A. PRELIMINARIES

The discussion of the main topic of the Phaedo, i.e. the immortality of the soul, begins at 63e8 with Socrates offering a further ‘defence’. Like the defence that he offered at his trial it is intended to justify the way he has lived, but more particularly it is intended as a justification of his present attitude in the face of death. His main theme is that the true philosopher has been practising for death all his life. As he develops this theme we begin to learn what he takes a ‘true philosopher’ to be, and what he thinks is actually going to happen to him at his death. Throughout this part of the dialogue (63e–69e) the immortality of the soul is simply assumed—of course, the rest of the dialogue will be devoted to proving it—and we may regard the discussion here as mainly an exposition of what has to be proved. In particular, I shall concentrate on the question what exactly it is that Socrates calls a ‘soul’ and takes to be immortal.

He begins by defining death as the separation of soul and body, and the state of being dead as the state in which soul and body exist separately from one another (64c4–8). The second part of this definition is somewhat careless, for there is obviously no reason to insist that a man’s body must go on existing all the time that he is dead (as is later recognized, e.g. at 80b–c). Those who are sceptical of immortality will evidently say the same of the soul. Setting this aside, another point worth observing is that the definition is somewhat vague about what it is that can be said to die or be dead. For the most part Socrates speaks of a person dying or being dead, meaning thereby that his soul and body have separated. But on one occasion he also speaks of a body dying (106e6), which we can understand as

From David Bostock, Plato’s Phaedo (Clarendon Press, 1986), 21–41. The version printed here has been revised for inclusion in the collection. Reprinted with permission from Oxford University Press and the author.
a matter of that body being separated from its soul, and three times he speaks of a soul dying or being dead (77d2–4, 84b2, 88a6), which is presumably to be taken in the same way. Death as separation, then, can easily be understood as applicable to persons and to bodies and to souls. But this last usage is somewhat awkward, for in the Final Argument Socrates will claim that souls ‘do not admit death’. (His position, obviously, is that souls can be separated from bodies, but cannot be destroyed. Perhaps he should have admitted that the word ‘death’ has other meanings than that which is here assigned to it.) But for the present these problems are hardly serious, and I turn instead to the much more fundamental problem that underlies this definition: what is meant by a ‘soul’, and in particular a soul ‘separated from the body’?

One must of course begin with the observation that the Greek word ψυχή (psyche) is not very well translated by the English word ‘soul’. I shall continue to use ‘soul’ as a purely conventional translation, but the English word has several unfortunate associations. (For example, it is often reserved for use in religious contexts, which is by no means the case with the Greek word. In more idiomatic speech ‘soul’ is often associated with emotion and feeling, in opposition to reason or intellect, but again there is no hint of this with the Greek.) What, then does the Greek word mean?

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE SOUL

The Greek word has many meanings. At its widest it simply connotes life, in a very general sense. For example, the living and the non-living are contrasted in Greek as the things with soul and without soul (τὰ ἐν ψυχῇ and τὰ ἄψυχα), and in this dichotomy it is by no means unusual to count plants as things with soul, just because they can reasonably be called living things. Thus Aristotle, who explicitly recognizes a variety of different kinds of soul, has what he calls the ‘nutritive’ soul (τὸ φυτικὸν) as his lowest kind, and this is the kind of soul that plants have. His point is that they exhibit life by taking in nourishment and so growing, and because this is something that only living things can do there must be a corresponding kind of soul responsible for their doing it. All ordinary living things have this ‘nutritive’ soul, but many will also have other kinds of soul in addition. For example, animals typically have ‘locomotive’ souls, which just means that they also exhibit life by moving around, and so on.

The general principle behind Aristotle’s approach is clearly to begin by

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1 For Aristotle, the stars are alive, and they have ‘locomotive’ souls but no ‘nutritive’ souls. God is a living thing with neither of these kinds of soul.
classifying the different kinds of activity that living things exhibit, and in
taste of which we class them as living, and then to associate a different
kind of soul with each. It will be best if we too begin with this line of
approach, listing some of the activities that can be credited to souls, so that
we can sidestep the awkward question of what kind of an affair the soul is,
and concentrate rather on what it does. (Equally, I shall begin by being
somewhat careless over the question whether it is quite right to say that
the soul itself does this or that, or whether we ought strictly to say that it
is the person who does these things, by virtue of the soul that he has. I shall
take up later the question of the relation between the person and his soul.)

First, then, we should note that ‘soul’ may be invoked to account for any
activity typical of living things, including those more or less biological
activities that human beings share with even very ‘lowly’ living things, for
example nutrition and growth, reproduction, locomotion, and so on. But
without attempting any more detailed list here, I shall pass straight on to
what we may call conscious activities, for consciousness seems to us a very
important ingredient in the typical activities of men (and higher animals),
and most distinctive of their lifestyle. Within this general area there are
still a wide variety of activities which can usefully be distinguished.

(i) Perception is perhaps the most simple form of conscious activity, as
when one feels hot or cold, or hears a loud bang, or sees a blue sky. But it
should be noted that we also speak of perception when much more sophis-
ticated activities are concerned, for example seeing that the approaching
bus is a no. 7. One cannot have this kind of perception without (in this
example) some knowledge of what buses are, and of the significance of this
way of classifying them; so altogether more complex mental apparatus is
involved. Along with simple perceptions one might include feeling pain,
which seems just a special kind of perception. In a different direction, many
have sought to assimilate memory to perception, and one might also wish
to add the peculiar phenomena of dreaming, hallucinating, and so forth.

(ii) Perception very often leads to action because we have goals, or
desires, e.g. the avoidance of pain. Desires again range from very simple
kinds, such as hunger or thirst, which are quite naturally called ‘bodily’, to
much more sophisticated kinds. Consider, for example, the differences
between wanting a drink, wanting to watch television, wanting to be prime
minister, wanting to know who put the drawing-pin on the chair, wanting
to understand differential equations, and so and on indefinitely. Clearly
there is scope for all manner of classifications of different kinds of desire.
Along with desires we might mention the enjoyment or pleasure one may
gain from satisfying a desire (or in other ways), and the unpleasantness
of pain or hunger, or again of continuing to be baffled by differential
equations.
(iii) Desires are in some ways similar, and in other ways dissimilar, to emotions such as fear, love, hatred, compassion, and so on. Some emotions (such as fear or embarrassment) are typically short-lived states, involving special kinds of feelings, and often with marked physical manifestations (e.g. sweating, blushing). Others are long-lasting states of mind with no such accompaniments, and shade off towards those states of mind or dispositions which we count as part of a man’s character. (Compare pride, which is sometimes counted as an emotion, and humility, which usually is not, with, for example, meanness or generosity.) Along with the emotions we might perhaps mention moods such as boredom, hilarity, depression, exhilaration, and so on.

(iv) Most perceptions, desires, and emotions inevitably presuppose knowledge of some kind, or at least belief. Some beliefs arise fairly directly from perception (‘This is water’), some are based on past perception and memory (‘Water satisfies thirst’), some are due to reasoning of various kinds (‘Drinking-water is colourless. This water is dark green. So it probably isn’t fit to drink’). Reason, again, may be classified into various forms. In one aspect (just hinted at), reason is often thought of as controlling our desires and emotions, and therefore directing our actions. But in another aspect it may be seen as operating ‘itself by itself’, as when we work out a sum simply because we want to know the answer, and with no intention to act on it. This is often called ‘theoretical reason’, contrasted with ‘practical reason’, and I shall have more to say about it as we proceed, since it is clearly important to the Phaedo.

This little catalogue of conscious activities (and states) makes no claim to completeness, but does illustrate the wide variety of forms of consciousness: we are typically conscious of almost all the activities and states just listed, and since the soul is specially connected with consciousness they can all be credited to the soul. (On the face of it, they could almost all occur unconsciously too; whether they should then be attributed to the soul is perhaps a matter for debate, which I shall not enter into.)

C. THE DISEMBODIED SOUL (63E–68C, 80C–84B)

When it is claimed that a man’s soul is immortal, or anyway that it goes on existing in separation from the body, this claim implies that some at least of these (or similar) activities continue in the separated state. Perhaps this is not strictly necessary. One might be able to make sense of a theory according to which when the soul was separated from the body it remained dormant, and nothing at all happened in it. But clearly Plato’s theory is not of this kind. He holds that the separated soul does indeed remain conscious.
and active. What kinds of activities, then, does he think do continue in the separated state?

When one reads Socrates' Defence (63e–69e), one is inevitably given the impression that the only activities of the soul that can survive separation are the activities of the true philosopher. The philosopher, we find, averts his attention from such pleasures as food and drink and sex (64d4–7), and does not desire material possessions (64d8–e6). Such desires concern the body, and such pleasures come by way of the body, whereas the philosopher has no concern with things bodily. The implication apparently is that since in the separated state there is no body, these desires and pleasures cannot then occur. Next we find that the philosopher despises perception and the use of his bodily senses, eyes and ears and so on (65a9–b7). They are merely a hindrance to what he is interested in, and they too, one presumes, will not occur when there is no body. Similarly, the body distracts him by needing to be looked after, by filling him with irrelevant lusts and desires, and with fears (and presumably other emotions) (66b7–c5). Again the point seems to be that when the body falls away, these desires and emotions will fall away with it, and in the separated state there will be no such things. What the philosopher is concerned with is called 'reasoning' (τὸ λογιζέομαι; 65c2) and described as reaching out for the forms 'by pure intellect alone' (εἰλικρινὴς διάνοια, αὐτὴ καὶ ἀυτὴν; 66a2).

Pursuing this goal, the philosopher is already separating his soul from his body as much as he can, and in that way practising for the complete separation that death will bring. We must presumably infer that pure reasoning will continue into the separated state, but nothing else will.

Before proceeding, I should add a few notes on what we have had so far. First, we are not here offered any very good explanation of why the philosopher despises his senses (65a9–b7). It is claimed that they are not accurate or clear, but no argument is offered for this, and it is anyway not much of a ground for rejecting them as a source of knowledge. But as we read on it becomes clear that the real complaint about them is not that what they tell us is inaccurate, but that what they tell us about—the physical world—is something that is of no interest. For the philosopher’s concern is with forms, and forms are not to be grasped by the senses anyway, but by pure intellect. There is no explanation at this point of how one can pursue an intellectual enquiry into anything if one cannot at least start from information supplied by the senses, and indeed this would seem to be a difficult problem. For centuries philosophers have supposed that all knowledge must begin with experience, for what other starting-point is there? But Plato clearly does not agree. He thinks that genuine knowledge is always knowledge of what he calls ‘forms’, and is to be attained by a
quite different method, i.e. the ‘method of hypothesis’ (explained mainly at 94d–100a and 101d–e). I cannot discuss these topics here, so I simply accept for present purposes what Plato has to say about forms and our knowledge of them.

A second point worth making here is that Plato is not saying, as a first reading might suggest, that while it is the soul that engages in reasoning it is the body that perceives, desires, fears, and so on. If that were his view, it would be difficult to explain how the body’s doing these things could so upset the soul, or why getting rid of these desires and emotions should count as purifying the soul. (It would also be difficult to explain the different view of the disembodied soul that we shall meet shortly.) Rather, it is the soul than actually does these things, but it does them when it is in a body, and because of the body it is in. Thus when it sees it sees through the eyes of the body, and will no longer see when it has no body to furnish eyes. Similarly when it wants food it does so because of the feeling which it gets from the body’s empty stomach, which again is a feeling it will be free of when it has no body. Generally, while it is in a body it will be sensible of what happens in that body, and this sensibility will inevitably give rise to perceptions, desires, and emotions of all kinds. They happen in the soul, but they would not happen if there were no body for the soul to be sensible of.²

This brings me back to the main point that I wish to make. Although there is no direct statement in the Phaedo that it is only the faculty of pure reason that survives into the disembodied state, that must surely be the implication of Socrates’ Defence. The philosopher is described as one who attempts to separate his soul from his body as much as he can, and in effect what this comes to is that he concentrates all his efforts on pure reasoning and pays as little attention as possible to the perceptions, desires, and emotions which arise only because he has a body. This is said to be practising for death, which is the complete separation of soul from body. It must surely follow that in death the soul has no such perceptions, desires, and emotions; it rejoices always in pure reason and nothing else.

But it is now time to look at some of the other activities which are elsewhere credited to disembodied souls. We have not completely described even the state of the dead philosopher, for we have omitted to mention that he will be happy, and will enjoy the society of other gods and (possibly) other men (63b–c, 69e, 81a). But with ordinary non-philosophers our

² In 94b–d it does appear to be the body which has desires and emotions and not the soul, but the passage is in any case a suprising one. I add a brief comment on it in my final section.
description has been way off target, for it seems that they practise pure reason no more after their deaths than before. Rather, they fear Hades (81c11), they retain their desires for things bodily (81e1), and they keep their characters as virtuous or vicious, social or anti-social, mild or cruel, temperate or gluttonous, and so forth (81e–82b). If we may add the evidence of the closing myth, they also retain a memory of their past lives (108b), and can meaningfully be punished and rewarded (133d–e). Dead souls can appeal to one another, persuade one another, forgive one another, and so on (114a–b). In these passages it appears that disembodied souls are capable of pretty well all those conscious activities that embodied souls are capable of: they can perceive (though presumably without eyes), they can feel pain (though without nerves), they can be frightened (though without adrenalin), etc. I do not wish to imply that this picture is self-contradictory—I do not think it is—but certainly it seems rather less plausible than the more economical picture we had first.

It may be suggested that Plato does offer some explanation of how this could be so: when a non-philosopher dies, he suggests that the soul is not after all completely separated from the body, but remains ‘interspersed with a corporeal element’ (81c4). But this is surely not an explanation that we should take seriously (and its application to ghosts is presumably humorous). If we do take it seriously, then it will imply that the non-philosopher’s soul is in life extended throughout his body, and retains this shape after death, with some material particles somehow ‘clinging’ to it. We can then contrast this with the spatial language which is sometimes used of the philosopher’s soul, which is said to ‘assemble and gather itself together, away from every part of the body, alone by itself’ (67c8; cf. 80e5). The philosopher’s soul is perhaps squeezed into a tight ball, so dense that there are no gaps or chinks where a material particle might be embedded, and so smooth of surface that none can stick to it. The theory can then be tested by accurate weighing of bodies just before and just after death: we expect to find that a non-philosopher’s body suffers some weight loss at death, while a philosopher’s body does not. But obviously this interpretation of the Phaedo is absurd. It treats the soul as if it were made of some quasi-material stuff, and just the kind of thing that might be blown apart by the wind, especially if you happened to die in a storm (77e1). It is not what Plato means to suggest at all, and when he spoke of a soul being ‘interspersed with a corporeal element’ he obviously meant to be understood as speaking figuratively. His point was just that the soul retains its desires for things bodily.

The belief in a reasonably ‘full’ mental life after death is common, and from Homer onwards (Odyssey 11) all those who have pictured it have
pictured the souls of the dead as having the shape of human bodies, and as doing just the kind of things that ordinary living human beings do. Upon reflection one has to admit that this picture is not to be taken literally, but we continue to use it because we do not know any better picture to substitute for it. Plato is no exception. He has no explanation of how disembodied souls can continue with very much the same range of conscious activities as living humans have, but he evidently believes that they do, and so he pictures them as if they were living human beings. We do him an injustice if we think he took the picture seriously.

The *Phaedo*, then, contains two distinct views of life after death. One, which is very much a philosopher's view, and is applied to the philosopher's death, supposes that at death all those aspects of conscious activity which depend upon the soul's awareness of its body will fall away, and as a result the disembodied soul will be capable of pure reasoning but nothing else. The other, which is the more usual religious view, and is applied to other deaths, supposes that pretty well all the conscious activities of ordinary living human beings will persist into the disembodied state. The two are reconciled by a religious doctrine, which Plato took over from Orphics or Pythagoreans, a doctrine of sin, purgatory, reincarnation, and eventual purification and release from 'the wheel of rebirth'. In more detail, the doctrine is that when you die then you are punished for your sins either by a longish period in purgatory (as in the Myth), or by a brisk reincarnation in a less pleasant form of life (as in the elaboration to Socrates' Defence), or by first one and then the other, which seems to be Plato's standard version (as in the myth of the *Republic*). So the object is to live a life that avoids sin—or, if one such life is not, enough, then sufficiently many (usually three, according to the myth of the *Phaedrus*). This is 'purification' (καθαρσίς), and will release you from the wheel of rebirth and admit you to bliss everlasting. To obtain our reconciliation, all we have to do is to adapt this religious doctrine. We take bliss everlasting to be the philosophic afterlife, in which the soul pursues pure reason and nothing else, and we take the life of purification to be the philosophic life, in which the body and all its works are held in contempt, and all energies are concentrated on the life of pure reason. The point here is that pure reason can be pursued in complete independence from all things bodily, and it is therefore the most admirable feature of the soul. (As Aristotle was to stress later, it is also the feature in which human beings most differ from other animals.) It will then follow as a corollary that sin must be equated with paying attention to bodily things. If killing others, injuring others, and behaving violently towards one's parents are to count as sins (114a), that
must be because they are cases of paying attention to bodily things, for the scheme now requires that that and nothing else be the criterion of sin.

Now that we have the full doctrine before us, a point that may be observed in parenthesis is that Socrates' Defence is misexpressed. Socrates says simply that he has spent his whole life practising for death, but he does not mean that he has been practising for what happens to all men when they die. On the contrary, he has been practising for a very special kind of death, the death that admits you to bliss everlasting. That is not, however, a very serious criticism. It is more important to consider the implications which this scheme has for morality, implications which Plato himself points to in 68c5–69d2.

D. IMPLICATIONS FOR MORALITY (68C5–69D2)

Socrates begins with the claim that what is commonly called bravery (ἀνδρεία) belongs especially to philosophers, and what is commonly called temperance (σωφροσύνη) belongs only to them (68c). Both these claims may be questioned, because Socrates seems to have misidentified what are commonly called bravery and temperance. Bravery he takes to be simply a matter of fearlessness in the face of death (68d), and no doubt it is fair to claim that the philosopher does have this characteristic. But in fact we commonly think that there are many other situations in which bravery may be displayed, e.g. by standing up to physical or mental torture, by being prepared to risk life or health or goods in a noble cause, or simply by being calm or cheerful in conditions of pain or adversity. (Plato had discussed the question 'What is bravery?' in the Laches, and he there saw a much wider range for it.) There seems to be no special reason why the philosopher should display these other sorts of bravery as well. With temperance the objection is rather different. We can grant Plato that what is commonly called temperance concerns those kinds of desires that he calls 'bodily', but ordinarily temperance is taken to require moderation or well-orderedness in the pursuit of these desires (ἐχειν κοσμίως περὶ αὐτάς), and not scorning them altogether (ἐχειν θλιγώρος) (68c8–10). The philosopher, it seems, is a single-minded ascetic who suppresses all his bodily desires, and this is not what is ordinarily called temperance (or moderation, or self-control) at all.LETE

3 σωφροσύνη is a notoriously untranslatable word. It combines the notions of temperance, moderation, and self-control, and often shades off into meaning just 'good sense'.

4 Aristotle would regard it as a vice opposed to temperance, which he calls ἀναισθησία (EN 1107b6–8).
(Nor is there any reason to suppose that only philosophers have it: misers and power-seekers may have it too, as our text appears to recognize at 82c5–8.)

Socrates goes on to say that there is something strange and illogical (ἀτομία, 68d3; ἀδιόνατον, 68e3) about ordinary bravery and ordinary temperance. Ordinarily, he says, a man is ‘brave through fear’—fear of something he regards as worse than death, perhaps shame, or dishonour. Similarly the ordinary temperate man is ‘temperate through being overcome by pleasures’, in so far as he abstains from pursuing some pleasures only because he desires others. (For example, he abstains from drinking too much tonight because he wants the ‘pleasure’ of a clear head tomorrow.) There is actually nothing strange or illogical about this, but it is made to seem strange when the claim that the brave man is brave ‘through fear’ (of greater evils) is re-expressed as the claim that he is brave ‘through cowardice’ (68d12), and similarly when the claim that the temperate man is temperate through his desire for other pleasures is put as his being overcome by these other pleasures, and hence as his being temperate ‘through intemperance’. So apparently these virtues are ‘caused’ by their opposite vices. But both these extensions are illegitimate.

Intemperance is not a matter of being led by any desire—e.g. by the desire for health—but rather of giving in to immoderate desires, and especially immoderate bodily desires, when one ought not to. Similarly, cowardice is not a matter of being led by any fear. Plato himself earlier specified the relevant fear as specifically the fear of death, and on this account being led by fear of shame or dishonour would not be cowardly. But anyway Plato’s simple characterization obviously will not do. Suppose I am thirsty, but abstain from drinking the weedkiller through fear of death, and instead go off to get a drink of water. Surely that is not a case of cowardice? Perhaps a better suggestion might be this: just as intemperance is giving in to immoderate desires, so perhaps cowardice is giving in to unworthy fears, when one ought not to. The ordinary temperate man, according to Plato, resists his immoderate (bodily) desires only because he has other desires too that he wants to satisfy, but there is no reason why these other desires should also be immoderate bodily desires. Similarly, the ordinary brave man may resist his unworthy fears only through fear of something else, but again that other fear need not be an unworthy one. Some distinctions such as these are certainly required, for otherwise, if we

5 But are courage and cowardice always concerned with fears? Neither the child who cries when he is mildly hurt, nor the child who bites back his tears when he is badly hurt, need be afraid of anything.
adopt Socrates' way of talking, every rational action whatever will be done through cowardice and through intemperance. If it is a rational action, there will be some purpose that the agent is trying to achieve, and we can always say that he acts out of a desire for the pleasure of achieving that purpose, and out of a fear that unless he so acts it will not be achieved. This applies even to the philosopher: he wants the pleasure of philosophizing and fears to be deprived of it. But Socrates would not like us to conclude that he is therefore intemperate and cowardly.

Although we can in this way remove the 'illogicality' that Plato professed to find in the ordinary man's behaviour, we have not touched the main complaint that he has against it, namely that its motivation is purely hedonistic: it consists in trading off one pleasure against another, and has as its object just the all-round maximization of pleasure (69a6 ff.). Clearly he is thinking here of more or less bodily pleasures; at any rate he is certainly excepting the pleasure of philosophy. But it would appear that once we add that into the account, the position of the philosopher is not essentially different. He is equally bent on maximizing pleasure, we might say, and his life differs from others only because he enjoys philosophy (or 'wisdom'; φρόνησις) much more than anything else. So he obtains his greatest pleasure by putting all his energies into philosophy and paying no heed to the things of the body, but for all that it still seems to be pleasure that he is pursuing. Perhaps, indeed, he is pursuing it more efficiently than others, because he is also taking into account the fact that his way of life will lead swiftly to bliss everlasting, while other ways will not. His hedonism, therefore, takes the longer view, and is very much better thought out. But is it not still hedonism?

Perhaps some light would be shed on this if we could follow out the contrast between 'what is commonly called' a virtue and the corresponding 'true virtue', for Plato evidently intends such a contrast, but seems to lose sight of it. One expects him to say that whereas ordinary bravery consists in overcoming the fear of death with the help of some other and countervailing fear, the 'true bravery' which is characteristic of the philosopher consists in his not having the fear of death in the first place. Equally the philosopher's 'true temperance' will consist in his not having the temptation to indulge in bodily desires, whereas ordinary temperate men do have such temptations but overcome them (when they are immoderate) with the help of other desires. I think, indeed, that this is what he means to say about true temperance and true bravery at 69b8–c3. Can we extend this idea to explain in the same way the notion of 'true justice' (δικαιοσύνη) and the generalization to 'all true virtue' (καὶ συλλήβδην ἀληθῆς αρετῆ;
69b3)? If so, then the thought will be that ordinary men are tempted away from virtue because of their interest in things bodily, and consequently if they do continue to act virtuously it can only be by resisting these temptations with the help of some countervailing 'temptation'. By contrast, the true philosopher never is tempted away from virtue in the first place.7 Plato is claiming, then, that the only reason why men are tempted from the path of virtue is that they pay too much attention to the body and all its works. But once a man sees that the only valuable thing is wisdom, and devotes himself single-mindedly to this, then all vicious temptations will fall away and his conduct will automatically be virtuous. That is what counts as 'true virtue'. (Admittedly this interpretation goes somewhat beyond anything that is to be found in our text. The very obscure characterization of 'true virtue' as a matter of recognizing that wisdom is the only 'right coin' (69a9–10) is a decidedly inadequate way of making the point I am here attributing to Plato.)

Supposing that that is Plato's doctrine, then he is doubly wrong: there are other temptations from the path of virtue than those which stem from the body, and the single-minded pursuit of wisdom will not preserve one from them. Indeed if we pursue wisdom in so devoted a fashion that this pursuit governs our every action, then there will be many virtues that we will lack. Plato has made out a case for saying that our single-minded philosopher will have a kind of courage, and that he will have a kind of temperance (though his 'courage' seems limited to one particular situation, and his 'temperance'—which seems more the asceticism of a fanatic—is far removed from the ordinary virtue). But consider now some virtues that he will not have. We can, in fact, begin with justice: why should it be supposed that one whose whole ambition is the pursuit of 'wisdom' should treat others justly and fairly? How would that help him in his one overriding pursuit? Why, indeed, should he be kind, considerate, loyal, merciful, generous, helpful, forgiving, and so on? How would that assist his intellectual enquiry? The answer must be that it would not. The demands of other people are just as unwelcome distractions to him as are the demands of his own body, and he will withdraw from them as much as he can. Yet morality, as we think of it, is primarily a matter of how one behaves towards others. The virtues of courage and temperance are in fact untypical, and are often distinguished as 'self-regarding' virtues, since they

6 Gallop translates 'and, in short, true goodness', using 'goodness' (instead of the more usual 'virtue') for ἀρετή. Evidently, a generalization to all true goodness-or-virtue is intended. (Phaedo, ed. D. Gallop (Oxford, 1975).)
7 In Aristotle's language ordinary men can at best attain 'self-control' (ἐγκράτεια), which Aristotle ranks below 'virtue'.

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can perfectly well be manifested in actions which do not affect other people. But most virtues are ‘other-regarding’, and essentially concern one’s behaviour to others. These virtues it seems that our philosopher will lack altogether. At any rate the temptation to act only with his own ends in view is a temptation he will certainly have, and apparently he will see no reason to resist it.

In short, the morality which our ‘true philosopher’ lays claim to is thoroughly egocentric. Perhaps it need not be classed as a kind of hedonism. At any rate, our dialogue lays no stress on the pleasure to be got from the pursuit of wisdom, though this is something that Plato does stress elsewhere (notably Republic 9, 580d–588a). Perhaps we could say that so far as the Phaedo is concerned wisdom is to be pursued for its own sake, and irrespective of any enjoyment that its pursuit may bring. But still, the philosopher clearly pursues his own wisdom. That is the one thing he wants, and the one thing that will get him where he wants to be, off the cycle of reincarnation and away to bliss everlasting. To this one overriding ambition everything else is subordinate, not only the demands of his own body but also all sympathy for others, all concern for justice, and in short practically everything that we consider important to morality. For this to be at all acceptable as an account of ‘true virtue’, it would have to be argued that a concern for others is in fact needed as a prerequisite for the efficient pursuit of one’s own intellectual goals, and Plato does indeed try to argue in this way in his Republic. I cannot discuss that argument here, but I think it is obvious that the proposition to be argued for is, at least on the face of it, very implausible.

After this digression on morality, let us return to our proper subject, the soul.

E. THE SOUL AND THE PERSON

We have seen that, so far as the ordinary person is concerned, Plato’s view is that in its disembodied state the soul retains pretty much the same range of conscious activities as the person enjoyed when alive, including many which we naturally think of as due to the happenings in the body. Of course

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8 One could imagine a modification of Plato’s doctrine, in which the pursuit of wisdom was recognized to be a co-operative endeavour, and the object was to make as much wisdom as possible available to the human race. There would still be objections to be raised to this view, though they would not be quite the same objections. But anyway, this would be quite a drastic modification to the religious doctrine of sin, purification, and release from the wheel of rebirth, which was our starting-point. That religious doctrine was always egocentric.
the soul will no longer be performing its function of animating a body—
neither such unconscious functions as keeping the heart beating nor such
(normally) conscious functions as moving the limbs—but a very good
range of its activities will survive. Moreover, the dead soul is thought of as
keeping the memory of its life on earth, much the same desires, skills, char-
acter, and dispositions, and most of what we regard as contributing to a
man's personality. It is therefore very reasonable to say that we can regard
what survives as still the same soul, and indeed to identify the soul with
the person and count it as the continuing existence of that same person.
When I die, I do not cease to exist, and what survives still counts as me,
though now I have lost my body much as in life I might lose a limb.

But what happens when my soul is reincarnated in a new body? In what
sense does that new body have the same soul as I had? What makes it the
same? Certainly no new child will be born already equipped with my mem-
ories, my knowledge, my character, and so on. It may be tempting to
imagine that the new child has a soul made from the same lump of ‘soul-
stuff’ as mine was, in the kind of way in which the same lump of gold may
be moulded into first one shape and then another. But the difficulty here
is that souls are supposed to be immaterial things, and the notion of an
immaterial stuff does not seem to make much sense. When we conceive
the soul as capable of existing in isolation from matter, we are conceiving
it as a centre of consciousness, and there seems to be no sense in which
the newborn child will have the same consciousness as I now have.

One might perhaps make some headway with the idea of a latent
propensity for certain activities. For example, if I am good at mental arith-
metic, perhaps my soul will easily (re)acquire this skill when it is next incar-
nated, though obviously it will not be born with it. We may extend this idea
to other features of my personality. Those who believe in reincarnation
have often wished to say that memory too is carried over in a latent form,
though in this case it will practically always remain latent, and never come
to the surface. (There are just a few cases of people who claim to remem-
ber a previous life, but they form an infinitesimal proportion of mankind.)
Since the idea of a permanently latent memory is somewhat suspect, one
might take it as part of the theory of reincarnation that the memories will
come to the surface again when the soul is next discarnate, and in that state
a soul will enjoy memories of all its previous lives—or, if that seems too
overwhelming, at least of its fairly recent lives. (Memories may fade with
time, but for discarnate souls the time-span will be very long.) However,
it must be admitted that this is not how Plato himself seems to envisage
it.

The reason why memory seems so important in this issue is that nothing
else seems adequate to ensure the identity of an immaterial centre of consciousness over time. A soul at one time may surely have all the same ambitions, skills, character, and personality as some other soul did earlier, and the two need not on this account be the same soul. Unfortunately, the same may be argued to be true of memory as well: though it does not in fact seem to happen, there is surely nothing impossible in the suggestion that two souls which are indeed different souls should nevertheless each seem to remember doing exactly the same things. You may reply that only one of them can be genuinely remembering, and the other must be suffering from a delusion of some kind, but then you are faced with the difficulty of distinguishing between genuine and apparent memory in a way which does not presuppose that we can already attach some content to the idea of being the same soul. Since the issues here become very complicated, I shall have to leave this question unresolved.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that the question is satisfactorily settled, and that we can make adequate sense of the idea that the same soul may occupy now one body and now another, with periods of discarnate existence in between. I shall leave aside the further question whether we have any reason to think that this theory is true, or whether on the contrary it has been upset by facts which Plato knew nothing of (such as the age of the earth and the growth of population). For there is still a further philosophical question which needs raising, namely as to the relation between the soul and the person. On Plato’s theory, an ordinary living person is a combination of soul and body, and at his death that combination is destroyed. Must not that be the destruction of him, the person? Perhaps, indeed, his soul will live on earth again in another body, but that is surely not the same as to say that he will live again. I think it would be generally agreed that if, when I die, your brain is transplanted into my body and the heart is started up again and the body made to live once more, then that may be another life for that body, but it will not be another life for me. Assuming the liaison between brain and consciousness that we normally do assume, the resulting person would have your consciousness and my body. But I am not to be identified with my body, and though the body may live again it does not follow that I shall. Why should we not say exactly the same thing about the soul?

The answer is implicit in the example I have just introduced. If your brain is transplanted into my body, and as a result your memories, your mental capacities, your character and personality change from one body to another, then indeed the resulting person is not I. But surely it is you? We are familiar with the idea that you might have a kidney transplant or a heart transplant, and this seems merely to be the extreme case of a whole-
body transplant. As one might say, where your consciousness is, there also are you. Generally, if a person is a combination of a soul, conceived as a centre of consciousness, and a body, then the soul is the dominant partner so far as the identity of that person is concerned. Admittedly, we have seen that there are problems in understanding the notion of 'same consciousness', problems which are partly sidestepped in my example by bringing in the brain, and assuming that if we have the same brain then we shall have the same consciousness. But if these problems can be favourably resolved, then it does not seem unreasonable to identify the person with his consciousness.

But now notice that it is crucial to this theory that being the same soul should be a matter of continuity of consciousness, for if we adopt any other account of being the same soul it will no longer be reasonable to identify the person with his soul. For example, suppose we think of a soul merely as a kind of animating agent that makes a body live, and not specially connected with consciousness, much as an engine may 'animate' a car. The same engine may be transferred from one car to another—cars of very different shapes and sizes, and very different performance on the road—and there is no temptation to say that these cars are all really 'the same car', just because they have the same engine. (On the contrary, a car may be given a new engine and still remain the same car.) Similarly for souls. If what now animates me will one day animate an astronaut, but there is no continuity of consciousness between me and that astronaut, then it is quite unreasonable to regard his life as another life for me. I am not my 'animating agent' on this view, and I shall never be an astronaut.

With these points in mind, let us consider Plato's own version of the theory of reincarnation. When I die, then since I am an ordinary person who has not spent his life withdrawing from all things bodily, it will be reasonable to say that I do survive into the disembodied state. For in the case of ordinary persons Plato does provide as much continuity of consciousness as one could ask between the embodied and the disembodied soul. But the difficulty comes when we consider the next transition back to the embodied state, for here Plato seems to provide no continuity of consciousness at all. Indeed he envisages my soul returning to earth to inhabit a donkey, a hawk, or an ant, and it is impossible to see how the consciousness of such a creature could still be my consciousness. (When Apuleius told how he was transformed into a donkey, he convinced us that the donkey was indeed he by allowing it to retain his memories, his desires, and his personality. That made it a very unusual donkey.) Perhaps one can find some sense in which it is still my soul that will be animating these later creatures,
but in that case I am not my soul, and though my soul may be immortal, I am not.

In the case of ordinary people, then, it is the transition from the disembodied state back to be next embodied state which creates the greatest problem, but this problem at least does not arise for the 'true philosopher'. When he dies, his soul never does return for a further earthly life. But here we have another problem: does enough of his soul survive death for it to be reasonable to say that he survives? At a first glance it appears that the answer must be 'no', for the only thing about him that persists beyond his death is his capacity for abstract reasoning, reasoning which does not in any way depend on what he has learnt through his body. This appears to be so small a part of his total personality that it is unreasonable to identify it with him, and difficult to say in what sense it can even be identified with his soul. Are we to suppose that at least his soul will remember its experiences on earth, even though it has no use for such memories? Since Plato gives us no information on such points, it seems rash to speculate. But perhaps we can just say this: during his life the philosopher has as it were 'identified himself' with his capacity for pure reasoning, in so far as that is the only thing he has been interested in, and that may make it seem reasonable to say that he survives. On the other hand, my own consciousness of myself as distinct from others seems not to play any role in the kind of abstract reasoning that Plato envisages, so perhaps it should be regarded as one of those things that the philosopher loses at death. But in that case what survives is not even self-conscious, and if so then it surely cannot be identified with the person it has survived from.

Of course Plato speaks, throughout the *Phaedo*, in terms of personal survival. Socrates says 'Cheer up! This is not the end of me. I am going from here to a better place.' It would surely be less comforting if he had said 'This is, after all, the end of me, but some bits of me will still survive: my bones will last for a little while yet, and my reasoning capacity will be disporting itself elsewhere.' But although it is clearly a personal survival that Plato envisages, we can only say that he has not really seen the problems that this involves.

Since Plato seems never to have abandoned the doctrine of reincarnation, he can never have seen the problem of personal survival properly. But it is connected, as we observed, with the question how much of the soul is supposed to survive death, and on this he certainly did have further thoughts. Indeed the *Republic* poses the question more sharply by explicitly distinguishing three different parts which together make up the whole soul. The 'top' part is the reasoning part (τὸ λογιστικόν), and this both
pursues theoretical reasoning (about forms) and has the job of controlling the desires. The ‘bottom’ part is called the desiring part (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικὸν), and this is responsible for the bodily desires and for such longer-term desires as spring from the bodily desires, such as the love of money. In the Republic there is less emphasis on the role of the body in prompting these desires, and more emphasis on the point that the desires are themselves desires of the soul. Finally, the ‘middle’ part is called the spirited part (τὸ θυμοευδές), and to some extent it seems to represent emotions, such as anger or self-reproach, while to some extent it seems to be the seat of another kind of desire, the desire for honour and glory and success in public life. It is accounted a ‘natural ally’ of the reasoning part. There are some problems with the precise delimitation of the functions of these three parts, which I do not intend to go into, but one must applaud Plato’s recognition that the soul is not after all such a simple and unitary thing as the Phaedo seems sometimes to suggest.

Like the Phaedo, the Republic also argues that the soul is immortal, but seems curiously undecided as to how much of it is immortal. The argument itself (which is quite unlike any argument in the Phaedo) speaks simply of ‘the soul’, and appears to apply to the whole soul (608d–610e). But then there is a passage—reminiscent of the Affinity Argument in the Phaedo—which suggests that since the soul is immortal it cannot really be composite, but must merely appear composite because of its association with the body (611b–612a). However, the question is not further explored there, and it seems that Plato continued to remain uncertain over it. The three parts of the soul reappear in the Phaedrus (likened to a charioteer controlling a white horse and a black horse), and in the Timaeus (located in the head, the breast, and the belly, respectively). In the Phaedrus it certainly seems to be implied that the compound of all three parts is immortal, but in the Timaeus we are clearly told that only the reasoning part is immortal.

Viewed in terms of the later doctrine of parts, the Phaedo’s position is that only the reasoning part is, strictly speaking, immortal. The other parts will standardly survive from one incarnation to the next, but they can be made to wither away by living a suitably philosophic life, and when that happens the reasoning part is freed from the wheel of rebirth and never comes back to earth again. (But then the question arises: how did the soul acquire those other unwanted parts in the first place? Perhaps the Phaedrus reflects Plato’s uneasiness over this question.) Ideally, we should of course hope to determine how much of the soul is immortal by seeing what is proved to be immortal by the arguments for immortality, and this brings me at last to a consideration of those arguments.
There are essentially four arguments, namely the Cyclical Argument (69e–72d), the Recollection Argument (72e–77d), the Affinity Argument (77e–80b), and the Final Argument (95e–106e). But between the third and the fourth there comes an Interlude (84c–95e), which is highly relevant to our topic. I take them in order.

The Cyclical Argument aims to show that the cycle of death and rebirth must go on for ever, since otherwise everything would end up dead, which is assumed to be impossible (72a–d). (This is quite a curious assumption, from our point of view. It is also at odds with Plato’s own view that philosophers can after all escape the cycle of death and rebirth, for why should not every soul end up as a philosopher?) It is clear that what Plato is thinking is that souls must oscillate perpetually between the state of being ‘alive’ (i.e. conjoined with a body) and ‘dead’ (i.e. separated from a body), but this by itself tells us very little about what kind of thing a soul is supposed to be.

The Recollection Argument is perhaps the most interesting argument in the book, and I cannot discuss it properly here. But one can certainly say at least this: it aims to show that some understanding which we have in this life can be explained only by supposing that we did not acquire it in this life, but were born with it. The relevant understanding is understanding of forms, and the argument presumes that we can be born with this understanding only if in a previous existence our souls enjoyed something like a ‘direct acquaintance’ with the forms, and now (dimly) remember it. This does tell us something about the soul: it is where understanding resides, and it has memory. We may fairly generalize this to the claim that what Plato later calls ‘the reasoning part’ must have had a previous existence, but it tells us nothing about the previous existence of desires or emotions.

A similar conclusion follows from the Affinity Argument, which claims that the soul more resembles the invisible, unchanging, and eternal forms than it does the visible, changing, and perishable objects that we perceive in this world. The support offered for this (implausible) claim is that the soul is at rest when contemplating forms, but ‘wanders’ and ‘is confused’ when perceiving the objects of this world (79c–e). So again it is the ‘affinity’ between souls and forms that is being relied on, which presumably applies only to the reasoning part of the soul. But Plato further adds a comparison between souls and the immortal gods, on the ground that in

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9 For discussion of this argument, see Vol. i, Ch. III, by Dominic Scott.
10 Compare Phaedrus (249b–c), which says that no soul can be reborn as a human soul unless it has seen the forms, and so can understand language.
each case their nature is to ‘rule’, where the thought is that the soul does—or anyway should?—rule the body (80a). In Aristotle’s terms, it is ‘practical reason’ rather than ‘theoretical reason’ that is here in question, so there has been something of a shift. But our present passage says little about the nature of this ‘ruling’, and for that we must look rather to the ensuing Interlude.

In this Interlude the defects of the two preceding arguments are clearly recognized: the Recollection Argument shows only that the soul existed before birth, but not that it will also exist after death, and the Affinity Argument draws analogies in one direction, but there are equally good analogies to be drawn in the opposite direction (84c–88b). More relevant from our point of view is that the suggestion is raised that the soul is not the kind of thing that could exist without a body, for Simmias proposes that the soul should be regarded as a ‘harmony’ (or ‘attunement’) of the physical elements of the body (85e–86d). Against this Plato uses once more the idea that the soul rules the body, and for that reason cannot be just a ‘harmony’ of its elements (92c–93a, 94b–95a). But in the development of this idea it becomes clear that what he is mainly thinking of is the point that (practical) reason rules (or should rule?) the desires and emotions. So if this is to be an objection to Simmias’ original proposal, we must take it that he is here construing desires and emotions as physical elements from which the body is composed. Taken literally, this is simply grotesque. More charitably we may say that the tendency of this argument is to associate desires and emotions very strongly with the body, and to contrast them with (practical) reasoning, which is to be construed as due to the soul and not the body.

Yet Plato interweaves with this argument another, which appears to tend in the opposite direction (93a–94b). This begins with the thought that a soul cannot be a harmony, since being a soul is not a matter of degree, whereas being a harmony is. But it goes on to suggest that souls differ from one another according to their own (internal) harmony, a good soul being more harmonious and a bad soul less harmonious. One therefore asks: what distinct elements are there in the soul between which this internal harmony may or may not subsist? Our text can hardly be said to be explicit on the point, but if we may borrow from the Republic the answer seems clear: it is the three parts of the soul (roughly, desire, emotion, and reason) that may or may not be ‘in harmony’ with one another. So one may fairly protest that one of these objections to Simmias’ proposal treats desires and
emotions as 'parts' of the body, while the other treats them as parts of the soul. One can only conclude that while Plato may be on the way to his mature theory, he has not yet got a clear view of it. But in any case these objections have no clear implications for immortality, which we must now return to.

The Final Argument begins with a long and interesting preamble, which focuses on the notion of a cause (or explanation), proposes various conditions on what can properly be counted as a cause, and concludes that the simplest and most straightforward examples are the forms. Thus the cause of a thing's being or becoming $F$ can always be given as (its participation in) the form of $F$-ness (93e–102a). One reason why this kind of cause is especially satisfactory is that the form of $F$-ness is itself a thing that is $F$, and one that cannot be or become not-$F$, and this is the point that is mainly relevant to the argument. For it is then claimed that there are also other examples of causes which satisfy all the conditions (102b–105c), and this is applied to the idea that the soul is the cause of life (105c–106e). The conclusion drawn is that the soul, as cause of life, must itself be alive, and cannot be or become not alive, which is apparently to say that it is immortal. (This conclusion does not in fact follow; all that follows is that a soul cannot both exist and be not alive, but that does not mean that it cannot cease to exist.)

Unfortunately this argument, which Plato eventually (in this dialogue) relies on, quite upsets the view of the soul which has been prevalent hitherto. For amongst his conditions for being a proper cause he has claimed that causes must be both necessary and sufficient for their effects, and so we must suppose that this too applies to the soul as cause of life. Thus whatever has a soul is alive, and whatever is alive has a soul, and this holds not only for man, and for the donkeys, hawks, and ants previously mentioned, but also for things which surely have no 'reasoning part', e.g. aphids, jellyfish, oak trees, cabbages. By this argument, all of these will have immortal souls, so it cannot be essential to an immortal soul either to be capable of reasoning, or to have desires and emotions, or even to be conscious. One presumes that Plato failed to notice this point. If he had done, he might have started from the premiss, not that the soul is the cause of life, but that it is the cause of consciousness, or of reasoning, or something else of this sort. That would certainly have clarified his conception of the soul (but it would not have improved the logic of his argument).

Cf. Phaedrus (249b–c), cited above, n. 10. But what, in that case, corresponds to the charioteer and his two horses, of which every immortal soul consists?