

3544
WOOLF, R.

2004

OXFORD STUDIES IN ANC PH 2004

THE PRACTICE OF A PHILOSOPHER

RAPHAEL WOOLF

IN a competitive field, Socrates' pronouncement that the philosopher practises dying and being dead (*Phaedo* 64 A 5–6) must rank as one of the most startling in all of Plato's works. What does he mean by it? The following, at least, seems tolerably clear. Death is the release or separation of the soul from the body (64 C), so that one who practises death strives even in life to effect this separation to the greatest possible extent. Given that the soul is one's true self,¹ the philosopher's task is to keep his soul—i.e. himself—free from his body. This in turn seems to encompass two related forms of disengagement. Firstly, the philosopher avoids the snares of bodily indulgence. He has no interest in the pleasures of food, drink, sex, fine clothing, and so on (64 D–65 A). At best these are a matter of indifference to him, and at worst a positive distraction from the philosopher's goal, which is the attainment of wisdom. Secondly, the philosopher makes minimal use of sense perception in his enquiries (65 A–66 A). The senses are a poor guide to the truth. The latter is instead to be found in the contemplation of eternal, unchanging Forms ('the things that are'), and these are discovered by the use of reason rather than perception. Reasoning is what the soul does, or does best, all by itself. In both ways, then, the philosopher in pursuit of truth must free his soul from his body, and to that extent be practising death.

But in what sense are we talking of separation here? Death itself provides the literal separation of body from soul. When I die, my body is no longer animated by my soul, which is the bringer of life (71 D–E, 105 C–D). It is a lifeless corpse destined to decay (80 B–D,

© Raphael Woolf 2004

I would like to thank Gabriela Carone for helpful discussion and David Sedley for patient and generous criticism. This paper was written during my tenure of a Mellon Fellowship for 2002/3 at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.

¹ Socrates can speak interchangeably of the soul not associating with the body (e.g. 65 C 8–9) and of 'we' (philosophers) not doing so (e.g. 67 A 3–4).

115 C–E). Whatever happens to my soul, it is no longer interacting with my body. But what could it mean to approach this state in life? What is it to live, as far as possible, without the body? Let me suggest that there are two main ways of reading Socrates' discussion of this issue. The first I will call the 'ascetic' reading, the second the 'evaluative' reading. Both, I think, have their attractions and both their weaknesses. I shall claim, in fact, that we are not supposed to make a firm decision between one reading and the other. Each has its own, distinct purpose: the first to provide reassurance in the face of death; the second to tell us how to live. But it is the latter that has priority in Plato's thinking, even in a work as overtly concerned with death as the *Phaedo*.

I

Let me begin with the ascetic reading. It provides an obvious way to interpret Socrates' remarks on bodily pleasure. Socrates opens his discussion of practising death by making it clear that the philosopher has no enthusiasm (*ἐσπουδακέναι*, 64 D 2–3) for the so-called pleasures of eating, drinking, or sex, that unholy Trinity of Platonic suspects, or indeed for other bodily indulgences such as the wearing of fine clothes or shoes (D 8–11). We might, then, be tempted to infer that Socrates conceives of the philosophical life as one that involves the avoidance of such pleasures. Being concerned with higher things, the philosopher will practise abstention from gross corporeal activity, and to this extent live a life that can be reasonably described as ascetic. With bodily indulgence kept to an absolute minimum, his time will be spent in abstract reasoning.²

The evaluative reading makes a somewhat weaker claim. Here the point is not that the philosopher refrains (or should refrain) in

² The term 'ascetic' has often been used by commentators to capture at least part of the *Phaedo*'s philosophical vision. David Gallop, for example, writes that 'Nowhere else in Plato is asceticism so uncompromisingly extolled' (*Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford, 1975), 88). Though by no means universal, this is not an unusual view. It finds recent echo, for example, in Dorothea Frede (*Plato's 'Phaidon'* (Darmstadt, 1999), 173); and Michael Pakaluk takes it as read that the true philosopher in the *Phaedo* is an ascetic ('Degrees of Separation in the *Phaedo*', *Phronesis*, 48 (2003), 89–115 at e.g. 99, 100). Since supporters of an ascetic reading rarely consider alternative possibilities, it can be hard to determine what their view amounts to. But not even its detractors (some of whom I shall discuss below) have, it seems to me, adequately marshalled the evidence on both sides, and this will be one of my main tasks here.

any strikingly austere way from those activities that require association with the body. It is, rather, that he should adopt a certain evaluative stance towards those activities. Certainly, Socrates' remarks are peppered with evaluative terminology. We noted above that his opening gambit is to mark not exactly the philosopher's avoidance of bodily pleasures but his lack of zeal for them. He goes on to ask rhetorically, about other bodily indulgences, whether the philosopher considers them of value (*ἐντίμους*, 64 D 9; cf. *τιμᾶν ἢ ἀτιμάζειν*, D 11). The philosopher in fact 'disvalues' (*ἀτιμάζει*, 65 D 1) and 'belittles' (cf. *ὀλιγωροῦσιν*, 68 C 11) the body. Similarly, at 69 A–B, we are warned against regarding virtue as the exchange, like tokens of currency, of pleasures for pleasures or pains for pains. The philosopher's virtue of wisdom (*φρόνησις*) is the only true currency (*μόνον τὸ νόμισμα ὀρθόν*, A 9–10). Whatever the precise import of this passage, its main message seems clear. The metaphor of currency shows how Socrates' concern is to emphasize the gulf in *value* between activities involving the body and what the soul pursues by itself.³

This emphasis on value is not itself a decisive strike against the ascetic reading. One obvious motive for leading an abstemious life would presumably be that one put no value on, or positively disvalued, the kinds of activities in question. But at the same time it certainly leaves room for a non-ascetic reading, one which makes the issue less one's behaviour than one's attitude. A comparison with Kipling's famous remarks on triumph and disaster might help explain what I am getting at. The poet is not recommending that one *avoid* triumphs and disasters. It is precisely because, in some measure, most human lives must encounter both that we are told to regard them as impostors—in the modern colloquial sense, to

³ For a more detailed reading of the passage, see R. Weiss, 'The Right Exchange: *Phaedo* 69a6–c3', *Ancient Philosophy*, 7 (1987), 57–66. Weiss argues that certain of its features positively rule out an ascetic reading. In particular, she claims that at 69 A 9–10 'Socrates recommends that we be indifferent to the passions . . . not that we avoid all intercourse with them' (58–9). Now the key phrase at A 10 (*ἀντὶ οὗ δέι' πάντα ταῦτα καταλλάττεσθαι*) certainly fits better with the rest of the passage when translated, with Weiss (her brackets), as 'for the sake of which all these things [pleasures, pains and fears] ought to be exchanged [with each other]', the sense being (roughly) that the passions are a given and one's 'traffic' in them should be whatever most conduces to the acquisition of wisdom. Yet in isolation the phrase is more naturally translated 'ascetically' as 'in return for which [i.e. wisdom] all these things should be exchanged', and I suspect that one reason for the linguistic murkiness of the passage as a whole is precisely Plato's desire to avoid closing off the possibility of an ascetic reading.

be 'philosophical' about them. So too, I think, with Socrates and the body. What is important for him is not that one avoids bodily pleasures and pains (the latter first mentioned at 65 c 6) but that one does not misread them—they too are impostors, presenting a false picture of reality, and it is a mark of the philosopher to be aware of that.

In fact, as far as I can see, there is only one place in his initial exposition where Socrates uses language explicitly suggestive of asceticism. This is at 65 A 5, where he speaks of the philosopher taking no part in the relevant bodily activities (*μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν*). But it is notable that this occurs as part of Socrates' report of what the *many* think is a life not worth living. For the many the issue is perhaps not the relatively subtle one of one's attitude towards pleasure (though even they talk in terms of one who does not care for bodily pleasures at A 6–7), but rather of whether one is *getting* a good share of bodily pleasures or not. Socrates had earlier emphasized (64 B 7–C 1) that the many tend to get the wrong end of the stick with regard to the philosopher's practice of death. So we should place no great weight on what Socrates presents as *their* formulation of the philosophical life.⁴

On the evaluative reading, then, Socrates' talk of keeping oneself away, or freeing oneself, from one's body would be interpreted as the injunction to place no value on the body and its works, without this entailing, as an embodied human, that one not take part in the usual range of human activities. A defender of the ascetic reading might object that, in his frequent talk of freeing the soul from the body, Socrates must be referring to something the philosopher *does* with regard to the body, or at least intentionally avoids doing. But one should not beg the question in advance. How to interpret this central idea is precisely the point at issue. It seems to me that, in principle, one's adoption of a scornful or belittling stance towards the body and its works—a 'Kiplingesque' attitude—might be a perfectly viable way of construing what it means for the soul to be free from the body. So I want now to make the case for the evaluative

⁴ The many also make the somewhat different point that a philosopher finds or takes no pleasure in these activities (*μηδὲν ἡδὺ τῶν τοιούτων*, 65 A 5). While doubtless true of such things as the wearing of fine clothes, this seems less plausible in the case of the 'biological' activities of eating, drinking, and sex. As I discuss further below, there is no reason to suppose that the philosopher is mysteriously immune to (say) the pain of hunger or the pleasure of eating. What distinguishes him is that he does not take these responses as a sign that the body has any great importance.

reading in a little more detail. I begin with a preliminary remark of a methodological nature, and then offer three points on which the evaluative reading seems to me to score well, and considerably better than the ascetic reading.

The preliminary remark is that we need to find a single interpretation of what it means to be free from the body that will fit what Socrates says both about pleasure and pain, and about perception. For he gives no indication that we are to take this to have one meaning in the case of the, as it were, 'affective' component and another in the case of the 'cognitive' component. The way he feels able, without strain, to bring them under a single head suggests rather the opposite. Thus at 65 c 5–9 he says that the philosopher reasons best 'when neither hearing nor sight nor pain nor pleasure gives the soul any grief, but the soul gets to be by itself as much as it can and leaves the body alone'. So too at 81 B 4–6 Socrates warns that association with the body leads one to believe that 'nothing else is true but the bodily—what one touches, sees, eats, drinks or uses for sex'. In the light of such formulations, and in the absence of explicit evidence to the contrary, we ought to seek a unitary interpretation of what it means for the philosopher to have separated himself from his body—and ultimately, therefore, what it means for him to be practising death.

This bears directly on the first of my substantive points against the ascetic reading. For it is very hard to apply the ascetic reading to Socrates' remarks on sense perception without a degree of absurdity. It is reasonable to conceive (whatever Socrates' own view may be) of a human being who indulges minimally in the pleasures that Socrates associates with the body. But what would it mean to indulge minimally in sense perception? Socrates is surely not suggesting that the philosopher walk around with his eyes shut and his ears plugged. Of course he specifically targets his remarks about the senses to their role in philosophical enquiry. But then to suggest that the philosopher sit in his study blindfold would be equally absurd. No, Socrates' point is that the senses are *unreliable*. They offer nothing 'accurate or clear' (65 B 5). We should not trust their evidence, which is full of deception, but rise above them (83 A). We as philosophers must (so to speak) see through the imposture of perception, its pretension to present reality, and hold it in the low regard it deserves.

The evaluative reading, then, fits what Socrates has to say about

perception much better than the ascetic reading does. The philosopher exercises his senses, but allots little or no philosophical utility to their reports. Perhaps, given that in the normal course of events one has functioning senses when embodied, they can provide a kind of stimulus to more abstract thought. According to the Recollection Argument, objects of perception put us in mind of Forms, which we must (therefore) have been originally acquainted with before birth. But the senses play no *essential* role in the acquisition (or reacquisition) of truth,⁵ which is an activity that reason performs best on its own.⁶ There is no reason to think that Socrates would regard anyone who lacked the use of his senses as hampered with regard to philosophical activity. They are, so to speak, the rotten core of embodiment, dangerous precisely because they encourage the false identification of reality with the sensible world, suggesting misleadingly that that is all there is.⁷

Philosophy's job, then, is to 'gently persuade' (83 A 2) the soul that the senses are deceptive, and not to be trusted.⁸ And of course to recognize a thing as deceptive is to neutralize (or take a large step towards neutralizing) its power to deceive *however much it presents itself*. Philosophy does not come along and, in some absurd or perhaps sinister fashion, *deprive* us of the evidence of our senses. What it does is reform our *attitude* towards that evidence. Under the unitary constraint, we should apply the same reading to bodily pleasures. As an embodied human one will take an embodied human's share of them. As a philosopher, one will realize that they are not just of little worth, but liable to give a highly distorted view of reality.

This is something that Socrates emphasizes with great vividness

⁵ At 75 A Socrates is already dealing with the case of our getting it in mind that the equal perceptibles fall short of equality when he says that we *could* not (A 6) get it in mind other than by perception: a trivial truth given that the comparison involves perceptibles. So at A 11–B 2 it is from the senses that it is necessary (δεῖ) to get in mind that their objects fall short of the Form. *How* we manage to get equality itself in mind by this route is what recollection then so neatly explains.

⁶ One might imagine that this is still to give the senses a utility that sits at odds with Socrates' earlier scathing comments about their accuracy. But even in the *Republic's* famous 'finger' passage (7, 523–4) the senses act as a stimulus only to the extent that reason recognizes that they offer a *confused* picture of reality, and so realizes it must rely on its own resources to derive the correct one.

⁷ Compare here the lovers of sights and sounds in *Republic* 5, whose cardinal error is to conflate beauty with the beautiful perceptibles (476 C–D).

⁸ This suggests in turn that stimulus by the senses is not sufficient to bring Forms to mind. The contribution of philosophical insight is required.

at 83 B–D. The main problem with intense bodily indulgence, he says, its 'greatest and deepest evil' (83 C 1–2), is not that it might make us sick or poor, but that it may cause us to identify the real with the perceptible or material (C 7–8, D 5–7). It is interesting that Socrates lays this problem specifically at the door of 'intense' (cf. *σφόδρα*, 83 B 8) feelings of pleasure, pain, or fear. There is no question, then, that the philosopher will avoid such intensity. One may speculate whether for Socrates (as, perhaps, for us) intensity of response is not just a begetter but a function of the evaluative stance one adopts towards the relevant sources: a kind of mutually reinforcing circle. But even if we take him, as seems plain, to be here warning us off bodily activities that produce such responses, this of course does not in itself turn the philosopher into an ascetic. With his mention of illness and poverty Socrates indicates that what he has in mind is a way of life whose condemnation would be quite consistent with, say, the recognition that moderate pleasures and pains are an acceptable part of an embodied existence.⁹

Thus Socrates makes it clear that the reason why intense indulgence is to be regarded as the 'imprisoning' (cf. *καταδεῖται*, 83 D 1) of the soul by the body is that it causes the soul to become bodily (*σωματοειδῆ*, D 6), where this in turn is explicated as the soul's judging that what is real is what the body says is real (83 D 6–7). As with sense perception, then, so too with pleasure and pain, what matters is the attitude one ends up taking towards the bodily realm. Release or freedom from the body will on this view be the adoption of the correct attitude towards it and its kin. The task of philosophy is to prevent us from being taken in by the body and to recognize the radically subordinate place of the bodily in the nature of things. The message of this section is not that there is no linkage at all between behaviour and attitude (Plato is too acute a psychologist to countenance that) but that for the philosopher it is the attitude that

⁹ So at 82 C the motive of the philosopher for not surrendering to bodily desires is contrasted with that of those who want to avoid material rack and ruin or a bad reputation, suggesting that the desires in question are of a fairly extreme sort (even though Socrates actually refers to *all* bodily desires at C 3–4). It is striking that Socrates here seems to countenance the possibility of the philosopher *having* such desires which he would then need to resist, despite this being bracketed with his declaration that the philosopher actually 'abstains' from them (cf. *ἀπέχουσαι*, C 3, 8; *ἀπέχεσθαι*, 83 B 6). Even the latter may simply mean (as 82 C 4–5 suggests) that the philosopher keeps them at arm's length by not giving in to them. If there is a whiff of asceticism about such language, it is a sign that an ascetic reading is not to be ruled out of court, as I argue more fully in sect. 11 below.

is important, not the behaviour. If one somehow never indulged in bodily pleasures but still thought that the material world was reality, one would score no points as a philosopher.

The second strike against the ascetic reading is that it signally fails to resonate with the life of Socrates. Why is this important? Socrates' overall purpose in the *Phaedo* is to explain to his companions why a philosopher should look forward to death, and in particular why *he*, as a philosopher, should be looking forward to death (61 C, 63 B–C, 63 E–64 A). The philosopher looks forward to death because he practises death even in life. He does so by keeping his soul, so far as is possible, separate from his body. Our task is to understand what this means. If it means being an ascetic, then Socrates himself (being no ascetic) has not been practising death. He has not, therefore, been a true philosopher. The ascetic reading thus commits us to the uncomfortable hypothesis of a Socrates who (unwittingly) demonstrates that he has not led a philosophical life. Moreover, Socrates repeatedly presents the practice of death as a necessary 'purification' for that communion with true being that is to come. On the ascetic reading he will have failed to purify himself in life, and so will have excluded himself from what he tells us he anticipates with great confidence.

These unhappy consequences of the ascetic reading rest on the thesis that Socrates (as depicted by Plato) was no ascetic, but the thesis seems undeniable. He married, he had children.¹⁰ He went to symposia; he went to war. In short, he played a full part in the social and cultural (if not political) life of his city. It is not just that Socrates is not portrayed as an ascetic. There is, I think, something about asceticism that is contrary to the spirit of Plato's Socrates. He has more important things to do than make an idol or fetish out of withdrawal from bodily activity. At one of the tensest moments in the *Phaedo*, Socrates is to be found stroking Phaedo's hair (89 B 2–4)—a habit of his, we are told, and an unmistakably sensual one, though used here as an artful preface to the rallying of his companions. On the broader scale, he is indeed Kiplingesque, not going out

¹⁰ As Kenneth Dorter points out (*Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto, 1982), 27), Socrates has an infant (60 A 2–3), so he has not forsworn sexual relations well into his seventh decade. In fact two of his three sons are described as 'small' (116 B 1; cf. *Ap.* 34 D 7–8). Dorter identifies Socrates' stance as indifference to (rather than avoidance of) bodily pleasure and pain but characterizes this, in an unfortunate phrase, as 'moderate asceticism' (29), which has no more conceptual content than (say) moderate alcoholism. The dialogue's ascetic elements need a different account.

of his way to avoid the bodily, even if he could, precisely because he recognizes that its claims are no more than imposture. Returning from fierce battle in Potidaea at the start of the *Charmides*, he is calmness personified (153 B). Alone with the handsome Alcibiades, he remains chaste the night through (*Sym.* 219 C–D). But it is hard to describe this exactly as a case of asceticism. It would, at least, be an unusual ascetic who put himself so blatantly in harm's way. Alcibiades sees Socrates' behaviour as an act of hubris, a kind of scorning and mocking of the former's charms (C 4–5). So what galls Alcibiades is that Socrates does not care—and it is not, as one might say of an ascetic, that he does not care *for* sex, forswearing indulgence on principle. Such an attitude might, for Alcibiades, be baffling, but ought not to occasion the sense that he is being personally mocked. What more plausibly explains Alcibiades' frustration (and his language) is that Socrates does not care *about* sex. Whether he desires Alcibiades or not, Socrates communicates loud and clear that a physical relationship with the Adonis of his age would be a matter of supreme indifference to him.¹¹

What is striking about Socrates is not that he never indulged, or (contrarily) was never exposed to material hardship, but that it seemed to have so little effect on him. In the *Symposium* (220 A–B), Alcibiades goes on to report Socrates' capacity to outdrink anyone without getting drunk, as well as his great endurance of cold weather on campaign. He enjoys (*ἀπολαύειν*, 220 A 2) a feast, but can endure food shortages better than anyone. It is not, as these last examples indicate, a question of Socrates being mysteriously *immune* to pleasure and pain. In the *Phaedo* (60 B–C) he himself remarks on the pain of being shackled and the consequent pleasure of release. But even here the observation is merely a cue for some philosophical remarks on the relation between the two. Rather than being immune or even especially abstemious, it seems best to read Socrates as fundamentally indifferent to his bodily pleasures and pains, in the sense of regarding neither as of great significance in his life. What matters is the quest for wisdom. It is in this sense that

¹¹ Richard Bluck has suggested that the *Phaedo* itself advocates 'not strictly speaking asceticism, but a sublimation of desire' (*Plato's Phaedo* (London, 1955), 5). This reading brings the *Phaedo* into line with what both the *Symposium* and *Republic* present as the philosopher directing his passion away from the body to higher things. To say that the *Phaedo* offers an account of 'sublimation', though, still leaves us needing to get clear about the respective roles of attitude and behaviour within that account.

he is detached from his body, purified and more ready than anyone for the reward that awaits the philosopher on death.¹² The evaluative reading succeeds, as the ascetic reading does not, in capturing Socrates as a model philosopher.

The third point that tells against the ascetic reading is in a way the most basic: it actually fails to make sense of the idea that the philosopher strives to separate himself from his body. What the ascetic does is essentially shut down his body as much as he can. This is, if anything, a separation of one's body, and then (at one remove) oneself, from the material world, not a separation of oneself from one's body. The ascetic reduces his bodily urgings, or at least their gratification, to an absolute minimum.¹³ One might certainly represent this as a release from the *demands* of the body. Indeed what the idea of release suggests is precisely that one is trying to get away from something that is perceived as *harmful* to oneself, or one's true interests.¹⁴ If so, then what the ascetic is really doing is pre-empting rather than effecting separation. For there is no

¹² Pakaluk claims that with a merely metaphorical detachment from the body 'a philosopher would not be one jot closer to the condition of being dead than anyone else' ('Degrees of Separation in the *Phaedo*', 100). But the text of the *Phaedo* begs to differ, for at 65 A 6–7 one who cares nothing for bodily pleasure is said to be getting close (*ἐγγύς*) to having died. That this is part of Socrates' description of the *many's* view (though not, I think, a point on which he takes issue with them) at least indicates that the understanding of a certain evaluative attitude to the body as a kind of closeness to death is ordinary enough. Pakaluk's appeal to Socrates' use of 'phrases that are typical for expressing a difference in degree among things similar in kind' (101) does not help. It is true that Socrates often speaks of the philosopher separating himself 'as much as possible' from his body, and so on. But that leaves open the question of what Socrates conceives the possibilities to be, and (therefore) of what their maximization would consist in. That Cebes goes on to question, at 69 c, not the separability but the survival of the soul on death is no objection to a non-literal reading, as Pakaluk holds (101). Death is accepted as the separation of soul from body at 64 c, so no expectation is raised that Socrates will need to defend separability further, by showing, for example, that the embodied philosopher can already achieve a degree of literal separation.

¹³ I assume that the successful ascetic is one whose abstention suitably regulates his bodily desires, at least to the extent that resistance of them gives extra space in his life for other things. Arguably one who continued to be preoccupied with the body's unsatisfied demands would be less free of the body than one who simply gave in to them. But the former could not be described as an ascetic, and would be prone, in the long run, to indulge the body's demands more intensely than would otherwise have been the case.

¹⁴ Socrates sometimes uses a neutral word such as 'separation' (*χωρισμός*) and its cognates to describe the nature of death and the philosopher's aim, but still in conjunction with the more loaded 'release' (*λύσις*) at 67 D 4–5, D 9. His most frequent usage is the similarly loaded *ἀπαλλαγή* and its cognates.

need to separate oneself from a body whose threat has already been neutralized by being made subject to the rigours of asceticism. The true ascetic, one feels, would be the only person who could (if such a thing were possible) keep his body after death and still be in a position to contemplate real being fully and uninterruptedly.

By contrast, only someone who takes part in the full range of human activities—such as Socrates, for example—will need, one way or another, to separate himself from his body. The body of such a person *is* a threat to philosophical activity simply by being a body through which one maintains and indulges a normal range of appetites. Its demands distract, and what one experiences through the body may make one prone to the philosopher's curse, a distorted view of reality. How, then, is one supposed to achieve the necessary detachment? There is certainly no suggestion in the *Phaedo* that the body can function as an autonomous subject of experience. It is the soul that perceives, and experiences pleasure and pain, not the body.¹⁵

Hence separation cannot be interpreted as, so to speak, the soul delegating these experiences to the body, such that the body can get on with them while the soul does philosophy. The leading contrast is between what the soul does by itself (*αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν*, e.g. 65 C 7, 79 D 1) and what it does with (*μετά*, e.g. 65 B 10) or through (*διὰ* + genitive, e.g. 79 C 5) the body. This language suggests not that the soul is the proper subject of some activities (namely those involving the exercise of pure intellect), and the body of others (perceiving and experiencing certain kinds of pleasure and pain). Framed in these terms, the contrast makes no sense unless the soul is the subject of both, but needs a body for the latter and not (according to Socrates) for the former.

Thus at 65 D 11, for example, Socrates refers to the senses themselves as operating *through* the body, which suggests that they are not literally faculties *of* the body. In fact the official antecedent of 'sense' (*αἰσθήσει*) at D 11 is 'eyes' (*ὀφθαλμοῖς*) at D 9. But we should not press Socrates' terminology too hard here. Clearly the physical organs are parts of the body, not things which operate through the body. So *αἰσθήσει* probably means something like 'sense faculty', with Socrates (in lieu of a sharp technical vocabulary) sliding rather loosely from organ to faculty, or perhaps using 'eyes' to

¹⁵ So David Bostock (*Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1986), 26–7) and David Gallop (*Plato: Phaedo*, 89).

stand as much for faculty as for bodily organ. The main point is clear and reasonable: the soul is the proper subject of sense perception, its sense faculties operating through certain bodily organs. At 79 c 3, with similar indifference to a distinction between organ and faculty, Socrates speaks of the soul using the body to examine something and immediately explicates this (c 3-4) in terms of the soul conducting its examination through seeing, hearing, or some other sense—that is to say (he adds) through the body (c 4-5). He goes on, again, to contrast this with soul investigating by itself (79 d 1). For this to be a genuine contrast, it must once more be soul that in the former instance too is doing the investigation, except not by itself. Thus in either case the soul is the proper subject of whatever cognitive activity is taking place.

What is notable, though, is that Socrates does seem willing, despite this, to treat the body as the agent of the confusion and falsehood that arises from investigations through the senses. In trying to conduct an investigation in consort with the body, the soul is said to be deceived by it at 65 b 9-11. And at 79 c 6 the soul is similarly said to get 'dragged by the body' into the confusing realm of instability. It is as if the body represents a genuine cognitive danger, even though the actual cognition is done by the soul albeit with the body's necessary assistance. So I think we have to see this in terms of the autonomy not of the body as subject of experience but of sense perception as the deliverer of a misguided picture of reality. Since sense perception needs the body to do its work, it is quite natural for Socrates to treat the body as the agent of the erroneous reports that, strictly speaking, the faculty of sense perception delivers through the bodily organs. It presumably strikes Socrates that, since without bodily organs the faculty of sense perception is useless, this faculty cannot be an essential part of the soul, but rather something that perhaps only arises at all in so far as we are embodied. He holds that abstract thought can proceed perfectly well without use of the senses, and hence without use of the body. From all this it is plausible to infer that souls are not essentially percipient, and therefore to 'blame' the senses on the body, even while maintaining (as I have argued he does) that souls are the proper subjects of perception.

There is no question, then, of the philosopher leaving the body to carry on with sense perception independently. That is not the way to understand what separation means. By contrast with his

exhortations to let our soul, or rational thought, investigate all by itself, Socrates never speaks of the body acting by *itself*.¹⁶ Nor, I have argued, can we construe the philosopher's striving for release from the body in terms of ascetic avoidance. In the case of perception, this is intrinsically absurd. In the case of pleasure and pain, we seem to have redescribed the situation as one in which separation is pre-empted, the body being made safe enough to obviate the need for its detachment from the soul.

We return, then, to the idea of release from the body in life as a disdain for the experiences that arise through it. In keeping the body sufficiently threatening to motivate detachment, a further advantage of this reading presents itself. It offers a more satisfying explanation of Socrates' apparent pessimism over the prospects for doing philosophy while embodied. This pessimism is especially prominent at 66 b-e, where Socrates represents the attainment of wisdom as virtually impossible for the living, given that one is either fighting wars (explained in turn as a means of acquiring material goods) or being disturbed by the body even when at peace. For the ascetic reading this passage will represent a somewhat gratuitous denial that one can ever become an ascetic. At any rate, someone who reduced his material needs to an absolute minimum would have little cause to go to war on Socrates' grounds, and be little disturbed when at peace.

On the evaluative reading, by contrast, the philosopher, while regretting that he is not disembodied, does not strive to wish his embodiment away in the literal-minded fashion of an ascetic. He recognizes that he is compelled to satisfy a certain range of material needs. His attitude to this process is one, as we would put it, of maximal *psychological* detachment. This notion, mundane enough for us, is one that Socrates is trying to formulate in the *Phaedo* for perhaps the first time. The best way to reconcile Socrates' advocacy of separation as the mark of the philosophical life with his apparent despair at its possibility is to interpret his conception of separation in life as implying a categorical contrast with the literal separation of soul from body that he takes to constitute actual death. He does not, as an ascetic reading might suggest, intend that we aim in life for an approximation to the actual condition of death as devoid of bodily experiences. Instead of initially promulgating separation as

¹⁶ The body only comes to be by itself—that is, becomes an inanimate corpse—on death (64 c 6).

an ideal of life only to decide within a few pages that it is not really (even approximately) attainable, Socrates can now be read, in a less mercurial fashion, as proceeding to draw out some corollaries of the original vision. The philosopher all along has a range of needs that require satisfaction. And certainly one may be compelled to do (cf. ἀναγκαζόμεθα, 66 c 9) what one would not, in an ideal world, choose to do. In this way one can explain why the release of death really is something that the philosopher would look forward to, as it clearly is for Socrates. This, he wants to maintain, is true *for the person living a philosophical life*, not just (and really not even) for someone who has failed to live it, if only by failing to live up to it. But then the (embodied) philosophical life needs to have some significant built-in limitations. The evaluative reading encourages this view, as the ascetic reading does not. Indeed the former is predicated on the existence of such limitations, to which one can then at best adopt an appropriately Kiplingesque attitude. In removing these limitations, literal release from the body will, just as Socrates portrays it, represent a big step forward for the philosopher.

II

I hope thus far to have provided some good reasons for preferring the evaluative reading over its ascetic rival. But now I want to offer some counter-argument. First, let me reiterate that as an interpretation of what the text has to say about the philosophical *life*, the evaluative reading is in my view much the more satisfactory option. Where it scores less well is in accounting for what Socrates has to say about (actual) death. My main discussion here will focus on the Affinity Argument. But let me begin, by way of preliminary justification for this focus, with some scene-setting.

The arguments for immortality come in response to Cebes' worry that the soul may be 'scattered to the winds' on death and not be anything anywhere (70 A 3–7). There is a need (he says) for confidence and reassurance that the soul be shown *both* to exist when one is dead *and* to possess some power and intelligence (B 2–4). But the first argument, the Cyclical Argument, concludes merely that 'our souls exist in Hades' (71 E 2), or that 'the souls of the dead exist' (72 D 9–10). Only the first part of Cebes' request has

been addressed. Next comes the Recollection Argument, which concludes that 'our souls existed before they were in human form and had intelligence' (76 C 11–12). This is more promising, but as the interlocutors are quick to object (77 B–C), does not show that our souls will exist once we are dead. Socrates' brief suggestion at 77 C–D that this will be shown if we combine the Recollection Argument with the Cyclical Argument fails to assuage the interlocutors' fears.¹⁷ The spotlight thus falls on what follows the Recollection Argument in sequence, namely the so-called Affinity Argument (78 B ff.).¹⁸

This argument in turn is somewhat reserved in its claims about immortality. Indeed one thread of my interpretation will be that the argument may not even necessarily guarantee that every soul *has* immortality, in the basic sense of everlasting survival of death. This thread would need a larger defence than I can mount here, and my remarks will at most be suggestive.¹⁹ More definitively, though, the

¹⁷ As well it might. For it is unclear that simply combining the Recollection Argument with an argument that the living come to be from the dead (so that the soul must survive even when nominally 'dead') suffices to show that the soul's rational powers are carried forward as well. To do this one would need to show that the retention of those powers is essential to the soul's survival. Otherwise rationality simply has the status of an 'add-on', which might be picked up and dropped as the soul passes through its cycle of life to death and back. But even the Final Argument of the *Phaedo*, though attempting to show that the soul is essentially alive, does not claim that it is essentially rational. As Gallop notes (*Plato: Phaedo*, 136), neither the interlocutors' objection nor Socrates' response actually mentions the issue of the survival of the rational powers. But *contra* Gallop (who is forced to say that Socrates has erred in appealing to the Recollection Argument here), I take the silence to indicate not that this is not the issue but that it is so obviously the issue that there is no need to spell it out once more. Socrates' appeal to combination suggests an acceptance that neither argument thus far is adequate on its own. Yet no one had doubted that, as far as it went, the Cyclical Argument showed the souls of the dead to exist. Equally, it was silent on another central component of Cebes' original worry.

¹⁸ That the Affinity Argument is introduced in response to Cebes' plea that the interlocutors' 'child within' be soothed (77 E 6–8) should not incline us to suppose that what is to come is not intended as serious argument. Cebes still wants the inner child *persuaded* (cf. *μεταπειθεῖν*, E 7) out of its fear of death; and Socrates himself takes the persistence of the childish belief that the soul may be 'scattered to the winds' to be a sign that the interlocutors wish further time devoted to the *argument* (*λόγον*, D 7). Socrates is to 'charm' the child (*ἐπαθεῖν*, E 9); but he of course is the charmer by argument *par excellence* (cf. *Chrm.* 175 E–176 B), the verb's usage at 114 D 7 notwithstanding (cf. n. 49 below).

¹⁹ To forestall one methodological objection, though: I do not think that a failure by the Affinity Argument to guarantee every soul's survival would entail a troubling clash with either the Cyclical or Final Arguments, both of which purport to show that whatever is a soul will survive. Such variation on Plato's part may simply encourage readers to enter the dialogue by comparing and contrasting the

argument claims that souls which fail to live the right kind of life take on a bodily condition which prevents them enjoying the rich immortality of everlasting communion with the Forms. Whether basic immortality is at issue or not, I shall argue that it is the ascetic reading which makes better sense of what the Affinity Argument has to say about the cause and prevention of this undesirable bodily condition.

One of Socrates' main assertions in the argument is that the soul is *like* (or 'more like' or 'most like') the immortal (e.g. 80 B, 81 A). And the task that he sets himself at its outset is to show simply that it is not *fitting* (προσῆκει) for the soul to be scattered (78 B 4–9); in similar terms he says at 80 B 10–11 that it is fitting for the soul to be indissoluble.²⁰ Now clearly 'it is fitting for *x* to be *F*' does not entail '*x* is *F*'; nor does Socrates draw that inference. What he commits himself to thus far is the thesis that the *proper* condition of the soul is immortality.²¹ At 80 C–D he points out that, suitably treated (as for example by the Egyptians), bodies can endure intact for an incalculable time, and that some parts of the body (like the bones) are in any case pretty much immortal.²² Here, then, Socrates resists the move from 'it is fitting for *x* to be *F*' to '*x* is *F*'. For he is happy to claim both that it is fitting for the body to be dissolved (80 C 4) and that sometimes it will be virtually indissoluble.

Socrates' remarks on almost immortal bodies lead one to expect, when one starts to read his next statement beginning 'The soul, then . . .' at 80 D 5, that he will say something like 'The soul, then, even more so is immortal'. But this is not quite what he does say. Instead he actually implies that the soul's immortality is *conditional* on the kind of relationship it has had with the body. It is the soul, as

arguments and forming their own judgements about the import of their respective conclusions. What I do suggest (see further sect. 111 below) is that the conclusions of the Cyclical and Final Arguments offer too thin a conception of survival (or, if you will, immortality) to provide the kind of reassurance that the interlocutors seek.

²⁰ Even here there is some qualification. Socrates says that the soul is fit to be altogether indissoluble 'or something near to this' (ἢ ἕγγυς τι τούτου, B 11).

²¹ This relatively weak thesis explains, for example, the caution with which Socrates declares the soul to be 'more like' the unseen than is the body (79 B 16–17), in virtue of its not being visible (as well, perhaps, as Cebes' reluctance to concede straightforwardly that the soul is invisible, B 7–15). As we shall see, a soul corrupted by the body may actually become visible.

²² As the 'pretty much' (ὥς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, 80 D 2–3) qualification may indicate, a slightly odd usage, since the body parts are no longer animate; but given the forthcoming comparison with the soul, a rhetorically intelligible one.

that invisible entity which goes on death to the realm of the noble, pure, and invisible (D 5–8) and is like that itself by nature (οὕτω πεφυκυῖα, D 9), that will be far from subject to immediate destruction (D 10–E 1). This seems clear-cut. But as a generic statement, it is of limited value in telling the fate of individual souls. Compare a statement such as 'The cheetah, which is swift and agile by nature and outruns any other animal, is far from subject to destruction by the buffalo.' Evidently a cheetah that was (say) laid low by disease might lack its natural qualities and be easy prey. In the *Phaedo*, a thing's being naturally *F* does not mean that, necessarily, it is *F*. Thus the soul is naturally ordained to rule the body and the body to be its slave (79 E 9–80 A 5), yet often the soul is the slave of the body (e.g. 66 D 1). What, then, of such impure souls?

Socrates proceeds to assert at 80 E 2–3 that *if* (ἐὰν μὲν) the soul escapes pure, dragging none of the body with it, then . . . 'There is no apodosis. Instead the remainder of the sentence elaborates on the condition for achieving such purity, and equates it with philosophizing and the practice of death (E 3–81 A 2).²³ We reach a quasi-apodosis in Socrates' next speech at 81 A 4–10: in this state (οὕτω . . . ἔχουσα, A 4)—i.e. having lived a philosophical life—the soul will reach the immortal realm and dwell with the gods for the rest of time. Here the soul finds happiness (A 5–6), having presumably fulfilled its nature. Given the link already forged between the journey to the divine realm and the avoidance of dispersal on death, a suspicion is raised that the soul that has failed to live up to its nature has no similar assurance of an immortal existence. One might indeed affirm straight away that immortality has not been achieved by the impure soul, just because of its failure to reach the immortal realm; and this is perhaps part of Socrates' point. Immortality has (for him as for us) ethical overtones that go beyond 'mere' everlasting life. But at this point even the latter seems in the balance.

Suspicion is maintained when Socrates elaborates the gloomy alternative at 81 B 1 ff. *But if* (ἐὰν δέ), he continues, the soul does not escape pure from the body, thanks to its constant association with it (B 2) . . . Again, there is no proper apodosis, but soon enough we discover (81 C 8–D 4) that through possession of the bodily (τὸ

²³ The insertion of these references to the practice of death evidently shows that we are supposed to take the Affinity Argument and the material on practising death as connected. I shall explore the connection further as we proceed.

σωματοειδές), which is heavy (*βαρύ*), earthy, and visible (C 9), such a soul will itself be weighed down (*βαρύνεται*, C 10), seen (D 4), and will presumably (by parity of reasoning) also be earthy. It will in fact shun the invisible realm and remain on earth (C 9–11), a long way therefore from the destination with which immortal life had been associated at 80 D. Far from dwelling with the Forms forever, it is unclear whether a soul in this state should be considered immortal at all. Socrates should not at any rate deny that what has weight and visibility is capable of being destroyed. For this would vitiate the major contrast on which (on any reading) the Affinity Argument rests, that between what is visible and destructible (on the one hand) and what is invisible and indestructible (on the other).²⁴ He might, in all consistency, maintain both that bodily souls remain on earth after death (in one guise or another) and that, in such a condition, they are in principle destructible even if not prone to the immediate dispersal from which, generically, the soul is exempt. His emphasis, though, falls on animal reincarnation, not destruction, as the fate of the impure soul (81 D–82 B), and this serves an edifying protreptic function.²⁵ It is the wretchedness of such a soul's post mortem existence that leaves the main impression.²⁶ As Socrates puts it later, in the wake of the Final Argument, it would be a 'stroke of luck' (*ἔρμαιον*, 107 C 6) for the wicked if death marked the end of everything, since it would free them from their wickedness. But

²⁴ Thus visibility is connected with instability at 79 A 9–10, which in turn features in a line-up that includes dissolubility and mortality at 80 B 3–5. Invisibility is related in corresponding fashion to its complements at 79 A 9 and 80 B 1–3 respectively.

²⁵ I see, however, little justification for Christopher Rowe's view that reincarnation is itself a denial of immortality on the grounds that 'Socrates does not propose any continuity of consciousness between one period of incarnation and another' (*Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1993), 9). Even if one accepts that continuity of consciousness is necessary for immortality, this is at best an argument from silence. Continuity of *character*, at least, is a basic feature of the reincarnation story (81 E 2–4). And it is risky to suggest that a dialogue which bases one of its major arguments for immortality on a doctrine of Recollection might (to adapt Rowe's own example) not have room for the donkey into which Sardanapallus' soul has entered to remember having been Sardanapallus. The myth (114 A–B) has certain departed souls hoping for refuge at the Acherusian lake (the place of transit for reincarnation) beg their victims' forgiveness for their earthly crimes, which, as Gallop points out, 'they must, presumably, remember having committed' (*Plato: Phaedo*, 223).

²⁶ At least in the case of those reincarnated as beasts. Those who become social insects are somewhat anomalous (cf. n. 42 below), and said to be 'happiest' of those who undergo reincarnation (82 B 11), though evidently the prospect of being an ant or wasp in a future life is not particularly appealing.

since, he says, the soul has proven immortal, its only salvation is to become as good and wise as possible (107 C 8–D 2).

Yet if the Affinity Argument itself should offer no guarantee of immunity from destruction for impure souls, this would have a protreptic force of its own for all but the incurably bad, since it means that the opportunity for redemption and the chance to dwell with the gods is not limitless. Failure to guarantee a soul's everlasting survival would in fact be quite consistent with the promise that death is no instant 'release from everything' for the wicked (107 C 5–8), which is the main thrust of the later protreptic. What does the real motivational work here is the prospect of posthumous suffering (108 B–C, cf. 114 B); and immortality is neither necessary nor sufficient for that.²⁷ Socrates indeed is somewhat extravagant in making his point rest formally on the soul's immortality, and one suspects that Plato is aware of this. As Cebes' weaver analogy, for example, has taught us (87 D–88 B), there is logical space for the soul's long-term survival of bodily death (with plenty of room for suffering) even without immortality.

Socrates at any rate upholds a certain exclusivity about immortality right to the end of the Affinity Argument. He is clear that only by having practised a philosophical life (cf. *ἐκ τῆς τοιαύτης τροφῆς*, 84 B 3–4; *ταῦτα δ' ἐπιτηδεύσασα*, B 4–5) will the soul not fear dispersal on death.²⁸ This seems not to mean that the philosophical soul will realize by its practice of philosophy that *all* souls are immortal in virtue of their affinity with the Forms. For the subject of the whole paragraph 84 A 2–B 7 is 'the soul of the philosopher' (*ψυχὴ ἀνδρὸς φιλοσόφου*, A 2–3). Thus at B 1–3, for example, it is the philosopher's

²⁷ Even the incurables, flung into Tartarus 'never to emerge' (113 E 6), seem by this language unenviable less for an eternity of suffering than for the loss of opportunity to reach a better state. The latter point is indifferent to whether eternal survival goes along with their eternal banishment.

²⁸ Some editors excise (or amend) the manuscripts' *ταῦτα δ' ἐπιτηδεύσασα*. This decision does not affect my main point, and the reading makes for an awkward sentence, with virtual repetition and clumsy syntax. But I am inclined (with Duke *et al.*'s OCT) to keep the phrase, and treat it as a case (no: uncharacteristic of the *Phaedo*) of emphasis triumphing over smoothness. Translate e.g. 'As a result of this nurture, there is no danger of it [sc. the soul of the philosopher] being afraid [οὐδὲν δεινὸν μὴ φοβηθῇ], but having practised these things, Simmias and Cebes, [it will not be afraid] that [ὅπως μὴ] it will be dispersed etc. Or one might take *ὅπως μὴ* as governed directly by οὐδὲν δεινόν, giving the stronger 'there is no danger that' it will be dispersed etc. For a substantive in the appropriate position, albeit with the sense of 'fear', cf. 77 B 4 (τὸ τῶν πολλῶν, ὅπως μὴ . . .); also *Sym.* 193 A 3–4 (φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν . . . ὅπως μὴ . . .).

soul that thinks it should live in the right way and that when it dies *it* should be free of human evils.²⁹ Since there is no indication of a change, we must take it that the philosopher's soul remains the subject down to the final statement at B 5–7: it has no fear that *it* will be dispersed on death and not exist anywhere. Reassurance on behalf of other souls is no more forthcoming here than it was earlier. To read it in (such that the fears of even the non-philosophical about destruction turn out to be groundless) would be to impute a liberality to Socrates that he shows no sign of possessing elsewhere in the argument.³⁰

How, then, should the Affinity Argument be understood?³¹ We can see that two connected principles underlie it. First, the soul is not guaranteed immortality, at least of the rich sort that involves communion with the divine (and possibly not any sort). Though it is the soul's natural and proper condition, such immortality is not, so to speak, automatic. Second, the soul takes on the character of that which acts upon it. In particular, that which is bodily causes the soul to become bodily. This in turn should remind us of a principle which we know independently, from its prominence later in the *Phaedo*, that Socrates takes very seriously: only that which has a certain quality can cause something else to take on that quality. Or, like causes like. This principle, together with its complement that opposites cannot cause opposites, underlies Socrates' whole discussion of cause (*αἰτία*) later in the dialogue (96A–102A).³² Even though

²⁹ Compare the similar point, also restricted to the philosopher's soul, at 81A 7–8.

³⁰ Without it, indeed, Socrates' own emphasis on the soul not being scattered to the winds (84B 6–7, cf. 77D 8–E 1) when it departs the body is given a nice extra twist. Far from the soul's ethereal quality being the danger, the only souls at risk of destruction are those that take on the condition of bodies.

³¹ For a different attempt at understanding, relying on a rather more elaborate apparatus than mine, see D. Apolloni, 'Plato's Affinity Argument for the Immortality of the Soul', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34 (1996), 5–32. Apolloni is somewhat over-elaborate in taking it (14–15) that only a distinct, 'physical' part of the soul can be infected by the body, its intellectual part remaining uninfected; purification involves the separation of the latter part from the former. Lack of textual support aside, this reading makes it puzzling why infection by the body should be of concern for Socrates, given that the only part of the soul even in the running for immortality apparently remains unaffected throughout. Apolloni claims that if the intellect were capable of being infected, it 'could be destructible . . . render[ing] unsound all proofs for the immortality of the soul' (14). But this rather begs the question of what exactly the Affinity Argument is trying to prove, and its relation to the other arguments.

³² More strictly, only that which has the property essentially can apparently function as a cause. This seems to be the case both with the 'safe' and 'subtle' causes

Socrates does not use the term *αἰτία* in the Affinity Argument, the argument is none the less suffused with language suggestive of causation of this kind. Thus the soul becomes unstable/stable *inasmuch as* (*ἄτε* at 79C 8, D 6) it is in contact with what is unstable/stable respectively (compare the similar co-ordinate usage of *ἄτε* at 80E 3, 81B 2). This surely means, or at least implies, *because* it is in contact with such things. It is by being the kinds of things they are (*τοιούτων*) that bodies and Forms respectively give to the soul, through contact, the character that it thereby acquires.³³

Similarly, at 83D 10–E 1, the soul's being full of the body *results in* (*ὥστε*, D 10) its falling back into another body.³⁴ The body's association with the soul *made* (*ἐνεποίησε*, 81C 6) the bodily ingrained in the soul *because of* (*διά* + accusative, C 5) the soul's always being with the body. Each (bodily) pleasure and pain *makes* (*ποιεῖ*) the soul bodily at 83D 4–6.³⁵ Perhaps most strikingly (given the terminology), souls not purified of the body 'participate' (*μετέχουσιν*) in the visible, *whence* (*διό*) they are seen (81D 4).³⁶ Later in the dialogue it is of course participation in the beautiful that makes things

of the later discussion; and with the relevant properties of bodies and Forms in the Affinity Argument.

³³ The means of contact is in turn given as, respectively, sense perception (79C 3–5) and pure thought (the soul examining 'itself by itself', D 1).

³⁴ Given that its 'fullness' results in the soul *falling* (*πίπτειν*), one should take 'full of the body' literally here. The soul becomes heavy when saturated with the body, as (for example) a sponge will when saturated with water. But is the soul's weight its own? Perhaps it remains weightless itself and, more generally, immaterial. The body remains essentially foreign matter even when absorbed (as is perhaps true of the water in the sponge). One can, though, be weighed down by one's own bulk, even if the latter is ultimately derived from external sources. In calling the bodily 'ingrained' in the soul (*σύνφυτον*, 81C 6) as a result of its association with the body, Socrates suggests that this is the right model. Telling, perhaps, is *Rep.* 609A 9–10, which argues that only an evil that is *σύνφυτον* in a thing can destroy that thing; there the term is clearly equated with 'one's own' (cf. *οἰκείας κακίας*, 609D 1). This is part of a proof that the soul is *not* destructible (since the soul's own evil, vice, does not actually destroy it). By allowing, as the *Republic* does not, the bodily to be *σύνφυτον* in a soul, the *Phaedo* stands at some distance from that proof.

³⁵ It is possible to read *σώματοειδές* as 'body-like' rather than 'bodily', but this does not affect my interpretation. The soul becomes like the body in taking on the appropriate properties: weight, visibility, etc.

³⁶ Given this, it is a mistake to suppose, with Rowe, that 'what we see . . . is not souls themselves but their "bodily accretions"' (*Plato: Phaedo*, 194). Rowe is referring to Socrates' talk of 'apparitions' (*φαντάσματα*, 81D 2) of souls being seen and 'images' (*εἰδωλα*, D 3) that such souls provide. But Socrates does not speak here of an invisible soul producing (mysteriously enough) a visible image. It is *souls* that are seen, and they provide these images just in virtue of their having taken on a visible condition.

beautiful, and so on. In context, 'the visible' here presumably refers to visible material absorbed by the soul rather than any Form of the Visible; but the linguistic resonance is suggestive none the less.³⁷

If this is right, then we have good reason to take the language of the Affinity Argument as an exemplification of the principle that like causes like. The soul's actual condition is given by the nature of what acts upon it, whether this be visible object or Form.³⁸ As several of the expressions indicate, the principle kicks in (on the corporeal side) when the body is the *active* power in the relationship; when, however unenthusiastically, the soul goes along with or gives in to the body's tendencies.³⁹ It is, to this extent, the *fact* of its being acted upon by the body and not merely its *attitude* towards the body that counts.⁴⁰

³⁷ Thus in the later discussion of causation a thing is beautiful 'because it participates' (*διότι μετέχει*, 100 c 5) in the beautiful. The discussion, as we can see, does not only utilize *aíria* language to capture the causation relation. Cf. e.g. *ποιεῖ* (100 d 5, 99 n 7); *διὰ* + accusative (esp. 101 A–B).

³⁸ Once we acknowledge the operation of this underlying principle, it should be accepted that the Affinity Argument is meant seriously. It is, after all, the only one of the arguments for immortality in the *Phaedo* aimed at showing how the soul may commune with Forms after death. One should therefore think twice before adopting the view of Christopher Rowe that it is written as a deliberate failure, with the dramatic function of allowing Simmias and Cebes to raise objections, thus forwarding the debate and illustrating the value of genuine dialectic ('Philosophy and Literature: The Arguments of Plato's *Phaedo*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 7 (1991), 159–81). (Compare, from a different perspective, M. Elton, 'The Role of the Affinity Argument in the *Phaedo*', *Phronesis*, 42 (1997), 313–16, who claims that it is written to illustrate a bad form of argument.) It would be the mark of a poor (or perverse) dramatist to write a passage as intricate and suggestive as the Affinity Argument as a kind of Aunt Sally, put up in order to be knocked down (or 'well and truly buried' as Rowe himself puts it, 178). To be sure, both interlocutors prove to be dissatisfied with the argument. Their objections lead to counter-objections (in the case of the harmony theory) and new theorizing from Socrates. But why regard this as a zero-sum game from the perspective of the author? Dramatic power is gained rather than lost in taking the later material not to supersede or 'refute' the Affinity Argument, but to encourage a closer reading.

³⁹ Socrates has no need to commit himself to the soul's corruption in those exemplary cases of interaction where the soul rules the body. Here the soul is an active power, opposing the body's tendencies (*ἐναντιούμενην*, 94 b 8, c 1), 'resisting and not giving in' (82 c 4). The relationship is fundamentally asymmetrical, however. The body can be resisted and ruled by, but not assimilated to, the soul.

⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that the soul is also pictured as passive when it comes to intellectual operations (at least in the initial phase). Philosophy is said to take hold of the soul imprisoned by the body and try to free it from its bonds by persuading it to rise above the senses (82 E–83 A). The portrayal of philosophy as virtually an independent force liberating a soul powerless, at first, to help itself reflects, I think, a genuine epistemological concern, which one might label the 'bootstrap' problem. How can a soul which (thanks to its embodiment) encounters only the corporeal

On the principle that like causes like, a soul that indulges the body's appetites is infected by the qualities of what acts upon it however much it might disdain those qualities. And this is where the evaluative reading runs into difficulty. Central to this reading was the idea that, even if the philosopher did not in any event indulge his body to excess, the point was not to avoid bodily pursuits but to place no great importance on them. Thus it is hard, in good conscience, for a defender of the evaluative reading to say that it is only excessive indulgence that on Socrates' view makes the soul bodily. Even if this is right,⁴¹ the defence exploits what is merely in the end a contingent feature of how, on the evaluative reading, the philosopher lives. What matters on the evaluative reading is attitude, not behaviour. It just happens to be a psychological fact, on Socrates' view, that excessive behaviour of a certain kind itself plays a role in shaping attitude. The ascetic reading, by contrast, fits the Affinity Argument with no rough edges. What matters on the ascetic reading is the philosopher's behaviour: his actual refraining from bodily activity. This is the dimension against which one's preparedness to escape the body, when death comes, is measured. Complete abstention is plainly not possible for a human being. But, as far as any human can, it is the ascetic with regard to the body who will, in virtue of his asceticism, keep his soul from becoming a corporeal kind of entity, thus preserving the purity needed to reach an everlasting communion with the Forms. One who is merely Kiplingesque about the

come to be aware that there is something more? To imply that the soul cannot initiate this process is to acknowledge (if not greatly illuminate) a puzzle which I suspect has considerable importance for Plato. In more generalized form, it bears some resemblance to Meno's Paradox; and there is an overt parallel to be explored in the way the prisoners are portrayed in the Cave analogy of *Republic* 7. In that book information provided by the senses apparently helps to turn the soul towards Forms (cf. n. 6 above); but the text is clear that the prisoners neither free themselves nor infer a world outside from their own circumstances (515 c–e). Philosophical inspiration (perhaps prompted by a good educator) must strike a soul that could otherwise make no progress.

⁴¹ At 83 d 4 it is, starkly, 'each pleasure and pain' that Socrates says will make the soul bodily, and one might imagine that any quantity should have some effect. But this is in a context in which he seems to be talking specifically about intense experience (cf. *σφόδρα*, 83 b 8, c 6). The advocacy of abstention from desire at 82 c is similarly poised (cf. n. 9 above). It is an obvious challenge that there seems no way to secure oneself against intense pain (though doubtless steps can be taken to reduce its chances of occurring), even if intense pleasure can be avoided; and Socrates evidently regards pain as an equal contributor to the soul's becoming bodily. There may be cases where learning to belittle one's pain is the best one can do.

body cannot, just in virtue of that no doubt admirable attitude, do the same.

Even so, evaluative and ascetic strands remain intertwined. Let me quote a relevant passage at somewhat fuller length:

[E]ach pleasure and pain rivets the soul to the body as if with a nail, and welds it and makes it bodily, believing those things to be real that the body declares to be so. For as a result of [$\epsilon\kappa$] believing the same as the body and enjoying the same things, it is compelled, I suppose, to take on the same character and nurture and not be in a condition to reach Hades in purity, but to depart always full of the body, so as soon to fall back into another body and grow into it as if planted like a seed, and as a result of this to have no share of association with the divine and pure and uniform. (83 D 4–E 3)

Earlier, in defending the evaluative reading, I took the soul's belief that the bodily was reality to be giving the *sense* in which it is made bodily. This is certainly, in isolation, the most natural reading of the opening sentence, and one supportive of the evaluative reading. But the following sentence in fact suggests that the soul's bodily character is not reducible to its materialist beliefs. Rather, as a *consequence* of its sharing both the beliefs and the enjoyments of the body, it literally becomes bodily, 'full of the body', heavy enough (and only fit) to fall back into the now fertile territory of another body to inhabit. Instead of the philosopher being able to rest (relatively) content with having the right evaluative attitude towards the body—not being bodily in that sense—the danger for those concerned with their soul's posthumous fortune is not now that one becomes materialist, but material. And what seems essential to this process is the brute interaction between soul and body with its concomitant experience of pleasure and pain.⁴²

⁴² Even when it comes to reincarnation, it seems to be the exercise or cultivation of one's character traits (81 E 3–4, E 6–7) rather than their mere possession that condemn one. There is no mitigation for those who 'preferred' (*προτετιμηκότας*, 82 A 4–5, an evaluative word etymologically) injustice, tyranny, and theft; but this still sounds as if one actually *did* these things (note the plurals at A 4 suggesting *cases* of them). The position of those who might have fancied a spot of tyranny but (say) lacked the opportunity is admittedly unclear. They could hardly have earned a life with the Forms, yet their circumstances will have shielded them from much bodily contamination. Perhaps they are comparable to (or even a version of) that other anomalous category: the peaceable folk who on the basis of habit and practice adopt a life of 'demotic' justice and restraint and incur the least bad reincarnation as social insects such as bees, wasps, or ants (82 A 11–B 8). Their lightness of body and (as with some ants) enjoyment of flight might suggest an intermediate realm between heaven and earth (they go to comparatively the best place, *βέλτιστον τόπον*, A 12),

Change of behaviour, specifically abstention, is the required antidote.

Yet one must not simply write the soul's beliefs out of the picture. If Socrates' only concern here had been to show what one must avoid if one wants a soul that is not liable to re-embodiment, he could have told a much simpler and in some ways more plausible causal story of how interaction with the body makes the soul bodily. It would have been the soul's seeing, tasting, and touching of material objects, through the body, with the accompaniment as it may be of intense pleasure and pain, that corporealized the soul.⁴³ Instead he has gone to the trouble of inserting as an intermediate step in his story the soul's taking on a certain attitude about the nature of reality, which seems an unlikely candidate for actually turning the soul corporeal. This suggests that Socrates retains a deep concern that one take the right view about reality. Perhaps only the ascetic reading, with its doctrine of abstention from bodily activity, can show how the Affinity Argument saves one from an earthbound post mortem existence. But what one believes to be real and important remains the core criterion for distinguishing the philosopher.

If the ascetic reading is back in the frame, it should none the less be noted that when it comes to explaining the soul's reincarnation, Socrates appeals to its *fear* of the invisible realm (81 C 11) or, more 'positively', its *desire* for the material realm (81 E 1–2).⁴⁴ Does this mean that attitude alone suffices after all? One needs to exercise some caution here. Entering a body and becoming bodily

though this may prove hard to square with the presence of birds of prey in the 'bad' category (82 A 5).

⁴³ This would have retained a parallel with the Forms, with whom interaction is achieved by means of rational thought, corresponding to perception in the case of material objects. But it is as if, even in the case of the abandoned hedonist, the soul cannot help exhibiting a rational aspect in forming the albeit 'degraded' abstract belief that the real is the material. Yet from within Socrates' own viewpoint, it would be hard to regard such a belief as a case of genuine interaction with the bodily that might therefore corporealize the soul. Interaction with the bodily is (necessarily) interaction with material particulars through perception.

⁴⁴ See here S. Broadie, 'Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes' ['Soul and Body'], *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 101 (2001), 295–308 at 304–6. I am not unsympathetic to Broadie's characterization of soul in the *Phaedo* as 'essentially a valuing power' (305), which enters bodies because it wills (albeit in ignorance of its own best interests) to do so, though I think this reading fails to capture the full picture.

are distinct episodes in a soul's career.⁴⁵ Not every embodied soul is doomed to become bodily (or remain so, if its bodily condition was the cause of its present embodiment). And when one does, this of course precedes its next incarnation. It is *because* the soul is in possession of the bodily (ὁ [sc. τὸ σωματοειδές] δὴ καὶ ἔχουσα ἢ τοιαύτη ψυχή, 81 C 9–10) that it is dragged back down to the visible realm, haunting the earth through fear of the invisible (C 10–D 1). There is apparent 'over-determination' here. What attracts the soul to earth is said to be both its bodily condition and its fear. One can best explain this by invoking the 'weight' (βαρύ, C 9; βαρύνεται, C 10) of its bodily condition as direct cause *both* of the soul's failure to climb free of the material realm *and* of its fear of so doing. That the fear is also mentioned as cause of the former is presumably on the grounds that it is the kind of thing that would cause the soul to remain, were not its weight in any event making escape impossible.⁴⁶ Thus we have a straightforward explanation of the failure in terms of like causing like: interaction with the body has imbued the soul with bodily weight that prevents it escaping. The fear is in turn explained by the same fact that the soul has, through its association with the body, become bodily (81 C 4–6), and so desirous of avoiding the (now alien) realm of the immaterial. So at 81 E 1–2 the desire that leads to reincarnation is specifically that of souls which have the bodily 'in accompaniment' (συνεπακολουθούντος, E 1).⁴⁷ In the end, interaction with the body is cause of the soul's becoming both bodily and re-embodied.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Broadie ('Soul and Body') is concerned chiefly with the former.

⁴⁶ So my being badly hung over might cause both my failure to go to work (by making me physically unable to do so) and a strong desire not to go to work which would itself suffice for me to stay at home.

⁴⁷ I take the relation between ἐπιθυμία and τοῦ σωματοειδοῦς at E 1–2 to be objective rather than subjective, with souls being the subject, since this is clearly the relation between φῶς and τοῦ αἰδοῦς in the co-ordinate passage at 81 C 11.

⁴⁸ As to why the soul becomes embodied in the first place, Broadie ('Soul and Body', 304) speculates that this is because it (mistakenly) 'feels incomplete' without a body. The *Phaedo* itself shows little interest in addressing the question, presumably because its ineluctable starting point is that we are embodied humans. Simmias' harmony theory (rejected by Socrates) would of course make the question redundant in its conception of the soul as supervenient on the body, though Cebes' theory (as Broadie points out) speaks of the soul making or 'weaving' its bodies. Socrates' recapitulation of Cebes' position at 95 B–E does not pick up on this idea, speaking more simply of the soul 'entering' a human body (D 2).

III

What this shows is that we need to give interpretative space to both the evaluative and the ascetic readings of the philosopher's practice of death. The former gives the more cogent account of the practice of death as a way of (embodied) life. But the latter, within the Affinity Argument, is needed to secure the appealing vision of immortality on offer there. This multivalence should not alarm us. On the contrary, it seems to me right to view the *Phaedo* as both a meditation on the fear of death and an exhortation to live the philosophical life. Socrates is about to die; but neither his interlocutors nor, in general, we the readers are facing imminent demise. Still less are we likely to have Socrates' rare justification of knowing that one is about to die. Most of us at some time have felt the need for the sort of reassurance that Simmias and Cebes demand. But for all of us, the immediate question remains how best to live. This dual aspect is brought out by Socrates himself. He may only have death to be concerned about; the others have the whole of the rest of their lives (τοῦ ἔπειτα βίου παντός, 90 E 3).⁴⁹

This leads me to suggest that, though both these themes are present, a somewhat more determinate conclusion can be drawn. For Plato, the question of our present lives remains paramount. This may seem a surprising claim, and not just because the *Phaedo* is packed with arguments that purport to demonstrate the soul's immortality. Commentators have often remarked on the way that Socrates apparently metamorphoses from agnosticism about death in the *Apology* to a conviction in the *Phaedo* that at least the soul of the philosopher can enjoy an immortal existence. A common way of explaining this is to say that the *Apology* represents something like the authentic voice of the historical Socrates, which the *Phaedo* replaces with the doctrines of the authorial Plato. I do

⁴⁹ Socrates later implies, at 114 C 6–9, that the possibilities for the soul after death provide the main motive for us to share in wisdom and virtue in life. But the possibilities he is referring to are those that have just been relayed in the myth, belief in which (he says) is 'worth risking' (114 D 5), given that the risk is a fine one, and which one should 'chant to oneself' (ἐπαδεῖν ἑαυτῷ, D 7). This seems rather a tenuous basis on which to *justify* the virtuous life, and suggests that for Socrates the myth is not primarily a demonstration that virtue's value is instrumental. If anything, it is a chant (or charm) that has instrumental power here. All Socrates commits himself to is that one tell (and retell) the myth that it may encourage a virtuous life.

not wish to challenge this view directly. But it does leave something important out of account. In both works the dramatic occasion (respectively, Socrates' trial and the day of his death) is very much to the forefront; and these occasions are chronologically in close proximity, even given the stay of execution necessitated by the voyage of Theseus' ship (*Phaedo* 58 A–C). It is rather unsatisfactory from a dramatic point of view to take Plato to be portraying Socrates as radically, and without apparent cause, changing his stance towards death in the period between his trial and his execution.⁵⁰ Even if we maintain that the two works were composed at quite different times, and that the distance between them marks a shift in various ways in Plato's own philosophical position, it seems preferable in principle to offer a reading that can explain the differences without appealing to a significant shift in philosophical viewpoint on the part of the character Socrates.

Given that Plato's Socrates has a firm belief in the soul's immortality in the *Phaedo*, what should one make of his attitude towards death in the *Apology*? In the *Phaedo* this belief is grounded on some fairly sophisticated arguments, many of which appeal to heavy-duty metaphysical doctrine. Such arguments are quite appropriate for the philosophically sophisticated Simmias and Cebes. But the body of regular Athenian citizens who composed the jury at Socrates' trial, even those who voted against his execution and to whom his remarks on death are primarily addressed, would probably make little or nothing of them. A trial is, in any event, not the place for philosophical argument.⁵¹ Socrates contents himself with assuring his supporters that he goes to a death which is either like a peaceful sleep or provides the opportunity to have marvellous conversations with the long-dead Homeric heroes in Hades. We cannot read anything beyond this into the text of the *Apology*. But if Socrates does have a more reasoned and sophisticated position up his sleeve, this would not be something communicable to the

⁵⁰ The hypothesis that the wait might have, so to speak, concentrated his mind does not really fit one who is already perfectly untroubled by the prospect of death in the *Apology* (and, for that matter, in his prison cell in the *Crito*, e.g. 43 B).

⁵¹ Cf. *Theaet.* 172 D–E. Early on in the *Apology* (19 A) Socrates doubts his ability to defend himself properly in the fixed time that court procedure allows. The *Phaedo* actually presents itself (63 B) as Socrates' attempt at a better defence than the one he made before the jury, at least on the question of why one should look forward to death.

jury.⁵² So what he says to the jury does not in itself tell either way on the question.

At *Ap.* 29 A–B, however, Socrates denies that anyone (alive) knows what death is like. Is this not an agnosticism flatly inconsistent with the views he expresses in the *Phaedo*? Note that his denial here is targeted *against* the idea that death should be feared, and is no doubt rooted in the commonsensical thought (one suitable for a jury) that no one has yet experienced it, something that (in this sense) he would hardly deny even in the *Phaedo*.⁵³ Likewise, his ridiculing of those on capital charges who abase themselves before the jury 'as if they would be immortal' if spared (35 A 6–7) is not a denial of post mortem survival, but the sensible point that we are all, in the mundane sense, going to die. Nothing here should give us cause for surprise when at *Phaedo* 63 C 2–4 Socrates reveals his own conviction (cf. *δυσχρησταίμην*, C 4) that after death he will be in the hands of gods who are good masters. The rest of the *Phaedo* offers reasons, before a suitable group of interlocutors, for that conviction. If an agnostic about the afterlife is one who lacks conviction that there is one, then Socrates is not to be convicted of agnosticism either in the *Phaedo* or the *Apology*. The most secure verdict in the latter case is perhaps 'not proven'; but there is nothing to compel attribution of a radical shift in the Socratic position between the two works.

Plato's stance, though, is more complex. He has written into Socrates' discussion in the *Phaedo* a model of the philosophical life which best captures Socrates' own life. But this model (exemplifying what I have been calling the evaluative reading), while in general making the best sense of what Socrates says about the practice of death, offers no argument for immortality. In itself, there seems no reason why it should. Do we not, after all, have a whole collection of arguments for immortality in the *Phaedo*? Yet if interaction with the corporeal corporealizes (as my reading of the Affinity Argu-

⁵² The notion that Plato's Socrates takes into account the level of accomplishment of his audiences or interlocutors is not always given sufficient weight, though it is, I think, demonstrable in a number of cases. Socrates himself tells us that the proper rhetorician matches discourse to soul in terms of the sophistication of the latter at *Phdr.* 277 C.

⁵³ Indeed at *Phaedo* 91 B 3 he is still canvassing the possibility that there is nothing after death, if only (in typical fashion) to encourage his interlocutors to maintain a critical stance, in this case towards his arguments against that possibility (B 8–C 6). Even Simmias' scepticism in the wake of the Final Argument is welcome, if it encourages Simmias to investigate further (107 B 4–9).

ment suggests), then we have reason to think that the soul of the philosopher who, like Socrates, practises death as understood on the evaluative reading (which does not enjoin radical bodily abstinence) will have a corporeal (and to that extent a mortal) soul, one that is thereby excluded from communion with the Forms. By contrast, those who abstain even for the wrong reasons (like those mentioned at 82c 5–8) will not, to that extent, be corporealizing their souls.

Nor, it turns out, is there a battery of extra argument waiting in the wings to shore up the position in a way that might reassure us. The Recollection and Cyclical Arguments, separately or combined, leave the interlocutors unsatisfied (as we saw above). The Final Argument (like the Cyclical Argument) may establish the soul's immortality as a life force, but does not even purport to demonstrate the retention of its rational powers. It rests its case on a proof that the soul is essentially alive; but evidently what has life does not necessarily have reason (and Simmias remains sceptical at its close). So there is no comfort to be had in relying on these conclusions. The Affinity Argument remains indispensable as the only one to offer an explicit recipe for the soul's communion with the Forms after death. In so doing it suggests that immortality on *these* terms is conditional on the practice of death (81 A 1–2). And here the latter must be interpreted 'ascetically', in the light of the principle that interaction with the corporeal corporealizes. Failure to be an ascetic will therefore leave us with one or other unappealing prospect for the soul's career after death. So we need a reading of 'practising death' different from the evaluative reading that worked best with the earlier material. I have suggested that in the context of the *Phaedo* this multivalence can be welcomed. But we still have to ask: should Socrates have been an ascetic after all? Given the way his life is presented as paradigmatic (as the last line of the *Phaedo* blazingly confirms), Plato's answer must be 'no'.⁵⁴ But if that is his answer, then it is not immortality that is his main concern, but the living of a good life.

Socrates himself seems unaware of the tension. He does not separate out the evaluative and ascetic strands that Plato has written

⁵⁴ I doubt much can be made of the hint of a qualification in *Phaedo*'s remark that Socrates was the best of those they knew 'at that time' (τότε, 118 A 16). It is one thing to allow the possibility of emulating or even surpassing Socrates; quite another to suppose that living even approximately as Socrates did would represent a second-rate form of existence through a lack of rigorous asceticism.

for him. He will go to his death 'with good hope' (67c 1, cf. 114c 9), leaving Plato perhaps less sanguine than his protagonist about the connection between living well and one's reward in the hereafter. A Socratic life is not necessary for the 'weak' immortality offered by the Cyclical and Final Arguments; nor sufficient for the 'strong' immortality on offer in the Affinity Argument. It may seem unfortunate that this reading commits Plato to a Socrates who unwittingly fails to show that he is properly prepared for death; a consequence I invoked as undesirable in motivating the evaluative reading earlier. Socrates' recognition at 69d that he will not know clearly whether his efforts to live philosophically have 'achieved anything' until he reaches Hades (D 4–6) is little mitigation. For he insists at the same time that he has striven in every way to practise philosophy (D 3–4); and these remarks form the climax to his defence of the cheerfulness with which he contemplates death. Socrates is confident that he is well prepared for the latter; and his belief that he has lived philosophically is surely not misplaced. What is in question is the linkage between the two. So his remarks prompt quite starkly consideration of the relative weight one should attach to, respectively, one's present life and what comes after. If the way one lives one's present life is of paramount value, then even a Socrates can be portrayed as not necessarily having secured an ideal existence after death. The close of the *Phaedo*, at any rate, is anxious to affirm that his 'achievement' may be susceptible of evaluation independently of any subsequent career in Hades.⁵⁵

Notice, then, how in introducing the first argument for the soul's immortality (the Cyclical Argument), Socrates makes the somewhat defensive remark that not even a comic poet could accuse one in his position of 'idle chatter' in discussing the issue of whether

⁵⁵ Socrates indeed seems as much *ἀστικός* in death as in life, with no clearly defined place (for all the *Phaedo*'s emphasis on this concept) in the post mortem scheme of things: not obviously a candidate for reincarnation; but not certainly qualified to dwell with the Forms. Perhaps, as Rowe suggests (*Plato: Phaedo*, 288), he will find himself on the radiant 'true earth' of the myth, the destiny of one who has lived a distinctively holy life (114 B 6–C 2) but without having been sufficiently purified by philosophy to live altogether without a body in realms even more beautiful (C 2–6). This certainly upholds Socrates' faith in the power of philosophy to render one bodiless, even if it chimes a little too modestly with his earlier epistemic reservations about his own life. At any rate, his fate on this view will rest exclusively on the myth Plato has him construct, since the notion of a (so to speak) super-refined *bodily* existence after death has no echo elsewhere in the dialogue. Even so, dwellers on true earth, being longer-lived than us (111 B 3–4), would therefore presumably themselves be subject to death and, in principle, the cycle of reincarnation (cf. Rowe, 278).

the soul survives death (70 B 10–C 2). No such defensiveness was deemed necessary for the preceding discussion of the philosopher's practice of death. This, as I have been trying to emphasize, is a discussion of how the philosopher is to live his embodied life. Socrates' defensive remark serves to indicate that the question of immortality is in principle a distinct one. It also highlights a fact so basic that it has attracted less notice than it deserves. Socrates is portrayed as discoursing on death *on the last day of his life*. If Plato's point were that death is something that should concern us in the midst of our lives, then he has chosen a rather odd way of making it.⁵⁶ Socrates' formulation, even as it exculpates *him*, invites the question: what acquits his interlocutors and the dialogue's readers, who are probably not about to die, of the charge of idle chatter? The saving clause is surely that the arguments for immortality will themselves involve the direction of one's thought to that eternal realm whose contemplation is the centrepiece of the practice of a philosopher. All the major arguments for immortality (with the exception of the Cyclical Argument) make extensive use of the theory of Forms. By this measure, each argument represents steady progress over the previous one, and the structure of the *Phaedo* is vindicated. The Final Argument is no anti-climax (as it might appear when viewed just as a proof of immortality),⁵⁷ since it involves the dialogue's most elaborate consideration of the Forms' nature and role. And this study is something we can undertake today, as the *Phaedo* so ably demonstrates, however imperfect the conditions.

Let me not put too much weight on Socrates' off-the-cuff remark.⁵⁸ But in conjunction with the other evidence I have pre-

⁵⁶ Socrates discourses on death (mainly but not exclusively by way of myth) in dialogues set at earlier periods of his life. Yet his fullest discussion is reserved for his final hours, as if this were indeed the most appropriate occasion.

⁵⁷ The most one can say is that, from a formal point of view, it nullifies Cebes' challenge, thus (in conjunction with the refutation of Simmias) removing the barriers placed in the way of accepting the results of the Affinity Argument. But considering its position in the dialogue this 'back-stop' role still looks rather thin on its own.

⁵⁸ Though one hardly need point out that an off-the-cuff remark by Socrates does not equate to an off-the-cuff sentence by Plato. Notice, too, how Socrates' special position continues to be emphasized, albeit with a dose of irony, at 91 A–C. The interlocutors should take care lest his enthusiasm in pressing the case for immortality is just a symptom of his imminent death (a similar concern that the latter may affect his views at *Crito* 46 D–47 A). By implication, the proper perspective for both interlocutors and readers is not to be so heavily 'invested' in the issue that their judgement is led astray. A genuinely philosophical stance (cf. φιλοσόφως ἔχειν, 91 A 2) mandates one to care for the truth, whatever it may be (A 4–5).

sented, it seems to suggest that, even as he lays out the arguments for immortality, the author of the *Phaedo* would first and foremost have us live well, and leave what follows to take care of itself. Socrates bids Simmias, at the end of the Final Argument, to examine more clearly 'the initial hypotheses' (107 B 5), which we know include the positing of Forms (100 B 5–7). Socrates says that if he does so adequately he will follow the argument (τῷ λόγῳ) to the greatest extent possible for a human, and seek nothing further (D 6–9). Socrates probably means that once Simmias has better examined the argument's basic premiss, he will be sufficiently reassured about its conclusion. But Plato has written a piece of text that is noble, in a different way, when detached from the issue of immortality. By studying Forms, one can fully achieve the highest goal possible for a human: to follow reason (τῷ λόγῳ). For Plato, I suggest, the mark of a philosopher is to seek nothing further than this.

Harvard University

IN OXFORD STUDIES IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY
26

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Apolloni, D., 'Plato's Affinity Argument for the Immortality of the Soul', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34 (1996), 5–32.
 Bluck, R., *Plato's Phaedo* (London, 1955).
 Bostock, D., *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1986).
 Broadie, S., 'Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes' ['Soul and Body'], *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 101 (2001), 295–308.
 Dorter, K., *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto, 1982).
 Elton, M., 'The Role of the Affinity Argument in the *Phaedo*', *Phronesis*, 42 (1997), 313–16.
 Frede, D., *Platons 'Phaidon'* (Darmstadt, 1999).
 Gallop, D., *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford, 1975).
 Pakaluk, M., 'Degrees of Separation in the *Phaedo*', *Phronesis*, 48 (2003), 89–115.
 Rowe, C., 'Philosophy and Literature: The Arguments of Plato's *Phaedo*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 7 (1991), 159–81.
 —, *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1993).
 Weiss, R., 'The Right Exchange: *Phaedo* 69a6–c3', *Ancient Philosophy*, 7 (1987), 57–66.