

Platonic Personal Immortality

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I argue that Plato distinguishes between personal immortality and immortality of the soul. I begin by criticizing the consensus view that Plato identifies the person and the soul. I then turn to the issue of immortality. By considering passages from *Symposium* and *Timaeus*, I make the case that Plato thinks that while the soul is immortal by nature, if a person is going to be immortal, they must become so. Finally, I argue that Plato has a psychological continuity approach to personal identity. Thus, for Plato a person becomes immortal by avoiding reincarnation and securing for themselves psychological continuity forever.

There is a difference between personal immortality and the immortality of the soul. Of course, if one thinks that the person just is the soul, then these two types of immortality are the same. But if one denies this identification, and thinks that the person and the soul are different, then the immortality of the former comes apart from the immortality of the latter. Throughout Plato's dialogues we find many arguments for and commitments to the immortality of the soul. Indeed, after the *Apology* Plato consistently maintains that the soul, or at least part of it,¹ is immortal.² But he never appears to entertain the question of personal immortality, at least not as an issue independent of the immortality of the soul. This seems to be good evidence that Plato identifies the person and the soul, and so, thinks that the immortality of the one is the same as the immortality of the other. This interpretation—that Plato identifies the person and the soul—is the consensus view among scholars. And it is so widespread and so entrenched in the secondary literature that the question of personal immortality is almost never broached. I believe, however, that the consensus view is mistaken. That is, I think that Plato *does* distinguish between the person and the soul. As a result, for Plato personal immortality does not neatly coincide with the

¹ For the sake of simplicity, going forward in the paper I usually write about the soul rather than parts of the soul. This is not to sidestep the important questions surrounding Platonic psychology (e.g., whether the soul in its natural form is unitary, whether only one part of the soul, the rational part, is immortal, and whether Plato changed his mind on these issues), but because they don't bear on my analysis; I am concerned with whatever part(s) of the soul is (are) immortal.

² Though, there are persuasive arguments that draw the view in the *Apology* closer to the view in the rest of the corpus (e.g., Brickhouse and Smith 2010, 248-259).

immortality of the soul. Further, I think that there is strong evidence that Plato conceives of personal immortality as different from the immortality of the soul.

In this paper, I will make my case for the above claims and offer a characterization of Platonic personal immortality. In order to do so I must undercut the consensus view by showing that Plato distinguishes between the person and the soul. Accomplishing this will be relatively straightforward, as there is textual evidence for this distinction. The more challenging task lies in determining what personal immortality is according to Plato. This will require me to consider the relationship between philosophy, the person, and the disembodied soul. I will argue that for Plato personal immortality is not secured by the immortality of the soul alone but instead relies upon a certain sort of psychological continuity of the soul.³

1. The (lack of) textual evidence for the consensus view

My first order of business is to undermine the consensus view that Plato identifies the person and the soul.⁴ I'll begin in this section by taking up the textual evidence offered in favor of this interpretation. I shall argue that properly understood, the passages that are cited in favor of the consensus view do not actually commit Plato to identifying the person and the soul. In sections §2 and §3 I will turn to my positive case by offering evidence that Plato distinguishes between the person and the soul.

Although commentators seem to agree that for Plato the person just is the soul, finding proof of this view in the dialogues is difficult.⁵ Scholars who argue for the consensus view tend

³ In what follows, I draw evidence from dialogues that span Plato's career. While this approach may seem to require a unitarian reading, it does not. One needn't be a unitarian to believe that there are at least a few doctrines that Plato held throughout his career. I am here offering one possible doctrine. Indeed, I want to leave open the possibility that Plato considered more than one model of personal immortality during his career; I am here offering one such model.

⁴ The main concern of my paper could be put in terms of the self, rather than the person. So, the central questions at hand could be put as whether Plato holds that the self is distinct from the soul and whether he holds that the immortality of the self is distinct from the immortality of the soul. It is worth flagging here that this topic is complicated, if only slightly, by the fact that Greek did not have a word corresponding to the English *person*. Thus, context is needed to determine, whether, for instance, 'ἄνθρωπος' is best taken as *human* or *person* in a passage. See n. 21 below.

⁵ If one judges on the basis of passages alone, then it seems we would have overwhelming evidence that Plato denies the strict identification of the person and the soul, even if there are passages that pull in the other direction. Indeed,

to make their case on the basis of two passages.⁶ One passage comes from the *Alcibiades* 1, where Socrates offers Alcibiades an argument for the claim that the person is the soul (130c2). But even setting aside the question of the dialogue's authorship—a bone of scholarly contention for the last century⁷—there are reasons to question whether the argument's conclusion reflects Plato's considered view. In particular, the argument is part of a protreptic, aimed at turning Alcibiades to philosophy.⁸ Thus, the argument need not issue in a true conclusion in order to count as successful. Furthermore, at its conclusion, Socrates himself calls into question the argument, saying that it is not precise or accurate (ἀκριβῶς) but that it will suffice for them (ἐξαρκεῖ ἡμῖν, 130c3) for now. Thus, it seems that we are getting explicit instructions to question the argument and its conclusion.

The second passage is *Phaedo* 115c2-5.⁹ Here, responding to Crito's question of how they should bury him after his death, Socrates laughs and says that his friends can bury him anyway they'd like, if they can catch him. The joke seems to be that Socrates is not his body, but is instead his soul, and so, *he* won't be buried at all. Admittedly, this does appear to be grist for the mill of the consensus view. However, as with the passage from the *Alcibiades* I, things are not so simple. For instance, even if we grant that Socrates identifies himself with his soul, it does

such evidence occurs both frequently in the dialogues and throughout the whole of Plato's career. For instance, at *Crito* 48a1, clearly referring to the soul, Socrates asks Crito whether this part of us is inferior to the body (ἢ φαυλότερον ἡγούμεθα εἶναι τοῦ σώματος ἐκεῖνο, ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων, περὶ ὃ ἢ τε ἀδικία καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἐστίν). Again, in the *Phaedo* at 79b1 Socrates explicitly claims that one part of us is the body, the other part is the soul (φέρε δὴ, ἢ δ' ὅς, ἄλλο τι ἡμῶν αὐτῶν τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ψυχή;). Even at the end of his career, Plato continues to write this way. In the *Laws* the Athenian announces that all people are made up of two parts (τὰ δ' αὐτοῦ διττὰ πάντ' ἐστὶ πᾶσιν, 726a4), with the soul being the holiest part and also the part that most belongs to the person (πάντων γὰρ τῶν αὐτοῦ κτημάτων μετὰ θεοῦς ψυχή θειότατον, οἰκειότατον ὄν, 726a3). Of course, these passages could be 'loose talk'. But, as we shall see, the same could be said about passages that suggest identifying the person and the soul.

⁶ See Sorabji 2006, 33-35 for a statement of the consensus view and discussion of these two passages.

⁷ See Smith 2004.

⁸ The overall protreptic argument is that in order to be successful in politics, one must understand one's self. And since the self is the soul, and the soul is something divine, in order to understand one's self, one must understand divine matters, which requires philosophy.

⁹ See Beere 2010, 263 and Gallop 1975, 88. One of the few scholars who explicitly denies that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the person and the soul, at least as far as the *Phaedo* is concerned, is Dorter 1982, 63, n. 11.

not follow that all people just are their souls. Indeed, most people seem to be more their bodies than their souls. For this reason, part of Socrates' mission is to encourage people to come to identify themselves with their souls. Moreover, and more importantly, Socrates' claim here is consistent with the view that the person somehow depends on but is not identical to her soul, the interpretation I maintain. That is, Socrates could hold that he won't be there because his soul won't be there, but still deny the strict identification of the person and the soul. Hence, this passage does not support the consensus view in the way interpreters suppose it does.

2. Immortality of the person in the *Symposium*

As we have just seen, the textual evidence used to support the consensus view does not withstand scrutiny. I will now offer evidence against the consensus view in the form of two passages that suggest that Plato distinguishes between the person and the soul. As we shall see, both passages also concern the issue of immortality. Thus, the next two sections also constitute the initial stages of the argument for my central contention in the paper, namely, that for Plato the immortality of the person differs from the immortality of the soul. I'll begin with what I take to be my strongest evidence, which comes at the end of Socrates' recitation of Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*.

Speaking of the person who has ascended the 'ladder of love', undoubtedly the philosopher, Diotima concludes her lessons of love, claiming, 'And this person, if anyone, becomes immortal' (καὶ εἴπερ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἀνθρώπων (sc. ὑπάρχει γενέσθαι) ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἐκείνῳ, 212a5). Her enigmatic ending has long exercised scholars because earlier in her speech Diotima seems to preclude humans from enjoying true immortality. Indeed, although all people want immortality, because it is necessary for satisfying our fundamental desire—to personally possess the good forever (206a4)—Diotima claims that our mortal nature prohibits us from partaking in genuine immortality.¹⁰ As she tells Socrates, in place of true immortality mortal creatures have reproduction (207c7-208b6).

Scholars have offered a host of interpretations aimed at resolving this apparent tension in Diotima's speech. Nearly every commentator favors the earlier part of Diotima's speech and so

¹⁰ It is important to realize that humans don't desire immortality for its own sake, but desire it because it is needed to possess the good forever (207a3-5). This is evident from Diotima's claim that humans do not love anything other than the good (206a1). Accordingly, she cannot mean that humans desire immortality itself, but only insofar as it is conducive to possessing the good.

eases the tension by precluding the philosopher from true immortality.¹¹ And almost all of these commentators characterize the immortality of the philosopher as a vicarious form of immortality based on reproduction.¹² Thus, on the most prevalent sort of interpretation, the philosopher—just like people who are more pregnant in body¹³ and non-philosophers who are more pregnant in soul, e.g., poets and lawmakers—secures vicarious immortality through reproduction; the only difference is that whereas people more pregnant in body reproduce human offspring (208e1-3), and non-philosophers who are more pregnant in soul reproduce poems and laws (208e5-209e4), the philosopher secures vicarious immortality by reproducing arguments or like-minded students (depending on the interpretation).

Despite its popularity among commentators, this kind of interpretation faces two serious difficulties. First, even though such a reading aims at relieving the tension in Diotima's speech, it only exchanges one tension for another. Diotima is clear that non-philosophers can secure for themselves a type of vicarious immortality (see 208e3 and 209d4, respectively). She never hedges her bets by stating that these people *try* to attain vicarious immortality. If this were so, then she could consistently maintain that although they try, non-philosophers fail to attain vicarious immortality. Rather, Diotima claims that they do in fact get it (ποριζόμενοι at 208e3, and παρέχεται 209d4). Thus, she is committed to reproducing non-philosophers successfully attaining some form of vicarious immortality. Yet, at the very end of her speech, she says that the

¹¹ Very few scholars argue that Diotima means that the philosopher attains true immortality. As far as I know only O'Brien 1984 and Sedley 2009a (cf. Sedley 2006, 63 and Shorey 1933, 196) argue that Diotima is committed to true immortality for the philosopher. However, both think that true immortality is a gift from the gods. As we shall see, this view—which implies that the soul is not in its nature immortal—is inconsistent with Plato's view.

¹² See Hackforth 1950, Kraut 1973, Irwin 1977, Price 1989, Rowe 1998a and 1998b, and Hooper 2013. Sheffield 2006, 137-153 offers a different sort of interpretation, which nonetheless precludes the philosopher from true immortality. On her view, the philosopher becomes immortal in the sense of becoming godlike (see also Frede 1993, and cf. Allen 1991, 89, Bury 1932, xlv n. 2, Pender 1992, 185, and Sedley 2009a, n. 20). That is, when the philosopher ascends the ladder and beholds the Beautiful itself, in that moment, she is like a god, and so immortal in the sense of divine. Very briefly, this otherwise attractive view should be rejected because it renders immortality something to be desired for its own sake, but as noted above Diotima is explicit from the outset that it is desired because it is necessary for possessing the good forever, not for its own sake (206b1-207a5).

¹³ Diotima states that all people are pregnant in both body and soul (206c2), which suggests that a single person can pursue more than one type of immortality. I think that we see Plato making the same point in other dialogues as well. For instance, see *Laws* 713e7-714a1 (cf. 904d3-905b2) and 721c.

philosopher alone has a chance to attain immortality.¹⁴ Thus, if Diotima in fact bars humans from attaining true immortality, then her final words must mean that the philosopher alone attains vicarious immortality. But this claim would contradict her earlier claims that reproducing non-philosophers *do* attain vicarious immortality. The only way to get her out of this difficulty is to realize that in her coda she means ‘true immortality’, whereas in the earlier passages, just as she explicitly states, she meant less-than-true immortality. That is, lest she contradict everything she has said about the vicarious immortality of non-philosophers, Diotima had better be talking about true immortality at the end of her speech. Thus, she must mean that the philosopher can attain something more than the vicarious immortality of other mortals.¹⁵ Accordingly, based on Diotima’s own claims, we must conclude that she believes that the philosopher attains true immortality.

The second difficulty for such interpretations is that a careful study of Diotima’s speech undercuts the motivation for denying that the philosopher can attain true immortality. Recall that commentators offer accounts that limit the philosopher to vicarious immortality because earlier

¹⁴ One should note the similarity between 211d2-3, where Diotima claims that gazing at the Beautiful, if anywhere, is where human life is worth living (‘εἴπερ που ἄλλοθι, βιωτὸν ἀνθρώπου, θεωμένω αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν’) and this line, where she claims that the ascended philosopher, if anyone, becomes immortal (‘εἴπερ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἀνθρώπων ἀθανάτω καὶ ἐκεῖνω’). Just as in the former line she is claiming that human life *is* truly worth living here, there can be little doubt that so too in the latter line she is claiming that this person *does* become (truly) immortal. For helpful discussions of the use of ‘εἴπερ’ here, see Luce 1952, 138 and O’Brien 1984, n. 34. Pace Bury 1932, xlv. I take it that Diotima employs ‘εἴπερ’ in these passages to emphasize likelihood (cf. Smyth 2379 and the LSJ entry on ‘εἴπερ’: ‘to imply that the supposition agrees with the fact’), which I am arguing means that Diotima is claiming true immortality is available to the philosopher. It is also worth comparing the several instances in the *Phaedo* where Plato employs ‘εἴπερ’ in relevantly similar contexts. For instance, he uses it when he claims that philosophers will fare well in the afterlife, if anyone does (59a1), when he claims that after death, if anywhere, he will attain the wisdom he desires (67b7), and when he claims that the philosopher, if anyone will reach what truly is (66a9).

¹⁵ This conclusion is supported by parallel claims Diotima makes about virtue. Early in her speech, just before turning to the philosopher, Diotima claims that the poets, lawmakers, etc. produce works about virtue (209c1) and in fact have ‘begotten every kind of virtue’ (209e1). Yet, when discussing the philosopher, she introduces the notion of ‘true virtue’ (ἀρετὴν ἀληθῆ) and claims that it is only the philosopher who gives birth to *true* virtue (212a7). Thus, what she earlier refers to as ‘virtue’ is not true virtue, which only belongs to the philosopher. So too, what she refers to earlier as ‘immortality’ is not true immortality, but as in the case of virtue, the genuine article belongs to the philosopher.

in her speech Diotima seems to preclude humans from true immortality due to our mortal nature (207c7-208b6). However, this widespread reading is a mischaracterization of what Diotima actually says; she never claims that the *soul itself* perishes, regenerates, or needs reproduction.¹⁶ Whereas she does claim that reproduction and replacement is necessary for the ‘entire body’ (σύμπαν τὸ σῶμα, 207e1), she never makes such claims about the soul. Rather, what she says is that the things ‘in the soul’ (κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν 207e1) come into existence and pass away.¹⁷ All of the psychological items that she cites—manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, and even pieces of knowledge—are *contents* of a soul.¹⁸ They are not *the* soul. And the fact that these contents perish and need replacing says nothing about whether the soul itself does.

Furthermore, if we consider Platonic characterizations of the soul elsewhere, then we can appreciate the full significance of the fact that Diotima does not claim that the soul itself perishes and is replaced. This is because in other works Plato is adamant that the soul (or at least a part of it) is divine (or at least very divine-like) and immortal. For instance, at *Phaedo* 80a1-b5 Socrates explicitly says that the body is like the mortal but the soul is like the divine. Again, in the *Republic* at 611e1-3 Socrates says that the soul is ‘akin to the divine, immortal, and everlasting’. Finally, in the *Timaeus*, undoubtedly referring to the (rational part of the) soul, Plato explicitly brands it the ‘divine part in us’, in contrast to the ‘mortal’, which includes bodily appetites and ambition (90b2-c5). Thus, Plato always identifies the soul with the divine and immortal. Importantly, in her speech Diotima explicitly contrasts the mortal with the divine and immortal (208a6). Thus, Diotima’s speech operates within the same binary that Plato always employs: the mortal on one side, and the divine and immortal on the other. So, understood in the context of Plato’s characterization of the soul as divine and immortal, we have good reason to think that Diotima means to exclude the soul itself from the scope of what is mortal. Thus, because she

¹⁶ Although White 2008 takes Diotima’s view to be consistent with the immortality of the soul, he thinks that her speech is about vicarious immortality (cf. Luce 1952). But for the reasons canvassed above, this cannot be the correct way to understand the immortality Diotima promises the philosopher.

¹⁷ See Sedley 2009a, 160 for this same point. See also Dover 1965, 18-19 and O’Brien 1984, 195-197 for helpful discussions.

¹⁸ Cf. *Phaedo* 81a2-5. Dan Devereux has pointed out to me that Diotima says that *pieces* of knowledge (μία ἐκάστη τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ταῦτὸν πάσχει) perish, not that a person’s wisdom perishes, leaving open the possibility that wisdom is permanent.

never says the soul itself is mortal, and because Plato characterizes the soul as divine and immortal, which is contrasted with the mortal, we can conclude that Diotima does not mean that the soul requires reproduction in order to persist. This is because although what is mortal requires reproduction in order to persist, the soul is not mortal. Hence, Diotima's speech does not call into question the immortality of the soul.¹⁹

Based on the foregoing, then, I think that we should resist the popular interpretation of Diotima's speech, according to which the philosopher only has a form of vicarious immortality. Instead, I think we should take her at her word—she is promising the philosopher true immortality.²⁰

Let's now tie this back to Plato's view of the relationship between the person and the soul. Based on the foregoing, it might seem that what I have offered supports the consensus view that Plato identifies the person and the soul. After all, I have claimed that throughout his career—and even in Diotima's speech—Plato maintained that the soul is immortal. And I have just argued that in Diotima's speech the philosopher enjoys true immortality. All of this is exactly what we should expect if Plato thinks that the soul is immortal and the philosopher is her soul. However, we must be careful. Diotima does not just claim that the philosopher attains true

¹⁹ Some scholars (e.g., Rowe 1998b, 250, cf. O'Brien 1984, 186-190) argue that Socrates' use of 'sophist' (indeed, 'οἱ τέλαιοι σοφισταί' 208c1) to describe Diotima prior to the ascent passage indicates he, and so Plato, does not fully endorse her view. However, Socrates explicitly says that he accepts her view and tries to persuade others to accept it too (212b3-4). This is borne out by the fact that Socrates' questioning of Agathon mirrors Diotima's questioning of him. Moreover, there are other significant features of Diotima's speech that indicate that she is expressing a Platonic view (see Sheffield 2001). Chief among these features is the presence of the theory of Forms, which is vital to the ascent passage. Though, see Guthrie 1971 for the argument that the theory of Forms is not present in Diotima's speech. For the opposite view, see Luce 1952.

²⁰ This conclusion is corroborated by the competitive context of the speech. Recall that Socrates recites Diotima's speech as part of a contest between speeches on love in celebration of Agathon's recent victory in a dramatic competition. Furthermore, Diotima's speech itself sets out an implicit competition between three sorts of lives corresponding to three sorts of people: those more pregnant in body, non-philosophers more pregnant in soul, and philosophers. In order to see how Diotima makes the case that the life of philosophy is superior, we must keep in mind her claim that all people fundamentally desire to personally possess the good for all time. So, I contend that by promising the philosopher true immortality, a prerequisite for personally possessing the good for all time, Diotima shows that philosophy alone enables us to achieve our fundamental desire.

immortality, but rather she claims that the philosopher *alone* attains true immortality.²¹ Indeed, she says that the philosopher *becomes* (γενέσθαι) immortal. But these two aspects of her view entail that non-philosophers are not immortal and that the philosopher was not immortal prior to the ascent. Clearly, then, there is a problem. Plato could not consistently maintain that the person just is the soul, that the soul is immortal, and that only philosophers are immortal. In order to save Plato from such an obvious contradiction, we must reject one of these claims. And based on the foregoing, I believe that the one we should reject belongs to the consensus view, namely that Plato thinks that the person just is the soul.

3. Immortality of the person in the *Timaeus*

As we have seen, Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* provides us with good evidence that Plato distinguishes between the person and the soul. Further, it furnishes us with evidence that for Plato the immortality of the former differs from the immortality of the latter. In this section I want to consider another passage—one from the *Timaeus*—that offers further proof of each of these views. I'll first set out the passage and then explain how it supports my case.

Near the end of the dialogue named for him, Timaeus contrasts the effects of living a non-philosophical life with the effects of living a philosophical life.²² He says:

²¹ Throughout her speech and even in her final words Diotima is concerned not with the soul but with the ἄνθρωπος. Gerson 2006 argues that Plato distinguishes between the human being and the person. He rightly notes (p. 2) that 'ἄνθρωπος' is usually translated as *human* or *man* but that Plato lacked a technical term for *person*. Accordingly, Gerson occasionally translates 'ἄνθρωπος' as if it were *person* (22-23). Like most interpreters, I agree that 'ἄνθρωπος' is sometimes best translated as *person*. And I believe that this is one such passage.

²² This is a standard Platonic trope. If we turn to the *Phaedo* we find an explicit discussion of the effect a body-loving lifestyle has not on the person, but on the soul. There, Socrates claims, 'Because every pleasure or pain provides, as it were, another nail to rivet the soul to the body... It makes the soul corporeal, so that it believes that truth is what the body says it is' (83d2-3, Grube/Cooper). In this passage, it is clear that with each bodily pleasure it seeks out and experiences, a soul moves further away from being able to escape the body completely. But it is not clear how the soul could be made corporeal (ποιεῖ σωματοειδῆ) given that just a bit earlier in the discussion Socrates argues that the soul is like the divine and invisible, and hence, not corporeal (cf. 80a4-b2). In light of this argument, at 83d2-3 Socrates cannot mean literally that the soul is made corporeal. Instead, Socrates surely means that the soul becomes corporeal, so to speak, by coming to have beliefs and desires that refer exclusively to things in the corporeal world. Indeed, this interpretation is borne out as Socrates continues, claiming, 'from sharing in the beliefs and objects of joys of the body, I believe that the soul necessarily comes to be habituated and to grow together with

So if a man has become absorbed in his appetites or his ambitions and takes great pains to further them, all his thoughts are bound to become merely mortal. And so far as it is at all possible for a man to become thoroughly mortal, he cannot help but succeed in this, seeing that he has cultivated his mortality all along. On the other hand, if a man has seriously devoted himself to the love of learning (φιλομαθία) and to true wisdom (φρόνησις), if he has exercised these aspects of himself above all, then there is absolutely no way that his thoughts can fail to be immortal and divine, should truth come within his grasp. And to the extent that human nature can partake of immortality, he can in no way fail to achieve this: constantly caring for his divine part. (*Timaeus* 90b1-c5, Zeyl translation).²³

According to *Timaeus* in this passage, a person can become immortal by thinking immortal thoughts. Importantly for our purposes, *Timaeus* must be talking about the person and not the soul, as earlier in the dialogue he claims that the soul (or at least a part of it) is immortal (69c3). Thus, unless he is here retreating from this stance, he cannot be saying that the *soul* can become immortal, or mortal for that matter. Instead, he must be referring to the person.²⁴ Hence, according to this passage, the person and the soul are different and the immortality of the soul and of the person are also different from one another.

One might object that the immortality at issue in this passage is of a different sort than I am after. Indeed, for Plato ‘ἀθάνατος’ can mean ‘godlike’ without necessarily involving eternal existence.²⁵ Thus, it might be objected that in this passage ‘immortal’ only means ‘godlike’ and does not carry any connotation of eternal existence. But this interpretation of ‘immortal’ does not fit with the context of the passage. For a few lines later Plato makes it clear that he has in mind a godlike existence *and* an eternal existence. At 90d5-6 Socrates says that by conforming our

the body’ (83d4-5, my translation). Thus, Socrates’ point in this passage is not that the soul literally becomes corporeal, but that the thoughts within it become exclusively about corporeal things.

²³ cf. Sedley 1999, 320 and Sedley 2009a, 157-158.

²⁴ In contrast to 41d3-42d1, which is about the soul, not the person. My thanks to Iain Laidley for noting this passage to me.

²⁵ This is how Sheffield understands the immortality of the philosopher in the *Symposium* (see n. 12 above).

understanding to the harmonies and revolutions of the universe ‘we shall achieve our goal: that most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods, both now and *forevermore*’ (τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον, Zeyl translation, my emphasis). Thus, in this passage, while there is no doubt that Plato has in mind godlikeness, as in Diotima’s speech, immortality also has the temporal aspect I suggest.

So, this passage indicates that the person and the soul are different, as are personal immortality and the immortality of the soul. It also tells us how a person can become mortal or immortal. According to the passage, if a person thinks mortal thoughts, then she becomes as mortal as possible.²⁶ Other people think immortal thoughts and by doing so, they become as immortal as possible.²⁷ This is because these people have cultivated and cared for their divine and immortal part.²⁸ Furthermore, in caring for their divine part, these people devote themselves to ‘the love of learning and to true wisdom’. Finally, although he does not employ the term ‘philosophy’ in the passage, it is clear that philosophy is what Plato has in mind. After all, Plato often uses ‘love of learning’ (φιλομαθία) interchangeably with ‘philosophy’.²⁹ The same goes for the other object of pursuit mentioned here, φρόνησις, which Plato often sets out as the goal of philosophical practice.³⁰

For our purposes, it is also vital to appreciate how neatly this passage from the *Timaeus* corresponds to the end of Diotima’s speech. The most salient similarity is that both passages focus on personal immortality, rather than the immortality of the soul. Furthermore, both

²⁶ Surely this is the result of pursuing bodily desire, and esteeming physical pleasures and pains, as spelled out in greater detail in the *Phaedo*. Put another way, when such a person pursues what she thinks is good, she is pursuing the goods of the body, that is, bodily pleasure, and so, all of her thoughts and desires relate to corporeal concerns.

²⁷ Of course, a person is not a god, and so we should expect that they enjoy a different type of immortality.

²⁸ cf. *Republic* 500d1, where Socrates claims that the philosopher, on account of philosophy, becomes as divine as is possible for a human being (θεῖος εἰς τὸ δυνατόν ἀνθρώπῳ γίγνεται), and *Theaetetus* 176b1-2. Notice that this passage from the *Republic* is another example where ‘ἄνθρωπος’ is best understood as *person* rather than *human* (at least in the merely biological sense of *human*).

²⁹ Indeed, Socrates employs this phrase in the *Phaedo* when he explains what happens when philosophy takes control of someone’s soul at 82c1-3. cf. *Republic* 490a6.

³⁰ cf. *Phaedo* 66e4

passages also indicate how personal immortality is secured.³¹ As we have just seen, in the *Timaeus* a person becomes immortal by practicing philosophy and thinking immortal thoughts. Although Diotima puts it in a slightly different way, it is clear that she has in mind the same path to personal immortality. In fact, Diotima explicitly identifies philosophy as what prepares a person to come to think divine thoughts (210d6).³² Thus, in both the *Timaeus* passage and Diotima's speech Plato is telling us that practicing philosophy results in immortal and divine thoughts and ultimately in personal immortality.³³

So, to sum up, in the *Timaeus* the (rational part of the) soul is immortal by its nature but the person must become immortal. Thus, according to the dialogue, the person is not the soul, nor is personal immortality the same as the immortality of the soul. Moreover, on the view here, as in the *Symposium*, a person becomes immortal by caring for the immortal soul, that is, by doing philosophy.

4. Personal immortality and avoiding reincarnation

We have just seen two passages where Plato seems to distinguish between the person and the soul. These passages, coupled with the lack of evidence for the consensus view, give us reason to doubt that Plato identified the person and the soul. At the same time these passages have given us reason to think that Plato distinguishes between personal immortality and the immortality of the

³¹ Sedley 2009a, 158 claims that immortality here is the result of 'unify[ing] your self with your intellect' (158) (cf. 1999, 320 and Bostock 1986, 39). This suggestion is appealing, though it seems to require a self that is distinct from—and so can be unified with—the soul. We need not posit a separate self if we accept my suggestion and understand the person or self in terms of the psychological continuity of the soul. Though see Barney 2016, 71-77 for textual evidence in the *Republic* and elsewhere that indicates a self-above-soul view.

³² She says that the object of the philosopher's thoughts is divine (211e2) and further says that it 'always is and neither comes to be nor perishes' (211a1). In a strikingly similar passage at the end of the *Republic* Socrates claims that the soul by its nature loves wisdom, advising that in order to discover the essence of the soul, we must, '[look] to its philosophy, or love of wisdom. We must realize what it grasps and longs to associate with, because it is akin to the divine and immortal and what always is...' (611e1-3, Grube/Reeve translation with modifications).

³³ Diotima also adds the additional step of giving birth to true virtue. We needn't pursue the question of what true virtue is on her view because it is clear that it is somehow bound up with wisdom, and so, there is no cleavage between Diotima's claim and this passage. For scholars who think true virtue is the possession of arguments about the good, see Prior 2006, 158, Sheffield 2001 and Sheffield 2006, 148- 153, and White 2004. For alternative views, see Rowe 1998a and 1998b and Price 1989.

soul.³⁴ In the remainder of the paper I want to investigate what Plato thought about personal immortality and in doing so construct an account of Platonic personal immortality.

As we have seen, it is by practicing philosophy that a person becomes immortal. While this is a fine starting point, our picture is incomplete, as we are still missing an explanation of how a person becomes immortal by practicing philosophy. What is it about being a philosopher that makes one immortal? In order to answer this question, and so, fill out the picture of Platonic personal immortality, we must consider the effect philosophy has on the fate of souls after corporeal death.³⁵ This will require us to examine some of the relevant aspects of Plato's discussions and depictions of the afterlife.

Although each Platonic discussion of the afterlife has unique features, a careful consideration of these passages, which almost invariably occur in the context of myths, reveals several similarities relevant for the current investigation. Let's begin with what, or rather, whom, Plato portrays as existing in the afterlife.

Even a cursory review of Plato's myths makes it clear that the person, not merely an impersonal soul, survives corporeal death and exists in the afterlife. Consider, for instance, the myth at the end of the *Phaedo*. Socrates tells us that before the punishment of unjust souls can end, these souls must beg forgiveness from those whom they killed or mistreated while embodied; punishment ends only when the souls successfully persuade those they have wronged to forgive them (114b1-3). These actions—begging, persuading, deliberating, and forgiving—are all the actions of a person. Moreover, because souls have to beg and persuade, or be begged and persuaded, they cannot be devoid of their personhood or memories. After all, in the case of those

³⁴ Although Bostock 1986, 35-41 is concerned with the *Phaedo*, he distinguishes between personal immortality and the immortality of the soul, and, in doing so sketches an account that is similar to the one I offer here.

³⁵ One might think that I must also offer an account of what a person is for Plato in order to fill out the picture. However, in order to make my case, all I need to do is to show that he thinks the person has different existence conditions than does the soul. And we have already seen reason to think that this is the case, namely, he believes that although all souls are immortal, only some people become immortal. What remains is filling out the picture of what the existence conditions for the person are on his view. Moreover, as we shall see, I am not committing Plato to a sophisticated view of personhood. Instead, all I want to maintain is that Plato thought that a person is marked by a particular set of psychological contents (e.g., beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, and knowledge) and their relation to one another. Accordingly, I am not entering into the discussion of whether or not subjective perspectives are required for personhood, or whether or not Plato countenanced such perspectives. See Gill 1996 and Gerson 2006, 1-14.

asking for forgiveness, they must recall whom they mistreated and say that *they* are sorry, indicating that they are the agents responsible for the actions in question. Thus, in the *Phaedo*, and, as we shall see below in other myths as well, Plato portrays people, not impersonal souls, as existing in the afterlife.

If this is correct, and people, not impersonal souls, survive corporeal death, then it seems that, despite what I've argued above, all people are immortal.³⁶ For, if all people survive corporeal death, as they apparently do according to Plato's myths, then it seems to follow that all people are immortal. Yet, if my contention is correct, then Plato denies that all people are immortal, for the philosopher becomes immortal but other people do not. Fortunately, by considering three further features of Plato's portrayal of the afterlife we can see how although all people survive bodily death, it is not the case that all people are immortal.

The first aspect, already alluded to above, is that after death all people are judged by how they lived and subsequently rewarded or punished.³⁷ The second aspect is that souls are reincarnated after being rewarded or punished. Indeed, we find this pattern of initial rewards/punishments and reincarnation in most of the afterlife myths in the middle dialogues,³⁸

³⁶ This may also appear to support the consensus view that the person just is the soul (cf. Beere 2010, 263).

However, as we shall see, the fact that all people initially exist in the afterlife is compatible with the view that the soul and the person have different existence conditions, and hence, are not identical.

³⁷ This feature even makes an appearance in the *Apology* at 41a1.

³⁸ Although in the *Meno* reincarnation appears outside of a myth, the passage (81a5-d2) has mythical elements. Annas 1982, 122-125 argues that reincarnation is precluded by the myth in the *Gorgias* because the judgments discussed there are final. There is some reason, however, to think Plato does not rule out reincarnation in the *Gorgias*. First, Socrates never explicitly denies the possibility of reincarnation nor does he say that the judgments are final. Indeed, the issue of reincarnation is irrelevant given the purpose of the myth, which Socrates employs to defend his claim that justice is always preferable. And because the promise of immediate judgments followed by rewards or punishment suffices for this goal, he need not bring up reincarnation. Second, he expresses the likelihood that there is a 'better and truer' account than the one he presents (527a5). Perhaps what Socrates has in mind is an account that emphasizes reincarnation. Finally, there might be some positive, albeit tacit, evidence of reincarnation for those souls that are not completely just but also not incurable. Socrates claims that the incurables are punished but that their punishment is not aimed at improving them (this is not possible, since they are incurable) but is aimed at serving as examples to newcomers to the afterlife (525b-d). As Dodds 1959, 303, 375, 380-381 (cf. Annas 1982, 124) argues, this seems to presuppose reincarnation. The idea is that in order for the punishment of incurables to serve as an example, it seems that the newcomers must be able to see this treatment, realize that this will happen to

most notably the *Republic* (614b1-621d3) and the *Phaedrus* (246a1-257a2), as well as in some later dialogues, like the *Timaeus* (90e1-92b5) and the *Laws* (870d6-e2, 872e3-6). Again, in spite of differences in the details—sometimes souls are reincarnated exclusively into human bodies, sometimes they are reincarnated into animal bodies as well—the general story is the same: souls are eventually returned to corporeal bodies in the corporeal realm.

Because reincarnation is so fantastic, it is easy to overlook the third aspect of Plato's view. However, for our purposes this feature of Plato's myths is essential. In several of his afterlife myths, Plato indicates that the souls of the extremely vicious are permanently punished, while the extremely virtuous are permanently rewarded. Members of the former group are sent to a terrible place to spend eternity,³⁹ while members of the latter group—exclusively the souls of philosophers—are sent to a wonderful place for eternity.⁴⁰ It is worth stressing that Plato does not posit these eternal punishments and rewards at the expense of reincarnation, as it is the norm that within a single myth Plato depicts these eternal punishments and rewards for a few souls alongside reincarnation for most souls.⁴¹ Thus, we can ascribe to Plato the view that most souls

them if they are completely unjust, and so act more justly when they return to the corporeal world. Annas, following Irwin 1979, 248, is correct that this passage can make sense without assuming reincarnation. This is certainly the case when we consider Socrates' claim that seeing the punishment of the incurables may make others 'afraid and become better' (525b3). But it makes less sense when we consider Socrates' claim that their punishment will serve as 'warnings' (νουθέτημα) to the incoming unjust people (525c7), which seems to imply the possibility of reincarnation. A warning implies that there is the possibility for future unjust action. Future unjust action, however, seems to make the most sense with reincarnation, as it does not seem that the souls have opportunity for future injustice while being punished in the afterlife. Accordingly, the fact that the punishment of incurables serves as a warning seems to suggest that certain souls are reincarnated.

³⁹ If these souls maintain their psychological continuity during their eternal punishment, based on what I will argue below, then it seems that becoming incurably vicious is a second, though entirely unenviable, way to acquire eternal existence. However, since Plato believes that immortality is godlike, then such eternal existence would not qualify as immortal in the proper sense.

⁴⁰ That good souls are removed from the cycle of reincarnation and sent to a perfectly good place seems to be implied at *Theaetetus* 177a4. Even in the *Gorgias*, where it is underdetermined whether or not any souls are reincarnated (see n. 38) the souls of philosophers are sent to the Isles of the Blessed (526c1-d1).

⁴¹ This is so in the *Phaedo*, but also in the *Timaeus* (90d6) and the *Laws* (904e). The *Meno* is an exception, but there only reincarnation—rather than removal of some souls from the cycle of reincarnation—is relevant, and Plato writes nothing to rule out permanent punishments or rewards. Annas 1982, 129-138 argues for the typical interpretation,

are reincarnated after their rewards or punishments but the souls of philosophers are permanently rewarded by being removed from the cycle of reincarnation.

In the final section of the paper I want to apply these insights to the question of personal immortality. Before doing so, however, I will consider a possible concern for my reading of Plato's afterlife myths. In particular, one might complain that my interpretation depends on too literal a reading of these myths.⁴² According to this worry, we should not take Plato's myths at face value, and because my reading does, it should be rejected.

Fortunately, there are several ways to respond to this concern. To begin, as I noted above, the features that bear on my account are found across multiple Platonic myths. This fact indicates at least some sort of commitment to these features on Plato's part. Moreover, because Plato's commitment to the immortality of the soul seems certain—he both asserts and argues for it in many dialogues—he must think that a soul has some sort of existence in the afterlife. Accordingly, it is not unreasonable to think that at least some of the features of the myths prominent in my reading are meant to gesture toward what that existence is like. In particular, the idea that the person, not just the soul, exists in the afterlife seems plausible (for one who accepts the immortality of the soul) and does not depend on an overly literal reading of the myths. And it is also worth noting that the consensus view discussed above, which identifies the person and the soul, seems to require a literal reading of this aspect of the myth, perhaps more so than my own account does.

In addition to the foregoing, when interpreting Plato's myths, I believe that we should not neglect what Socrates has to say about them. After several myths, Socrates does in fact offer a disclaimer about its content, perhaps indicating that we should not think that it portrays things exactly as they are.⁴³ But just as frequently, he indicates that believing something similar to what

according to which all souls in the *Republic* are reincarnated. This, however, cannot be correct. As Annas 1982, 131 notes, the incurably wicked are sent to Tartarus forever (615c5-616a7). Further, since Socrates claims that people who are just and pious during life are rewarded according to the 'same scale' on which the unjust are punished (615b7), it seems that those who are especially just and pious will be rewarded in a similar way to the way those who are especially vicious are punished, namely, by being forever sent to a blissful place (cf. 498b-498d4 and 540c1).

⁴² I thank an anonymous referee for encouraging me to discuss this concern in greater detail.

⁴³ E.g., *Gorgias* 527a6 and *Phaedo* 114d1.

he describes in the myths would be good for us.⁴⁴ Such passages may well support a minimally literal reading of at least some of the aspects of the myth.

Of course, one might push back and claim that these passages are evidence against a literal reading. Rather than a literal reading of the myths, then, one may favor an allegorical reading of at least some of the features of Plato's myths. For instance, one may think that an allegorical reading of reincarnation is preferable to a literal reading. In fact, this sort of strategy is perfectly fine for my interpretation.⁴⁵ When approaching an allegory, a commentator faces two tasks. The first is to work out the mechanisms of the allegory. That is, one must determine what the allegory is saying. Thus, if Plato uses reincarnation as an allegory, one still needs to determine how it works and how the parts of the allegory relate to one another and to other doctrines. The second task—an endeavor that depends upon the successful completion of the first task—is to determine the point of the allegory. That is, one must provide an explanation of what the allegory means and explain what Plato is using it to communicate. Here, my account has a sensible and plausible answer: Plato uses this allegory to attempt to capture the different possible fates of souls. Reincarnation symbolizes a complete break from a person's life with the start of a new one. Thus, the allegorical reading, when stripped of the imagery, is that 'reincarnated' souls will be completely cut off from their previous, embodied lives (i.e., lives of bodily experiences and concerns), whereas the soul of the philosopher, who avoids 'reincarnation', will be able to continue to enjoy life as she lived it while her soul was embodied, since she was concerned with the non-bodily and divine. That is, 'reincarnated' souls will be completely alienated from their past lives because they will be without their bodies, which they value and with which they identify. On the other hand, the disembodied existence of philosophical souls will be continuous with the lives they lived while embodied, and it is in this sense that the philosopher alone is immortal.

So much then for the concern that my interpretation is an overly literal reading of Plato's myths. We can now consider the question of personal immortality in light of our findings about

⁴⁴ E.g., *Phaedo* 114d2 and *Republic* 621b6. Cf. *Meno* 86b4-e1, where he says something similar about recollection, which Plato goes on to argue for in *Phaedo*.

⁴⁵ Similarly, there are allegorical readings of the punishment/rewards feature of Plato's myths. For instance, one can read punishment in the *Gorgias* myth along the lines of the Socratic elenchus (see Sedley 2009b and Shaw 2015), or the punishment in the *Phaedo* myth as an allegory for the necessary frustration of bodily desires in the afterlife.

Plato's view of the afterlife. According to the passages from the *Symposium* and the *Timaeus*, the philosopher becomes immortal while non-philosophers do not. At the same time, as we have just seen, although all people survive death and go to the afterlife, the souls of philosophers avoid being reincarnated, while the souls of non-philosophers do not. Thus, there is a correlation between being immortal and avoiding reincarnation. In particular, a person who is immortal has a soul that is not reincarnated.⁴⁶ In the next section I will argue that there is more than correlation between personal immortality and avoiding reincarnation, as the latter explains the former.

5. Psychological continuity, personal identity, and personal immortality

In this final section I will argue that we can explain the correlation between personal immortality and the avoidance of reincarnation if we ascribe to Plato a psychological continuity approach to personal identity. I will also provide textual evidence in support of this ascription. Before doing so, however, it is worth elaborating on the psychological continuity approach to personal identity and considering the history of the view.

John Locke is usually credited with originating the psychological continuity account of personal identity. In the chapter entitled 'Of Identity and Diversity' (II. XXvii) in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke spells out and endorses the view. Early in §9 he writes, 'as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of the *Person*; it is the same self now it was then; and 'tis by the *self* with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done'. So, for Locke personal identity is a matter of continuity of consciousness, not a matter of sameness of body, or even sameness of soul. Thus, he believes that even if a human or soul at time t_0 is numerically identical to a human or soul at t_1 , if the consciousness of the human or soul is not continuous between at t_0 and t_1 , then they are not the same person.

Two further aspects of Locke's account are relevant for our purposes. First, Locke holds that consciousness 'always accompanies' and is 'essential' to thought. Thus, where there is thought, Locke believes, there is consciousness. Accordingly, on his view personal identity is a function of connection of thoughts and psychological experiences along with an awareness of

⁴⁶ Bluck 1955, 28 (cf. Waterfield 1994, xxxiii) recognizes this correlation and argues that the soul purified by philosophy is released from reincarnation. Yet, as we shall see, this is not enough to explain why the philosopher alone is immortal.

these thoughts and experiences. Second, memory is especially important to Locke's account. This is because he believes that 'consciousness [is] always interrupted by forgetfulness' (§10). Thus, on his view, a loss of memory results in an interruption of consciousness, and so, a break in personal identity. So to sum up, Locke's view is that personal identity requires psychological continuity, constituted by a connection of thoughts and psychological experiences, which is always disrupted when there is loss of memory.

While there is no doubt that Locke's formulation constitutes the first thorough articulation of the view, there is evidence that personal identity was tied to psychological continuity well before he wrote his *Essay*. If we turn to Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* I believe that we find something very much like the psychological continuity approach to personal identity. In order to appreciate how the issue of psychological continuity arises, a bit of background on Epicurean philosophy is needed. The Epicureans were atomists, holding that everything, including the soul, is made up of indivisible parts. They maintained that upon death both the corporeal atoms and the soul atoms disperse.⁴⁷ Thus, given these two commitments, the Epicureans argued that because it results in the dissolution of the body and soul, and the dispersal of the atoms that constitute the soul, upon death the person no longer exists. Hence, they claimed that 'death is nothing to us' because upon death the self no longer exists to experience anything, death included. At 3.830 in *On the Nature of Things* Lucretius entertains a possible problem for this view: what if all of the soul atoms of a given person come back together in exactly the same configuration after having been dispersed, i.e., death?⁴⁸ If this possibility obtains, then it looks like the person *has* survived death, and so death is *not* nothing to

⁴⁷ It is worth pointing out that this same view of the soul motivates Cebes' initial objection to Socrates' commitment to the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*. Cebes suggests that when a person dies, the soul leaves the body and is dispersed (70a3). He considers the possibility that it could gather itself ('εἴπερ εἴη που αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν συνηθροισμένη' 70a6), but asks Socrates for some reason to think that the soul could exist with intelligence and power after death (70b2), suggesting perhaps that even if it did come back together, the intelligence—and perhaps the person—may not necessarily be present. This sort of objection is later referred to as a 'childish fear' (77d5), indicating that it is naïve, though perhaps also widespread enough for children to be aware of it. Of course, given that Epicurus was an atomist, and so worked in the tradition of Democritus, we should not be surprised to find this sort of view preceded Epicurus, and so, was available to Plato.

⁴⁸ Indeed, because on the Epicurean view time is infinite (cf. LS 4C) this scenario is not only possible, it is inevitable.

her. To this possibility Lucretius replies, ‘even that eventuality would be of no concern to us, once our self-recollection was interrupted’.⁴⁹ Lucretius’ response, then, is that even if the very same atoms re-arranged in the very same way—meaning that the numerically identical soul would exist—death would still be ‘nothing to us’. I take it that the only way that this response could be effective is if Lucretius means that even though it would be the numerically same soul, the person in question no longer exists. Further, Lucretius’ reason for denying that the same person exists is that the memory of the soul would have been interrupted. Because of this interruption of memory there is no psychological continuity between the soul prior to death and the reconstituted soul after death, and so, no personal identity between the two instances of the numerically same soul. If this is the correct way to understand the response, as it seems to be, then Lucretius’ view here seems to be that psychological continuity is required for personal identity, the same view that Locke defends.⁵⁰

If my reading of Lucretius is on target, then we have good reason to think that something like the psychological continuity approach to personal identity stretches back to the time of the Greeks.⁵¹ I want now to argue that Plato also tied psychological continuity and memory to

⁴⁹ Long and Sedley translation (24E).

⁵⁰ See Sorabji 2006, 96-99. Those who object to this reading can point to a few lines after the above quote, where Lucretius writes that we are not concerned about our past selves even though we can imagine that the same atoms were arranged in the same way in the past. Because Lucretius puts the point in terms of ‘our past selves’, he appears to be allowing that the same person *can* exist in spite of a lack of psychological continuity. Hence, Lucretius cannot be positing a psychological continuity view. But this understanding of the passage misses Lucretius’ point. His argument here is based on the fact that we do not care about a particular arrangement of atoms in the past. But he has an implicit premise—a very reasonable one—that we *do* care for our selves. Hence, given that we do not care about this past arrangement of atoms, we must not really take it to be our selves. Accordingly, we should understand his argument as beginning with the premise of his opponent and showing that it results in an absurdity (i.e., that we would care about this past arrangement of atoms). This reading becomes evident in the subsequent line as Lucretius asserts that in order for some event to cause unhappiness or suffering, ‘the person must also himself exist at the same time’. Here, then, Lucretius is denying, in his own voice, the claim that it is the same person either in the past or the future. And the reason, as we have seen, is the absence of psychological continuity.

⁵¹ To be clear, I am not claiming that Plato and Locke share the same view about personal identity. For instance, on Locke’s view sameness of the soul is not necessary for personal identity, but on Plato’s view it is. My claim is only that the two thinkers share the broader view that personal identity depends on psychological continuity.

personal identity.⁵² As we have seen, Plato thinks that philosophers are immortal while non-philosophers are not. Further, the souls of philosophers are not reincarnated, while the souls of non-philosophers are reincarnated. As I noted above, this indicates a correlation between personal immortality and avoiding reincarnation. Here, I want to venture that the psychological continuity approach to personal identity explains this correlation and that it is Plato's explanation for why the philosopher enjoys immortality while the non-philosopher does not. I'll begin by making explicit the general relationship between personal immortality and personal identity.

In short, personal immortality requires personal identity. This is because personal identity must remain intact in order for the person to persist, and so, be immortal.⁵³ Furthermore, on the view under consideration, personal identity requires memory. Thus, personal immortality requires memory and psychological continuity. So, we can make sense of a correlation between personal immortality and the avoidance of reincarnation if it turns out that reincarnation results in a loss of memory and continuity of psychological contents. If there is evidence that Plato thinks that reincarnation results in a break of psychological continuity, it would explain why he thinks that non-philosophers are not immortal: reincarnation destroys personal identity, so although the reincarnated soul is numerically identical to the soul before reincarnation, it is not personally identical to it. Further, such evidence would explain why philosophers are immortal: the souls of philosophers are not reincarnated, which means that their memory remains, and their thoughts and psychological contents are continuously connected, meaning that their personal

⁵² The interpretation that comes closest to my reading is Jaeger 1962, 50-52, who links personal immortality to continuity of consciousness and memory. His interpretation, however, concerns Aristotle's lost dialogue *Eudemus*. Given that Jaeger takes the dialogue to reflect Platonic philosophy (cf. Chroust 1966, 27-30), it is safe to assume that he thinks Aristotle's view of personal immortality is Platonic. One further significant difference between my interpretation and Jaeger's is that he thinks memory continues even after reincarnation. As we shall see, this is in tension with the *Republic*.

⁵³ Indeed, as we saw, it was in the context of a discussion about personal immortality that Lucretius posited the psychological continuity approach, and so, raised the issue of personal identity. Locke also connects his discussion of personal identity to personal immortality. In §14 he considers the possibility of preexisting souls and reincarnation. Using the example of none other than Socrates he argues that even if the numerically identical soul of Socrates were now embodied, no one would say that it *is* Socrates. The reason he cites (and thinks everyone would agree) is that although it is the same soul, it is not the same consciousness. Hence, Locke believes that personal immortality depends not on numerical identity of the soul, but on personal identity.

identity is preserved, and so, they are personally immortal. As I shall now argue, there is textual evidence that suggests that Plato believes that reincarnation results in a break in psychological continuity. I will end this section by setting out further evidence that Plato ties personal identity to psychological continuity. Admittedly, what follows is speculative. But together with the foregoing, I believe it provides us with a plausible way of understanding Plato's view of personal immortality.

Let's begin with evidence that Plato linked reincarnation with a loss of psychological continuity, or as Locke puts it, 'forgetfulness'. My evidence comes from the myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*. According to the myth, twelve days after Er died his soul returned to his body and he was able to share the tale of his journey to the afterlife.⁵⁴ For our purposes two features of the myth are especially important. First, as in other myths, like the *Phaedo* myth discussed above, the souls in the afterlife are depicted as people, complete with memories from their embodied lives. We know this because the souls are said to exchange greetings with those that they had known while alive (614e2). Indeed, Er even refers to some of the souls by name (615c3). So, the souls are people and they possess memories formed while embodied. Second, before being reincarnated into new bodies the souls camp for the night in the Plain of Forgetfulness (τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδίου) and are compelled to drink from the River of Unheedingness, which causes them to forget everything (πάντων ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι, 621b1).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Socrates initially says that when Er died 'his soul left him' (614b7), which makes it sound as if only his soul, and so, not Er himself, exists in the afterlife. But throughout the rest of the myth Socrates refers to the entity in the afterlife as 'Er' (e.g., 614d1). Thus, I believe that the initial characterization is a symptom of the difficulty of discussing personhood and the relationship between the self or person and the soul.

⁵⁵ Some of the people—those who were 'not saved by reason' (τοὺς δὲ φρονήσει μὴ σωζομένους)—drink more than they have to drink. Perhaps this line is meant only to indicate that these people are immoderate. But perhaps Plato is alluding to recollection, which is otherwise absent from the dialogue. That is, these people who are not saved by reason and so drink too much will forget not only their personal memories, the soul will also be stripped of any awareness of the Forms. Either way, the personal immortality account is consistent with recollection. I assume here that in embodied life only the philosopher gains conscious access to the Forms (cf. Scott 1995, 53-87). Thus, even if it is the case that all, or most, souls qua souls have access to the Forms, it is only the philosopher who has conscious thoughts about them. Thus, only the philosopher's psychological continuity includes thoughts about Forms. It is also worth mentioning that Plato does not appear to have tied recollection to personal immortality. In the *Phaedo* Socrates claims that recollection would be 'impossible, unless our soul existed somewhere before taking on human form' (ἀδύνατον, εἰ μὴ ἦν που ἡμῖν ἡ ψυχὴ πρὶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ εἶδει γενέσθαι, 73a1). Note that he does not

Unlike all of the other souls present, Er is forbidden from drinking from the river (621b3) because he is charged with being a messenger to humans to inform them of the afterlife (614d2). Thus, the relevant difference between Er and all other souls who are reincarnated is that he retains his memories, and so his psychological continuity, while the others do not.⁵⁶ Hence, the reincarnation of souls—save for the unusual case of Er, which is explicitly an exception to prove the rule—results in a break in psychological continuity.⁵⁷

If my reading is correct, then the myth of Er constitutes the textual evidence required to make sense of Plato's view of personal immortality. We know that non-philosophers are not immortal in spite of the fact that their souls are immortal.⁵⁸ And now we have a plausible explanation of why this is so: the process of reincarnation results in a loss of memory and break in psychological continuity, which in turn means that the reincarnated soul is not personally identical to the soul before it was reincarnated. Thus, if a soul is not reincarnated, which, as we have seen is the case for the philosopher's soul, its memory and psychological continuity, and so

say that *we* must have existed before but that our soul(s) must have existed before in order for recollection to be possible. Moreover, I take it that the soul is the appropriate vessel for knowledge of the Forms—which is the kind of knowledge that is recollected—because the soul is akin to the Forms (*Phaedo* 79e).

⁵⁶ A further difference is that his soul is returned to its original body, whereas all of the other souls are reincarnated into new bodies. It seems possible that this is relevant. Given that the non-philosopher's soul becomes connected to her particular body, perhaps such a soul would need to return to its original body in order to have psychological continuity. As an anonymous referee suggested, it could be that upon entering a new body a soul is overwhelmed with new sensations, which cause it to lose all of its old memories. Indeed, this seems to me to be a plausible reading if we take reincarnation literally but prefer an allegorical reading of the end of the myth of Er.

⁵⁷ One might object that in the *Phaedo* there is psychological continuity for a soul before and after reincarnation, as there we find souls reincarnated into animals that match the characters of their previous embodied lives. If this were so, then according to my view here, all people would be immortal because everyone—those who avoid reincarnation and those who don't—have the psychological continuity required for personal immortality. Even setting aside the legitimate question of whether Socrates offers this possibility in earnest, this might be continuity of lifestyle (if you will), but it is not continuity of memory or consciousness. Indeed, we should expect that Plato believed that the psychological experiences of a soul in a lower animal would differ considerably from—and so are not continuous with—that same soul in a human body, or disembodied.

⁵⁸ Annas 1982, 132 agrees, suggesting that in the myth the person is 'only one interlude for a soul on the wheel of reincarnation'.

its personal identity, are preserved. Hence, the philosopher is personally immortal, while non-philosophers do cease to exist.⁵⁹

It is worth noting that Socrates never explicitly claims in the myth of Er that a reincarnated soul is not the same person as it was before reincarnation. And although it is implied by the case of Er, and it is the best explanation of all of the evidence, one may nonetheless be wary of ascribing to Plato the psychological continuity account of personal identity on the strength of this passage alone. Fortunately, there is further proof outside of this myth that Plato linked personal identity to psychological continuity. And if we return to Diotima's speech, we shall find it.⁶⁰

The passage that I have in mind is at 207c7-208b6, which is where Diotima discusses reproduction and immortality. As we have seen, this passage is often read as evidence that Diotima excludes people from obtaining true immortality. Above I argued against interpreting the passage in this way but now I want to consider it again, this time with an eye toward personal identity and psychological continuity.

Given our interest in personal identity, one line of this passage in particular demands our attention. At 207d3-6 Diotima says, 'even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same—as a person is said to be the same from childhood till he turns into an old man—even then he never consists of the same things, though he is called the same, but he is always being renewed...'. What matters for our purposes is that Diotima is not here denying that personal identity persists over time. Indeed, her words betray a commitment to personal identity, as her point is that while the same person is growing old, all of his parts are constantly being renewed.⁶¹

⁵⁹ At *Republic* 611a4-6 Socrates says that the set of immortal things cannot be increased (c.f. Sedley 2009a, 158). My interpretation does not trespass against this dictum, as on my view the person is not an additional entity above and beyond the soul. So, when a person becomes immortal, the number of immortal beings does not actually increase.

⁶⁰ We might also add as evidence the passage from the *Timaeus* discussed above. There, the view is that the type of thoughts a person has makes her the sort of person that she is; if a person has mortal thoughts, she becomes mortal, but if she has immortal thoughts, she becomes immortal. This might suggest that personal identity is somehow connected to thoughts.

⁶¹ Diotima is not espousing radical flux regarding living beings. If she were, then, as we know from one of Socrates' criticisms of radical flux in the *Theaetetus* (179c-183c), she would not be able to speak coherently about living things, for there would be no thing to which she could refer. On the contrary, she is making coherent claims about

So, she is assuming that there is a person who is growing old, but she is denying that he is the same person in virtue of being constituted by the same parts throughout life. What she is offering, then, is not a denial of personal identity, but a different analysis of it. The commonsense view is that personal identity consists in sameness of parts. But Diotima denies that the same person consists in the same parts. Instead, she believes that the parts of a person are constantly being replaced.

So, Diotima, like Locke, is moving us away from the folk view that characterizes personal identity in terms of sameness of parts. It is not enough, however, for Diotima simply to deny this view of personal identity. Instead, given that she assumes that persons do persist over time, in order for her position to be plausible, she must replace the commonsense view with a new view of personal identity. In fact, although she does not state it explicitly, her view is easy to extract from what she does say. Based on her words, the strongest (and likely only) candidate for a criterion of personal identity in her discussion is continuity. That is, Diotima must think that, for instance, Socrates is the same person when she is addressing him as he was earlier because all of Socrates' present parts are replacements of the earlier parts, or replacements of replacements of earlier parts.⁶² Put more formally, her view must be that some collection of person parts at time t_0 is personally identical to a collection of other person parts at time t_1 because the parts at t_0 are connected continuously (in a replacement relationship) to the parts at t_1 .

Importantly, as we know from our earlier review of this passage, Diotima maintains that what she says about the replacement of body parts also holds for the replacement of the contents of the soul.⁶³ That is, she explicitly claims that a person's 'manners, customs, opinions, desires,

people and other living things throughout her speech, and so, must think they exist. Moreover, her statement is about the parts in *him* (τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχων ἐν αὐτῷ) and she says that even though these parts are not the same, we still call *him* the same (ὁμῶς ὁ αὐτὸς καλεῖται), which indicates that she believes that there is a single person over time.

⁶² 'Replacement' is the correct word because Diotima supposes a continuous transition from one part to another, not a brute overhaul.

⁶³ Sheffield 2006, 147-148 worries that given the replacement view, the sort of soul that could be immortal would not be the sort of entity needed for personal immortality. However, as we have seen, even while the soul is embodied, its contents are constantly getting replaced, but this doesn't mean that there is not a person present. Bostock 1986, 39 similarly worries that a purely rational soul would not be *personal*. I happily endorse the solution that leaves him uneasy, namely that for Plato—and I think for a philosopher as Plato understands the term—the pure

pleasures, pains, [and] fears' are constantly replaced (207e1),⁶⁴ and that 'we are never the same even in respect to our knowledge' because each piece of knowledge perishes and is replaced by a fresh piece of knowledge (298a1-3). So, we can conclude that on Diotima's view, Socrates remains the same person over time in virtue of his psychological contents being continuously replaced by new psychological contents.⁶⁵ She does not indicate whether bodily continuity is more, less, or equally important as psychological continuity for personal identity. However, since Plato elsewhere prioritizes the soul over the body, we should have no problem elevating the importance of psychological continuity. Thus, I offer that in this passage from Diotima's speech, Plato connects personal identity to psychological continuity.⁶⁶

Let's sum up the major moves of my account of Platonic personal immortality. As we have seen, the philosopher alone becomes immortal. Furthermore, after corporeal death, all people exist in the afterlife, but unlike other souls, the philosopher's soul is removed from the cycle of reincarnation. Thus, there is a correlation between personal immortality and avoiding reincarnation. I have argued that the explanation for this correlation is that Plato holds that personal identity requires psychological continuity. Further, I have just argued that there is evidence in her speech that Diotima takes psychological continuity to be the criterion of personal identity. As we saw, she denies that a person is the same in virtue of consisting of the same

reason would be enough. Furthermore, a purely rational soul would suffice for personal identity if personal identity is understood in terms of psychological continuity, as I have argued.

⁶⁴ This list should be compared with *Phaedo*, 66c1, where Socrates identifies the sorts of contents with which the body fills the soul

⁶⁵ As we saw above, Diotima does not think that the soul itself perishes and is replaced. So, the view is that psychological continuity is required for personal identity and that psychological continuity requires the numerical identity of the soul, which is the bearer of psychological contents.

⁶⁶ As noted above, scholars working on the *Symposium* often try to interpret the immortality of the philosopher on the model of the immortality of the non-philosopher. I suggest that we should do the opposite. The philosopher is immortal because she enjoys genuine psychological continuity, but the vicarious immortality of non-philosophers also depends on vicarious psychological continuity. Those more pregnant in body have biological continuity but are also remembered by their progeny (208e3), and so, have a kind of psychological continuity through being remembered. And the non-philosophers pregnant in soul are likewise remembered (209d4) and in some cases manifestations of their own psychological contents—their poems, laws, etc.—live on in the corporeal world.

psychological parts, but instead is the same in virtue of a continuous replacement of and connection between those parts. Finally, as we saw in the myth of Er, reincarnation ends a soul's psychological continuity by causing it to forget everything and wiping it clean of its psychological contents.⁶⁷ Thus, although a soul is numerically identical before and after reincarnation, because reincarnation terminates the soul's psychological continuity, the person ceases to exist. Thus, the only way for a person to achieve immortality is to avoid reincarnation, which the philosopher alone does.

Conclusion

At the outset of this investigation I claimed that Plato distinguishes both between the person and the soul, and between personal immortality and the immortality of the soul. In order to make the case for both theses I began by undermining the consensus view that Plato strictly identifies the person and the soul. As I argued, not only is the textual evidence for it weak, the consensus view cannot accommodate passages where Plato distinguishes between personal immortality and the immortality of the soul. These passages, which we found in the *Symposium* and in the *Timaeus*, indicate that Plato believed that the soul is immortal, but the person must *become* immortal. Furthermore, both passages inform us how this is accomplished: through philosophy. By recognizing that the souls of philosophers are removed from the cycle of reincarnation, we realized that there is a connection between philosophy, avoiding reincarnation, and personal immortality. This connection was explained by attributing to Plato a psychological continuity account of personal identity. Finally, as we have just seen there is good evidence that Plato maintained both that reincarnation disrupts psychological continuity and that such continuity is constitutive of personal identity.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ It is worth stressing that the souls forget *everything* (πάντων ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι, 621b1). This means that all of things Diotima mentions as constantly and continuously being replaced (manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, and knowledge) are lost to reincarnated souls. See n. 35 above.

⁶⁸ Many people provided valuable feedback and discussion on the ideas here, in particular, Dan Devereux, Dominic Scott, Matt Duncan, Walter Ott, Jenny Reed, and Glenn Rawson, as well as audiences at the Virginia Philosophical Association, the University of Virginia, the University of Rhode Island, and the History of Philosophy Roundtable at Brown University. I also thank the editors of this journal and the anonymous referee who provided helpful comments.

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