

Plato's *Phaedo*

FORMS, DEATH, AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE

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To my parents

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This book works through the *Phaedo* in order. Most of my essays on the *Phaedo*, by contrast, take up a specific topic and follow it through the dialogue. Hence the content of a single essay typically cuts across several chapters of this book. This is true for “The Asceticism of the *Phaedo*: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul’s Proper Activity,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 99 (2017), 1–30, “The *Phaedo*’s Final Argument and the Soul’s Kinship with the Divine,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 60 (2021), 25–62, and “The Unfolding Account of Forms in the *Phaedo*,” in D. Ebrey and R. Kraut (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) (2022), 268–97. “The *Phaedo* as an Alternative to Tragedy,” in *Classical Philology* 118 (2023), is the only essay that overlaps with just a single chapter: Chapter 2. I thank the journals for allowing me to use the material from these articles in this book.

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Introduction

The *Phaedo* is a literary gem that develops many of Plato's most famous ideas and arguments, so it comes as no surprise that there are trenchant debates and deep disagreements about almost every part of the dialogue. This book argues that these debates and disagreements cannot be resolved so long as we consider the dialogue's passages in relative isolation from one another, separated from their intellectual context. Many of the *Phaedo*'s ideas can only be fully understood once one recognizes how Plato is engaging with and responding to ideas in his literary, religious, scientific, and philosophical context. Moreover, the dialogue itself is tightly unified in such a way that one can fully understand its central ideas and arguments only in light of its overall structure. Even arguments that appear to stand on their own rely on claims made elsewhere in the dialogue. Carefully working through the details with an eye to the dialogue's structure and aims, in light of its context, is the best way to understand it. And so, I have written this as a comprehensive treatment of the dialogue. This overall approach yields new interpretations of key ideas in the *Phaedo*, including the nature and existence of "Platonic" forms, the continued existence of the soul after death, the method of hypothesis, and the contemplative ethical ideal. Moreover, this approach shows how the interaction between the characters plays an integral role in the *Phaedo*'s development and how its literary structure complements Socrates' views while making its own distinctive contribution to the dialogue's drama and ideas.

The *Phaedo* is a story of how Socrates, on the last day of his life, faces his death. He does so as a philosopher, and in doing so shows others how to live philosophical lives and philosophize in the face of death. Socrates seems to defend a radical sort of Platonism in the dialogue – although many modern interpreters have denied this in various ways.¹ For example, Socrates claims that the philosopher's only pursuit is

¹ In general, references to the secondary literature are found in the following chapters, but here are a few examples of scholarship from the last sixty years that interpret the *Phaedo* in ways that

dying and being dead (64a), that the soul continues to exist after death and reincarnates (e.g. 72a, 81d–e, 107d–e), that the soul is akin to the unchanging forms (79d, 80d, 84a–b), and that, by becoming like the forms, the soul can escape the cycle of reincarnation and be eternally happy (81a).² He claims that one should not inquire using the senses (65e–66a, 83a, 99e–100a) and that natural scientists have proposed the entirely wrong sorts of causes (96e–99c); instead he uses forms – things such as largeness, equality, justice, and beauty (100c, 101c) – to specify causes. He holds that forms cannot be seen (65d, 79a) and are superior to ordinary, perceptible objects (74d–75b).

In this book I argue that Socrates' views in the *Phaedo* are every bit as radical as they initially seem – perhaps even more so. They are radical by today's standards as well as by those of his time. Socrates (by which I mean the Socrates of the *Phaedo*, unless otherwise noted) is not trying to seem reasonable and capture ordinary intuitions; instead, he is arguing that we fundamentally misunderstand the nature of reality, how to acquire knowledge, what we are, and how we should live. Scholars sometimes attribute more reasonable-sounding views to Socrates on the basis of charity, thinking that otherwise he would put forward radical views without any explanation, or with laughably poor arguments. This book aims to uncover the explanations for radical ideas widely seen as at the heart of Platonism. One way I do this is by considering all the parts of the dialogue, including the more radical parts that scholars often pass over. I also show that, once we accept that Socrates is genuinely making the radical claims he seems to be making, the details of his account carefully fit together, clarifying what his views are and why he defends them.

Another way in which I develop my reading relies on an important thesis of this book: the *Phaedo* has what I call an “unfolding structure,” in which claims are made earlier in the dialogue apparently without being defended, but then are explained and argued for at later stages. Recognizing this structure clarifies the reasons for radical claims that otherwise seem unexplained, allowing me to provide new accounts of forms, the soul, and the good life in the *Phaedo*. These are not three independent topics: Socrates grounds his account of the soul in his account of the forms, and his account of the good life in his accounts of the soul and the forms. Thus, while Socrates' ultimate concern in the dialogue is with how to live, the ultimate basis for his view is found in his account of the forms.

Since these are central topics in the dialogue and important to my overall account, let me provide here a brief overview of this unfolding structure, beginning with the account of the forms. A form is what is picked out by the correct answer to

makes it seem less radical than it at first appears: Vlastos 1969, Nehamas 1975, Penner 1987, Most 1993, Woolf 2004, and Lee 2012. For a general overview of secondary literature on the *Phaedo*, see Ebrey 2017a.

² Throughout, references to Plato's dialogues are to the most recent OCT editions.

Socrates' "what is *f*-ness?" question. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates repeatedly says that forms are distinct from ordinary, perceptible objects such as sticks, horses, and cloaks. He has no set vocabulary in the *Phaedo* for referring to these ordinary things; instead, he typically introduces them with examples (74a, 78d–e). They are often referred to as "perceptible" or "sensible" things in the secondary literature, following Aristotle, but I will call them "ordinary objects," since I will argue that in the *Phaedo* being perceptible is not one of their most important features.

Scholars often claim that Socrates simply presupposes the existence of so-called Platonic forms in the *Phaedo* – that is, forms that are separate from ordinary objects – or that the recollecting argument provides one of his few arguments for their existence.³ I argue instead that Socrates introduces the idea that forms are different from ordinary objects near the beginning of the dialogue, but we do not fully understand how and why until the final stages of the unfolding account, well after the recollecting argument. Socrates introduces forms in the defense speech and gets Simmias to agree that they are not perceived (at 65d–e). In the recollecting argument, he draws attention to the fact that ordinary objects change over time, whereas the forms do not (at 74b–c). Moreover, he claims there that ordinary objects are deficient in comparison to the forms (74d–75b), although it is unclear what exactly this deficiency consists in. In the kinship argument (78b–80b, traditionally called the "affinity argument"), Socrates considerably expands his description of how they differ; I argue that he describes forms there as simple and partless and so as having all their features as a whole rather than in virtue of some part or structural feature that they possess. By contrast, not only do ordinary objects change over time, they have opposing features at a single time owing to their complex structure. This clarifies how forms differ from ordinary objects, but does not yet explain why they do so. That is explained in Socrates' account of forms as causes (100b–101e) and in the final argument (102a–107b). Forms, he argues, do a sort of causal–explanatory work that ordinary objects cannot do. The form of *f*-ness is that because of which every *f* thing is *f*. But ordinary objects are by nature receptive of opposites, which, he argues, means that they could not fulfill this role. Thus forms cannot be ordinary objects. For forms to do their explanatory work, they must be simple, be explanatorily prior to ordinary objects, and possess their features owing to their own nature; this is why they must have the features Socrates ascribes to them in the recollecting and kinship arguments.

According to this reading, Socrates distinguishes forms from ordinary objects quite differently from how we might – for example, by distinguishing between universals and particulars, or by thinking that forms are "abstract entities" and that

³ This book presupposes that one has read through the dialogue, ideally several times. If not, I suggest beginning with Sedley and Long 2010's translation. At the end of this introduction there is a brief overview of the dialogue that provides the widely used names for the dialogue's different sections.

such entities, as a conceptual matter, could never be one of the ordinary objects we touch and see. Instead, the idea in the *Phaedo* is that we can learn about the nature of things like justice and largeness by thinking about the sort of causal–explanatory work they do and about what sort of thing is capable of doing this work.

Socrates’ unfolding account of the soul builds on his unfolding account of the forms. Despite the *Phaedo*’s lengthy discussion of the soul – in antiquity, it had the alternative title *On the Soul* (DL 3.58) – this topic has not received much scholarly treatment. I argue that Socrates develops a novel account, according to which the soul belongs to the same broad category as the forms (roughly speaking, they share a genus), but, depending on how the soul acts, it can become more or less like the forms. The kinship argument (78b–80b) is the first place where Socrates explicitly turns to the question of the sort of thing the soul is, arguing that it is akin to the forms; this kinship allows the soul to grasp them. Most souls investigate with their bodily senses and are not very form-like (79c), but the philosopher’s soul becomes stable like the forms (79d). The soul’s ability to be more form-like or less so is crucial for underwriting Socrates’ ethical views in the *Phaedo*. But if the soul were able to become less form-like in any and all respects, this would allow it to be destroyed. In Cebes’ cloakmaker objection to the kinship argument (86e–88b), he suggests that the soul might ultimately be destroyed by the process of bringing life to the body; he then challenges Socrates to show that the soul is entirely immortal and indestructible. I argue that the final argument directly responds to Cebes’ objection by showing that the soul’s bringing life to the body, far from leading to its destruction, is precisely what ensures that it is immortal and indestructible. According to this interpretation, the final argument fills out a key part of the kinship argument’s account of the soul; taken together, these two arguments present the soul as able to become more form-like or less so in several respects, but fixed in its connection to the form of life, and therefore entirely immortal and indestructible.

In and after the kinship argument (78b–84b), Socrates grounds his ethical account in his account of the soul and forms. But significantly earlier, in the defense speech (63b–69e), he presents his basic ethical account. Socrates says there that the philosopher disdains bodily things, avoids bodily pleasure, pain, desires, and fears, and instead devotes himself entirely to grasping the truth.⁴ Again, Socrates makes these claims without fully explaining why they are the case. In and after the kinship

⁴ I refer to the philosopher as “he” throughout this book, since (unfortunately) Socrates consistently assumes in the *Phaedo* that philosophers are men. Forms of *ἀνὴρ* are used to discuss the actual or aspiring philosopher at 63e9, 67d12, 68b8, 76b5, 78a4, and 85c7. Socrates also refers to the philosophical man (*φιλόσοφος ἀνὴρ*) at 64d2, 84a2–3, and 95c1. Heraclitus, in the first extant occurrence of the word “philosopher,” uses the phrase “philosophical men” (B35). Moore 2019, for example, argues that this term was used to refer to Pythagoreans. Perhaps, then, Socrates’ use of “philosophical man” is part of his appropriating Pythagorean ideas and language in the *Phaedo*. For a discussion of this appropriation, see Section 1.3.

argument, he explains why we should all live as philosophers and why this means that we should live such an ascetic life. The soul is, by nature, akin to the forms, and so it is able to enter the divine, stable, and unchanging state that they are in. The soul can reach this state by grasping the forms, thereby becoming more like them. We are, most properly, our souls, and so we have a chance to become more like the divine by coming to know the forms. However, bodily pleasures and pains lead us to believe falsehoods, so we do not grasp the stable truth but rather become like the changing ordinary objects. More insidiously, pleasures and pains lead us to desire things other than grasping the truth, so that we do not even attempt to do what will lead to our obtaining wisdom and eternal happiness. When we acquire these bodily desires, our souls become impure, infected with something not proper to the soul. Near the end of the dialogue, Socrates' account of the cosmos and the afterlife (107c–115a) uses his account of the soul's purity and impurity to explain how such souls are benefited or harmed after death. Then in the death scene (115a–118a), Socrates exemplifies the demanding ethical theory he has articulated over the course of the dialogue.

There are several threads running through the *Phaedo*. At its core are the three just mentioned: the unfolding accounts of forms, the soul, and the good life. Another central thread is Socrates' interconnected account of fear, doubt, trust, persuasion, and inquiry.⁵ Early in the dialogue, Socrates is happy that Cebes is always scrutinizing arguments and difficult to persuade (63a). In Cebes' challenge (69e–70b), Cebes says that people are fearful that the soul dissipates upon death and so asks Socrates to persuade them not to have such doubts. The cyclical and kinship arguments aim to persuade them not to have this fear. But over the first half of the dialogue, Simmias' and Cebes' rapid-fire acceptance of and objections to arguments leads to the threat of misology that Socrates highlights near the dialogue's midpoint (89c–91c). Socrates says that misology arises from repeatedly trusting a *logos* – here, a theory or argument – and then a little later doubting it; after this has happened several times, one ends up distrusting and hating all *logoi* entirely (90b). I argue that several parts of the second half of the dialogue are designed to show how to avoid misology. Immediately following this discussion, Socrates responds (at 91e–95a) to Simmias' *harmonia* objection to the kinship argument. His response, I argue, displays the method of hypothesis that Socrates later introduces (100a–101e) in the autobiography. This method is part of the skill in argumentation that allows one to avoid misology. Seeing Socrates' response to Simmias as an example of the method of hypothesis helps to clarify the details of this notoriously obscure method. Instead of quickly switching one's allegiance between views, the method involves thoroughly evaluating a view on its own terms before accepting it. It provides a way to cultivate the right sort of trust in *logoi*. Socrates' cosmological and eschatological account, near the end of the dialogue, illustrates another way to avoid misology: by

⁵ My ideas here are heavily indebted to Sedley 1995, although developed differently.

carefully recognizing the appropriate level of confidence to have in a belief, given the nature and strength of one's reasons.

Another thread running through the dialogue identifies Socrates as a new sort of hero in a new type of story, an alternative to tragedy. The references to epic and tragic drama throughout the dialogue help to establish it as an alternative to tragedy – as Plato conceives of tragedy – with Socrates as a hero responding to the apparently tragic circumstances of his unjust death. Socrates should be admired, not pitied; his happiness is not the result of chance but rather within his control. The *Phaedo*, I argue, is written as a story that meets all the requirements described in *Republic* II–III for a properly told story about heroes, gods, daemons, and the underworld. Socrates not only acts as a hero should in such a story; his philosophical views explain why he can have control over his own happiness and why he, as a philosopher, has courage and the other qualities needed to be a hero. His heroic activities are identified as philosophical, fitting with the dramatic action of the dialogue being driven by arguments and objections, as well as by Socrates' efforts to help his companions avoid misology, the greatest evil (89d). The dialogue shows how a true hero faces death.

There are several other important threads that run through the dialogue and so this book, which I will briefly mention here. The opening of the dialogue introduces the topic of storytelling, which extends through to the end of the dialogue. Another thread is about how to inquire, which is closely connected to Socrates' views on forms and ordinary objects, as well as his account of misology. A third is about the nature of opposites; opposites play a role in each of his arguments that the soul exists before birth or after death. A fourth thread is the way in which Socrates draws on natural philosophy to defend his claims about the soul. Rather than expand on these and other threads here, I will allow them to emerge as we carefully work through the dialogue.

I have begun by introducing these threads because most readers come to the dialogue interested in specific topics, such as the soul or the forms. But ultimately the goal of this book is to understand the progression and development of the dialogue on its own terms, seeing how these various threads are woven into a unified work. At the end of this introduction I describe the overall arc of the dialogue that emerges from my reading.

Another important thesis of this book is that many of the *Phaedo's* ideas are developments and reinterpretations of ideas from other philosophers or other intellectual and religious groups. The dialogue explicitly and implicitly refers to a large number of such people and groups – beginning with the dialogue's namesake and narrator, Phaedo, himself a writer of Socratic dialogues, who was freed from slavery – perhaps even by Socrates. As noted earlier, there are several allusions to epic and tragedy throughout the dialogue. A number of people connected to Pythagoreanism are mentioned early on, including Philolaus, the most prominent Pythagorean at the dialogue's dramatic date. Socrates goes on to refer to a variety of ideas associated

with Philolaus and Pythagoreans, along with related ideas associated with Orphic writings, the Eleusinian mysteries, and initiation practices in general. Later, in the autobiography, Socrates discusses views from the Hippocratic medical tradition and from early Greek cosmologists, explicitly mentioning Anaxagoras and discussing his views at some length. Throughout the dialogue, Plato portrays Socrates as accepting key claims made by these intellectual movements and thinkers, but at the same time reinterpreting and transforming them. In doing so, he provides his own versions of Pythagorean, Orphic, Hippocratic, and Anaxagorean views.⁶ Recognizing how Socrates appropriates his predecessors' ideas often clarifies Socrates' own ideas. It also helps avoid the tendency to dismiss parts of the dialogue. In general, the approach of this book is to show how we can develop a richer, more satisfying interpretation of the dialogue by taking seriously all of its many elements, showing how they are carefully integrated into a cohesive whole.

Some parts of the *Phaedo* have been explicitly dismissed for having “religious” arguments and views instead of “philosophical” ones.⁷ But the religious language does not signal that Socrates' claims are any less philosophical. Instead, Socrates reinterprets and reimagines terms such as “initiation” and “purification” to express philosophical points. Consider Socrates' account of reincarnation. Pythagoreans (at least typically) believed in reincarnation. Socrates argues that the soul reincarnates, but he provides his own reasons for accepting this; they are initially based on an account of the nature of coming to be (in the cyclical argument), and then further refined with his account of bodily desires (after the kinship argument). Pythagoreans had a distinct way of life, which involved adhering to detailed Pythagorean strictures, the *acousmata*. Socrates argues for a distinctly Socratic form of philosophical life, which involves adhering to different sorts of demanding strictures. Socrates provides an account of how this life allows the soul to be purified and thereby escape reincarnation and obtain eternal happiness. In arguing for this, the *Phaedo* presents a Socratic version of Pythagorean ideas, including a Socratic account of how they are interconnected.

This is not to suggest that Plato intended the dialogue for people with Pythagorean sympathies or, for that matter, for people with Anaxagorean sympathies. We do not know who Plato's intended audience was. He may have thought that the dialogue would be particularly good at convincing people with Pythagorean sympathies, but the arguments do not in fact rely on having them. In any event, Plato could think that it is illuminating to see the best way to defend some Pythagorean ideas, whether or not his audience was antecedently attracted to them. On a similar note, there is no need to suppose that Plato intended the *Phaedo* for those who

⁶ I am here building on important recent work by scholars. See Section 1.3 for references.

⁷ E.g. Hackforth 1955, 44; Dorter 1982, 77; Ebert 2004, passim; and White 2006, esp. 457. Frequently scholars mention that these discussions have a mythical, religious, or Pythagorean overtone and then do not provide a detailed account of them (e.g. Gallop 1975, 88, Bostock 1988, ch. 2).

already accepted central Platonic ideas; on my reading, it contains arguments for them.

More controversially – and not necessary for accepting my other claims in this book – I think that the project of presenting a Platonic version of some Pythagorean, Orphic, Eleusinian, and Anaxagorean ideas can explain some of the discrepancies between the *Phaedo* and other dialogues, including those typically identified as middle-period dialogues. For example, in the *Phaedo* Socrates says that we can never genuinely attain a worthwhile share of wisdom while embodied (66d–e, 68a–b); he develops the idea – found in Orphic religious practices, among others – that if we prepare ourselves properly we can look forward to a better existence after death. By contrast, in the *Republic*, Socrates says that one could acquire genuine wisdom in the correct educational regime and that a philosopher so educated could possess, while embodied, the happiness that comes from true wisdom. Socrates is committed to the same broad principles across the dialogues: knowledge is incredibly difficult to acquire; only philosophers can acquire it; the soul is immortal; and those who live a philosophical life will have a better afterlife. The *Phaedo* provides a version of how Plato’s broad commitments could be realized that draws on and develops certain Pythagorean, Orphic, and Eleusinian ideas. I do not see any reason to think that one dialogue or another presents Plato’s definitive views on the topic. If Plato thought that he, like Socrates, lacked genuine knowledge regarding the most important matters, he would have reason to explore different ways in which his commitments could be realized.

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I have not divided the dialogue with an eye toward having roughly equal-sized chapters, but rather toward preserving the structure of Socrates’ arguments and allowing readers to turn directly to the parts likely to interest them. While this is a comprehensive book, it is not a commentary, and I do not attempt to resolve every interpretive puzzle or address every interesting issue or bit of reasoning along the way. Doing so would obfuscate the central development of the dialogue, as I see it, and make this book unmanageably long. Instead, I discuss the dialogue’s main arguments and ideas – emphasizing those that reoccur across different parts of the dialogue, where a comprehensive approach is particularly fruitful. I also only address topics where I have something new and (I hope) interesting to say.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DIALOGUE (WITH THE CORRESPONDING CHAPTERS AND SOME OF MY KEY CLAIMS)

The *Phaedo* is a dialogue within a dialogue, which starts in the outer frame with Echecrates asking Phaedo about the last day of Socrates’ life (57a–60a). Phaedo describes who was there – many of Socrates’ closest companions – and then begins

describing the day, when Socrates had a conversation primarily with Simmias and Cebes. After Socrates sends Xanthippe away, he outlines a myth and then explains why he has been writing poetry (60a–61b). I argue that the opening of the dialogue sets it up as a new sort of story of a hero's death (Chapters 1, "The Characters," and 2, "The *Phaedo* as Alternative to Tragedy and Socrates as a Poet").

Socrates suggests that Evenus, a poet and sophist, follow him as quickly as possible in dying (61b–c). Cebes is shocked by this suggestion, leading Socrates to defend the claim that one should not commit suicide (61c–62c), and then provide what is called his "defense speech" (63b–69e), which explains why the philosopher's true desire is to be dead. In arguing for this, Socrates describes the forms for the first time in the dialogue and draws attention to a variety of problems caused by the body. He ends by arguing that only the philosopher has genuine virtue. This section introduces most of the central philosophical ideas in the dialogue, which are then further developed in later sections (Chapter 3, "Defense of the Desire to be Dead").

The core of the dialogue is structured by four arguments that the soul exists before birth or after death (70c–107b). These come in response to Cebes' challenge that Socrates should convince them that the soul is not destroyed upon death, and that it will have some power and wisdom (69e–70b). Cebes does not ask Socrates here to show that the soul is immortal and, I argue, Socrates' initial arguments are not meant to show this, but rather simply to address the fear that the soul is dispersed upon death. The first argument is Socrates' so-called cyclical argument (70c–72d), which includes a general account of how opposite comes to be from one another. It uses this general account to argue that the soul exists after death and reincarnates (Chapter 4, "Cebes' Challenge and the Cyclical Argument").

The second argument, the recollecting argument (72e–77d), comes in response to a suggestion from Cebes that the same conclusion is also shown by Socrates' view that learning is recollecting. In response, Socrates argues that when we learn, we recollect knowledge acquired before we are born, and so the soul must exist before birth. In arguing for this, Socrates develops views on (among other things) (i) different types of recollecting, (ii) forms and ordinary objects, and (iii) how we cognitively access the forms. I argue that Socrates is thinking of recollecting as an extended process, and that he is focused on a type of recollecting in which someone perceives one thing and brings to mind another, which is the very standard by which we judge the first (Chapter 5, "The Recollecting Argument").

Next comes the kinship argument (77d–80d, traditionally called the "affinity argument"), which argues that the soul is by nature similar and akin to the forms, and so unable to be disintegrated, just like them. I argue that this argument provides a much more careful and detailed account of forms than scholars have appreciated. The aim and structure of the argument has also been misunderstood, obfuscating its interest and strength. In any event, it plays a central role in the structure and development of the dialogue, in part because Simmias and Cebes provide

objections to it, which Socrates responds to in the second half of the dialogue (Chapter 6, “The Kinship Argument”).

The first thing that the kinship argument sets up is Socrates’ return to the ethical claims made earlier in the defense speech, in a discussion I call “the return to the defense” (80d–84b). Socrates here draws on the account of the forms and soul in the kinship argument, as well as the account of reincarnation in the cyclical argument, to provide a basis for almost all of the ethical claims made earlier in the defense speech (Chapter 7, “The Return to the Defense”).

After the return to the defense, Simmias and Cebes present their objections to the kinship argument: Simmias’ *harmonia* objection and Cebes’ cloakmaker objection (84d–88c). These objections lead them to doubt their ability to make any progress on these topics, which prompt the first return to the outer frame discussion, at almost the precise midpoint of the dialogue (88c–89b). After this, Socrates warns the companions to be careful not to become misologues (89c–91c). I argue that Socrates’ main argumentative goal in the second half of the dialogue is to respond to Simmias’ and Cebes’ objections while showing how they can avoid the premature trust in *logoi* that leads to misology. I also argue that Simmias’ *harmonia* objection does not present an epiphenomenalist view (Chapter 8, “Misology and the Soul as a *harmonia*”).

Socrates says that, in order to address Cebes’ cloakmaker objection, they need to thoroughly discuss the cause of coming to be and passing away (95e–96a). This leads to Socrates’ so-called intellectual autobiography (95e–102a), in which he describes his early investigation into natural science, including: what he expected from Anaxagoras’ claim that *nous* (intelligence) is responsible (*aitios*) for all things, his disappointment with what Anaxagoras in fact did, and his own theory that uses forms to specify causes (*aitiai*), which he supports with his method of hypothesis. I argue that Socrates responds to the project of natural science in just the way one would expect, given his portrayal elsewhere: he has trouble understanding what other people take as obvious, he becomes incredibly excited by the prospect of acquiring knowledge of the good, but when he is unable to acquire this knowledge he finds a way of proceeding that does not require knowledge. I also argue that Socrates’ discussion of causes and of hypotheses should be understood in light of the sophisticated Greek medical works that predate the *Phaedo* (Chapter 9, “The Autobiography”).

Socrates’ intellectual autobiography provides the methodological and metaphysical foundation for the final argument. I argue that this argument is meant to show why Cebes’ cloakmaker model of the soul is mistaken: instead of the soul’s suffering from its connection to the body, its ability to bring life to the body is precisely what ensures its immortality and indestructibility. The soul entirely possesses immortality, a characteristic feature of the divine (Chapter 10, “Cebes’ Objection and the Final Argument”).

After the final argument, Socrates returns to discussing the afterlife (107c–115a). In the secondary literature this is called “the myth,” but Socrates does not refer to all of

it as a myth, and doing so obscures the fact that Socrates thinks that different parts of his account have different epistemic statuses: some parts he says he is convinced are true; another part, which he calls a “*muthos*,” he says it would be foolish to insist upon. He provides here an account of the journey that souls take after death – a journey situated within an overall cosmological account of the nature, size, and regions of the earth. I argue that this is a distinctly Platonic account of the cosmos and the afterlife, one that treats the heavens as form-like and the worst parts as the source of flux. Moreover, this eschatology gives no role to divine justice; instead, our souls are harmed or benefited as a natural result of their constitution (Chapter 11, “The Cosmos and the Afterlife”).

Socrates turns quickly from the entire cosmos to his own death (115a–118a). He continues to adhere to the philosophical views he has argued for over the course of the day, illustrating how to live in line with his ethical views. Throughout the dialogue Socrates is portrayed as deeply principled, someone who has not changed his approach to living or his basic commitments on the last day of his life. He drinks the poison without trepidation. His companions weep uncontrollably, leading Socrates to chastise them. After regaining their composure, Crito asks if Socrates has any last wishes, leading to Socrates’ enigmatic last words: “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. All of you must pay what is owed and not be careless” (118a7–8)⁸ (Chapter 12, “The Death Scene”).

⁸ Translations of the *Phaedo* throughout this book are modified from Sedley and Long 2010.