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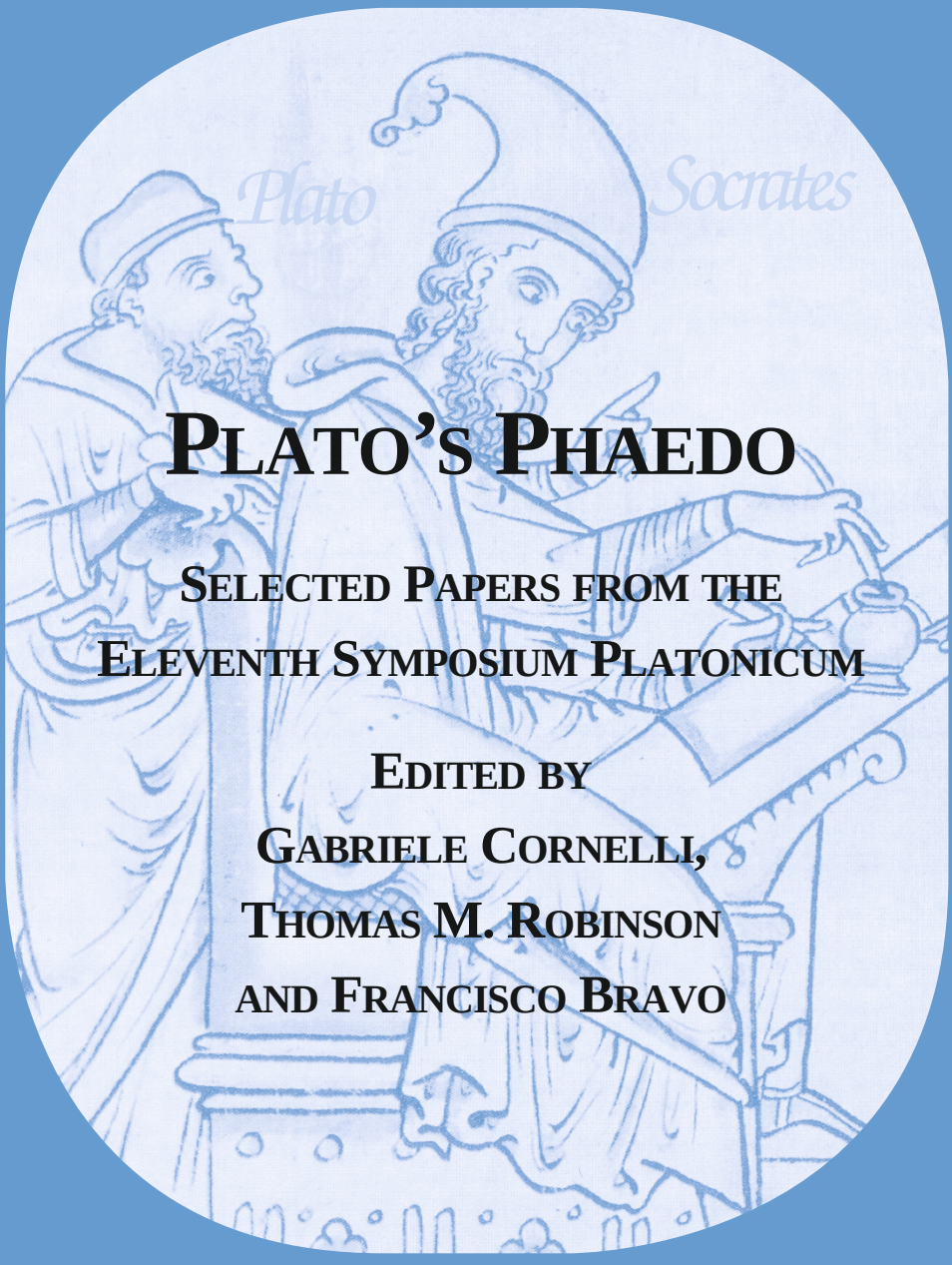

PLATO'S PHAEDO

SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE ELEVENTH SYMPOSIUM PLATONICUM

EDITED BY
GABRIELE CORNELLI,
THOMAS M. ROBINSON
AND FRANCISCO BRAVO

ACADEMIA

Gabriele Cornelli / Thomas M. Robinson /
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Plato's Phaedo

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Deuteros Plous, the immortality of the soul and the ontological argument for the existence of God

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Some preliminary remarks

As we all know, Plato's Socrates uses the term "*deuteros plous*" (*Phd*. 99c9-d1) in connection with his intellectual autobiography. His intellectual life led him away from that "wisdom" (*sophia*) they call "the study of nature" (*physeôs historia*) (*Phd*. 96a8) to look at "the truth of things" (*alêtheia tôn ontôn*) in the *logoi* (*Phd*. 99e6). The study of nature, in an immediate way, that is, by our sense organs, may be called the "first" (*prôtos*), whereas the "flight into the *logoi*" may be called the "second voyage" (*deuteros plous*) (*Phd*. 99c9-d1). The decisive passage runs as follows:

> [S_1] *edoxe dê moi chrênai eis tous logous katafugonta en ekeinois skopein tôn ontôn tên alêtheian*.
>
> [S_2] *isôs men oun hô>i< eikazô tropon tina ouk eoiken*.
>
> [S_3] *Ou gar pany synchôrô ton en tois logois skopoumenon ta onta en eikosi mallon skopein ê ton en tois ergois*
>
> [S_1] So I thought I must take refuge in the logoi and look at the truth of things in them.
>
> [S_2] However, perhaps this analogy is inadequate;
>
> [S_3] for I certainly do not admit that one who investigates things by means of logoi is dealing with images more than one who looks at facts (*Phd*. 99e4-100a3, Transl. Grube with modification by R. F.)

First, (I) I will give an interpretation of this passage, and then (II) I will proceed to the philosophical problem that this passage implies, and (III) I will apply the philosophical problem to the final proof of immortality and draw an analogy with the ontological argument for the existence of God, as proposed by Descartes in his *5th Meditation*.

I

"*Deuteros plous*" is a proverbial expression whose correct meaning had been indicated by Eustathios from Thessaloniki (about 1110 to about 1195) by referring to Pausanias (2nd century): "*deuteros plous*" means "the next best way," that is, the way of those who try another method if the first does not succeed, namely those who "try oars when the wind fails after Pausanias" (*Eusth*. p. 1453; cf. Burnet, 1911, p. 99; cf. Liddell-Scott et al., 1940[9] *s.v.*;

Martinelli Tempesta, 2003).[1] There has been some dispute about whether this is really Plato's intended meaning and whether the expression is not here used by Plato in an ironic way (Burnet, 1911, p. 99; Gadamer, 1968, p. 254),[2] that is, if the second best is not the second best, but the best voyage for the Platonic Socrates. But after the exhaustive study of St. Martinelli Tempesta, there can be little doubt that its meaning is that of second voyage in the evaluative sense of inferiority to the first voyage, and that it is not used here in an ironic way (cf. already Murphy, 1936, p. 41, n1), as it is not used in an ironic sense in the two other occurrences in Plato (*Phlb*. 19c2-3, *Plt*. 300c2) and Aristotle (cf. *EN* B 9 1109a34-35, *Pol*. 1284b19). In fact, the related comparison of the Socratic enterprise with a "raft" (*Phd.* 85d1) — instead of a boat — is also not used in an ironic way, unless it is very "complex irony".[3] The best, or at least better, voyage is the method of direct vision of things "with my eyes," or by "trying to grasp them with any of my other senses" (*Phd*. 99e3-4, Transl. Rowe), as travelling with sails is better than moving forward with oars. The main advantage of the direct method is that it reaches the destination faster and in a less laborious way, although it has the disadvantage of being the more dangerous course and may lead to complete blindness of the soul, that is, complete ignorance (cf. *Phd*. 99e2-3; 79c7). On the other hand, the second voyage has the advantage of being the safer (*asphalesteron*) course (cf. *Lg.* 897e1-2), but the disadvantage of being slower and more laborious than the first one. Thus, the second voyage implies a change of means but not of the goal, that is, "*to look at the truth of things*" (*skopein tôn ontôn tên alêtheian)* (*Phd*. 99e5-6). This goal of the second best voyage implies for the Platonic Socrates investigating the "true" (*alêthôs*) (*Phd.* 98e1) or "real" (*tô<i> onti*) (*Phd.* 99b3) cause, that is, the final or second-order cause of the mechanical causes, which are only "co-causes" (*synaitia*) (cf. *Phd*. 98c2-e1; Ti. 46c7) — quasi the *cause of causes* — "that would direct everything and arrange each thing in such a way as would be best" (*Phd*. 97c5-6). Thus, Socrates starts from the anti-naturalistic assumption that nature has a teleological structure and that the "study of nature" should explain this structure, a project to be realized by Plato later in the *Timaeus* (cf. *Ti*. 30a2-7). But what is this "second best voyage" in more detail?

[S_1] says that it is a flight from direct perception or vision to the indirect method of the use of the *logoi.* A flight implies a turning away from something to something. The "second best voyage" is — so to speak — the "linguistic turn" of Socrates away from "the study of nature" into that which we say (*dialegesthai*) (cf. *Phd*. 63c7-8) - or dialectic. Although he does not yet use the substantive *"dialektikê methodos"* (*R*. 533c7), he speaks of an *allos tropos tês methodou* (*Phd*. 97b6-7) to find out "the reasons of each thing — why it comes into

[1] Martinelli Tempesta, 2003, p. 89: "[…] il significato del celebre proverbio utilizzato da Platone in *Phd.* 99c-d può essere soltanto quello […] di *second best*, come è suggerito inequivocabilmente da tutte le testimoninanze antiche." Martinelli Tempesta (2003, p. 123-125) also gives a useful index of the passages where the expression "*deuteros plous*" is used in a proverbial way, and argues on p. 108-109, *pace* Kanayama (2000), against Kanayama's interpretation of Polyb. *Hist.* VIII 36.6.2 B.-W. that the "*deuteros plous*" means merely the safer voyage second in time.

[2] Cf. Burnet, 1911, p. 99, *ad locum*: "In any case, Socrates does not believe for a moment that the method he is about to describe is a *pis aller* or 'makeshift.'" Gadamer, 1968, p. 254: "Ein sehr ironischer Passus. Ich habe schon in meinem oben abgedruckten Buche 1931 ausgeführt, wie weit gerade die Erforschung des Seienden in den Logoi der Zugang zur Wahrheit des Seienden ist [...]". Gadamer seems not to see the problem that the Socratic *logoi* — esp. the hypothesis of ideas — can lead not only to consistency but also to truth. Cf. also Thanassas, 2003, p. 10: "The 'images of logoi' are the only means at our disposal for approaching the truth of beings." But the hypothesis of ideas is not an image. For Gadamer's interpretation of the *Philebus*, cf. Ferber, 2010.

[3] Vlastos, 1991, 31: "In 'complex' irony what is said is and isn't what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another."

being, why it perishes, why it exists" (*Phd*. 96a9-10, Transl. Rowe), namely *hê peri tous logous technê* (*Phd*. 90b7). "It looks as if there's a path (*atrapos*) that'll bring us and our reasoning safely through in our search" (*Phd*. 66b3-4, Transl. Rowe). For this path, Socrates gives a negative contextual definition when he distinguishes it (a) from the "first voyage" of Ionian natural philosophy, because it makes no use of sense perception or proceeds *a priori*, and (b) from "antilogic," that is, arguments that aim merely at contradiction (*antilogikoi logoi*) (*Phd*. 90c1). It is positively spoken of as a method of "giving an account of being" (*logon didonai tou einai*), that is, a *logos tês ousias* by the method of question and answer ("*erotôntes kai apokrinomenoi*") (*Phd*. 78d1, cf. Burnet, 1911, *ad locum*). It is therefore not to be identified immediately with (a) the hypothetical method or (b) the theory of forms or (c) the explanation of things in terms of formal causes (cf. Rose, 1966; Preus/Ferguson, 1969, p. 105).

On the meaning of the expression "*logoi*" in *Phd*. 100a1, we do not have in our modern European languages a word with an equivalent meaning, and there have been a great variety of translations: *Gedanken* (Schleiermacher), *Grund-Sätze* (Natorp), *Begriffe* (Apelt), *Reden* (Rufener), *discussions* (Grube), *ideas* (Jowett), *definitions* (Bluck), *propositions* or *statements* (Ross), *raisonnements* (Dixsaut), *postulati* (Reale*), arguments* (Hackforth), *theories* (Tredennick) (for a selection, cf. e.g. Murphy, 1936, p. 40, Casertano, 2015, p. 360-362). Probably Plato's intention was here only to contrast Socrates' new method of dialectic with the old one of observations of facts. Therefore, he may also use the word in *Phd*. 100a1 in a non-technical way as in *Phd*. 59a4 in the sense of "discussions," and this would exclude only the translations with "Begriffe" and "ideas."[4] Nevertheless, D. Ross writes quite definitely: "The language of 'agreement', and the fact that what Plato calls the 'strongest logos' is the proposition that Ideas exist, shows that *logoi* means statements or propositions" (Ross, 1951, p. 27). But with the flight into the *logoi*, Plato also looks back to the *Crito*, where he describes his Socrates as "the kind of man who listens only to the *logos* [that is, the argument] that on reflection seems best *(beltistos)* to me" (*Cri.* 46b4-6). Later on, in the *Parmenides*, young Socrates' eager desire *epi tous logous* (cf. *Prm*. 135d3) implies also a zeal for *logoi* in the sense of arguments. Therefore the expression *"logos"* means an expression with a sentential structure, but it is used in different ways by Plato: It can be rendered as "discussion," as in *Phd*. 59a4, as "proposition" or "statement," as in *Phd.* 100a4, but also as "argument," that is, a logical connection of propositions, as in *Phd.* 100a1. The last translation seems especially suited to the methodological device that "[…] one must at least get hold of the best *logos* [that is, argument] that human beings have come up with, the hardest to refute *(dysexelenktotatos),* […]" (*Phd*. 85c7-d1, Transl. Rowe). We could also say: One must get hold of the inference to the Best Explanation concerning the destiny of our soul. Rowe translates this meaning of "*logos*" quite well as "reasoned account" (Rowe, 2010). Refuge in the "*logoi*" means refuge in reasoned accounts, that is, in arguments or simply theories, for theories, too, imply arguments:[5] Therefore, I render the intended meaning of

[S_1]: "So I thought I must take refuge in theories, and investigate the truth of things in the interior of them."[6]

[S_2] makes an interesting addition and qualification: It declares the flight into theories to be an image (*eikazô),* and qualifies the image or *eikasia* as being in some sense not as exact.

[4] So Loriaux, 1975, p. 93: "dès 99e5, *tous logous* vise plus que de simples 'notions.'"

[5] Cf. Murphy, 1936, p. 40-41: "[...]; logoi are verbally contrasted with erga, and perhaps some word like 'theories', though it is not an exact equivalent, would bring out this contrast, [...]."

[6] I adopt "in the interior of them" from the translation of Dixsaut (1991): "[...], et, à l'intérieur de ces raisonnements, examiner la vérité des êtres."

What is not exact about this image? To see reality through an image suggests indirect access to reality, which shows the reality not as it is itself, but only as it is for us.

[S_3] "[…] is confusing" (Gallop, 1975, p. 178).[7] It can have at least two different interpretations. I call these the common and the astonishing interpretations. In the common interpretation, the indirect way of theories is not inferior to the direct way, because theories are also images of reality, namely "pictures in words," as the image of the sun in water is an image of the real sun, although theories are "images of a higher grade" (Gallop, 1975, p. 178).[8] *Logoi*, or arguments, would then be on the same level as *eikasia*, that is, conjecture through images (cf. *R*. 511e2), as the sun seen in water is an image of the real phenomenon. The upshot of Socrates' flight into the *logoi* would be that theories are also not exact images. Socrates would then in some sense anticipate Wittgenstein's picture-theory of language and thought: "The picture is a model of reality" (*TLP* 2. 12). As "a model of reality," a picture is not an exact representation of reality. The flight into the *logoi* would be the flight from blindness to inexactness.

In the second way, S_3 makes the astonishing claim that the indirect way of arguments is nevertheless not inferior to the direct: A medium, like an image, gets us to reality itself, as does the direct way by vision. Since the common interpretation insinuates that the Platonic Socrates adheres to the logical impossibility that the *logoi* which posit ideas (cf. *Phd*. 100b5) depict first what they then posit, and leaves open the question about what false *logoi* would depict, I prefer the astonishing interpretation. As an aside: *Logoi* (and hypotheses) are for Socrates not on the same level as *eikasia*.[9]

In the astonishing interpretation, Socrates will, as in the common interpretation, "not altogether admit that his method of studying things is less direct than that of the physicists […]" (Ross, 1953, p. 27). But the astonishing interpretation gives quite a different twist to these words than the common one does: The physicists study things *en ergois*, that is, in reality.[10] Socrates studies things *en tois logois*, that is, in arguments. If Socrates "will not altogether admit that his indirect method of studying things is less direct than that of the physicists," then his indirect method is not less direct than that of the physicists. If it is not less direct, it is at least on an equal footing to the physicists' method of getting at the truth of things.

---

[7] "The sentence in which Socrates qualifies his comparison of 'theories' with images (a1 -2) is confusing [...]".

[8] The common interpretation has been defended e.g. by Gallop, 1975, p. 178; Bostock, 1986, p. 157-162; Gadamer, 1978, p. 254, Thanassas, 2003; Dancy, 2004, p. 295, though refuted by Murphy, 1936, p. 43: "the *logoi* are in no sense *like* the things being studied, and it becomes equally clear as we read on that the *logoi* are not *logoi of* the things. [...]. But surely they are independent propositions and thoughts introduced *ab extra*." Gallop, 1975, p. 178, makes the confusion still greater when he writes that theories are "images of a higher *grade*." What is an image of "higher grade"? A sharper or a more blurry image?

[9] Cf. Apelt, 1928, *ad locum*: "Der Vergleichspunkt, meint Platon, ist nur der, dass in beiden Fällen eine indirekte Betrachtungsweise vorliegt: dort das *Bild* der Sonne, nicht die Sonne selbst, hier der Begriff des Dings, nicht die Dinge selbst. Im übrigen, sagt er, liegt das Verhältnis ganz verschieden. Die Begriffe stehen an an Seinswert *über* den Dingen, das Sonnenbild unter dem Sinnending, das es darstellt, d.h. unter der Sonne selbst. Die Begriffe stehen nicht nur über den Bildern der Sinnendinge, sondern sogar über den Sinnendingen selbst, den diese haben nur den Wert von Abbildern, und das Sonnenbild ist nur ein Bild vom Bild." Cf. also Dixsaut, 1991, p. 140: "Saisir une réalité à travers un discours réflexif, ce n'est pas n'en saisir qu'une image. Au contraire, c'est l'expérience concrète qui ne livre que l'image de la chose, alors que la réfléxion accède à sa réalité véritable."

[10] Robin, 1950, p. XLIX: "L'expression *en ergois*, [...] fait penser à l'*energeia* d'Aristote: *acte* qui est à la fois forme logique et réalité; qui, à l'état pur, est Dieu même."

II

The question now arises: How is it possible that the indirect way of arguments is on an equal footing with the direct way of seeing, that is: *to skopein en logois ta onta* on equal footing with *to skopein ta onta en ergois*?

This problem is analogous to the problem that was called by G. Vlastos "The problem of the elenchos";[11] I call it the problem of the hypothesis. For all the "reasoned accounts" or theories can do is to arrive at *symphônia*, that is, harmony or concord (cf. *Phd.* 100a5). The expression *symphônia* or "concord" has been made more precise by R. Robinson here and at 101d5 by distinguishing "consistency" from deducibility (cf. *Prt*. 333a6-8; *Grg*. 457a1-3; *Phdr*. 270c6-7).[12] I cannot enter here into the logical problems which the translations "consistency" and "deducibility" offer.[13] I make only the following point concerning consistency. If a hypothesis leads to inconsistent consequences, then it is supposed to be false: "If anyone should question the hypothesis itself, you would ignore him and refuse to answer until you could consider whether its consequences were mutually consistent or not" (*Phd.* 101d3-5, Transl. Rowe). If the consequences are not mutually consistent, then the hypothesis is false.

But consistency or "concord" is only a negative test of truth.[14] Nevertheless, we can ask the question which remains open: *Logoi* or theories may be consistent or harmonious, but are they also true in the sense of corresponding to reality? Mere consistency is for the Platonic Socrates not by itself a guarantee of truth (cf. *R.* 533c2-5; *Crat.* 436c7-d7). In fact, we find in Plato not only consensus (*homologia*) (cf. *Grg*. 487e6-7) or consistency (*symphônia*) as a criterion of truth (*Phd.* 100a4-7), but also correspondence: "A true *logos* says that which is, and a false *logos* says that which is not" (*Crat.* 385b7-8; cf. *Sph*. 263b3-7). If his Socrates tries to investigate "in the interior of the *logoi*" "the truth of things" — that is, the reality of things — he tries to arrive by his flight into the *logoi* at the reality of things. Therefore, [S_3] seems to indicate that coherence is no less a way to truth than correspondence is. Metaphorically speaking, the second sailing is no less a method to arrive at the goal — "the truth of things" — than is the first; or the rowing boat is no less a vehicle to get to the final destination than is the sailing boat. Or to put it differently again: By dreaming as Socrates does (*Phd*. 60e1-61a4; cf. *Symp.* 175e2-3), we arrive at reality as in a state of wakefulness, whereas by seeing with our eyes, we are blinded.

Or to use another metaphor which the Platonic Socrates then uses in the *Republic*: By "surviving all refutations" (*dia pantôn elenchôn diexiôn*) (*R*. 534c1-2) with a "*logos* not liable to fall" (*aptôti tô<i> logo<i>*) (*R*. 534c3), the philosopher-kings and -queens not only

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[11] Vlastos, 1983, p. 38-39: "The question then becomes how Socrates can claim, [...]to have proved that the refutand is false, when all he has established is the inconsistency of p with premisses whose truth he has not undertaken to establish in that argument: they have entered the argument simply as propositions on which he and the interlocutor are agreed. This is *the* problem of the Socratic elenchus [...]."

[12] Cf. Robinson, 1953, p. 131.

[13] Cf. Robinson, 1953, p. 126-136. But cf. now also Kahn, 1996, p. 316: "I suggest that the term for consequence is deliberately avoided, because Plato is here presenting the method hypothesis as more flexible and also more fruitful than logical inference. [...] Whatever is incompatible with some basic feature of the model, as specified in the *hupothesis,* will be 'out of tune' *(diaphônein)* or fail to accord. But the positive relationship of 'being in accord' *(sumphônein, synâidein*) is not mere consistency. It means fitting into the structure, bearing some positive relationship to the model by enriching or expanding it in some way."

[14] Cf. Robinson, 1953, p. 135-136: "'Seeing whether the results accord', considered as a test, is merely negative. It can sometimes show that the hypothesis must be abandoned, but never that it must retained."

get at an infallible or irrefutable *logos*, but they are "brought at last to the goal" (*R*. 540a6), namely "to lift up the eye of the soul to gaze on that which sheds light on all things" (*R*. 540a7-9), that is, "the Good itself" (*R*. 540c8-9) or "a principle that is not a hypothesis" (*anhypothetos archê*) (*R*. 510b7), to which the "something sufficient" (*ti hikanon*, *Phd.* 101e1) may allude (cf. Gallop, 1975, p. 190-191).[15]

This is quite an astonishing claim. The question was in principle already aptly formulated by Donald Davidson:

> But there is not much comfort in mere consistency. Given that it is almost certainly the case that some of our beliefs are false (though we know not which), making our beliefs consistent with one another may as easily reduce as increase our store of knowledge. (Davidson, 2005, p. 223)

In fact, the flight into the *logoi* takes the risk that some of the *logoi* — or even the *logos* judged to be the "strongest" (*Phd.* 100a4), that is "the hardest to refute" (*dysexelenktotatos*) (*Phd*. 85c9-d1) — are false. Now the method with which the Platonic Socrates takes refuge in the *logoi* in the *Phaedo* is the method of mathematics known from the *Meno* as the method of hypothesis (*ex hypotheseôs*) (*Men.* 86e3). But in the *Phaedo*, it is neither a mathematical hypothesis that is put forward nor the meta-ethical hypothesis that virtue is a science: "if virtue is a science, then it would be teachable" (*Men*. 87c5-6). It is the hypothesis that ideas exist where "is" has the emphatic Parmenidean meaning of being real or really real (*ontôs on*):

> My aim is to try to show you the kind of reasons that engage me, and for that purpose I'm going to go back to those much-talked-about entities *(polythrylêta)* of ours - starting from them, and hypothesizing that there's something that's beautiful and nothing but beautiful, in and by itself, and similarly with good, big, and all the rest. If you grant me these, and agree that they exist, my hope is, starting from them, to show you the reason for things and establish that the soul is something immortal. (*Phd.* 100b1-9. Transl. Rowe)

The reasoning is roughly this: If the hypothesis of ideas is true, then the soul is immortal. Not only does the theory of ideas depend on a hypothesis, but the final proof of the immortality of the soul also depends on the theory of ideas: The final proof depends on the theory of ideas (*Phd.* 100b7-9), and the ideas depend on a hypothesis or premise.[16]

But Socrates does not do in the *Phaedo* what Parmenides does later in the *Parmenides*: to consider the consequences of the negations of his hypothesis, namely, "if that same thing is hypothesized *(hypotithesthai)* not to be" (*Prm.* 136a1-2). What are the consequences if "the beautiful, the good and every such reality" (*Phd*. 76d8-9) are hypothesized not to be? In fact, Socrates assumes concerning the preexistence of the soul: "If these realities do not exist, then this argument is altogether futile" (*Phd*. 76e4-5).

But how without that does the Socrates of the *Phaedo* know that his hypothesis of the individual ideas is not false? In fact, Plato's first interpreter, Aristotle, would say that the *polythrulêta* — the Platonic ideas — are *teretismata* (*An. post*. A 22 83a33), that is, twitters, and to speak of ideas as paradigms and participating is *kenologein,* idle talk (cf. *Metaph.* A 9 991a21-22). Aristotle refers with this critique to the *deuteros plous* of the *Phaedo* (cf. *Metaph.* A 9 991b3-7).[17] In *De generatione et corruptione*, he attributes the theory not to Plato, but to "Socrates in the *Phaedo*" (cf. *GC* B 9 335b10-14).

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[15] This is nevertheless a disputable issue, cf. Verdenius, 1958, p. 231.

[16] Cf. now Sedley, 2018, in this volume.

[17] Cf. now the careful article of Delcomminette (2015).

The answer of Socrates in the "Meno" was: "We have like the slave of Meno hidden in us true opinions, because we are 'fallen souls', for 'the truth of things' is always in our soul" (cf. *Men*. 86b1). D. Davidson thus writes correctly in the article "Plato's Philosopher":

> [T]he assumption is that, i*n moral matters, everyone has true beliefs which he cannot abandon and which entail the negations of his false beliefs*. It follows from this assumption that all the beliefs in a consistent set of beliefs are true, so a method like the elenchus which weeds out inconsistencies will in the end leave nothing standing but truths. (Davidson, 2005, p. 229)

In the same vein, Socrates *could* say in the *Phaedo:* Everyone has hidden true beliefs about the universals like the equal (*Phd.* 74a5-75a3). The hypothesis of ideas will remain at the end true because an examination of this hypothesis would leave realism as the only viable option about the universals. We arrive through the *deuteros plous* at the same result as through the *prôtos*, because in us are true opinions about the universals that cannot be shaken but must be made explicit by cross-examination.

Metaphorically, we can give the answer in the following way: The rowing boat has in itself a sail, which can be hoisted, that is, by *skopein en tois logois*, we arrive at the *alêtheia tôn ontôn en ergois.* Or, to use another metaphor: Our soul as the "place of ideas" (*topos eidôn)* (Aristotle *de An.* Γ 4 429a28)[18] is a mirror of the truth, but has to be purified from its hidden contradictions by an examination of the *logoi* until it can see the unveiled truth.

Again, in the same vein, Socrates could say: Everyone has hidden true beliefs about his soul and its destiny after his death, for example that the soul brings life (cf. *Phd.*105d3-4, *Cra*. 399d11-e2, *Lg*. 895c11-12). The hypothesis of the immortality of the soul will remain at the end true because an examination of this hypothesis by cross-examination would leave it as the only viable option.

But there is a caveat: As long as our soul is in a body, we may come in the best case as near as possible or "very near" (*engutata)* (*Phd*. 65e4, 67a3) to the truth, but it remains at a "distance" from the truth — caused by our corporeality. There is a distance between pure knowledge and the closest approach to this knowledge in life which is not possible to bridge by a "shortcut" (*atrapos*) (*Phd*. 66b4):

> [If] it's impossible to get pure knowledge of anything in the company of the body, then one or the other of two things must hold: Either knowledge can't be acquired, anywhere, or it can be, but only when we're dead; because that's when the soul will be alone by itself, apart from the body, and not until then. (*Phd.* 66e4-67a2)

If this principle is applied to the soul, it is impossible to acquire *pure* knowledge of its immortality in the company of the body, that is, in this life, although it may be possible to attain different degrees of approximations, depending on the degrees of separation from the body (cf. *Phd.* 67a2-3).[19] But only after death would we not only *believe*, but really *know* if we are immortal, if we are after death — paradoxically speaking — still alive. For us, Socrates has departed "like a bee, leaving his sting behind" (*Phd*. 91c5).

As I have shown elsewhere, this impossibility to arrive at pure knowledge remains true for Plato right up to the digression in the 7th letter "because of the weakness of *logoi* or arguments" (*dia to tôn logon asthenes*) (*Ep*. VII 343a1)[20] — a corollary of the "human weakness" (*Phd*. 107b1; cf. *Lg.* 853e10-854a1) caused by the embodiment of our souls.

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[18] Cf. Ferber, 2007, p. 183.

[19] Cf. Fine, 2016, p. 563-564.

[20] Cf. Ferber, 2007, esp. p. 56-66, 106-120. The interpretation of Burnyeat, 2015, p. 121-132, does not take into account this discussion. Cf. now the critique of Burnyeat by Szlezák, 2017, p. 311-323, esp. p. 318-320.

III

I arrive now at the question of how we can apply this to the proofs for the immortality of the soul and the ontological argument for the existence of God. Since David Sedley has this morning already given an excellent reconstruction with a translation of the final proof of immortality, I will rely on his reconstruction:

> "Well now, what do we call that which does not admit death?"
> "Deathless/immortal [*athanaton*]."
> "Does soul not admit death?"
> "No."
> "Then soul is something deathless/immortal?" "It is something deathless/immortal."
> "Well now," said Socrates, "are we to say that this has been proved? What do you think?"
> "Yes, and most sufficiently, Socrates." (*Phd.* 105e2-10, Transl. Sedley)

This argument has a certain affinity with the ontological argument used by Descartes in his *5th Meditation*. I prefer Descartes' version of the ontological argument because it has more affinity with the final proof than does Anselm's. Like the *Phaedo,* the *Meditations* also tries to prove the immortality of the soul, as is indicated by the subtitle of the first edition (1641), "*In qua Dei existentia et animae immortalitas demonstratur*":

> [...] from the fact that I cannot think of God except as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from God, and hence that he really exists. It is not that my thought makes it so, or that it imposes any necessity on anything; but, on the contrary, it is the necessity which lies in the thing itself, that is, the necessity of the existence of God, which determines me to think in this way: for it is not in my power to conceive a God without existence, that is, a being supremely perfect, and yet devoid of an absolute perfection, as I am free to imagine a horse with or without wings. (*AT* 7, 67; *5th Meditation*, Transl. J. Veitch/J. Cottingham)

The analogy consists in the following: As the final argument for the existence of an immortal soul concludes from the meaning of the expression "soul" or "*psychê*" that a soul does not admit death *and* is — after the "ultimate final" proof — indestructible (cf. *Phd.* 106d5-7),[21] so too does the ontological argument conclude from the meaning of the word "God" as implying "existence" in the sense of a perfection that God also exists *and* is real (*existentiam a Deo esse inseparabilem*, ac *proinde illum revera existere)* (*AT* 7, 67). Both try to prove the existence of something — in one case the existence of God and in the other case the existence of an immortal soul — by the method of a *skopein en logois.* By a *skopein en logois*, we are supposed to arrive at the *alêtheia tôn ontôn*. In Kantian terms: Both propositions — "God exists" and "The soul is immortal" — are on the one hand analytic, and their negations — "God does not exist" and "The soul is mortal" — therefore false. On the other hand, they presume to give substantive information about the reality. Let's therefore call the "ultimate final proof" the ontological argument for the immortality of the soul.

Of course, there remain doubts: doubts about the validity of the proof for the immortality of the soul and for the existence of God. I cannot open the whole battery of arguments for and against the ontological argument, or for and against the immortality of the soul. Johannes Caterus, the author of the *First Set of Objections* to the *Meditations*, writes e.g.:

> Even if it is granted that a supremely perfect being carries the
> implication of existence in virtue of its very title, it still
> does not follow that the existence in question is
> anything actual in the real world *(in rerum natura actu quid esse)*;
> all that follows is that the concept of existence is inseparably

[21] Cf. For the expression "ultimate final" Pakaluk, 2010, p. 643-677.

> *(conceptum existentiae inseparabilter)* linked to the concept of a supreme being. So you cannot infer that the existence of God is anything actual *(actu quid esse)* unless you suppose that the supreme being actually exists *(actu existere);* for then it will actually contain all perfections, including the perfection of real existence. (Adam/Tannery 7:99, Transl. Cottingham).

This objection has a similarity to the objection of Strato of Lampsacus against the "ultimate final" proof for the immortality of the soul:

> Never can it rashly be accepted that, if the soul does not admit death and is in this sense deathless, it is also indestructible: immortal is namely also a stone in this way, but it is not indestructible. (Tr. Ferber).[22]

Although a stone is not a living being, the example is well chosen to illustrate a weakness of the "ultimate final" proof: It proves only that a soul is deathless as long as it is alive, but therefore it is not indestructible. In other words: Whereas the predicate "deathless" describes a conceptual or second order attribute of the soul of which we do not have any real experience, the predicate "indestructible" describes a real or first order attribute of which we can have real experience like that of a (relatively) indestructible stone. In the same way: If a supremely perfect being carries the implication of existence in the conceptual sense it does not carry the implication of existence in the real or "actual" sense.

To meet this objection, Descartes replies to J. Caterus: "But, from the fact that we understand [by clear and distinct perception] that actual existence is necessarily and always conjoined with the other attributes of God, it certainly does follow that God exists" (Adam/Tannery 117, Transl. Cottingham). But Descartes leaves the decisive point open about whether the existence of God is a really or "actually" real or only a conceptually real predicate of God.

So the question remains: What do these arguments prove, the really real *(ontôs on, revera)* or only the conceptually real existence of God or an immortal/indestructible soul? We do not have the reply of Plato to Strato (c. 335–c. 269 BC), but only of Damascius (c. 458–after 538) to Strato, who seems to have sided with Strato.[23]

But if God and the immortal/indestructible soul are only conceptually real, would they not presuppose something really real? In an analogous vein: If the Platonic ideas were only thoughts, were these thoughts not thoughts of something, namely Platonic ideas (cf. *Prm*. 132b4-c8)? The history of the ontological argument seems to be a virtually never-ending story.

The fact remains that these proofs did not convince everybody, and, without a doubt, the proof for the immortality of the soul did not convince the mature Aristotle (cf. *de An.* 407b20-24 with b1-5) any more than the proofs for the Platonic theory of ideas did. It is also significant that Plato did not return to the final proof of the *Phaedo* for the immortality of the soul, but did develop three other proofs (cf. *R*. 610e5-611a2; *Phdr*. 245c5-246e3; *Lg*. 894e3-895c11, 896a1-b3). The immortality of the soul remained for Plato, as for his Socrates in the *Meno* (81a10-b7), "an old and holy saying" (*palaios te kai hieros logos*) (*Ep.* VII 335a3) to be obeyed although "hard to prove" (*dysapodeikton*, cf. *R.* 488a1). Therefore — perhaps — he whose "faith was strong but he needed proof" — tried it again and again. Moreover, even his Socrates of the *Phaedo* seems not finally convinced when he says to Simmias: "[...] our initial hypotheses [the hypothesis of ideas] really must be examined more clearly, even if the two of you do find them trustworthy" (107b5-7, Transl. Rowe). The initial hypotheses are the

[22] Wehrli, 1969, fr 123, h, p. 38.

[23] Cf. Gertz, 2015, p. 255.

hypotheses of "the beautiful, the good and every such reality" (*Phd*. 76d8-9), that is, the hypotheses of the individual Platonic ideas. But when Platonic ideas are presupposed for the existence of an immortal soul, the theory of ideas needs first to be established. But for the theory of ideas, we find in the whole Corpus Platonicum perhaps only one "direct argument" (Kahn, 1996, p. 330), namely at *Tim*. 51d3-51e6.[24] The "Sticks and Stones" argument (*Phd*. 74a5-75a3) presupposes the theory of ideas with its employment of the emphatic Parmenidean meaning of *esti* (*Phd*. 75b6), but does not yet prove the theory,[25] any more than the other passages of the *Phaedo* prove the theory of Ideas (*Phd*. 65d4-5, 76d7-9, 78d3-7, 100b3-7) in a direct and formal way. So the final proof remains somewhat in the air.

Nevertheless, with the metaphor of a "raft" with which one can sail through life (*Phd*. 85d1-2), the Socrates of the *Phaedo* indicates not only the instrumental character of the flight into the *logoi* as a *Hilfskonstruktion*, but also of the hypothesis of the theory of ideas, which Plato, too, later on "never asserts to be definitely true."[26] A raft is not a stable vehicle like a sailing or a rowing boat, although it can have, like the raft of Odysseus, sails as well (cf. Hom. *Od.* 5.259-261). A voyage on a raft with oars *and* a sail which can be hoisted may also be an apt metaphor for the Socratic *deuteros plous* in the *Phaedo*. But for all its instability, a raft with oars *and* a sail is still a better way than swimming without a raft through the troubled water — the *pontos atrygetos* of the *genesis* and *phthora* of our lives — if probably many or most of us, like Simmias, can neither find out the truth about the destiny of our soul in a direct way by our sensory organs nor rely on a presumed divine — that is, a superhuman — utterance.[27]

[24] Cf. Ferber, 1997.

[25] *Pace* Forcignanò, in this volume, cf. Svavarsson, 2009, p. 60: "The argument is not intended to establish that there are Forms; their existence is explicitly assumed."

[26] Burnyeat & Frede, 2015, p. 167, n. 76.

[27] For stimulating discussions, I thank the audience during my presentation in the plenary session of 7th July 2016, esp. Andrea Capra, Barbara Sattler and Harold Tarrant.