

## 24.01 Classics of Western Philosophy

Prof. Rae Langton

### I. Plato

#### Lecture 4. The *Phaedo*

1. *Socrates' reply to Simmias* (91d). Simmias had raised the possibility that the soul is a kind of harmony or attunement, analogous to that of the lyre, in some sense distinct from the body (wood, strings), fine, 'akin to the divine', but nonetheless dependent on the body (wood, strings) and unable to survive the body's destruction. Socrates reminds Simmias of the Recollection argument, which Simmias accepts: although that argument implies only that the soul pre-existed, not that it is eternal, it nevertheless conflicts with the harmony theory (92b) since the soul pre-existed *without a body*. A second reason for thinking the analogy with the lyre does not hold: the soul directs, controls, the body, whereas the harmony is directed by, controlled by, the wood and strings (94c).

2. *Socrates' reply to Cebes*. Cebes had objected to Socrates' argument with the analogy that soul may be to body as weaver is to cloak: a weaver is stronger and more durable than his cloak, but nonetheless some cloak can outlast the weaver; and likewise with the soul and body. Socrates' reply takes the rest of the entire discussion. Cebes' question 'calls for a through inquiry into the whole question of the reason for coming-to-be and destruction' (96a), an inquiry which again draws together an argument about the Forms, and an argument for immortality.

3. *Socrates' intellectual autobiography*. He used to have a passion for cosmology and natural explanation—roughly speaking, for science. Now he is puzzled about the simplest truisms about the natural world, or even basic arithmetic (96e-97a). A physical account of the 'reason' for Socrates' sitting there talking misses out entirely on the real reason. That his bones and sinews are thus and so is not the real reason; the reason is that he *judges it best* to stay and submit to his penalty (98c). 'Fancy being unable to distinguish two different things: the reason proper, and that without which the reason could never be a reason!'

3. *Kinds of explanation*. Socrates now believes that the naturalistic, physical explanations of things do not give the true reasons for their being how they are: a better explanation is given in terms of the Forms. The reason for a thing's being thus and so is that it participates in a Form. The reason for a thing's being beautiful is that it participates in Beauty (100d). This 'simple' view is then modified, at 103-105. The reason for a thing's being beautiful is that has something that is essentially beautiful—something that essentially participates in Beauty (e.g. a particular arrangement of petals). In general: the reason for a thing's being F is something that is F essentially. A body is hot because of *fire*, which is essentially hot (105b). Fire is not the same thing as the Hot, but since Fire is *essentially* hot, it cannot 'admit the Cold' and still remain Fire, any more than 'the Hot itself' can 'admit the Cold'. Note these important refinements of the theory of Forms:

(i) There are *relations between the Forms* themselves, of *entailment* (one Form ‘brings another with it’); *incompatibility* (one Form does not ‘admit’ another); and *compatibility* (one Form does ‘admit’ another). Snow entails the Cold; the Cold does not admit the Hot, neither does Snow. Fire entails the Hot; the Hot does not admit the Cold, neither does Fire. Three entails the Odd; the Odd does not admit the Even, neither does Three.

(ii) There is a distinction based on these relations between the *accidental* and *essential* properties of *particulars*: snow, the particular, is essentially cold, because of the relationship between the Forms Snow and Cold. A particular fire is essentially hot, because of the relationship between the Forms, Fire and the Hot. A piece of wood is only accidentally hot: it can exist without being hot, because Wood ‘admits’ Cold. However, a piece of wood is accidentally hot because of fire, which is *essentially* hot. Here we have general principles about change and explanation which Socrates uses to construct the final argument for immortality which will answer Cebes.

4. *The Final Argument*. ‘Answer then, and tell me what it is, by whose presence in a body, that body will be living’. (105c). Cebes’ reply: the *soul*. The body is accidentally alive because of the soul, which is essentially alive; just as the wood is accidentally hot because of the fire which is essentially hot. This is because of the relationships between the corresponding Forms: Fire entails the Hot, does not admit the Cold; Soul entails the Alive, does not admit the Dead. These general principles are used in the Final argument.

- A. If something cannot be F, it cannot become F.
- B. If something is essentially F, it cannot be not-F.
- C. The reason for something’s being F is something that is essentially F.
- P1. The reason for someone’s being alive is that they have a soul
- C1. The reason for someone’s being alive is something that is essentially alive (by C)
- C2. The soul is essentially alive (by P1, C1)
- C3. The soul cannot be not-alive, i.e. cannot be dead (by C2, B)
- C4. The soul cannot become dead, i.e. cannot die (by C3, A)

‘Beyond all doubt, Cebes, soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls really will exist in Hades.’(107)

*Questions about the Final Argument*. What should the conclusion really be? The soul cannot stop being alive *and still exist*. A fire is essentially hot. If a fire stops being hot, it ceases to exist, since it has lost what was essential to it. If a soul stops being alive, it ceases to exist, since it has lost what was essential to it. Note too the assumption that being dead is a property, like being cold (we questioned that for the Cyclical Argument).

5. *Final scenes*. Socrates dwells in detail upon the poets’ accounts of the journey to the afterworld; it is like a journey from a hollow on the muddy ocean floor, to the pure air and light above (109b). His friends ask for instruction: ‘in what fashion are we to bury you?’ ‘However you wish’, says Socrates with a laugh, ‘provided you can catch me’ (115c). He takes the poison, and as it begins to work, makes his last request: Crito should make a sacrifice of thanks on his behalf to Asclepius, god of healing (118a).