would deny, I believe); or that Plato thought that all existing things could be sorted into two exclusive and exhaustive kinds, souls and bodies (this too Plato would deny).

⁵ Compare 64c4-8.

2. To be dead, i.e., a soul's being completely separated from any body, and to be alive, i.e., its being joined to some body, are contradictory opposite attributes.
3. When a soul comes to be alive, it comes to be joined to a body.

Note that premise 3. now stands. It will do no good to object that "the premise fails to consider the possibility that the soul's coming to be alive is its simply coming into existence, as alive", since we are construing the coming into existence of a living thing as a joining, or combination, and it is appropriate to understand a joining, as such, as the combination of previously existing parts.⁶ Note also that our new assumptions force us to make explicit that *CA* is about souls and the changes they undergo, not about living things or animals. Gallop's intuition was that Plato's talk of souls "insinuates a view of 'birth' in which the soul's discarnate existence is already covertly assumed". We might say, rather, that the understanding of a living thing as a composite of soul and body implies a view of 'birth' as the soul's coming to have a relation to a body.

It therefore follows trivially that:

4. Any soul that comes to be alive, i.e. joined to some body, previously had the attribute of being dead, i.e. completely separated from any body.

If we simply rewrite the next premise (premise 5.) in accordance with our definitions we get:

Every soul that is dead, i.e., completely separated from any body, was previously alive, i.e., joined to some body.

This is unsupported as it stands, but it is not difficult to provide some support. Suppose we assume something like "The soul is continually subject to change" or even "No soul remains unchanged forever" – perhaps because we have a notion of nature as necessarily involving change, and we regard the soul as within nature. Then it would follow that any soul that, as it happens, is completely separated from a body, in fact *came to be* so: it was not always so. But any soul that came to be separated from

⁶ We might imagine, say, a single thing coming into existence out of nothing, and its becoming steadily differentiated into two components as it springs into existence, as an instance of two things coming to be joined while coming into existence. But this speculation, besides involving creation *ex nihilo*, the coherence of which Plato would deny, seems rather to be a case of two things coming to be separated, rather than joined.

any body, by premise 1., was previously joined to some body. So we need to supplement the argument in some such way as follows:

- 5.1. Nothing that changes in some respect is ever eternally unchanged in that respect.
- 5.2. No soul that comes to be joined to a body is ever eternally in a state of separation from a body.
- 5.3. Therefore, every soul that is completely separated from a body but will be joined to a body was previously joined to a body.

Of course it remains *possible* that souls do not exist eternally through the past but come into existence themselves, from being compounded out of simpler parts. Plato aims to rule out this alternative, of course, initially in the Affinity Argument and then more definitively in the Final Argument of the *Phaedo*. Yet in the context of the Cyclical Argument he might reasonably maintain, simply, that a conception of nature according to which souls are successively compounded and decomposed out of simpler parts introduces unnecessary complications – what agent compounds them, once their parts are scattered? – and therefore should not be entertained without evidence or supporting reasons.

The rest of the argument proceeds as before, now without any hitches:

6. Therefore, any soul that comes to be alive, i.e. joined to some body, was previously alive.
7. Therefore, living souls come from previously living souls.
8. Therefore, living souls will once again become living souls.
9. Nothing comes to take on again, at a later time, an attribute that it now has, if it perishes in the process.
10. Thus, souls that are now alive, i.e. joined to some body, do not perish after they come to be dead, i.e. after they come to be completely separated from any body.

The argument is not meant of course to be a deduction based on necessary principles and on the meanings of words: obviously, premise 8. involves something like an inductive inference: from the conclusion that the soul of a living thing has in the past undergone cycles of reincarnation, we can be confident that it will continue to do so in the future. Rather, the argument aims to sketch the most reasonable picture of the world (διαμυθολογῶμεν 70b6, cp. μυθολογεῖν, 61e2), given the assumption that the soul is a distinct substance from the body.⁷ Given that assumption – and if we

⁷ We might expect it to rely on principles that are true typically and ‘for the most

rule out generation *out of nothingness* and destruction *into nothingness* as incoherent – then that souls undergo cycles of reincarnation is the most reasonable position to adopt: and if generally such is the place of souls in nature, then, in the absence of arguments to the contrary, it would be misguided to fear that one's own soul will perish after its separation from the body.

So *CA* is not evidently unsound if we assume substance dualism. However, someone might object that substance dualism is equivalent to the immortality of the soul, and that, therefore, Plato begs the question after all. Yet this is not so: substance dualism is clearly a weaker view than immortalism. Consider the following series of increasingly stronger claims:

- (i) The soul is capable of existing upon the destruction of the body.
- (ii) The soul in fact continues to exist upon the destruction of the body.
- (iii) Necessarily, the soul continues to exist upon the destruction of the body.

Presumably substance dualism is roughly equivalent to (i), and immortalism involves at least (ii) and maybe (iii), but these are stronger claims than (i).⁸

Not that it isn't easy to conflate substance dualism and immortalism: even Descartes in his eagerness did just that. Recall that the original, 1641 edition of the *Meditations* bore the subtitle, "in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the immortality of the soul" (*in qua Dei existentia et animæ immortalitas demonstrantur*). But Descartes quite appropriately corrected this in the 1642, second edition, so that it read, simply: "in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and the body" (*in quibus Dei existentia, et animæ humanæ à corpore distinctio, demonstrantur*). Descartes made the change in reaction to Mersenne's early criticism, expressed to him in a letter, that in fact Descartes says nothing about the immortality of the soul in the *Meditations*. "You should not be surprised," Descartes writes back in response, "I could not prove that God could not annihilate the soul, but only that it is by nature entirely distinct from the body, and consequently

part', which should be presumed to have force unless we are given reason to think otherwise.

⁸ Or consider a series of temporal, rather than modal, assertions about the soul:

- (i)' The soul continues to exist only momentarily upon the destruction of the body.
 - (ii)' The soul exists for a significant interval upon the destruction of the body.
 - (iii)' The soul exists for an indefinite time upon the destruction of the body.
- (i)' is perhaps roughly the same as substance dualism, under some understandings, but (ii)' and (iii)' are stronger, and immortalism would require at least these.

it is not bound by nature to die with it".⁹ The difficulty also gets stressed near the end of the second set of *Objections*, usually attributed to Mersenne: "... you say not one word about the immortality of the human mind. . . . We now make the additional point that it does not seem to follow from the fact that the mind is distinct from the body that it is incorruptible or immortal. What if its nature were limited by the duration of the life of the body, and God had endowed it with just so much strength and existence as to ensure that it came to an end with the death of the body?"¹⁰ In reply, Descartes agrees and refers to his *Synopsis*, where he acknowledges that, in fact, a proper demonstration of the immortality of the soul must go far beyond the mere argument for a real distinction and depend up on "an account of the whole of physics".¹¹ We might appropriately understand CA, then, not to be begging any questions, but rather to be filling in some of the gap Mersenne had noticed.

Note, furthermore, that the precise worry at which CA is directed takes it for granted that the soul is one thing and the body another, but that the soul is relatively frail and needs, as it were, to be shielded or protected by the body. As Cebes says at 70a2-6: "men fear that *when it's been separated* (ἐπειδὴν ἀπαλλαγῆ) from the body, it may no longer exist anywhere, but that on the very day a man dies, it may be destroyed and perish, *as soon as it's separated* (εὐθύς ἀπαλλαττομένη) from the body; and that *as it goes out* (ἐκβαίνουσα), it may be dispersed like breath or smoke, go flying off, and exist *no longer* (οὐδὲν ἔτι) anywhere at all." What's imagined here, in fanciful, popular imagery, is momentary separation, then dispersion. Similar language is used when Socrates paraphrases the con-

⁹ Letter to Mersenne of 24 December 1640, in J. Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, eds. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol. III: Correspondence, ('CMSK')* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 163. This is a good statement of the limited character of substance dualism. Descartes here mentions needing to prove that "God could not annihilate the soul" because this would be required in order to establish the absolute necessity of the soul's continued existence. Of course he also means to insinuate that, since God's interfering to annihilate the soul seems unlikely, then to show a real distinction is to go a long way towards establishing immortalism.

¹⁰ John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, eds., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Vol. II, ('CSM')* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 91. Note the similarity between Mersenne's supposition and Cebes' objection that, for all we know, the soul may wear out and die, even if not on account of the body's dissolution.

¹¹ CSM 10, 108-109.

cern later, at 80d9-11: “can it be that this, which we’ve found to be a thing of such a kind and nature, should *on separation* (ἀπαλλαττομένη) from the body at once (εὐθύς) be blown apart and perish, as most men say?”

Someone might object that we should not place too much emphasis on the precise way in which the worry that motivates *CA* is presented. That worry is, after all, said to be one that concerns ‘common people’ or ‘most men’: it is feared ‘by people generally’ (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, 70a1-2) that the soul will be dispersed when it leaves the body; it is ‘the popular fear’ (τὸ τῶν πολλῶν, 77b3-4); this is ‘as most people say’ (ὥς φασιν οἱ πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, 80d10-e1). And it was of course an ancient and common belief in popular Greek religion that the soul was some shadowy thing distinct from the body. Isn’t Plato simply motivating an argument for immortality by bringing in this popular belief, which he and his interlocutors obviously do not endorse?

But Greek popular views on the survival of the soul were indistinct and mixed; Plato might just as easily in the context have made reference to the ‘belief of most men’ that the soul *does* survive death, in some attenuated condition, in Hades. Clearly, what Plato does is to select some aspect or strand of popular opinion to suit his purposes. But what are those purposes? We see them at the beginning of *SD*. After it is mentioned that ‘most people’ regard philosophers as walking dead men, living impoverished lives, Socrates tells his interlocutors to dismiss what most people think, so that they can speak among themselves (εἵπωμεν γάρ . . . πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτούς, χαίρειν εἰπόντες ἐκείνοις, 64c1-2). Socrates then introduces the definition of death as the separation of the soul from the body (64c4-8) and gives his Defense. The whole argument of *SD* is meant to be developed among friends who share philosophical views that set them apart from ‘most people’. Thus, when the views of ‘most people’ are brought in again, just before *CA*, this is to introduce a doubt not shared by Socrates and his circle. (To be precise: it is not shared by them insofar as they rely on their philosophical conception of the soul. Of course, it is shared by them insofar as they are open to influence from common views, on account of ‘the child inside us, who has fears of that sort’, 77e5.) But since the purpose of the appeal to what ‘most people’ think at this point is precisely to raise a doubt ‘from the outside’, as it were, then what ‘most people’ are said to *concede* – that the soul is separable from the body – may reasonably be taken to represent the state of the argument at that point, among Socrates and his friends.¹²

¹² That the Greek mind at the time of Plato might admit some kind of dualism while

So then, the *CA* is not evidently unsound, if we supply substance dualism. The usual canons of interpretation, then, would suggest that we *should* supply substance dualism, if doing so would be at all consistent with the text. And in fact the text does not hinder us from doing so; rather it gives us strong considerations in favor.¹³

II. *Substance dualism is asserted in SD.*

Yet we can go beyond this, since *SD*, which immediately precedes *CA*, should evidently be construed as affirming substance dualism. Therefore, without reasons to the contrary, we should regard this affirmation as remaining in place, throughout the three initial arguments.

That Socrates' Defense affirms substance dualism is clear if we consider the nature of its argument. Unfortunately, the usual summaries are flawed. It is not enough to summarize Socrates' view, as the commentators do, by saying some such thing as: "A philosopher will not fear death, since his entire life has involved the practice of death".¹⁴ For this leaves entirely unclear what it is to 'practice' being dead. Furthermore such a

not admitting immortalism is strikingly although indirectly confirmed in a (much later) argument attributed to Chrysippus, who grants that death is the separation of the soul from the body, but who takes this to imply that the soul is *not* immortal: since only those things that were in contact can become separated, and since only a corporeal can be in contact with a corporeal, then the soul as well as the body must be corporeal (*SVF* 2.270). (I owe this point to Sean Kelsey.)

¹³ That *CA* begins from conclusions of *SD*, shared by Socrates' interlocutors, is perhaps suggested as well by Cebes' remark at 69e6: "The other things you say, Socrates, I find excellent; but what you say about the soul is the subject of much disbelief". Notice Cebes does not say that he himself doubts anything that Socrates has said about the soul. Moreover, we need not take δέ at 70a to be adversative: the sentence *could* have the sense, "Although I personally agree with everything you've said, people are liable to take issue with what you've said about the soul."

¹⁴ Burnet: "The philosopher will not fear death; for his whole life has been a rehearsal of death" (63e8 ad loc.), in *Plato's Phaedo*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911). Hackforth: Socrates "is not so foolish as to complain at the approach of that for which his whole life has been a preparation" (42). Gallop: "The philosopher's whole life is a preparation for death. He should therefore welcome death when it comes" (86). Rowe: "the true philosopher will look forward to his death, which is a reward rather than a punishment for his way of life", in *Plato: Phaedo*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 135. Yet later Rowe writes, somewhat more accurately: "If [dying and being dead] is the philosopher's sole preoccupation, he can reasonably be expected to be 'eager for it'" (*ibid.*, 64a8 ad loc.).

summary contains no inference that involves *maximization*; yet Socrates' Defense is clearly concerned with arguing from a partial to a maximal condition: the philosopher aims to be *as dead as possible* while alive; hence he welcomes the *maximal* condition of death, when it arrives.

To construe the argument correctly, we would do well to start with the crucial definition of dying and death, which Socrates introduces at 64c4-8:

'Do we take death to be something?' 'To be sure', replied Simmias. 'Then is it anything other than the separation of the soul from the body? And to be dead is this: the body's having come to be separate, alone by itself, apart from the soul, and the soul's being apart from the body, separated off, alone by itself? Is death anything other than this?' 'No, that's just what it is', he said.

ἡγουμεθά τι τὸν θάνατον εἶναι; Πάνυ γε, ἔφη ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Σιμμίας. Ἐὰρ μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγὴν; καὶ εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ τεθνάναι, χωρὶς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγὴν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσθαι αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν εἶναι; ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο;

The definition is essential to the argument, since Socrates hauls it in at the very point in his Defense when he wishes to conclude that the philosophical life is the practice of death (67d3-10). Now we need to ask: what, according to Socrates, is the relationship between what a true philosopher achieves in living a philosophical life, and what is picked out by this definition? To what extent does a true philosopher, in his asceticism and devotion to contemplation, realize what the definition describes? We can distinguish four possibilities, I think, which for clarity's sake may be explained in terms of a simple example:

- (1) A true philosopher achieves what the definition describes only in intention, in the way that someone who yearns to visit Paris and thinks about it constantly might reasonably say "It's almost as if I'm in Paris already". But in fact he isn't in Paris; and he never gets closer to Paris simply by yearning to be there. Call this a realization of the definition *in intention*, merely.
- (2) A true philosopher achieves some analogue of what the definition describes, in the way in which someone with limited resources might travel to Montreal and say "That's as close to being in Paris as I'll ever get." He never is in Paris; he is only in that city in a neighboring francophone country that has a character similar to Paris. Call this an *analogical* realization of the definition.
- (3) A true philosopher achieves exactly what the definition describes although to a less than maximal degree: as someone who has a

one-day stopover in Paris might say something like "I was in Paris once, but only briefly and would love to go back for a longer visit." He truly is in Paris and would eagerly be there longer for more of the same. Call this a *strict* realization of the definition, differing from other such realizations only in degree.

- (4) A true philosopher achieves 'substantially' what the definition describes and falls short from a full realization of the definition in some accidental or superficial respect: as someone might say that he stayed long enough in Paris to see all the principal sites but would love to go back and live there for a year. He's gotten most of what he wants to get out of Paris, but of course there's always more to see. Call this a *substantial* realization of the definition.

Note that all four cases involve someone who would eagerly welcome a visit to Paris, and all four involve someone who might, in some sense of 'practice', be described as having practiced or prepared himself for spending time in Paris.¹⁵

So what kind of separation of the soul from the body does Socrates maintain that a philosopher practices? We can rule out (1) and (2) straight away, since that would give *SD* something of the status of a bad pun. If no more than that were meant, then, for all his asceticism, a philosopher would not be one jot closer to the condition of being dead than anyone else. Furthermore, it would make *SD* pathetically circular: a philosopher eagerly anticipates death – and why? Because his life is one of anticipation of death. Perhaps at best *SD* could be regarded as an appeal to consistency: a philosopher welcomes death, when it arrives, because he has welcomed it throughout his life in the past.¹⁶ But then *SD* would lack any of the character of an apologetic for the philosophical life, which Socrates clearly intends it to be (63b4-c6, 63e8-64a3, 69d8-e5).

¹⁵ Of course someone who visited Paris in one of the stronger senses might also do so in a weaker sense: a man who once traveled there might spend his years pining and yearning to return.

¹⁶ I do not deny that at some points in *SD* Socrates appeals to consistency, in the sense that he points out how absurd and foolish it would be, to vacillate: "if they've set themselves at odds with the body at every point, and desire to possess their soul alone by itself, wouldn't it be quite illogical if they were afraid and resentful when this came about" (67e6-68a1). But a change in course is a foolish vacillation, rather than reasonable repentance, only if the course is a good one from the start; yet this is what *SD* aims to defend.

Moreover, if Socrates were maintaining that a philosopher separates soul and body only in senses (1) or (2), then *SD* would invite and presumably receive a very different challenge from what it gets. As we saw, when Socrates finishes his *apologia*, Simmias and Cebes concede that the soul is distinct from the body and can be separated from it – what they are concerned about is whether it stays long in that condition. Their fear is that, at the moment when the soul of a philosopher comes into possession of his life's goal, it gets scattered into oblivion. They do *not* object, as they obviously would, if Socrates had meant that a philosopher achieves separation in only a metaphorical sense, that Socrates has still to show that what the philosopher strives for is at all *possible*. Their objection is not that Socrates' defense is *vitiated*, but rather that it is *incomplete*.

Again, throughout *SD* Socrates uses phrases that are typical for expressing a difference of degree among things similar in kind – which suggests that he regards the philosopher's separation as *strict*, although limited. The philosopher “differs from other men in releasing his soul, as far as possible (ὅτι μάλιστα), from its communion with the body” (65a1); his soul “comes to be alone by itself as far as possible (ὅτι μάλιστα)” (65c7); he approaches “each object with his intellect alone as far as possible (ὅτι μάλιστα)”, (65e6); philosophers are “closest (ἐγγυτάτω) to knowledge . . . if we consort with the body as little as possible (ὅτι μάλιστα)” (67a3).

We might imagine, too, that part of Plato's purpose in introducing the imagery of purification into *SD*, at 65e6-66a7 and 67c5-d1, is to suggest that separation in this life differs only in degree from death. The process of removing an impurity is, of course, a process of reaching an extreme degree of a quality already present. That “we can know nothing purely in the body's company” (66e4) implies that we *do* know it already, to some degree, in the body's company. In linking the practice of death to the notion of purification, then, Socrates evidently means to suggest that dying is a matter of reaching an extreme degree of a state already attained¹⁷: “purification,” he says, “turns out to be just what's been mentioned . . . the parting of the soul from the body as far as possible, and the habituating of it to assemble and gather itself together, away from every part of the body, alone by itself, and to live, both in the present life and in the hereafter (καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἔπειτα), released from the body, as from fetters” (67c5-d1). That Socrates in this way links together

¹⁷ Observe that this is exactly where the definition of death from 64c4-8 gets recalled.

a philosopher's present life with his condition after death would appear to clinch the case.¹⁸

We can conclude, then, that *SD* affirms that a true philosopher, through his asceticism and dedication to a life of study, achieves death in the strict sense and to some degree. But since separation in the strict sense could not take place at all unless, in principle, it could take place completely, what Socrates asserts in his *Defense* is substance dualism. We should take this affirmation, then, to be in force as Socrates next turns to the *CA*.

III. *SD argues for substance dualism.*

Yet does Plato give any *argument* for substance dualism in the *Phaedo*, or does he simply take it for granted? It would help first to consider what an argument for substance dualism might look like; we won't have much chance of recognizing one otherwise. In this regard, it is instructive to recall the challenge that Descartes once posed to Mersenne: "Do you claim that if we clearly understand one thing apart from another, this is not sufficient for the recognition that the two things are really distinct? If so, you must provide a more reliable criterion for a real distinction – and I am confident that none can be provided."¹⁹ The intuition behind Descartes' challenge is extremely powerful. Let us distinguish between a 'full blown' and a 'provisional' argument for a real distinction. Both begin with a conception of a thing which is coherent and putatively complete; and from this they conclude that that thing which is so conceived can exist separately. But a 'full blown' argument, such as that which Descartes gives in the *Meditations*, aims at certitude and is reflexive in character, since it aims to justify that very step of arguing from our conception of a thing, to the existence of the thing, in the manner conceived. A 'provisional' argument for a real distinction is more modest and aims, not at certainty, but simply to shift the burden of proof. It too starts from our conception of a thing, and draws an inference about the reality of the thing. But that inference is taken to be intuitive and goes unexamined.²⁰ Presumably it is

¹⁸ Yet it should be said that there are passages of *SD* that indicate that separation is intended in sense (4). For instance, at 66b6 Socrates says that "as long as we possess the body, and our soul is contaminated by such an evil, we'll surely never adequately gain (κτησώμεθα ἱκανῶς) what we desire", which seems to imply that we do gain it fairly well already in this life.

¹⁹ *CSM* 95.

²⁰ Both sorts of argument may be found in the *Meditations*. It is not uncommon for

this sort of argument, if anything, that we might expect to find in the *Phaedo*.

But do we find such an argument? Our suspicion has to turn to the definition of death, already cited, with which *SD* begins. It is curious that commentators are divided as to whether the mere definition begs a question. Gallop insists that it does: "From this definition," he objects, "conjoined with the admission that there is such a thing as death (c2), it follows that the soul does exist apart from the body. If it did not, there would be no such thing as death, in the sense given to the word at 64c5-8. It therefore seems hard to acquit Socrates of prejudging the issue at this point" (86-87). Hackforth however writes: "The definition does not, of course, prejudge the question of the soul's survival; all that Socrates here wants is an admission that we can properly think and speak of soul 'apart' from body; whether soul continues to exist when thus apart is the question at issue" (44, n. 1). Yet it is telling that Hackforth puts 'apart' in scare quotes, as if the admission that we can properly speak of *soul apart from the body*, without hedging or qualification, would itself have important implications. And then Hackforth adds something not to the point, because, as we have seen, the issue of the soul's *independent* existence is distinct from that of its *continued* existence. The mere definition might go some way towards establishing the former, without thereby establishing the latter.²¹

I suggest that the reason the definition provokes controversy is that, if it is coherent, it does provide *prima facie* grounds for a real distinction. But presumably that is what *SD* is meant to show: it aims to show that the definition is coherent, by isolating and characterizing an activity in which the soul can engage without any evident need of the body.

Consider the following argument:

1. *A* exists independently from *B*, and therefore may exist if *B* ceases to exist, if we can conceive of *A*, without thereby conceiving of *B*.

students, encountering that work for the first time, to take Descartes to have established the distinction between the soul and body in the Second Meditation alone. That is because the Second Meditation contains an intuitive or 'provisional' argument. Yet the whole apparatus of the 'Cartesian circle', which is meant to *justify* the inference from conception to the world, by giving a criterion of the trustworthy operation of our powers of conception, is of course developed in the successive Meditations and not concluded until the Sixth.

²¹ On the other hand, precisely because substance dualism is a weaker position than immortalism, Gallop's claim that Socrates has indeed 'prejudged' the issue is mistaken.

2. To conceive of *A*, without thereby conceiving of *B*, it suffices to identify an activity Φ attributable to *A*, which is such that *A* can Φ without any assistance from *B*.
3. A philosopher's experience is such that from it we can see that there is an activity of the soul, thinking, which is such that, in principle, nothing hinders the soul from engaging in it alone and without any assistance from the body.
4. Hence we can conceive of the soul, without thereby conceiving of the body.
5. Hence, the soul exists independently from the body and may exist if the body ceases to exist.²²

I regard an argument of this sort as implicit in *SD*. The definition of death at 64c4-8 has the force of premises 1. and 2., and most of *SD* which follows is meant to underwrite 3.

It does so by a series of observations which have something of the character of a protreptic. A true philosopher, first of all, cares little about activities of the soul in which the body plays an essential role, on account of their involving pleasures derived from nutritive or procreative functions of the body: eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse (64d1-7). Similarly, he cares little about aiming to adorn the body and making it attractive (64d9-e1). Note that these activities are ones that cannot be described without mention of the body: for instance, for a person to take pleasure in eating just is for him to derive pleasure from a certain function of the body. So none of these activities qualifies as one in which the soul can be engaged without the body, and none of them, therefore, could contribute to a conception of the soul 'alone by itself'. To the extent that someone engages in them, then, he is not dead; and when a true philosopher tries to avoid these activities, he is aiming, at least, not to be not dead.

Socrates next takes his interlocutors to a second stage, pointing out that, generally speaking, a true philosopher is concerned, rather, with acquiring knowledge and truth. One might think that the use of one's sense organs is suitable for this, but in fact, Socrates claims, the senses are deceptive and themselves contain no truth (65b1-7).²³ Thus a true philosopher will care little about simply looking at things, hearing, smelling, and

²² The argument is meant to be roughly analogous to the paraphrase of Descartes' in Margaret D. Wilson, *Descartes*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 189.

²³ It is not important for our purposes *why* he claims this, only *that* he does so. Commentators object that, in the *RA* which follows, Socrates will argue that sense experience plays an invaluable role in provoking recollection of the Forms; conse-

so on. Of course, all of these activities, too, require essentially the assistance of the body, so in avoiding these, too, the philosopher aims not to be not dead.

Finally Socrates turns to a particular activity of the soul, thinking or reasoning: “So isn’t it in reasoning (λογίζεσθαι), if anywhere at all, that any of the things that are become manifest to it?” (65c2-3). He considers this activity both from the point of view of the activity itself (65c5-d1), and from the point of view of the object of that activity (65d7-e9), and in each case he argues both that there can be differences in degree of ‘purity’ and that the philosopher strives for the purest degree:

And it reasons best, presumably, whenever none of these things bothers it, neither hearing nor sight nor pain, nor any pleasure either, but whenever it comes to be alone by itself as far as possible, disregarding the body, and whenever, having the least possible communion and contact with it, it strives for that which is. (65c5-9)

Λογίζεται δέ γέ που τότε κάλλιστα, ὅταν αὐτὴν τούτων μηδὲν παραλυπῇ, μήτε ἀκοὴ μήτε ὄψις μήτε ἀλγηδὼν μηδέ τις ἡδονή, ἀλλ’ ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτὴ καθ’ αὐτὴν γίγνηται ἐῶσα χαίρειν τὸ σῶμα, καὶ καθ’ ὅσον δύναται μὴ κοινοῦσα αὐτῷ μηδ’ ἀπομένῃ ὀρέγεται τοῦ ὄντος.

... whoever of us is prepared to think most fully and minutely of each object of his inquiry, in itself, will come closest to the knowledge of each? (65e2-4)

ὅς ἂν μάλιστα ἡμῶν καὶ ἀκριβέστατα παρσκευάσῃται αὐτὸ ἕκαστον διανοηθῆναι περὶ οὗ σκοπεῖ, οὗτος ἂν ἐγγύτατα ῥοι τοῦ γινῶναι ἕκαστον;

Typically sensations accompany thinking, but these are distracting, and the soul thinks best when not bothered by them (Λογίζεται δέ γέ που τότε κάλλιστα, ὅταν αὐτὴν τούτων μηδὲν παραλυπῇ, 65c5-6): we can easily enough conceive of undistracted thinking and see how desirable it would be. Furthermore, since the objects of thinking – such as the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, and so on – are not bodily, we grasp these objects better to the extent that we do not rely even on imagination (μήτε τὴν ὄψιν, παρατιθέμενος ἐν τῷ διανοεῖσθαι μήτε τινὰ ἄλλην αἴσθησιν 65e7-66a1).

Socrates and his interlocutors presuppose that thinking is a kind of perception of something: it is a “touching of the truth” (τῆς ἀληθείας

quently it would seem a true philosopher could not afford to dismiss it entirely, even if this were possible. Yet such an admission makes the senses only instrumentally valuable for arriving at the truth, and the use of the senses would play no role in that activity which, strictly, constitutes our grasping of truth. (We might think that Plato has Socrates so strongly discountenance sense perception in *SD*, precisely because what is at issue there is not truth so much as whether sense perception can be taken as an *end* in knowing.)

ἄπτεται, 65b7), “a viewing of the truest nature of things” (τὸ ἀληθέστατον θεωρεῖται, e2). Therefore, they reason, if thinking were something that we accomplished through the body, it would be accomplished through the organs of perception that the body provides, the familiar five senses. However, from the experience of thinking, it turns out that one succeeds better at thinking, the less use one makes of sense perceptions and images derived from sense perception. Thinking, therefore, in its purest form, does not make use of images; hence, it does not make use of sense organs; hence, it does not make use of the body at all. Thus, thinking is an activity in which the soul can engage without the assistance of the body.

In sum, then, Socrates maintains, through this appeal to the experience of a true philosopher, that we can conceive of an undistracted soul thinking of the Forms without relying on images. This is the limit, or ‘purification’, of what a philosopher *already* achieves. To conceive of this is to conceive of someone “using his intellect alone by itself and unsullied, [who undertakes] the hunt for each of the things that are, each alone by itself and unsullied” (66a1-3). It is the pure activity of the mind, directed at pure objects of thought:

Then would that be achieved most purely by the man who approached each object with his intellect alone as far as possible, neither adducing sight in his thinking, nor dragging in any other sense to accompany his reasoning; rather, using his intellect alone by itself and unsullied, he would undertake the hunt for each of the things that are, each alone by itself and unsullied . . . (65e6-66a3)

Ἄρ οὖν ἐκεῖνος ἂν τοῦτο ποιήσειεν καθαρώτατα ὅστις ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ ἴοι ἐφ' ἑκάστον, μήτε τὴν ὄψιν παρατιθέμενος ἐν τῷ διανοεῖσθαι μήτε τινὰ ἄλλην αἴσθησιν ἐφέλκων μηδεμίαν μετὰ τοῦ λογισμοῦ, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ καθ' αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ διανοίᾳ χρώμενος αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ εἰλικρινὲς ἑκάστον ἐπιχειροῖ θηρεῦειν τῶν ὄντων . . .

This protreptic supplies premise 3. of the argument above, which then yields the desired conclusion. The Forms play a crucial role in the argument, since presumably an activity is not completely specified until we specify the object of that activity. In his Defense, Socrates characterizes thinking, in effect, as an activity of the soul which has the Forms as its object. A true philosopher, in having discovered the Forms, has simultaneously discovered something about himself, namely, that the soul is the sort of thing that can engage in this activity of grasping the Forms.²⁴

²⁴ It is because of this connection between knowledge of the Forms and self-knowl-

Consequently, he can conceive of the soul as engaged in this activity, without thereby bringing in any mention or reference to the body. Thus he can form a notion of the soul 'alone by itself': from which he concludes that the soul, in its activity of thinking, is independent of the body and may exist even if the body is destroyed.

The basic argument for dualism in *SD*, then, is a provisional argument for a real distinction. Yet we may identify in *SD* two additional and supporting considerations for substance dualism. The first is at 66a10-67b5, where Socrates points out that a philosopher who is striving to achieve, by asceticism, a complete separation of his soul from his body, will quickly see that he is taking the wrong track: he cannot gain entire possession of what he wants, until the gods liberate his soul from the body at death. The reason for this, Socrates intimates, is that the human body and other corporeal things are at war with the activity of thinking. Thinking is not something encouraged in the corporeal world, supported by it, or aimed at by it. Rather, a true philosopher will engage in thinking *in spite of* the body, with its cares and distractions, and *in spite of* the corporeal world as a whole, with its business, wars, and absence of leisure. Thinking, then, is something alien to the world, and therefore its complete fulfillment is to be found, if at all, outside the world. Yet this consideration has the force of making it at least initially implausible, that thinking is in some way *dependent* on the body, since one might naturally expect that anything that depended on the body would be at home with the body and serve its needs: consider, for instance, how we do not need to set ourselves at odds with the world in order to see with our eyes, or to enjoy the pleasures of eating.

The second consideration is the deduction of the virtues at 68b2-69d7. There Socrates famously argues that someone acquires true virtue only to the extent that he lives a philosophical life and separates his soul from his body. Yet why does *SD* conclude with such a deduction? One reason, of course, is that Socrates has claimed that he is justified in not fearing death, because he has reason to expect that he will be better off, and be among better companions, after he has died (63b7-8); and if people grow in virtue in proportion to their success in separating their souls from their

edge that I take Socrates later to assert, in the course of *RA*, what appears to be overstated at first, viz. that the hypothesis of the Forms, and that of immortality, stand or fall together: "It is equally necessary that those objects exist, and that our souls existed before birth", 76e5-6.

bodies, then one might reasonably anticipate that a fully separated soul will have more virtue than any that is still embodied – thus corroborating Socrates' claim. However, another reason for the deduction is surely that it suggests that the soul is not naturally joined to the body: that the soul fares poorly to the extent that it is joined, and that it flourishes to the extent that it becomes separated, would seem to indicate that the soul is independent and distinct, since one might expect that nothing naturally dependent on another thing would get better by being cut off from it.

IV. *SD* was intended by Plato to provide the context of the three initial arguments and therefore counts as the 'primary argument' of the *Phaedo*.

On the interpretation defended here, an interesting structure emerges for the *Phaedo*. The three main parts of the dialogue may be taken to correspond to distinctions we drew earlier: *SD* maintains that the soul *is capable of* existing when the body is destroyed; the three initial arguments maintain that it *does* in fact do so, through repeated cycles of incarnation (unless liberated from those cycles through devotion to philosophy); and the final argument (*FA*) maintains that the soul *necessarily* exists when the body is destroyed, because by no process of change in nature can the soul go out of existence.²⁵

The result of *SD* is provisional in the sense that it takes our ability to conceive of the soul as independent of the body to be a *prima facie* reason for regarding it as distinct. This result is, however, powerful, as far as it goes, since it shifts the burden of proof. But since *SD* concludes merely that the soul *can* exist when the body is destroyed, it provides only a basis for *hope* that the soul continues to exist after the demise of the body, as Socrates stresses in many passages: "I expect (ἐλπίζω) to join the company of good men" (63c1); "that's why I am not resentful, but rather am hopeful (εὐελπίς) that there is something more in store for those who've died" (63c4-5); "a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy . . . is hopeful (εὐελπίς) that, when he has died, he will win very great benefits in the other world" (63e9-64a2); "if that's true . . . there's plenty of hope (πολλὴ ἐλπίς) for one who arrives where I'm going" (67b7-8); "they may hope (ἐλπίς ἐστίν) to attain what they longed for throughout life" (68a1-2).

²⁵ That is, we might say that the dialogue defends, successively, "substance dualism", "weak immortalism", and "strong immortalism". (See the chart at this article's end.)

It is clear that Plato intended the provisional conclusion of *SD* to serve as the context of the three initial arguments. As we saw, *SD* begins with a definition of 'being dead' (64c4-8) that employs unusual technical terms in its definiens: 'being dead' indicates the soul alone by itself (αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτήν); the body alone by itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό); and both of them being in a condition of separation (ἀπαλλαγῇ) from the other. We may therefore take any occurrence of these technical terms, in the text that follows, as involving a reference back to the definition at 64c4-8. Hence we have a rough criterion for determining whether a text is meant to depend upon *SD*: if it contains this sort of technical language, it should be regarded as falling under the scope of the discussion which begins with that definition and is developed in *SD*.

However, what we find is that, as soon as Socrates finishes with his three initial arguments, this technical language from *SD* makes a reappearance. In fact the "Affinity Argument" (AA) merges smoothly into an extended reprise of *SD* (80c1-84b8).²⁶ All the chief themes from *SD* are brought forward once again: "... whenever [the soul] studies alone by itself, it departs yonder towards that which is pure and always existent and immortal and unvarying, and in virtue of its kinship with it, enters always into its company, whenever it has come to be alone by itself (αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτήν)" (79d1-4); "suppose too that it has been gathered together alone into itself (αὐτὴ εἰς ἑαυτήν), since it always cultivated this" (80e5); "do you think a soul in that condition will separate unsullied, and alone by itself (αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτήν)?" (81c1); when the soul is in the body it "is forced to view the things that are as if through a prison, rather than alone by itself (αὐτὴν δι' αὐτῆς)" (82e4); philosophy frees such a soul "by urging it to collect and gather itself together, and to trust none other but itself, whenever, alone by itself (αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτήν), it thinks of any one of the things that are, alone by itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό)" (83a7-b1). Even the earlier deduction of the virtues is recapitulated at 83e5-7.

So we should regard *SD*, strictly, not as a passage which merely precedes the three initial arguments, but rather as that which frames them and sets them off, providing their context. This conclusion is reinforced by other references in the three initial arguments back to *SD*:

- (i) Socrates concludes *CA* with the claim that he's shown that "the souls of the dead exist *and after death things are better for the good and*

²⁶ Surprisingly, none of the major commentaries sets off the passage following AA and identifies it as "Reprise of Socrates' Defense", or some such thing.

worse for the dead” (my italics, 72e1). Editors tend to strike the italicized phrase, not on the basis of evidence in the manuscripts, but on the grounds that, as Rowe puts it, the phrase “makes no sense in this context and is clearly an interpolation from 63c6-7”, sc. from *SD*. But if *CA* is meant to rely upon and develop *SD*, the phrase does make sense: relying on the ‘hope’ articulated in *SD*, and which is implied by the doctrine of ‘purification’ (see 69c2-d1), Socrates anticipates a fuller conclusion, to which he cannot quite help himself here, but which he will more adequately support by the time he reaches *AA* (cf. 80d5-81c).

- (ii) *AA* refers back explicitly to *SD* at 79c2-8: “Now weren’t we saying a while ago that whenever the soul uses the body as a means to study anything, either by seeing or hearing or any other sense – because to use the body as a means is to study a thing through sense perception – then it is dragged by the body towards objects that are never constant, and is confused and dizzy, as if drunk, in virtue of contact with things of a similar kind?” The reference is to 65b1-7. But what is especially striking is the formula, τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ διὰ τοῦ σώματος, τὸ δι’ αἰσθήσεως σκοπεῖν τι, which makes it clear Plato wants to stress the principle that, if it is necessary to mention or refer to the body in specifying that activity, then that activity is not one that the soul can engage in ‘alone by itself’.
- (iii) Again, *AA* refers back to *SD* at 79d9-e1: “Once again, then, in the light of our earlier and present arguments (ἐκ τῶν πρόσθεν καὶ ἐκ τῶν νῦν λεγομένων), to which kind do you think the soul is more similar and more akin?” Since Socrates is looking for his interlocutor to draw a conclusion based on what he had just said, at 79c2-8, it is clear that Socrates means to include *SD* among the earlier arguments, viewed as of a piece with the present ones. (It is not to the point that Socrates speaks of λεγόμενα rather than λόγοι; clearly *AA* is an argument, and he uses the same term for *SD* as *AA*.)
- (iv) The passage at 79e9-80a5 has little cogency if not read with *SD* as its backdrop. That passage begins: “. . . when soul and body are present in the same thing” (ἐπειδὴν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ᾧσι ψυχὴ καὶ σῶμα). But this is an odd figure of speech, apart from the viewpoint of substance dualism; yet this way of speaking has not been licensed by any particular text *after SD*. Furthermore, the passage presumes that ‘nature ordains that [body] shall serve and be ruled, whereas the other shall rule and be master’, and commentators complain that this premise is entirely new, unsupported, and at odds with the notion that the soul

is imprisoned in the body. Yet we may take this language to come directly from *SD*, where, in his discussion of the false virtues of the many, Socrates noted that the soul's servitude to the pleasures of the body was declared contrary to the divinely decreed order of things: see 68e7, 69a2, and 69b7.

Hence *SD* is properly regarded as providing the context for the three initial arguments. But then how do those arguments rely upon *SD*? We have seen already how *CA* does: it presupposes substance dualism, which *SD* articulates and supports. But *RA* and *AA* also depend upon *SD*. The basic intuition underlying *CA* may be summarized as: since the soul is distinct from the body, and nothing comes from nothing, then we should postulate reincarnation, as the most plausible explanation of the origin of body-soul composites. Similarly, *RA* may be understood as arguing that, since the soul is distinct from the body – and indeed since the soul may be understood as *that which is capable of grasping the Forms* – then, since nothing comes from nothing, and since the soul's capacity to grasp the Forms cannot be accounted for by its existence *after* it is joined to the body, then this capacity must be accounted for by its existence *before* its being joined to the body.²⁷

Again, *AA* is aptly understood as strengthening the conclusion of *SD*, by proposing that the soul and the body belong to larger classes, each characterized by attributes which are incompatible with those that belong to the other. Soul belongs to the class of imperceptible, invariable, and incomposite things; body belongs to the class of perceptible, variable, and composite things. Hence we may have additional confidence that soul and body are distinct, because the classes in which they are appropriately grouped are distinct and indeed incompatible.

²⁷ In this way we see how a common objection to *RA* may be answered. Bostock objects that Plato gives no reason why the capacity to grasp the Forms might not simply be present in the soul from birth, in the manner of 'innate ideas': "... it is open to an objector to maintain that we were just born with this knowledge of equality, but did not have to learn it at any previous time. When Plato himself belatedly notices this objection, at 76c14-15, he gives a reply which can only be regarded as missing the point" (102). But it looks rather as if Bostock has missed the point: to hold that the soul comes into existence with such knowledge would be to postulate an effect without a cause. How does it come to have those innate ideas? Nothing comes from nothing. (The doctrine of innate ideas that survives into the modern era presupposes for its cogency the view that the soul is immediately created by God.)

We may note that, when understood in this way, AA resembles an argument in Descartes as well. In his Sixth Meditation, Descartes first draws to a close his elaborate argument for a real distinction: "The inference to be drawn from these results is that all the things that we clearly and distinctly conceive of as different substances (as we do in the case of mind and body) are in fact substances which are really distinct one from the other; and this conclusion is drawn in the Sixth Meditation."²⁸ We have seen that SD supplies a rough analogue of this argument. But once Descartes finishes his argument for a real distinction, he gives an additional argument, intended to strengthen this result: "This conclusion is confirmed in the same Meditation by the fact that we cannot understand a body except as being divisible, while by contrast we cannot conceive of a mind except as being indivisible . . . and this leads us to recognize that the natures of mind and body are not only different, but in some way opposite".²⁹ That is, he assigns body and mind to different classes, which have incompatible attributes.³⁰

All three initial arguments, then, are correctly viewed as taking the substance dualism of SD as their starting point. But since they argue, not merely that the soul *may* exist when the body is destroyed, but also that it *does* so exist, they go beyond supplying a basis for 'hope', and provide 'firm evidence' and 'sufficient evidence' (ικανὸν τεκμήριον, 70d1, cp. 72a6), of the sort that can ground conviction (72d6). Nonetheless they are inductive and analogical rather than demonstrative, and they reach no conclusion having the character of necessity, and thus they are still open to reasonable doubts. Note that, on this way of construing the *Phaedo*, there is not the slightest reason to take Plato to have regarded any of the three initial arguments as fallacious or unsound.

But whereas the initial arguments respond to a worry of the common man, not entirely shared by Socrates' interlocutors, the objections of Simmias and Cebes involve worries that arise from within the new natural philosophy, with which Simmias and Cebes evidently do have sympathy: Simmias'

²⁸ The quotation is from Descartes' *Synopsis*, CSM 9.

²⁹ CSM 9-10.

³⁰ Yet the FA is still needed, because AA says merely that the soul is best likened to indestructible things, and therefore has the character of an induction or analogical inference; also, because the whole drift of SD and its reprise is that the soul may have more or less of the character of corporeality, and so it needs to be made clear that its having this character is secondary, derivative, and accidental to it.

objection, relying on a view of the soul as a harmony and proportion, aims to overturn the presumption of dualism carried over from *SD*; Cebes' objection, perhaps broadly indebted to Heracleiteanism, strikes at the absence of necessity in the earlier arguments, already noted.³¹ To respond adequately to these, Plato needs to forge new philosophical tools: dialectic, to respond to Simmias, and a rudimentary metaphysics, to answer Cebes. The reply to Cebes of course aims at something like demonstration from incontrovertible premises, and it would show that necessarily the soul continues to exist.

The *Phaedo*, then, is not a dialogue in which Socrates, after an initial expression of faith, searches without much success for vindicating reasons, but rather one in which Socrates and his interlocutors, through reasoned discussion, arrive at increasingly stronger reasons for increasingly stronger claims, developed in response to increasingly stronger challenges. The dialogue is thoroughly constructive in character, with later parts confirming earlier ones.³² Its general structure may be represented in a table such as the one on page 115.

Etienne Gilson concluded his classic study of the history of philosophy, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* by remarking that "the recurrence of similar philosophical attitudes is an intelligible fact".³³ There are patterns of philosophical thought and argument throughout history, which have a kind of law, or necessity, that transcends the purposes of the philosophers who express them. Dualism is one such philosophical attitude, and Plato, of course, was a dualist. It should hardly be surprising, then, that a kind of inner necessity in dualism governs the way in which he constructs his great dialogue on the soul, bringing it into correspondence, in interesting ways, with Descartes' project. To read the *Phaedo* in this manner, *selon l'ordre des raisons*, is to recognize that the usual

³¹ I regard the objections of Simmias and Cebes as representing Plato's concern that the new natural philosophy denies the priority of the soul – a concern which finds full expression in *Laws* X. There Plato insists that the soul is older than corporeal beings and their cause, whereas the new natural philosophy would make the soul derivative and dependent upon corporeal things. See 889b1-890b1, 891c1-8, 892a4-b8.

³² Note that, at the end of the Final Argument, both Cebes and Simmias affirm that they now find *all* the arguments beyond doubt: "... for my part I've no further objections, nor can I doubt the arguments at any point" (Cebes, 107a3); "... nor have I any further ground for doubt myself, as far as the arguments go" (Simmias, a8-9).

³³ Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 302.

diagnoses of fallacious argument are much too superficial, as are those remedies that would have us look instead at incidental dramatic details. There is no merit in simply overlooking the powerful philosophical view which the dialogue expresses.³⁴

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³⁴ I wish to thank Sean Kelsey, Anthony Price, and Paul Woodruff as well as the participants in the 25th Texas Workshop in Ancient Philosophy for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

The Argumentative Structure of the *Phaedo*

	Motivating Worry	Source of Worry	Thesis Defended	Kind of Argument	Kind of Conviction
I. Socrates' Defense	Perhaps Socrates has recklessly neglected his own good in not resisting death	Socrates' friends and disciples	Substance dualism	<i>Prima facie</i> , provisional	Hope
II. The Three Initial Arguments	Perhaps the soul disperses upon separation from the body	The 'common man'	Weak immortalism (reincarnation)	Inductive, plausible story	Sound inference
III. The Final Argument	Perhaps the soul wears out eventually	Presocratic natural philosophy	Strong immortalism (divinity of the soul)	Deductive, necessary	Certainty, proof