

**Reading 3: The *Phaedo*: Summary of the Text****[1] Introduction**

Scene setting: Socrates prepares for his death.

**[2] Socrates in Prison****[2.1] Opening Conversation**

(a) A paradox: the philosopher welcomes death but suicide is not permissible.

(b) Why suicide is not permissible:

- We are prisoners (or, perhaps, custodians).
- We are the property of the gods.

**[2.2] Socrates' Defence**

(c) Why the philosopher looks forward to death:

Death, appropriately prepared for, takes us to better and wiser gods and perhaps to our ancestors.

The *Phaedo* is mainly concerned with justifying (c) and the justification involves a number of stages:

(i) the influence of the body on the soul

- the soul is superior to the body
- bodily pleasures are despised by the philosopher

(ii) the soul and knowledge:

- the body hinders the acquisition of knowledge
- only the soul, unhindered by the body, has access to absolute standards. For example absolute justice, absolute beauty, and absolute good. These are not perceived by the senses.

So there is at least some hope that with death we will achieve a better state.

Socrates thinks that he can provide arguments to show that the soul has existed before birth and will exist after death and that some souls will exist in a 'world' in which these absolute standards exist.

**Arguments for the immortality of the soul:****[3] First Argument: from opposites, becoming, and ceasing to be:**

(a) Opposites are generated out of opposites

‘All things which have opposites are generated out of their opposites’ - examples:

(i) lesser → greater → lesser

(ii) hot → cold → hot

(iii) wakefulness → sleep → wakefulness

(iv) death → life → death

(b) These cycles go on eternally.

Proof: if they did not, everything would come to a stop

Therefore the soul is eternal.

#### **[4] The Theory of Knowledge as Recollection**

(a) All coming to know is recollection

Proof: See the discussion in the *Meno*, included at the end as extra reading.

(b) recollection is being reminded by something of something that is like it or of something that is not like it. E.g. a lyre reminds us of a lover and a picture reminds us of the person of whom it is a picture.

(c) Our recognition of equality and inequality etc. must be recollection.

(d) Proof: we do not perceive equality through the bodily senses.

(e) Therefore we acquired knowledge of it either:

(i) before birth - and then forgot it at birth or

(ii) at birth - and at the same time forgot it.

(f) (e)(ii) is not coherent - we would have to have and not have knowledge at the same time.

Socrates claims that 3.2 proves the existence of the soul before death, combined with 3.1 this proves eternity of soul.

#### **[5] The Affinity Argument**

The soul is not compound so cannot disperse.

Proof: the soul is like the objects that are the proper objects of its knowledge (i.e. it has an affinity with them). These objects are simple so it is simple, that is, indivisible.

**Corollaries.** The relation of the soul to the body explains

Ghosts and transmigration to animals

To escape these possibilities, the philosopher seeks to detach soul from pleasure and pains of body.

### **Refutation of alternative theories**

#### **[6] Simmias' objection: The Harmony Theory**

We may apply the Affinity Argument to the affinity of the soul with the attunement (i.e. being in tune, translated as 'harmony' in the Reader) of a lyre: The soul is like the attunement of a tuned lyre which does not exist apart from the lyre.

Socrates' reply: Everyone now accepts recollection theory.

(i) The soul, unlike attunement, is not a property that depends on the prior existence of something - the material of the lyre.

(ii) Attunement is a matter of degree, having a soul is not a matter of degree - all souls are equally souls.

So the Attunement Theory must hold that all souls are equally attuned. But then it cannot appeal to degrees of attunement to explain virtue and vice. So it has to conclude that all souls are entirely virtuous.

(iii) The soul is the ruling principle of the body and may oppose the affections of the body. But whether or not a musical instrument is attuned depends entirely on the physical state of the instrument.

**[7] Cebes' objection): The Tailor and his coats** Granted that the soul exists before birth, it has not been proved that it exists after death, The soul might be like the body of a weaver. It occupies many different coats while alive but eventually dies.

**[8] Socrates and the study of natural philosophy)** Socrates in reply gives an account of his own intellectual development and rejection of 'scientific naturalism' in favour of a different kind of theory, one which seeks a rational principle of order and in particular is concerned with human values.

This biographical account has been described by Gregory Vlastos (*Philosophical Review* 1969, p. 297) as 'One of the great turning points in European natural philosophy'.

#### **[9] The Final Argument: Socrates' New Method of Hypotheses**

[Note the translation in the Reading has 'absolute beauty', 'absolute goodness' etc., a better translation is 'the beautiful itself' etc. Where the Reading has 'partakes of' a better translation is 'participates in'.]

(a) Assume the existence of absolute standards - standard of *x*-ness - where '*x*' is 'good', 'beauty', 'equal', 'large', 'small' etc. i.e. assume that there are standards of goodness, largeness, smallness etc.

The standards, or Forms, are **the-*X*-itself**: the Beautiful-itself, the Good itself etc.

(b) Explain the fact that something is *X* by its **participation** in the-*X*-itself.

**[10] The exclusion of opposites**

(c) Something can participate in both the-*X*-itself and the-*Y*-itself and so in the-*X* itself and its opposite in certain respects.

E.g. Simmias is greater than Socrates and Simmias is less than Phaedo so Simmias participates in both the-great-itself and its opposite.

(d) But the-*X*-itself-itself cannot become non-*X* (e.g. the-small-itself cannot become large, the-odd-itself cannot become even).

If Simmias were to become larger than Phaedo it would be because his smallness has been replaced by greatness.

(e) If something is (unqualifiedly, or essentially) *X* in virtue of the-*X*-itself, it cannot become non-*X* (e.g. three cannot become even).

**[11] The argument concluded: The soul is proved to be immortal**

(f) A human (body) is alive in virtue of soul.

[(g) The soul is unqualifiedly alive]

(h) Therefore the soul is immortal.

The myth of afterlife and the judgement of souls. Note that Socrates says a number of things here about the nature of the world rather contradicting his claim above that he is not interested in natural science.

**[12] The Final Scene - Socrates' death)****Extra Reading****The Meno Argument\***

Meno ... [W]hat do you mean by saying that we do not learn, and that what we call learning is only a process of recollection? Can you teach me how this is?

Socrates I told you, Meno, just now that you were a rogue, and now you ask whether I can teach you, when I am saying that there is no teaching, but only recollection; and thus you imagine that you will involve me in a contradiction.

Men. Indeed, Socrates, I protest that I had no such intention. I only asked the question from habit; but if you can prove to me that what you say is true, I wish that you would.

Soc. It will be no easy matter, but I will try to please you to the utmost of my power. Suppose that you call one of your numerous attendants, that I may demonstrate on him.

Men. Certainly. Come hither, boy.

Soc. He is Greek, and speaks Greek, does he not?

Men. Yes, indeed; he was born in the house.

\* From Plato's *Meno*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Oxford, 1892

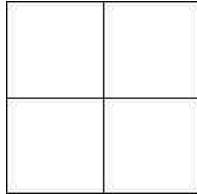
Soc. Attend now to the questions which I ask him, and observe whether he learns of me or only remembers.

Men. I will.

Soc. Tell me, boy, do you know that a figure like this is a square?

Boy. I do.

Soc. And you know that a square figure has these four lines equal?



Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And these lines which I have drawn through the middle of the square are also equal?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. A square may be of any size?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And if one side of the figure be of two feet, and the other side be of two feet, how much will the whole be? Let me explain: if in one direction the space was of two feet, and in other direction of one foot, the whole would be of two feet taken once?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. But since this side is also of two feet, there are twice two feet?

Boy. There are.

Soc. Then the square is of twice two feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And how many are twice two feet? count and tell me.

Boy. Four, Socrates.

Soc. And might there not be another square twice as large as this, and having like this the lines equal?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And of how many feet will that be?

Boy. Of eight feet.

Soc. And now try and tell me the length of the line which forms the side of that double square: this is two feet – what will that be?

Boy. Clearly, Socrates, it will be double.

Soc. Do you observe, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but only asking him questions; and now he fancies that he knows how long a line is necessary in order to produce a figure of eight square feet; does he not?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And does he really know?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. He only guesses that because the square is double, the line is double.

Men. True.

Soc. Observe him while he recalls the steps in regular order. (To the Boy.) Tell me, boy, do you assert that a double space comes from a double line? Remember that I am not speaking of an oblong, but of a figure equal every way, and twice the size of this-that is to say of eight feet; and I want to know whether you still say that a double square comes from double line?

Boy. Yes.

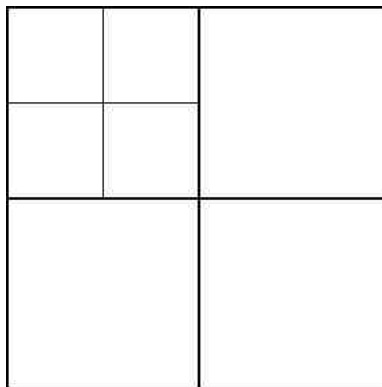
Soc. But does not this line become doubled if we add another such line here?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And four such lines will make a space containing eight feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. Let us describe such a figure: Would you not say that this is the figure of eight feet?



Boy. Yes.

Soc. And are there not these four divisions in the figure, each of which is equal to the figure of four feet?

Boy. True.

Soc. And is not that four times four?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And four times is not double?

Boy. No, indeed.

Soc. But how much?

Boy. Four times as much.

Soc. Therefore the double line, boy, has given a space, not twice, but four times as much.

Boy. True.

Soc. Four times four are sixteen – are they not?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. What line would give you a space of eight feet, as this gives one of sixteen feet – do you see?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And the space of four feet is made from this half line?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. Good; and is not a space of eight feet twice the size of this, and half the size of the other?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. Such a space, then, will be made out of a line greater than this one, and less than that one?

Boy. Yes; I think so.

Soc. Very good; I like to hear you say what you think. And now tell me, is not this a line of two feet and that of four?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. Then the line which forms the side of eight feet ought to be more than this line of two feet, and less than the other of four feet?

Boy. It ought.

Soc. Try and see if you can tell me how much it will be.

Boy. Three feet.

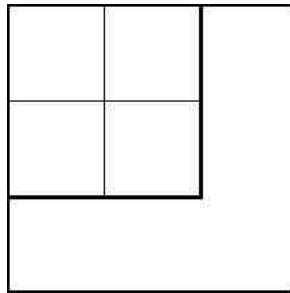
Soc. Then if we add a half to this line of two, that will be the line of three. Here are two and there is one; and on the other side, here are two also and there is one: and that makes the figure of which you speak?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. But if there are three feet this way and three feet that way, the whole space will be three times three feet?

Boy. That is evident.

Soc. And how much are three times three feet?



Boy. Nine.

Soc. And how much is the double of four?

Boy. Eight.

Soc. Then the figure of eight is not made out of a square of three?

Boy. No.

Soc. But from what line? – tell me exactly; and if you would rather not reckon, try and show me the line.

Boy. Indeed, Socrates, I do not know.

Soc. Do you see, Meno, what advances he has made in his power of recollection? He did not know at first, and he does not know now, what is the side of a figure of eight feet: but then he thought that he knew, and answered confidently as if he knew, and had no difficulty; now he has a difficulty, and neither knows nor fancies that he knows.

Meno. True.

Soc. Is he not better off in knowing his ignorance?

Meno. I think that he is.

Soc. If we have made him doubt, and given him the "torpedo's shock," have we done him any harm?

Meno. I think not.

Soc. We have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance, but then he would have been ready to tell all the world again and again that the double space should have a double side.

Meno. True.

Soc. But do you suppose that he would ever have enquired into or learned what he fancied that he knew, though he was really ignorant of it, until he had fallen into perplexity under the idea that he did not know, and had desired to know?

Meno. I think not, Socrates.

Soc. Then he was the better for the torpedo's touch?

Meno. I think so.

Soc. Mark now the farther development. I shall only ask him, and not teach him, and he shall share the enquiry with me: and do you watch and see if you find me telling or explaining anything to him, instead of eliciting his opinion. Tell me, boy, is not this a square of four feet which I have drawn?



Boy. Yes.

Soc. And now I add another square equal to the former one?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And a third, which is equal to either of them?

Boy. Yes.

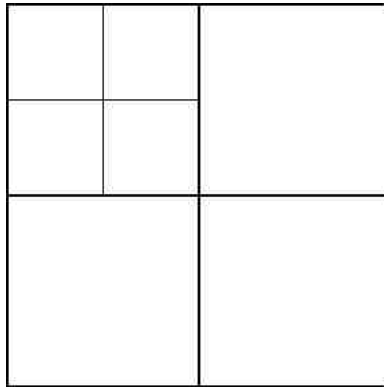
Soc. Suppose that we fill up the vacant corner?

Boy. Very good.

Soc. Here, then, there are four equal spaces?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And how many times larger is this space than this other?



Boy. Four times.

Soc. But it ought to have been twice only, as you will remember.

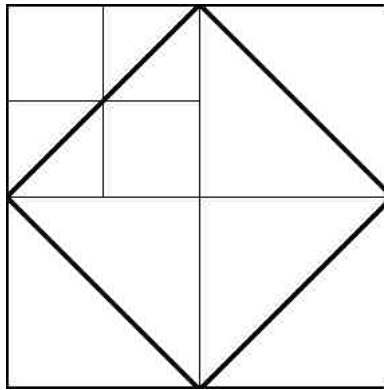
Boy. True.

Soc. And does not this line, reaching from corner to corner, bisect each of these spaces?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And are there not here four equal lines which contain this space?

Boy. There are.



Soc. Look and see how much this space is.

Boy. I do not understand.

Soc. Has not each interior line cut off half of the four spaces?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And how many spaces are there in this section?

Boy. Four.

Soc. And how many in this?

Boy. Two.

Soc. And four is how many times two?

Boy. Twice.

Soc. And this space is of how many feet?

Boy. Of eight feet.

Soc. And from what line do you get this figure?

Boy. From this.

Soc. That is, from the line which extends from corner to corner of the figure of four feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And that is the line which the learned call the diagonal. And if this is the proper name, then you, Meno's slave, are prepared to affirm that the double space is the square of the diagonal?\*

Boy. Certainly, Socrates.

Soc. What do you say of him, Meno? Were not all these answers given out of his own head?

Men. Yes, they were all his own.

Soc. And yet, as we were just now saying, he did not know?

\* That is,  $2a^2 = d^2$ , where 'a' is the length of the side of the square, and 'd' is the length of the diagonal, a partial form of Pythagorus' Theorem.

Men. True.

Soc. But still he had in him those notions of his – had he not?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Then he who does not know may still have true notions of that which he does not know?

Men. He has.

Soc. And at present these notions have just been stirred up in him, as in a dream; but if he were frequently asked the same questions, in different forms, he would know as well as any one at last?

Men. I dare say.

Soc. Without any one teaching him he will recover his knowledge for himself, if he is only asked questions?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And this spontaneous recovery of knowledge in him is recollection?

Men. True.

Soc. And this knowledge which he now has must he not either have acquired or always possessed?

Men. Yes.

Soc. But if he always possessed this knowledge he would always have known; or if he has acquired the knowledge he could not have acquired it in this life, unless he has been taught geometry; for he may be made to do the same with all geometry and every other branch of knowledge. Now, has any one ever taught him all this? You must know about him, if, as you say, he was born and bred in your house.

Men. And I am certain that no one ever did teach him.

Soc. And yet he has the knowledge?

Men. The fact, Socrates, is undeniable.

Soc. But if he did not acquire the knowledge in this life, then he must have had and learned it at some other time?

Men. Clearly he must.

Soc. Which must have been the time when he was not a man?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And if there have been always true thoughts in him, both at the time when he was and was not a man, which only need to be awakened into knowledge by putting questions to him, his soul must have always possessed this knowledge, for he always either was or was not a man?

Men. Obviously.

Soc. And if the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal. Wherefore be of good cheer, and try to recollect what you do not know, or rather what you do not remember.

Men. I feel, somehow, that I like what you are saying.

Soc. And I, Meno, like what I am saying. Some things I have said of which I am not altogether confident. But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know – that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power.



A woman teaching geometry in the middle ages.