

SELF-KILLING IN PLATO'S *PHAEDO*

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates Plato's prohibition on suicide at *Phaedo* 62b2-c9. I first lift two descriptions of death early in the text. At *Phaedo* 64c, Plato offers a description of physical death. A person dies physically when their body falls away from their soul. Plato goes on to offer a description of psychological death at 67c-d. A person dies psychologically when their soul has unencumbered itself from the body as much as is possible. Generally, I conclude, death is the separation of the soul and body from one another. Having determined what death is for Plato, I turn to the central topic of the dissertation, Plato's prohibition on suicide. I suggest that the suicide prohibition consists of two parts. The Enclosure Argument indicates the body is an enclosure from which we should not seek freedom so as not to defy the gods. The Guardian Argument indicates that we humans should not kill ourselves because we are enslaved to the gods. In all, the two arguments cohere insofar as they both tell against abandoning right rule.

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I am centrally concerned with explicating Plato's account of suicide's wrongness at *Phaedo* 62b2-c9. In service of this goal, I begin the project by investigating Plato's conception of death in early *Phaedo*. Then I turn to an examination of the suicide prohibition.

In order to evaluate why a certain type of death is bad, we must have a good handle of what death *is*. Accordingly, before examining Plato's argument against suicide, I attempt to sort out what concept of death Plato assumes early in *Phaedo*. In Chapter 1, I argue that Plato builds a coherent account of death in *Phaedo* across two passages, lines 64c4-8 and 67c5-d5. I term the description in the first passage 'physical death' and the description in the second passage 'psychological death.' These two kinds of death are unified under a general description of death. A person has died when her soul and body have separated from one another. A person has died *physically* when her body falls away from her soul. A person has died *psychologically* when her soul unencumbers itself from the body. After defending my interpretations of the two kinds of death, I compare them. This comparison yields six observations: (i) it is not possible for a person to avoid physical death; (ii) only some people may die psychologically, though philosophers are the most likely to die psychologically; (iii) it is possible for a person to have physically died without having psychologically died; (iv) it is possible for a person to have psychologically died without having physically died; (v) it is possible for a person to have psychologically died and physically died; and (vi) it is unlikely that a person may die psychologically after dying physically.

Before considering the suicide prohibition, I evaluate the notoriously difficult preceding comments at 62a2-7. Leading up to the suicide prohibition, Cebes asks Socrates to offer a clear account of suicide's wrongness. In Chapters 2-3, I interpret Socrates' reply. I suggest that

Socrates tentatively forwards three propositions at 62a: (i) the suicide prohibition does not admit of exceptions; (ii) it is better for some people to be dead than to be alive; and (iii) those for whom death is better than life should nevertheless refrain from killing themselves until they receive divine permission to do so. Further, I suggest that Plato delivers these propositions to foreshadow his forthcoming suicide prohibition. I call this interpretation the ‘Preview Reading’ of 62a.

The remainder of the dissertation concerns Plato’s prohibition against suicide at lines 62b2-c9 of *Phaedo*. I divide the passage into two distinct arguments. I term the first the ‘Enclosure Argument.’ At 62b2-5 Plato indicates that we must not kill ourselves because our bodies are enclosures from which we must neither free ourselves nor escape. This interpretation of the passage differs from most in that I take Plato to describe the body as an ‘enclosure.’ I defend this reading by appeal to other Platonic texts and ancient conceptions of prison. I make a further interpretive intervention: I argue that Plato intends to portray the body as both restrictive to and protective of the soul. In addition, the soul is protective of the body. ‘Enclosure,’ I conclude, adequately supports this layered reading of the passage without itself trafficking in unintended connotations.

In Chapter 4, I consider Plato’s second argument against suicide which he delivers at 62b5-9. I call this second argument the ‘Guardian Argument.’ The Guardian argument tells that suicide is wrong because to kill oneself it to defy the gods, to whom we belong. I suggest that we belong to the gods as human property. Plainly, we humans are enslaved to the gods; correspondingly the gods are our masters. I argue that we may reasonably interpret Plato to have argued for this claim. I consider, too, how Socrates’ seeming exemption from the suicide prohibition squares with his status as a slave to the gods. Namely, the gods send a sign that they

want for Socrates to be dead, and so he may kill himself without violating the suicide prohibition.

I conclude my exploration of the suicide prohibition with an explanation for how, in my view, the Enclosure and Guardian Arguments cohere. I suggest that each argument emphasizes that we must heed right rule. Plato commits himself to the view that the soul is the rightful ruler of the body. The Enclosure Argument relies on this commitment and the relationship to the gods Plato indicates in the Guardian Argument. The gods task us with exercising right rule over the body, so it would be wrong for us to free ourselves or run away from the body. So, the Guardian Argument importantly undergirds the Enclosure Argument. Moreover, the Guardian Argument offers a further, related argument against self-killing: self-killing defies the orders of the gods to whom we are enslaved.

Lastly, a note on method and scope. The scope of the dissertation is quite narrow. Centrally, the project aims to make sense of three passages in *Phaedo*: 62b-c, 64c, and 67c-d. In service of this goal, I invoke only Platonic texts which I think illuminate or clarify some feature of the target passages. Principally though, I aim to dissect the three central passages, to the admitted detriment of explicating related concepts and secondary literature. This trade-off, to my view, invites a close reading and investigation of the passages in question. In the conclusion, I consider how insights gleaned from 62b-c, 64c, and 67c-d may contribute to further areas of study.

Chapter 1: Death as Separation

Plato's *Phaedo* begins with Phaedo recounting Socrates' death to Echebrates. Echebrates asks Phaedo, "how did he die?"¹ This question is not simply answered. Echebrates might be asking 'was he killed?' or 'what state was Socrates in when he died?' He could have been asking 'did Socrates kill himself?' In order to answer these questions and others that this simple query generates, it is necessary to identify what exactly death is for Plato at the start of *Phaedo*.

Toward this end, I consider two early definitions of death in *Phaedo*. This chapter is purposefully narrow — I consider only Plato's two early definitions of death. Found at 64c and 67c-d, I term these conceptions physical and psychological death respectively.² For a person to physically die is for her soul to physically separate from her body; a person psychologically dies when her soul is unencumbered by her body. I next offer my view of how they are related: roughly, physical and psychological death are distinct from one another, but both are death insofar as they describe the separation of the soul and body from one another — in one case physically, in the other mentally.

¹ *Phd.*, 57a6. Tr. Grube.

² As summarized in Melina Mouzala 2014, Neoplatonic commentators (of whom she most closely analyzes Olympiodorus and Damascius) also noted this distinction. Mouzala refers to these two types of death as 'bodily' and 'voluntary.' As a note, my analysis of the text, uninformed by these commentators, accords remarkably well. Which is perhaps to say, the distinctions between the two definitions under consideration are easy to spot for a reader of Plato. What these differences amount to is up for debate.

I. Physical Death

After his interlocutors agree that there is such a thing as death, Socrates offers a definition.

Ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγὴν; καὶ εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ τεθνάναι, χωρὶς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγέν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσθαι αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν εἶναι; ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο;³

Is [death]⁴ anything other than the separation of the soul from the body? And is this having died: the body separately, on the one hand, has come to be separated from the soul by itself; the soul separately, on the other hand, exists separated by itself apart from the body. Is death anything other than this?

Socrates first describes death as the departure of the soul from the body.⁵ He elaborates that the body has come to be separated from the soul while the soul exists alone, apart from the body. That the soul and body come apart from each other just *is* what it is for a person to die. I will call what Socrates describes here *physical death*. For a person to die physically is for their soul to physically separate from their body.

I argue that Plato refers to death in two ways in this passage. First, he raises the question of whether death — θάνατος⁶ — is the separation of the soul from the body; I will call this Q1. In lines 5-8 he raises a second question: what it is for something to have died, τεθνάναι; I will refer to this as Q2. In Q1 (lines 4-5) Plato seems to describe the event of death, in Q2 (lines 5-8) the state of being dead (having died). Correspondingly, I take the subject of Q1, θάνατος, as the event of death; I take the subject of Q2, τεθνάναι, as the state of being dead.⁷ Q2 arises from Q1.

³ All Greek reproduced from *Oxford Classical Texts. Phd.* 64c4-8. Tr. Grube, lightly amended.

⁴ I take τὸν θάνατον from 64c2 here.

⁵ *Phd.* 64c4-5.

⁶ See footnote 4, I take the subject of line 4 as θάνατος.

⁷ Mouzala (p.176), calling on close lines (most importantly, in my view, 67e6) contrasts ἀποθνήσκειν, as the event of death or the process of dying (certainly the former in the case of psychological death) with τεθνάναι. I, however, take θάνατος to contrast with τεθνάναι because it is, I think very plausibly, the subject to which τί refers at 64c4. I take Mouzala's point that at other spots in the text Plato draws this distinction (between the event, process, and state of being dead). However, at least in the passage at hand,

Given that a person experiences the event of death — θάνατος — when their soul and body physically separate from one another, it would seem that the state which follows—τεθνάναι—is naturally a state in which the soul and body are apart from each other. Immediately following his explication of τεθνάναι, Plato concludes with a final question, Q3: “Is death anything other than this?”⁸ To what, one might wonder, does the τοῦτο refer? I suggest that this final τοῦτο again refers to the θάνατος of line c2, the subject of Q1.

Before making the case for taking τοῦτο with the θάνατος of c2, I will argue against what might seem a more natural reading of the passage. The natural referent of τοῦτο might seem to be the preceding description of τεθνάναι. (“And this is having died: the body separately, on the one hand, has come to be separated from the soul by itself; the soul separately, on the other hand, exists separated by itself apart from the body.”⁹) However, if this were the case, and should θάνατος consistently describe the event of death, the conclusion of the passage would amount to: “is the event of death anything but the state of being dead?” In other words, on this reading θάνατος and τεθνάναι ultimately amount to the same thing, the state of being dead. Put another way, reading τεθνάναι as the referent of τοῦτο would blur the distinction between θάνατος and τεθνάναι, again prompting us to wonder why Plato uses two different terms at all. Even if more grammatically appealing, in this case reading τοῦτο with nearby τεθνάναι renders θάνατος and τεθνάναι identical. However, I have argued that Plato takes care to distinguish between the two senses of death, the event on the one hand, the state on the other. To preserve this distinction, we should opt for a different interpretation: I suggest that τοῦτο be taken with θάνατος instead.

I take that point to be made clearly and solely through the uses of the gapped subject θάνατος for τι at 64c2 and τεθνάναι at 64c5.

⁸ ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο;

⁹ καὶ εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ τεθνάναι, χωρὶς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγὲν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσσαν αὐτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν εἶναι;

On my reading of the passage, τοῦτο refers to θάνατος, understood as the event of death. I suggest that Plato asks in Q3 whether the event of death is anything other than the separation of the soul and body. Which is to say, isn't death just what we have said it is, namely, the separation of the soul and body? Plato first establishes the event of death then generates a different sense of death on the basis of that first definition. Q1 establishes death as separation. Given this, we can answer Q2: the state of being dead is the persistent separation of a person's constitutive parts. Crucially, Plato then reiterates that despite being generated in contrast to the event of death, the state of death does not amount to the event of death; they do not turn out to be the same thing. I interpret Q3 as serving two purposes. On the one hand, Q3 emphasizes the closeness of the two phenomena. Given what we know about the event of death, we can infer a definition of the state of being dead. Q3 serves a second purpose of reminding the reader that despite the relatedness of the phenomena, the state of death and the event of death are neither identical nor interchangeable with one another.

We, too, invoke different senses of separation. Sometimes we mean to refer to states of separation; sometimes we mean to refer to events. We might say, for example, that two people are divorced. We may mean that the couple has at that moment completed the process of divorce; 'they are divorced' serves as a declaration of an event. We may alternatively mean that the couple have been divorced for years; 'they are divorced' describes a state of affairs. Though the word divorce is used in both cases to describe a separation, the sense in which they are separated differs. The first case describes the event of divorce, the second the state of being divorced. As with the divorce example, we often use the same word to mark separation as an event and

separation as a state.¹⁰ In introducing precise language to refer to the event and state of death, Plato eliminates the confusion that arises from using one word to refer to multiple phenomena. What's more, Plato's delineation between senses of death (i.e., death as an event versus death as a state) will apply to each of the two species defined, physical and psychological death. We can, for example, describe what it is for a person to die physically and what it is for a person to be dead physically. This more fine-grained distinction between not only kinds of death but the senses in which someone has died allows us to reconstruct a robust, more complete metaphysical picture of what definitions of death emerge in the early pages of *Phaedo*. Further, this precision gives us tools to compare and contrast physical and psychological death more thoroughly (a task I take up in Section V of this chapter).

I have argued that Plato at 64c clearly distinguishes between two senses of death, the event (θάνατος) and the state (τεθνάναι). We may still wonder, though, what the *process* of dying involves. Just as Plato generated a definition of the state of death from that of the event of death, we can construct a Platonic description of what the process of dying is from the definitions in our passage. For a person to die physically is for her soul and body to separate from one another. The occurrence of the soul and body separate from each other constitutes the event of death. Following this, the soul and body persist apart from one another, the state of death. Given this, we can infer that the process of dying describes *the process by which* the soul and body come to separate from one another. This process naturally precedes the event of death. The passage at 64c enables us to construct a description of the process of dying but does not

¹⁰ And, for that matter, separation as a process (e.g., 'their divorce spanned many years,' 'her death was long and painful.' However, often we use present participles to indicate processes (e.g., *dying*, *divorcing*, *separating*, etc.).

offer this description outright. However, in the course of the forthcoming Cyclical Argument, Plato *does* give a description of what the process of dying involves.

We can infer from 64c that for Plato the change from life to death – dying – marks the transition from the soul’s embodiment to its freedom. Corroboration for this inference comes at 71b-e. In short, the opposites ‘being dead’ and ‘being alive’ — like all opposites — come from one another via a process.¹¹ In one direction this process is to become alive, in the other, to die. Death¹² *comes to be* (i.e., dying) from being alive; the state of being alive *comes to be* (i.e., coming to life) from being dead. In the course of arguing for the soul’s eternity, the Cyclical Argument usefully describes what it is to die. The soul’s process of dying is one of the two parallel processes connecting opposite states, being alive and being dead. The process itself describes a person’s transition from being alive to being dead. This is, of course, a brief discussion of one of the most studied segments of the text.

The Cyclical Argument and the 64c passage provide complementary information about the process of dying. The Cyclical Argument establishes that coming to be alive and dying are processes; we can infer from 64c that that process is when a person’s soul and body separate (i.e., are *separating*) from each other. However, in both passages Plato offers no guidance as to what this change involves. Independent of Plato, but plausibly, I speculate as to how this process might present. The process of dying may occur over long or short spans of time — it might describe a prolonged illness, it might describe the split second of impact during a fatal crash. Centrally, I take it that dying tracks what death in fact consists in for living beings, not what might count as death merely in theory. For humans, death involves a process of dying, even if that process is very fast. That said, I accept that it is *theoretically* possible that in some cases the

¹¹ *Phd.* 71b.

¹² Plato uses two words for death throughout this passage: θνήσκω and ἀποθνήσκω.

change from life to death is instantaneous and so not a process. We can imagine a case where a person could be alive one moment and dead the next, jumping immediately from life to death. Imagine, for instance, that a machine instantly zaps the life out of persons, bypassing the dying process. However, moving from life immediately to death is merely imaginable; it is a conceptual possibility. Constrained by physical reality, persons do undergo a process of death, however short.¹³

Death, whether physical or psychological, can at different times describe a process, event, or state. As with Plato's account, I think that any comprehensive account of death will, and should, describe all three of these concepts.

II. Physical Death as Separation

Our concept of death, colloquially and philosophically, involves the process, event and state of death — dying, the event of death and the state of being dead respectively. Plato seems to denote this by calling death, simply ἀπαλλαγή, separation.

Plato describes the separation of the soul from the body in different terms than that of the body from the soul. In the first case, he says that the body has come to be separated from the soul. In the second case though, he says that the soul *is* and *exists* having been separated from the body.¹⁴

¹³ In fact, the process of dying might be imperceptibly fast and so indistinguishable from and coincident with the event of death. What distinguishes the two from one another is the following: the process of dying is a transition from life to death, including the liminal moment between the states 'being alive' and 'being dead.' The event of death, by contrast, is the first moment when the soul and body exist separately from one another following their (process of) separation.

¹⁴ I doubly translate εἶναι here to convey both what I think is the correct translation in this case (exists) and also to emphasize the force of the εἶναι (is). To me, it seems that Plato emphasizes the toughness or robustness of the soul as compared with the body by modifying it with εἶναι. Cf. Kahn 2009.

The separation of the body from the soul and the soul from the body are in some way symmetric to one another. Plato, I think, stresses that the result of separation is that things that were once together are no longer. The language of separation in both cases is nearly identical. “ἀπαλλαγεῖσαν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ” describes separation in each case. The word “χωρῖς” further emphasizes each part’s independence from the other. The symmetry of the separation is entailed by the result of separation — while the result of the process of separation is symmetrical, the process of separating need not be symmetrical.

Imagine, for example, a case where someone, X, suddenly breaks up with their partner, Y. X had contemplated ending their relationship for months unbeknownst to Y, who was satisfied with their relationship. X underwent a process, coming to decide to break up with Y and then breaking up with Y. Y underwent no such process; she had no inkling that X intended to break up with her. That said, once X has broken up with Y, the relationship has ended for both X and Y. The result of the process of this asymmetric breakup is the symmetric state of being broken up from one another. Put another way, when X is separated from Y, Y is necessarily separated from X. Similarly, I’ll argue, while Plato argues in 64c5-8 that the body undergoes a process of separation, the soul does not. Yet the result of that unilateral process is the mutual separation of the soul and body from one another.

While the parting of the body from the soul is a process, the parting of the soul from the body is simply its release from the body, the soul undergoes no process of separation. On the one hand, the body has *come to be* separated from the soul. Just as paint chips off of a wall or a popsicle melts off a stick, so too does a body come to be separated from its soul at death; the body falls away from the soul. Further, if the state of being dead is the state during which the body *has come to be* separated from the soul, dying is that process by which the body *comes to*

be separated from the soul. Dying describes the body's coming to be disentangled from the soul; death is when the body has undergone the process of separating from the soul, whatever that involves.

By contrast to the body's separation from the soul, the soul exists having been already separated from the body. Though the process of dying consists entirely in the body being separated from the soul, the soul too is separated from the body in the sense that, on death, it is distinct from the body. However, the soul does not undergo any process of separation from the body in the way the body does from the soul. Persons X and Y, for example, may be holding hands, walking down the street. They stop, and Y drops X's hand and walks away from X. Just as X comes to be separated from Y without herself moving, the soul comes to be separated from the body without itself undergoing a process of separation.

One noteworthy difference between the imagined cases and death is that both in the breakup and the hand-holding examples, one person initiates or causes the process of separation. In death the body in some sense does not cause the process of separation. Events that initiate death cause the separation of the body and soul. A more analogous hand-holding case might be that Y dropped X's hand because a loud noise startled her, or another person, Z, rushed by and took Y's bag, prompting her to run after Z. In the breakup case, a cross country move may have prompted separation. Similarly, the body does not itself initiate death. Rather, something else (e.g., disease, accident, deprivation of food or water, etc.) prompts the body to undergo the process of separating from the soul.¹⁵

As the body disintegrates, it alone causes disunity between itself and the soul. To again invoke the breakup case, though prompted by a cross country breakup, X may initiate and

¹⁵ It's quite plausible that the initiator of this process might be the evil peculiar to the body, disease, as described in *Republic X*.

enforce the breakup while Y merely accepts X's decisions. When someone dies, her soul and body work less and less well together as her body declines. A rusty key, for example, cannot combine with its lock to open a door; the rustier the key gets, the harder it will be to unlock the door. Like a rusty key, a failing body cannot work alongside the soul to carry out the processes which support life. A person with advanced dementia, for instance, may be unable to think clearly; a person fatigued by a fatal illness may be unmotivated to eat or drink.

Plato explicitly states that the soul *exists* during the state of being dead. The state of being dead follows the event of death, so if the soul exists during the state of being dead, it has survived the event of death.¹⁶ For Plato then the soul survives death — it persists through the process of dying and the event of death to the state of being dead.

Plato offers no such parallel claim about the body. One is in the state of being dead in the time during which her soul and body are physically distinct from one another. The soul persists throughout this state, the body need not. Plato merely says of the body that one is in the state of being dead during the expanse of time after the body has come to be apart from the soul. This *does not* imply that the body, like the soul, survives death. A tree's molted leaves quickly rot; the tree persists from year to year. Similarly, the body decomposes while the hardier soul persists.

I have shown that Plato argues for the persistence of the soul after death. The body alone disintegrates itself from the soul while the unchanging soul weathers the change; Plato seems to suggest that the body is correspondingly weak, and the soul strong. We are left to wonder: how strong is the soul? Put another way, we may wonder: if the soul can survive the process most apt

¹⁶ This is just to make claim about chronology with respect to the soul's transit, not a (presumably incoherent) claim about the temporality of states.

to destroy it — death — what can destroy it, if it can be destroyed at all? Is the soul eternal? Immortal?¹⁷

I contend that Plato does not argue for, or even imply, the soul's immortality at 64. Instead, I extract a weaker claim: the soul is eternal and deathless.¹⁸ First, the soul is eternal. For Plato, a person is composed of a soul and a body.¹⁹ For someone to die is for her soul and body to separate from one another. Correspondingly, for someone to have died, her body will have undergone a process of separation from her soul and her soul will exist, having been separated from her body. After death, a person is eternally dead. To be dead, though is for her soul to exist apart from her body. So, to be eternally dead, a person's soul must exist apart from her body. In order to be dead, a person's soul must *exist*; therefore, the soul exists eternally.

To say that Mary Astell is dead, for example, is to say that her soul exists apart from her body. For it to be the case that Mary Astell is presently dead, her soul must still exist apart from her body. For this to be the case, her soul must exist. And so, if people are to remain dead eternally after death, the soul must too be eternal.

That the soul is deathless merely implies that the soul is not subject to death, it is not among the things that die. Per the definition of death at 64, we learn that death applies to persons; persons are entities to which death applies. By contrast, souls are *not* the type of things which are subject to death, so souls are deathless. To say a soul is deathless is like saying the sound of a honking horn is odorless — it's just not the type of thing which receives that property. Souls too, are not the type of thing which is subject to death. Interestingly, it seems that bodies

¹⁷ Bostock 1986, for instance, takes Plato to assume, but not argue for, the immortality of the soul through the entirety of Socrates' defense. That is, Plato seems to take for granted the immortality of the soul before having argued that the soul is, in fact, immortal.

¹⁸ Gallop 1975 identifies uses of ἀθάνατος at 72e-73a, 95b-e, and 105d-e.

¹⁹ I defend this claim in Section III.

are also deathless in that they alone are not subject to death — a *person* dies by the separation of her body and soul; her death does not require the death of either constituent part. Bodies are not, however, eternal — bodies decompose and disintegrate after death.²⁰ Persons, composites of bodies and souls, die. A person's constituent parts do *not* die. So, the soul *and* the body are deathless.

One might wonder, if Plato has shown that the soul is deathless and eternal, has he not then shown that it is immortal? Put another way, what is it for a thing to be immortal if not just for that thing to be deathless and eternal? To prove the immortality of the soul, Plato would have to show that the soul is eternal (and therefore also deathless²¹) and *alive*. He has not here shown or even suggested that the soul is alive, thus he has not argued for soul soul immortality.

Immortality applies to those things which would seem to be subject to death or disintegration but, in fact, are not. Deathlessness, eternity, and immortality are compatible but not interchangeable with one another.²² For example, the body is deathless but neither eternal nor immortal, the figure of a triangle is eternal and deathless but not immortal, and the soul (Plato will ultimately argue) is immortal and thus also eternal and deathless. An object is deathless in that it cannot admit of death, just as an image is soundless. In the text at hand, Plato certainly lays down resources for a later argument for soul immortality, he completes that argument over the course of the text.²³

²⁰ Naturally and unnaturally – unburied bodies might slowly decompose into the earth, cremated bodies may be disintegrated in a fairly short period of time.

²¹ An object can be deathless and not eternal. However, I cannot think of a thing which is eternal and fails to be deathless. An issue of a newspaper is deathless and not eternal, the number '5' is eternal and deathless (were it subject to death, it would not be eternal).

²² Gallop 1975, I think mistakenly, claims that deathlessness and immortality are interchangeable: he takes ἀθάνατος to interchangeably mean deathless and immortal or eternal.

²³ From 69 on, I take it that Plato is primarily focused on arguing for the immortality of the soul.

III. Psychological Death

Having offered a definition of what I call physical death, Socrates asks his interlocutors, “is death not anything but this?”²⁴ To which Simmias quickly assents, “Nothing but this, he [Simmias] said.”²⁵ Socrates leverages this concession in his next description of death at 67c5-d5:

Κάθαρσις δὲ εἶναι ἄρα οὐ τοῦτο συμβαίνει,
ὅπερ πάλαι ἐν τῷ λόγῳ λέγεται, τὸ χωρίζειν
ὅτι μάλιστα ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ
ἐθίσαι αὐτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν πανταχόθεν ἐκ τοῦ
σώματος συναγείρεσθαι τε καὶ ἀθροίζεσθαι,
καὶ οἰκεῖν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν
παρόντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἔπειτα μόνην καθ’ αὐτὴν,
ἐκλυομένην ὥσπερ δεσμῶν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος;
Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ἔφη.
Οὐκοῦν τοῦτό γε θάνατος ὀνομάζεται, λύσις
καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος;
Παντάπασί γε, ἦ δ’ ὅς.²⁶

Soc.: Doesn’t purification happen to be this, just as was talked about before in the argument, to separate the soul as much as possible from the body and to accustom [the soul] both to collect and gather itself on all sides away from the body and to live as much as it is able, both now in present circumstances and hereafter, alone by itself, loosed, so to speak, from the bonds of the body?

Simm.: Certainly, he said.

Soc.: And isn’t this called death, parting and separation of the soul from the body?

Simm.: That is altogether so.²⁷

In this passage, Socrates resumes his discussion of death from 64c, remarking that soul purification too is a kind of death. He then elaborates that soul purification is a kind of death insofar as it is the separation of the soul from the body as much as is possible, whereby the soul dwells now and in the future by itself (away from the body). Simmias assents to this initial characterization and so Socrates concludes that death is surely the parting and separation of the soul from the body; Simmias assents to the conclusion.

Socrates characterizes death here as the soul unencumbering itself from the body. I use ‘unencumber’ carefully here to mean relieving a burden, in this case, relieving oneself of bodily concerns and desires. This relief is often achieved through much effort. For example, “having

²⁴ ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἦ τοῦτο;

²⁵ Οὐκ, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο, ἔφη; *Ph.* 64c8-9.

²⁶ *Phd.* 67c5-d6.

²⁷ Translation my own.

participated in many years of therapy, she is now unencumbered by agoraphobia.” Philosophers, thinks Plato, condition their souls to be unconcerned with their bodies through the practice of philosophy. In fact, Plato describes this practice as soul purification.²⁸ The less intertwined the body and soul — in other words, the purer the soul — the closer one is to death (in the sense of this second definition). The soul-bearer plays an active role in her psychological death through her philosophical practice. On this second definition, death is the welcome estrangement of the soul from the body brought about by proper conditioning of the soul. I will call this second definition of death *psychological death*. For a person to die psychologically is for her soul to be unencumbered by her body.

As I see it, Plato implies that psychological death is achievable in life.²⁹ Plato takes care to say that psychological death is the separation of the soul *as far as possible* from the body.³⁰ Psychological death, I suggest, may indicate that while the incarnate, purified soul resides in the body, it is not intertwined with the body. The philosopher who purifies her soul as much as is possible in life, psychologically *dies* in life. So, while the philosopher is alive, she may psychologically die.

Achieving psychological death while alive might at first seem like a mere conceptual possibility. However, I contend that we often observe that the dying are largely unconcerned with the condition and desires of their bodies. That is, we observe cases where people attempt to unencumber their souls from their bodies; in fact, this is the natural culmination of many disease processes. For most, this final attempt at estrangement of the soul and body does not constitute psychological death; the soul cannot be sufficiently purified before the imminent onset of

²⁸ *Phd.* 67c5.

²⁹ Stern 1993 (pp.46-7) explicitly endorses this view. I take it that Beere 2011 (p.258) implicitly endorses this view.

³⁰ *Phd.* 67c6.

physical death. However, the philosopher, having conditioned her soul to eschew these desires, *can* achieve the uncoupling of her body and soul in life.

Some object that psychological death is only achievable when the soul is disembodied; the farthest the soul can separate from the body is to be completely distinct from it.³¹ ‘As far as possible,’ proponents of this view hold, means as far as is physically possible. In response, while I accept that Plato could have meant to suggest physical separation, I reject that this is exclusive of psychological separation. The qualification can reasonably be taken to mean ‘as far as is possible in any given state of existence,’ or, in my terms, ‘unencumbered.’ While physical death is when the soul is no longer *in* the body, psychological death is when the soul is no longer *encumbered* by the body. The former is only achievable by the physical cleavage of the soul and body from one another. The latter, by contrast, is achievable while the soul is embodied, though admittedly rare.

A further challenge may be offered against my view: a strong conjunctive reading of the conditions for psychological death. The challenge primarily concerns the following phrase: λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος. On what I am calling the conjunctive reading, the καὶ connects a set of necessary conditions for the achievement of psychological death, (1) parting and (2) separation of the soul from the body. The τοῦτο refers to the conjunctive phrase. Psychological death requires both parting and separation, neither parting nor separation are independently sufficient for psychological death. The conjunctive reading sharply contrasts with my own — I take it that either condition (parting or separation) is sufficient for some kind of psychological death. Parting and separation are each the culmination of a process — parting

³¹ Most philosophers who take a view on this issue — M.G. J. Beets (1997), Archer-Hind (1984), Bluck (1955), Peter Ahrens Dorf (1995), Murray Miles (2001) and James Warren (2001) — lean toward this view.

describes a soul's successful estrangement from the body *while embodied*, separation describes the unencumbered soul's disembodiment. Parting and separation each describe the soul achieving as much distance as possible from the body given its state (embodied or disembodied), and so parting and death each constitute psychological death.

Consider the following comparable phrase: "we had fun last night, we drank and danced." Or another, "they're very agile, border collies and greyhounds." Drinking and dancing individually may constitute having fun; analogously, border collies and greyhounds are each agile dog breeds. In both examples, the conjunctive word 'and' signals a list not a set of necessary conditions or parts that must co-occur to achieve an activity (e.g., having fun) or an attribute (e.g., agility). Similarly, parting and separation are not a yoked set of necessary conditions for psychological death. They are instead a list of possible psychological deaths, each alone sufficient to constitute psychological death.

Contrary to what I have called the conjunctive reading, I have argued that parting — estrangement while embodied — and separation — a purified soul's disembodiment—are each sufficient for psychological death. My reading of the conjuncts and distinct sufficient conditions for death is, I think, by itself more plausible than the conjunctive reading. My reading is further bolstered when taking the full context of the passage into account. We may read the phrase in question alongside the following phrase: καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἔπειτα. This phrase complements my reading — parting is the type of death a philosopher may achieve presently (i.e., when her soul is embodied), and separation is the type of death which a philosopher may achieve in the future.³² It is unclear to me how these two temporal claims are accommodated on

³² Further evidence for this distinction comes at the end of *Phaedo*. At 114c Plato says, "Those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live *in the future* (εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον) altogether without a body." Tr. Grube. (emphasis added).

the conjunctive reading. On the conjunctive view, the second passage would have to mean something like: the parting and separation of the soul and body now, and the parting and separation of the soul in the future. However, complete separation is not achievable in embodied life; disembodiment and embodiment are obviously incompatible. The temporal claims do not fit neatly with a conjunctive reading. By contrast, my view is compatible with and complemented by the temporal claims, offering further reason to prefer the view.

The most pressing evidence against my view that psychological death is achievable in life can be found in the text itself. It may seem plain that Plato asserts that the embodied soul cannot apprehend the truth by itself, and so a person cannot achieve death in life. Plato says,

“if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death. Then and not before, the soul is by itself and apart from the body. While we live, we shall be closest to knowledge if we refrain as much as possible from association with the body and do not join with it more than we must, if we are not infected with its nature but purify ourselves from it until the god himself frees us.”³³

In this passage Plato seems to say that the soul is only apart from the body after physical death. As such, the soul cannot attain knowledge in life, because it cannot be properly disassociated from the body in life (i.e., it cannot be physically separated). However, we may approach knowledge by estranging ourselves from our bodies, and in this way be prepared for our physical deaths.

One might naturally understand this passage to mean that no death is achievable in life. However, I take this passage to convey that a person may only achieve the central goal of their philosophic efforts — knowledge — on physical death. However, a person may make much progress toward this goal in life. Plato again takes care to note that the person who distances her

³³ *Phd.* 66e-7a. Tr. Grube 1977.

soul from her body may approximate knowledge in life. Moreover, attainment of knowledge does not constitute death itself. That knowledge is only achievable on physical death does not mean that one cannot die, in some sense, in life. Even if philosophic achievement is only available on physical death, estrangement — which is necessary preparation for that achievement — *is* possible in life. What I have further identified with ‘parting’ is a type of death insofar as it meets the condition Plato specifies shortly following this passage. Parting is the culmination of the soul’s embodied purification, the soul’s estrangement as far as is possible *now in present circumstances*. Again, this emphatic temporal claim suggests strongly to me that Plato allows that a kind of psychological death is achievable in life.³⁴

IV. Comparing the two deaths

I have teased out two definitions of death from the beginning of *Phaedo*. For a person to physically die is for their soul to physically separate from their body. For a person to psychologically die is for her soul to be unencumbered by her body.³⁵ In what follows, I consider how these phenomena differ from one another by explicating a series of claims that emerge from the definitions I have generated of the two types of death.

- (i) It is not possible for a person to avoid physical death.

Put simply, everyone dies physically. I think it is uncontroversial to assert that everyone will die. While the soul may persist, persons as composites of body and soul at a particular time will at some point cease to exist in that combination that exists during that particular slice of time.

³⁴ One may still wonder how my description of psychological death fits with Plato’s description of philosophy as practice for death. This topic will be taken up in the next chapter, in relation to Plato’s suicide prohibition. Specifically, I address this topic while considering why Socrates might issue a suicide prohibition at all, that is, why the philosopher desires death.

³⁵ These definitions are of the event of death. The definitions of the corresponding processes and states are easily derived.

Physical death is certain even granting, as Plato will argue for, that the soul is immortal,³⁶ and that a person is essentially her soul. People who exist as particular soul-body combinations in particular spatial and temporal conditions will cease to exist when their souls and bodies separate from one another. To clarify this point, consider a tangible case, a particular death.

Consider the death of George Washington. For Plato, on George Washington's death, the soul and body of George Washington separated; to say that George Washington has died is to say that his soul and body have separated from each other. Neither the soul nor the body has died, but their combination — the person George Washington — has died. George Washington's soul and body persist following their separation from one another — the former eternally, the latter for some short amount of time. Despite the soul's eternality, we are disinclined, I think, to say that George Washington, who lived in 18th century Virginia, *exists* because George Washington's soul is not presently combined with *his* body. Imagine further that the soul which combined with George Washington's body now exists in combination with some other body, call this person GW; imagine, too that GW was born in 1992 in Alberta. Despite the persistence and present embodiment of the soul in question, I still think we would be disinclined to say that GW's existence implies or requires that George Washington still exists.

An imperfect but useful comparison can be made with a computer hard drive. Imagine that an outdated computer has died and we transfer its hard drive to a new computer. The hard drive is one important component which makes both computers functional. Moreover, the information stored on the hard drive is accessible on the new computer.³⁷ We would still be disinclined to say

³⁶ As stated earlier, Plato will ultimately make an argument for the soul's immortality because it has three central features: the soul is (1) deathless, (2) eternal, and (3) alive. In this subsection, I engage this developed view of immortality, which does not appear in the section of *Phaedo* this chapter is centrally concerned with. As such, I assert, but do not present Plato's argument for, the conditions for immortality.

³⁷ This accommodates the Recollection Argument.

that the two computers are identical with one another. The new computer has features which enable us to add and modify data stored on the hard drive, for example, we may utilize the contents of hard drive differently. Similarly, the soul is the thing which makes a person functional.³⁸ However, the people who result from that soul's myriad embodiments are not identical to one another because though they share a soul, they share neither matter (i.e., bodies) nor situation (i.e., the time and place into which they are born). So, when we say that a person has died, for Plato we are remarking about the status of the combination of soul and body, not the soul alone. A person may die even though her soul will persist, very much alive, eternally.

People, each understood as the combination of a body and a soul, will die when their soul and body inevitably come apart. As surely as everyone is born, everyone will die.³⁹ Birth does not, however, imply eventual psychological death. While everyone will die physically, few will die psychologically.

- (ii) Only some people may die psychologically, though philosophers are the most likely to die psychologically.

Very few people may estrange their souls from their bodies. Fewer still, thinks Plato, can estrange their souls from their bodies in the *correct* way. Immediately following the definition of psychological death, he says, "It is only those who practice philosophy *in the right way*, we say, who always most want to free the soul; and this release and separation of the soul from the body is the practice (μελέτημα) of the philosophers?"⁴⁰ Simmias, of course, quickly assents. Here, Plato does not outright declare that philosophers alone may die psychologically. Instead, he says

³⁸ Moreover, the soul is that which makes a person *alive*. This is of course disanalogous to the hard drive.

³⁹ Recall once more the Cyclical Argument. Plato holds that the state of being alive comes to be from its opposite, the state of being dead, and *vice versa*. The two states — being alive and being dead — come to be via the other, so if there is a state 'being alive' there is also a state 'being dead.'

⁴⁰ *Phd.* 67d. Tr. Grube.

that philosophers, owing to their years of work to purify their souls, have the strongest desire to die. He further clarifies that the soul purification itself describes the separation of the soul and body. So, the philosopher *wants* most to die and is *best prepared* to die. From these two claims we can arrive at the presumed conclusion: so, the philosophers are the most apt to die.

Plato seems careful not to assert that *only* philosophers may die psychologically. Presumably, one may manage to muster a strong desire for death and cultivate a practice that enable's the soul's separation from the body. Imagine a person who has been raised in a religion which dictates that she not indulge her bodily desires and remain stoic and indifferent in the face of pains. For her commitment to her religion, she is promised that which she most desires after she's died — everlasting life — during which she can somehow indulge all of her desires. This devotee surely desires death; death grants her the thing she most desires. More impressively, she has conditioned her soul to distance itself from her body through her religious practice. It seems that according to Plato, the devotee is eligible for psychological death. However, the devotee does not achieve this eligibility *the correct way*, i.e., through the practice of philosophy.

In the devotee case, I have built in that the subject desires death. However, it is not clear to me that desire to die is required for psychological death. If there were no promise of eternal indulgence, for example, but the devotee still practiced her religion, it seems to me that she may still psychologically die. The definition of psychological death concerns the way that the soul and body separate. The embodied soul may turn away, so to speak, from the body absent an agent's strong desire for what might come when this separation is achieved.

- (iii) It is possible for a person to have physically died without having psychologically died.

Whether a person dies physically does not at all depend on whether they have or may die psychologically; a person does not need to die psychologically in order to die physically. In fact, everyone dies physically, but, as I have shown, only philosophers may die psychologically. Physical separation of the soul and body is not the same as the soul's purposeful estrangement from the body; the two deaths — as I have spent much time arguing — are not one and the same. A person's soul may physically separate from her body (physical death) without having estranged or estranging itself from the body.

We might then wonder, though, how the soul manages to establish physical distance from the body without establishing psychological distance, so to speak. That is, we might wonder how or what it looks like for a person to die physically but not psychologically. How does the soul of a person whose desire fulfilment depends on the union of her soul and body part from the body? Put another way, what exactly does physical death look like for a non-philosopher? Plato presents an answer to this question at *Phaedo* 81c.

Having described the clean cleavage of the philosopher's purified soul from her body upon her physical death, Socrates contrastingly describes what happens upon the physical death of the appetitive person. The soul of the appetitive person, thinks Plato, has been so tightly bound to the body that physical remnants of the body are ground into it. He says of the soul of the appetitive person,

Ἀλλὰ διειλημμένην γε οἶμαι ὑπὸ τοῦ
σωματοειδοῦς, ὃ αὐτῇ ἢ ὁμιλία τε καὶ
συνουσία τοῦ σώματος διὰ τὸ ἀεὶ
συνεῖναι καὶ διὰ τὴν πολλὴν μελέτην
ἐνεποίησε σύμφυτον;⁴¹

But indeed I suppose that [the soul of the
appetitive person] has been tied up by the
corporeal, which communion and also
association with the body through constant
intercourse, and a lot of practice, has
become natural to it?

⁴¹ *Phd.* 81c4-6. Tr. Grube.

Emphasizing its corporeality, Socrates goes on to describe the bodily fragments fused to this soul as “heavy and earthy and visible”⁴² on account of these features the souls themselves are weighty.⁴³ The soul of the appetitive person has bodily features, weight and perceptibility from its close association with the body from which is parted on death.

After describing how the appetitive person’s soul manages to retain bodily fragments on death, Socrates gives a story for how this soul is tethered to the perceptible world. He says,

ὥσπερ λέγεται, περὶ τὰ μνήματά τε καὶ
τοὺς τάφους κυλινδουμένη, περὶ ἃ δὴ
καὶ ὄφθη ἅττα ψυχῶν σκιοειδῆ
φαντάσματα, οἷα παρέχονται αἱ τοιαῦται
ψυχαὶ εἶδωλα, αἱ μὴ καθαρῶς
ἀπολυθεῖσαι ἀλλὰ τοῦ ὀρατοῦ
μετέχουσαι, διὸ καὶ ὀρῶνται.⁴⁴

As was said⁴⁵, it wanders around the monuments and graves where also shadowy phantoms of souls were seen such as those produced by these phantom souls, not having been freed completely but sharing in the visible, and are thus seen.

Socrates seems to say here that not only are souls of appetitive people perceptible, but we may see them — they haunt graveyards. This story seems to lend plausibility to Socrates’ claim that the appetitive person’s soul is so tainted by the body as to be perceptible. Socrates appeals to common lore (“as they say”) to show that encumbered souls to some extent remain in the perceptible world. Socrates seems to suggest to his interlocutors, “ghosts, which you undoubtedly think exist, are in fact the encumbered souls of appetitive people.”

While Socrates convinced his interlocutors that ghosts that haunt graveyards are in fact the encumbered souls of appetitive people⁴⁶, we, lacking the cultural context of Socrates’ interlocutors and Plato’s readers, may not be so easily convinced that souls remain earthly in the

⁴² βαρὺ καὶ γεῶδες καὶ ὀρατόν.

⁴³ *Phd.* 81c8-10.

⁴⁴ *Phd.* 81c11-d4. Tr. Grube.

⁴⁵ i.e., as they said, or as was told to us.

⁴⁶ Cebes says of this story, Εἰκόσ γε, ὦ Σώκράτης, “that is likely, Socrates.”

way described. I think we can, however, be easily convinced of the plausibility of Plato's picture by considering a similar case: the experience of having a phantom limb. Consider a person, P, whose arm has been amputated from the elbow down. Even though she no longer has a forearm and hand, psychologically, P still has a limb. P reaches for items and tries to grasp them, she feels pain when her non-existent fingers are caught in a door, she attempts to scratch her forearm. Despite lacking the physical limb, P retains psychological remnants of it. We might say, more Platonically, that P's *soul* is encumbered by the psychological weight of her detached arm after it has been separated from her body just as the soul of the appetitive person is encumbered by her body after it has been similarly separated from her body (i.e., on death). And, just as the encumbered soul takes on features of the body, so too does P's soul take on features of her detached limb; the encumbered soul is perceptible and weighty, P's soul, affected by her psychological phantom limb, *feels* her detached arm.

Admittedly, the two cases are dissimilar in a few important ways. First, while P's soul has been psychologically tainted by her imagined limb, the soul of the appetitive person has been physically tainted by her body. However, P's case still, I think, effectively shows that a person's soul may be separated from a body or body part inasmuch as it is no longer physically bound to it but be nonetheless tainted by that physical item. A second important dissimilarity between the two cases is as follows: the phantom limb case gives us more resources to understand how the soul might yearn for the body, like in Plato's case. However, in the phantom limb case, the condition of one's soul does not spur its attention to its missing limb. That is, the person whose soul aches for a separated body part does not experience this longing because her soul is appetitive; the psychology, I contend, is different. Finally, despite the language of the phantom

limb example, the imagined limb one experiences is not perceptible. Contrastingly, the tainted, and weighty soul of the appetitive person is perceptible to the unassisted, untrained eye.

Both cases show that the soul may cling to the body on death. In Plato's example, the soul retains physical bodily remnants. In the phantom limb case, the soul is, to use Plato's reasoning, infatuated or preoccupied with its amputated body part. In the case of the appetitive soul, it is unable, because of their semi-corporeality, and unwilling, so to speak, because of its desire to pursue bodily pleasures (and avoid pain), to leave the perceptible world. So, though the soul of the appetitive person clings to remnants of its corporeal host, it still separates from the body at death. And so the appetitive person is able to die physically without dying psychologically.

- (iv) It is possible for a person to have psychologically died without having physically died.⁴⁷

A person may experience each death independent of the other. As I have shown, a person may die physically without dying psychologically. Conversely, a person may die psychologically without dying physically. As I've interpreted the text, Plato has provided language for such a death: "parting". Recall that I have defended that psychological death can occur while a person is alive, this death is described as a "parting."⁴⁸ Parting occurs when the soul has unencumbered itself from the body as far as is possible in its embodied state. Relatedly, parting describes when a person's soul is completely unconcerned with its accompanying body's pains and pleasures. As I have argued, this *can* and *does* occur while a person is alive. Some people are capable of, and,

⁴⁷ For statements (i)-(iii), the symmetrical claim to do with processes (e.g., "a person may be psychologically dying while not physically dying") is also true. So too, the closely related but asymmetrical claim to do with a process and a state, "a person may psychologically *die* without having physically died."

⁴⁸ As opposed to the separation that occurs at or after physical death, to be discussed in the next subsection, v.

more rarely, *experience* parting. A philosopher may accustom her soul to philosophize, nearly exclusive of all other activities.

We may well wonder what the life of the philosopher is like, what kind of life *promotes* psychological death. Relatedly, we may wonder what the life of the philosopher is like *after* she has achieved parting. To me, there are two candidate lifestyles: that of asceticism and that of experiential neutrality. The ascetic is unaffected by any stimuli: she does not move from where she sits, even as the temperature drops, she does not wince when poked. She is unmotivated by base desires: she denies food and drink. The ascetic is undoubtedly quite rare, she will also not survive for long in this condition. A person unaffected and unmotivated by bodily concerns will likely succumb to some external danger (e.g., exposure) or dehydration. The ascetic person is entirely unconcerned with her bodily desires, and it is plausible that this is a condition from which a person can achieve psychological death.

The ascetic person surely ignores her bodily urges. However, it is not obvious that she is able to ignore them. This may spell trouble for the ascetic who attempts to practice philosophy. Imagine how difficult it would be, for example, to turn one's mind away from the body while experiencing aching hunger pangs and thirst. We may instead plausibly imagine that the philosopher aspires to a neutral condition between the pleasures and pains of life. The person who neither indulges pleasures nor invites pains best frees herself of bodily distractions.

The question of asceticism is not one to be settled here.⁴⁹ Rather, it demonstrates that the achievement of psychological death in life, and preparation for such a death, is plausible; we can imagine at least two lifestyles which promote psychological death. In either case, the philosopher may psychologically die while her soul is embodied.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ebrey 2017.

Parting is possible in life, and life and physical death cannot co-occur. A person's soul and body cannot at once exist in combination and apart from each other, someone cannot both be alive and physically dead.⁵⁰ That said, a person may be psychologically dead at one point in time, and physically dead at another. So, it is possible for a person to have psychologically died without having physically died.

(v) It is possible for a person to have psychologically died and physically died.

A person may die psychologically and physically. The claim has two interpretations: (1) it is possible for a person to die psychologically at t_1 , and physically at t_2 , and (2) it is possible for a person to simultaneously die psychologically and physically. I will defend both claims (1) and (2). I have shown that a person may die first psychologically and then physically in the course of arguing for claim (iv). A person may psychologically die while her soul is embodied and later physically die. The practiced philosopher, dirty and clad in threadbare clothes, eating barely enough to survive, alive despite having psychologically died. This philosopher, like everyone else, will eventually die physically. So, it is possible for a person to psychologically die at one time, and physically die at a different point in time. Second, a person may die physically at the moment they achieve psychological death. Again, I think Plato has language for this type of psychological death: separation.⁵¹ Separation as a kind of psychological death occurs when the soul is unencumbered by the body *and* separate from the body. While parting describes the maximum distance a person's soul may establish between itself and the body *while embodied*, separation describes the maximum distance a person's soul may establish between itself and the perceptible realm while *disembodied*. It follows that psychological death as separation can only

⁵⁰ This is not to say that the *soul* cannot be alive and *separated* from the body. Recall that the soul is not the type of thing subject to death; persons are.

⁵¹ As opposed to parting.

occur at the moment of physical death: separation as psychological death occurs when the soul and body are physically separated, and physical separation *is* physical death. So, an investigation of simultaneous psychological and physical death reveals an interesting feature of psychological death: separation as psychological death always co-occurs with physical death.

The two types of death may occur for the same person, simultaneously and at different times. In fact, it seems that the two claims (1) and (2) can be true of one person. A person can psychologically die (i.e., parting) at t_1 and then physically and psychologically die (i.e., separation) at t_2 . The “practiced philosopher,” as I have painted her, experiences death in just this way — she dies psychologically via parting, then she dies physically and psychologically via separation at a later point.

(vi) It is unlikely that one may die psychologically after dying physically.

A seeming upshot of the conclusion to (v) is that it is not possible for a person to die physically at t_1 and then psychologically at t_2 . When a person has physically died, her soul’s philosophic development is arrested until it is again embodied. If a very appetitive person, for example, resolves to deny herself bodily indulgences just before her death, her disembodied soul is still effectively that of the ghostly soul described in (v). The soul is too entwined with the body to cleanly separate at the moment of physical death. It will turn out, too that the person engaged in philosophic practice who dies before separating their soul as far as possible from their body also fails to achieve psychological death.

Using as evidence the eschatological myth at the close of *Phaedo*, I contend that the soul may make purificatory progress after physical death. However, for the vast majority, this progress will not conclude in psychological death.

Plato offers an eschatological myth in part to motivate an argument for living a philosophic life. Socrates concludes the myth, "...one must make every effort to share in virtue and wisdom in one's life, for the reward is beautiful and the hope is great."⁵² If it were possible for all but the most incurable souls to purify themselves after death, then there would be no reason to live piously, moderately, and so on, in life. However, Plato clearly delivers the myth to inspire his readers to live a certain way in order that they reap rewards, and avoid punishments, on death. So, it seems unlikely that Plato thinks that a person can make significant moral progress after their physical death.

Plato tells us much about the path that each type of soul takes through the underworld. He says of the start of the journey, "When the dead arrive at the place to which each has been led by his guardian spirit, they are first judged as to whether they have led a good and pious life."⁵³ The average person, whose soul is curable, but nonetheless tainted, is subject to punishments which have the effect of purifying their soul of its wrongdoings.⁵⁴ For example, the wrongdoer who does not persuade those they wronged of their regret for their actions is thrown back to Tartarus.⁵⁵

Only the most accomplished—the most pious people and full-fledged philosophers — are not subject to purification (of any sort) after physical death. Plato specifies that "those who are deemed to have lived an extremely pious life"⁵⁶ are sent to live on the surface of the earth. In addition, the philosophers' souls will live, disembodied, in the intelligible realm.⁵⁷ While the philosophers have undoubtedly achieved psychological death and now reap its benefits, I am

⁵² *Phd.* 114c.

⁵³ *Phd.* 113d. Tr. Grube.

⁵⁴ *Phd.* 113e.

⁵⁵ *Phd.* 114b.

⁵⁶ *Phd.* 114c.

⁵⁷ *Phd.* 114c.

unsure whether the pious may achieve psychological death on the earth's surface. There seems to me no comment on the philosophical prospects of the pious, and so no evidence for or against the claim that they may further purify their souls after physical death. It would thus be an overstatement to assert that *no one* may achieve psychological death after physical death, for it is possible that the pious may. So, we can be confident that for Plato the average person has hope of soul betterment after physical death. Contrastingly, the philosopher cannot further purify their soul, as they have successfully purified their soul as much as is possible. It is unclear, however, whether the pious, who have made much progress toward purifying their souls in life, may complete their soul purification after physical death. So, we cannot rule out the possibility that a pious person may achieve psychological death after physical death.

At this point, I seem to have made two, conflicting claims regarding psychological death. First, physical death cannot precede psychological death. Second, parting and separation are each sufficient for psychological death; they are not jointly necessary conditions. The tension is as follows: given that psychological death cannot precede physical death, parting is required for separation. One must have separated their soul as much as possible from their body while embodied to separate as far as is possible physically. In other words, parting is necessary preparation for separation.

I am comfortable accepting this result. That is, parting is a necessary precursor to separation. However, the relationship *between* parting and separation does not contradict my initial claim, that they are each psychological death and achievement of each is sufficient for psychological death.

V. A unified concept of death

I can now offer a unified picture of death which emerges in the early part of *Phaedo*: For a person to die is for her soul to separate from her body. Separation, I take it, can be understood here as disunion. In physical death, the body and soul come apart physically, in psychological death, the soul actively disunifies from the body. For a person to be physically dead is for her soul to be physically separated from her body. By contrast, psychological death is a mental separation. For a person to be psychologically dead is for her soul to be unencumbered by her body. Physical and psychological death are distinct phenomena, both death insofar as they constitute separation. In what follows, I consider which characteristics hold for both physical and psychological death, and which features are unique to each. I then suggest why, despite their dissimilarities, we should still consider both phenomena death but not identify each with the other.

Dying physically consists in a person's body, spurred by some external event⁵⁸, cleaving itself from their unmoving soul. For example, the body may be triggered to fall away from the soul by disease. At the event of death, a person's body and soul separate entirely from one another, the soul ceases to exist within the body, and the person (i.e., composite) formerly composed of that particular body and soul no longer exists. To be dead physically is for a person's soul and the body to which it was most recently attached to *be separate* from each other. After death the soul and body persist but are no longer combined. Each sense of physical death — the process, event, and state — constitutes separation.

Contrastingly, the separation of psychological death is purification. Just as running river water through a sieve constitutes separation in that it separates water from sediment,

⁵⁸ See n.13.

psychological death is separation insofar as it constitutes the disentanglement of the soul from the body. That is to say, purification is a type of separation. A person is dying psychologically when her soul is being purified; that is, when she is philosophizing. A person has died psychologically at the moment when her soul has been purified as much as is possible given her physical condition. Finally, a person is dead psychologically when her soul, purified as much as is possible, resides by itself.

Physical death describes the mutual separation of one's soul and body as the body falls away from the soul; often physical death is unintentional and undesired. The terminally ill appetitive person, for example, surely neither desires nor intends death because death prevents her from fulfilling her bodily desires. Psychological death, on the other hand, describes one's effortful distancing of their soul from their body. A person practicing philosophy and eschewing bodily desires actively works toward death. So, while psychological death is always the voluntary, desired distancing of the soul from the body, physical death is often, but certainly not always, the involuntary, undesired movement of the body from the soul.

Notably, a person may intentionally die physically in accordance with her desires. Put differently, a person may die by suicide. Suicide and psychological death are alike in important ways. Both suicide (understood as intended self-inflicted physical death) and psychological death are to some extent intentional and a person may desire either death.⁵⁹ Despite these similarities, intentional physical death (i.e., suicide) is still importantly different from psychological death insofar as the nature of the intention and desire associated with each death differs. The person who desires psychological death desires philosophic rewards (e.g., wisdom). The person who desires physical death in many cases desires the cessation of life and with the cessation of its

⁵⁹ This is, of course, not to comment on the psychological state a person is in when they desire death.

accompanying pains and discomforts. So, while psychological death and suicide share features, the character of the desire and the frequency with which the desire arises differ.

Moreover, a person can voluntarily halt the process of psychological dying. For example, a person may stop practicing philosophy, thus halting the process of psychological death. Contrastingly, once the process of physical dying has been initiated, its cessation depends primarily on circumstance, not the intent of the person dying. A person may desperately attempt to staunch bleeding from a life-threatening wound and still die. Similarly, a person suffering an illness may be able to slow the process of death, but will not, through their will alone, be able to halt the process entirely. So, while both physical and psychological death can be voluntarily undertaken, only psychological death can be halted solely by the intent of the agent. So, the process of psychological death is wholly voluntary. One can only choose to initiate physical death; after that initiation the process is largely out of the agent's control.

Physical and psychological death share in a unique species relation: the two differ with respect to all three senses of death. The processes of dying, events of death and states of being dead, as previously detailed, differ between the two deaths. The processes of death are straightforwardly different. Once the process of physical death is underway, the body falls away from the soul. Psychological dying, on the other hand, describes the soul's movement away from the body. The events of death are resultingly quite different. In physical death, the body and soul come apart from one another; in psychological death, the soul frees itself from concern with the body. As the names suggest, one event marks a physical change, the other marks a psychological change. The states of being dead, it might seem, are not so straightforwardly different. For each death, the state of being dead involves the soul and body existing apart from each other.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Even if just temporarily. Of course, for Plato the body will not exist eternally while the soul will.

The state of being physically dead is not identical with the state of being psychologically dead. A person is physically dead when their body and soul are apart from one another. A person is psychologically dead when her soul is completely unencumbered by the soul. As I have shown in the previous section, the two states may co-occur. However, I maintain that the two states of being dead — physical and psychological — are not one and the same. A useful comparison case might be the two states of being asleep and being unconscious. A person in a state of sleep shares many features with a person in a state of unconsciousness. Both people are unresponsive to stimuli, for example. However, the two states are distinct from one another, distinct enough that we classify the states differently. The person who is merely asleep, may be roused, while the person who is unconscious cannot be; the unconscious person is unresponsive to painful stimuli, the sleeping person will react to pain.

Generally, death is separation; physical and psychological death are both species of death. Physical and psychological death are both death in the same way balding and waxing one's head are both "hair loss". The processes of each balding and waxing and physical and psychological death distinguish the two phenomena from each other. Balding — like physical death — is biological and often unintentional;⁶¹ shaving one's head — like psychological death — is elective and intentional.

I have shown that the two deaths are distinct from one another. One might now wonder though whether these two deaths are related at all. In what way are physical and psychological death species of a shared genus if, as I have argued, they differ in process, event, and state? To this worry, I have two responses. First, physical and psychological death both concern the same

⁶¹ Suicide constitutes an intentional physical death.

concept — separation — of the same objects — body and soul — with respect to the same agent — a person.

Second, and relatedly, I tentatively contend that there are concepts which are deployed conceptually and physically, so to speak, with respect to the same agent. The species nested underneath them are related insofar as they share the relation just described (i.e., they concern the same topic, involve the same objects, and refer to the same agent). For example, we might refer to a person's conception to mean the moment at which their parents decided to attempt a pregnancy or the moment at which the sperm and egg from which the person eventually blossomed combined. We refer to the same concept, conception, theoretically and literally, conception in both cases loosely refers to the same agent. Similarly, the two deaths are two species, one conceptual, one physical, of the same genus, death as separation.

For Plato, for a person to die is for her body to separate from her soul or for her soul to unencumber itself from the body. I have termed these two deaths physical and psychological death, respectively. In the course of this chapter, I have explored what each type of death involves and given a plausible account of how they are related to one another.

In defining physical death, Plato describes the parting of the body from the soul differently than that of the soul from the body. The body undergoes a process of separating from the soul while the soul remains unchanged through the process. The soul is separated from the body because that's what separation entails — if X separated from Y, then Y is necessarily separated from X.

Psychological death is the separation as much as is possible of the soul from the body (i.e., soul purification). I further distinguish between psychological death as parting and psychological death as separation, I argue that the former is achievable in life. A philosopher

may achieve psychological death in life by distancing her soul from body as much as is possible while she is incarnate. From these two definitions, I conclude that the two deaths may co-occur, each *may* precede the other, and while everyone experiences physical death, only some, primarily philosophers, experience psychological death.

I end by offering a picture of how the two deaths are related: physical and psychological death are both death insofar as they are each the separation of the soul and body. However, the different processes, events and states of separation distinguish the two deaths from one another.

In this chapter I have endeavored only to piece together and expound upon the definitions of death Plato offers early in the dialogue. Plato need not — we might think that he *does* — commit himself to this physical picture even through the rest of *Phaedo*. For example, while Plato remains agnostic about the soul's immortality in the text we have considered, he spends much of the text arguing for its immortality. Despite the development of Plato's views over the course of the text, the descriptions of death that I have developed are those in play when we arrive at the suicide prohibition beginning at 62b2. So, for our purposes, the central characterization of our investigation.

Next, I turn to a question posed early in the text, “how did he die?”⁶² In particular, I turn to an investigation of what type of self-inflicted death Plato prohibits at 62b2-c8. Plato might prohibit death and so prohibit both self-inflicted physical and psychological death. Were this the case, the prohibition might run: a philosopher should not loosen and separate her soul from her body; she should neither kill herself physically — thus separating her soul from her body as much as is possible after life — nor psychologically, separating her soul from her body as much as is possible in life. By explicitly prohibiting philosopher suicide though, does Plato mean to

⁶² *Phd.* 57a6.

prohibit exclusively a philosopher's death, i.e., psychological death? Might this seem a surprising result given how much time Plato devotes to praising the life of a philosopher? On the other hand, what evidence, if any, does the text provide that Plato means to prohibit only self-inflicted physical death? Armed now with nuanced understanding of what death is for Plato, we are now well-positioned to investigate these and other such questions.

Chapter 2: Introducing Plato's Account Against Suicide

The central aim of what remains of the dissertation is to examine Plato's argument against self-killing offered at 62b2-c9. In service of that goal, I spend the whole of this chapter exploring the set-up to that account at 61e-62b. I primarily investigate the notoriously difficult passage at 62a. Ultimately, I submit that this passage consists of a set of provisional propositions to do with suicide which Plato goes on to substantiate from 62b-67d. I term this interpretation of the 62a passage the Preview Reading.

In the present chapter, I defend three contested interpretive stances I take on 62a1-7: (1) θαυμαστόν is best translated 'strange,' (2) both θαυμαστόν ...εἰ statements⁶³ are not clearly endorsed by Socrates at this point in the argument, and so are not here assigned truth value; we should understand each ensuing proposition "it may appear wondrous to you if X is the case", (3) τεθνάναι and ζῆν are two contrasting states. I then suggest that the appropriate referent of the τοῦτο at 62a2 is, in effect, an account of the wrongness of suicide.

I begin, however, by identifying where Plato's conception of suicide in *Phaedo* differs from the conception of suicide we generally accept. The whole of the dissertation concerns suicide; it is crucial that we understand what conditions must be met for a death to qualify as a suicide. For Plato⁶⁴, I will show, any instance of death where a person kills herself qualifies as suicide.

I. What is suicide for Plato in *Phaedo*?

The average person considers another to have killed herself (or to have attempted to kill herself) when she (1) uncoerced, undertook an action with the intent that it kill her and (2) the

⁶³ At *Phd.* 62a2 and 62a5-6.

⁶⁴ At least, in *Phaedo*.

primary goal of her action was initiating her physical death. Further, most consider suicide to have a moral valence; the law reflects this, as well.⁶⁵ Suicide is often — I think harmfully — considered wrong and is often criminalized. Our language reflects the tight connection between the legality of suicide and our perception of it — we often say that a person has ‘committed’ suicide, which presupposes that their suicide was wrong.⁶⁶ This view, which I will call the common current view, best captures clear cut cases of suicide. An incident where someone takes a lethal dose of methamphetamines exclusively in order that they die would qualify as a suicide on this view.

In *Phaedo*, Plato describes suicide as αὐτὸν ἀποκτείνουσα, killing oneself.⁶⁷ Like the common current view, Plato’s *Phaedo* view holds that suicide is wrong.⁶⁸ In fact, he delivers the suicide prohibition precisely to demonstrate its wrongness. However, the conditions for which an act qualifies as suicide seem for Plato much wider than the contemporary view. Consider Socrates’ death. Socrates died by voluntary ingestion of hemlock in accordance with his death sentence. On the current view, Socrates’ death may not qualify as suicide because he was ordered by the state to die, he has chosen a self-inflicted death in the face of few options.⁶⁹ Socrates’ suicide was in some sense coerced by the state insofar as Socrates was forced to choose

⁶⁵ For a good introduction to the issues which arise when constructing an account of suicide — which is to say, the issues which complicate straightforward cases of suicide (and so bring to the fore the boundaries of the phenomenon) — see Cholbi 2011 (especially pp.15-37). For a more global perspective, see Honkasalo and Tuominen’s *Culture, Suicide and the Human Condition* (2014), particularly pp. 1-18.

⁶⁶ For this reason, I avoid this language throughout the project.

⁶⁷ At 61e and 62a. Early on in the text, Socrates speak instead of doing violence to oneself, βιάσεται αὐτόν. Whether or not they are interchangeable, it does seem that in explicit discussions of suicide, Plato defers to usage of ἀποκτείνω.

⁶⁸ Henceforth I will refer to Plato’s account of suicide to indicate Plato’s account of suicide in *Phaedo*. I consider other expressions of Plato’s view of suicide in the Conclusion.

⁶⁹ For an argument that Socrates dies by suicide even on a more contemporary account, see Frey 1978. For other article length discussions about whether Socrates died by suicide, see Walton 1980, Duff 1983, Christensen 2020a.

between either abiding by the state's sentence (thus killing himself) or disobeying the law.

Similarly, we would be disinclined to say that the spy who ingests cyanide instead of revealing her secrets has died by suicide. Facing a narrow set of options — betray one's organization or die — the spy, like Socrates, chooses death.

Regardless of how it might be assessed on the common current view, Plato considers Socrates' death a suicide. Plato's categorization of Socrates' death is unsurprising given his conception of suicide. For Plato, suicide is simply to kill oneself. It seems that for Plato suicide is intentional self-killing in the weakest sense. Regardless of circumstance, if a person performs an action with the intent that it bring about her death, it qualifies as Platonic suicide. Resultingly, cases which are difficult to adjudicate on the current view — the spy who takes cyanide, the terminally ill person who kills herself before she dies from her disease, etc. — easily qualify as suicide on Plato's more inclusive view.

Given their divergence, it seems then a mistake to identify Plato's concept of self-killing with our current concept of suicide at all. Instead, I suggest that we understand suicide in a Platonic context to mean intentional self-killing without caveats or exceptions. In the remainder of the paper, any reference to suicide invokes this Platonic conception.

II. Interpreting 62a

Just before delivering the suicide prohibition, Socrates issues a much discussed, textually rich preface. Cebes twice asks why people say that self-killing is not right. At 61d3-5, he asks,

πῶς τοῦτο λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ μὴ
θεμιτὸν εἶναι ἑαυτὸν βιάζεσθαι, ἐθέλειν δ'
ἂν τῷ ἀποθνήσκοντι τὸν φιλόσοφον
ἔπεσθαι;

How do mean this, Socrates, that it is not
right to do violence to oneself, and yet the
philosopher wishes to follow one who is
dying?⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Tr. Grube, lightly amended.

Cebes sharpens his question at 61e5-9:

κατὰ τί δὴ οὖν ποτε οὐ φασι θεμιτὸν εἶναι
αὐτὸν ἑαυτὸν ἀποκτείνουσαι, ὧς Σώκρατες;
ἤδη γὰρ ἔγωγε, ὅπερ νυνδὴ σὺ ἤρου, καὶ
Φιλολάου ἤκουσα, ὅτε παρ' ἡμῖν διητᾶτο,
ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἄλλων τινῶν, ὡς οὐ δέοι τοῦτο
ποιεῖν: σαφεῖς δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν οὐδενὸς πώποτε
οὐδὲν ἀκήκοα.

At 62a1-7, Socrates responds:

τάχα γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἀκούσῃς. ἴσως μέντοι
θαυμαστὸν σοὶ φανεῖται εἰ τοῦτο μόνον τῶν
ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἀπλοῦν ἐστίν, καὶ οὐδέποτε
τυγχάνει τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὥσπερ καὶ τᾶλλα,
ἐστίν ὅτε καὶ οἷς βέλτιον⁷² τεθνάναι ἢ ζῆν,
οἷς δὲ βέλτιον τεθνάναι, θαυμαστὸν ἴσως σοὶ
φαίνεται εἰ τούτοις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μὴ ὄσιον
αὐτοῦς ἑαυτοῦς εὖ ποιεῖν, ἀλλὰ ἄλλον δεῖ
περιμένειν εὐεργέτην.

On the basis of what do they say that it is not right to kill oneself, Socrates? As to your present question, I have heard Philolaus say this when staying in Thebes and I have also heard it from others, so there is no need to produce this: but I have never heard anyone say something clear about it.⁷¹

Perhaps you may yet hear something. But perhaps it will appear strange to you if this alone of all things is simple, and it never happens for people, just as with everything else, that it is better at certain times to be dead than to be alive⁷³, and it is better for certain people to be dead. And perhaps it appears strange to you if the following is the case: those people are not permitted to do well for themselves, but must await some other well-doer.⁷⁴

This 62a passage is much discussed and much debated. Canvassing the array of interpretive disputes and the translations which permutations of those interpretive decisions yield is an immense task beyond the scope of the present discussion.⁷⁵ I will thus focus on a narrative or argumentative point: Socrates' comments at 62a1-7 are a *preview* of the argument to come against suicide. Plato narrows the scope of discussion through Cebes' repeated questioning at

⁷¹ Tr. Grube 1977, lightly amended.

⁷² Burnet 1911, following Heindorf, adds an 'ὄν' here. I, in line with both Rowe 1993 and Gallop 1975, find this addition unnecessary; Burnet himself justifies its inclusion only on the grounds that its 'safer' to include it than omit it in order that *τυγχάνει* be paired with a participle.

⁷³ I translate ζῆν 'to be alive' because I take Socrates to contrast two states here, the state of being dead and the state of being alive. The Greek cannot capture the state. English helpfully has an expression to account for the state.

⁷⁴ Translation my own.

⁷⁵ For an excellent introduction to the subject and a survey of some interpretive issues, see Gallop 1975 (pp. 79-85). Dorter 1982 (pp. 11-19) also nicely surveys and groups a number of interpretations. For individual interpretations, see Rowe 1993 (pp. 126-8), Burnet 1979 (pp. 20-22), Bostock 1986 (pp. 16-17), Warren 2001 (pp. 95-7), Bluck 1955 (pp. 151-3), Trabattoni 2023 (pp. 35-47).

61d3-9. Socrates parallelly offers two rounds of response to Cebes, the first of which occurs at 62a1-7. This initial formulation of the suicide prohibition, I show, gestures toward the propositions at 62b-c, what I call the Enclosure Argument and the Guardian Argument. I will call my reading of the 62a passage the Preview Reading. Such a reading of 62a has been implicitly endorsed in literature on *Phaedo* and to me seems an apparent and reasonable interpretation of the passage. I endeavor here to make an explicit case for it, both through noting supporting grammatical features of the text and identifying the points where 62b-c clearly echoes 62a. This is all to say, though not novel, offering a story for the relationship of 62a to 62b-c is an important task often overlooked in favor of untangling the grammatically intractable 62a passage.

Before defending my Preview Reading of 62a1-7, I will spend this chapter flagging important, contestable interpretative choices I have taken. My preferred translation (which I have offered above) betrays my interpretative stances on three important points: (1) θαυμαστόν is best translated ‘strange,’ (2) both θαυμαστόν ...εἰ statements are not clearly endorsed by Socrates at this point, and so are not here assigned truth value; we should understand each ensuing proposition “it may appear wondrous to you if X is the case”, (3) τεθνάναι and ζῆν are faithfully rendered as ‘be dead’ and ‘to be alive.’ None of my three contestable interpretive choices militate explicitly in favor of or against the Preview Reading. Nevertheless, the choices concern three controversial interpretive issues of the text and so should be, even if briefly, justified.

(i) θαυμαστόν is best translated ‘strange.’ The two phrases containing ‘θαυμαστόν’ are often rendered to express surprise or astonishment⁷⁶, with the effect that Cebes is shocked by the content of both clauses. I, however, take θαυμαστόν to mean ‘strange.’ While θαυμαστός can be

⁷⁶ Bluck 1955 (p.43), Grube 1977 (p.99), Bostock 1986 (p.16), Dorter 1982 (p. 12) and to some extent Rowe 1993 (p.26) takes wondrous to *mean* surprising, Gallop 1975 (p.82) also considers this translation.

positively connotated⁷⁷, it neutrally means ‘wonderful’ or ‘marvelous.’ However, I do not think we should translate θαυμαστός here literally to yield, “perhaps it may appear wonderful to you...” It seems clear to me that Plato means to situate Cebes as a skeptical interlocuter, not, as a straightforward translation taking θαυμαστός as ‘wonderful’ might express, a fawning yes-man. Instead, in our context, I interpret θαυμαστός to mean ‘strange,’ as in, ‘a matter of wonder.’⁷⁸ At this point in the argument, Socrates is priming Cebes to be receptive to his stance on self-killing. Cebes has already questioned two propositions, (1) that one must not do violence to themselves, and (2) that the philosopher wishes for death. Socrates responds by affirming Cebes’ skepticism, as if it say, “I already know you find my initial remarks about self-killing contradictory; bear with me and I will offer a fuller account.” Taking ‘strange’ is my preferred reading of θαυμαστός because it is both faithful to the meaning of the word and reflects the skepticism Cebes has toward Socrates’ comments regarding suicide up to this point.

Taking θαυμαστός as astonishment misguidedly traffics in expected surprise on behalf of Cebes. The word ‘astonishment’ would express something like, “you may be *shocked* to learn that...” This overstates Cebes’ expected reaction to Socrates’ forthcoming prohibition. Had Cebes been well and truly astonished by Socrates’ remarks on suicide, I would struggle to make sense of his response because astonishment conveys surprise to the point of an inability to respond. However, Cebes immediately challenges Socrates on hearing the full-fledged prohibition on self-killing. ‘Strange’ nicely leaves room for Cebes’ challenge; it can imply inquisition and follow-up. By contrast, ‘astonishment’ and even the less forceful ‘surprise’ do not, at least not straightforwardly invite further discussion.

⁷⁷ For instance, at the end of *Apology* Socrates spending time with the great thinkers of his time. He says, “ἐπεὶ ἔμοιγε καὶ αὐτῷ θαυμαστὴ ἂν εἴη ἡ διατριβὴ αὐτόθι.”

⁷⁸ Gallop 1975 (p.79) offers this translation among his interpretations, as well.

(ii) Both θαυμαστόν ...εἰ statements are not clearly endorsed by Socrates at this point, and so are not here assigned truth value; we should understand each ensuing proposition to mean “it may appear strange to you if P turns out to be true.” Socrates delivers two clauses beginning with ‘εἰ.’ First, “*if* this alone of all things is simple, and it never happens for people, just as with everything else, that it is better at certain times to be dead than to live, and it is better for certain people to be dead.” The content of the second ‘εἰ’ clause is as follows: “...*if* the following is the case: those people are not permitted to do well for themselves but must await some other well-doer.” I suggest that though Socrates does eventually endorse the content of each clause, in this preliminary statement of the prohibition⁷⁹, he remains neutral as to whether he endorses them (which is to say, deems them true) or not. My straightforward translation of εἰ to mean ‘if’ in both cases conveys the neutrality I take Socrates to express toward the content of each clause. The ‘if’ portrays a non-committal Socrates. Socrates’ timidity to endorse the content of each clause is appropriate given the stage of the argument at which he offers the propositions. Socrates expects his interlocuters to find his arguments about self-killing strange. In fact, despite having spent time with Philolaus, an established Pythagorean, they are unfamiliar with the details of the Orphic doctrine against self-killing. Socrates risks distancing his interlocuters early in discussion if he asserts his view too early, without ample preparation. Instead, Socrates hypothetically debuts propositions which he will soon substantiate. He quickly undertakes the task of making his point more comprehensibly — 62b begins, “‘Indeed, it [argument against suicide] does seem,’ said Socrates, ‘unreasonable when put this way, but perhaps it has some reason.’”⁸⁰ Having given a convoluted, theoretical sketch of the argument, Socrates will now

⁷⁹ Of course, casting this as a preliminary statement of the proposition is controversial. I substantiate this view below through my defense of the Preview Reading of 62a.

⁸⁰ *Phd.* 62b. Tr. Grube. καὶ γὰρ ἂν δόξειεν, ἔφη ὁ Σωκράτης, οὕτω γ’ εἶναι ἄλογον: οὐ μέντοι ἀλλ’ ἴσως γ’ ἔχει τινὰ λόγον.

deliver a version which is intelligible, and so more defensible; hypothetical statements of the 62a passage are replaced by declarative statements at 62b-c. Socrates' strategy, characteristically, is to convince his interlocuters to assent to the later iteration of the argument offered at 62b-c. Having assented to the 62b-c formulation, they will have tacitly endorsed the 62a iteration, as well.

Incompatibly with my view, one interpretation considered is that the θαυμαστών ...εἰ statements are assertive.⁸¹ On this view, the first clause is rendered, "it may appear strange to you *that* this alone of all things is simple..." An assertive reading of the two clauses implies that Socrates endorses the propositions which they contain. Resultingly, Socrates would effectively say, "it may seem strange to you that these things are the case, but they are."

I do not find this reading persuasive because I do not think that Socrates has, or needs to, endorse this skeletal argument against self-killing at 62a. As I have noted, Socrates has a better chance of convincing his interlocuters of his argument by remaining non-committal than steadfast at this stage. I will shortly further substantiate this point in my narrative defense of the Preview Reading.

One may attempt a defense of this assertive reading on the basis that it is grammatically plausible. Liddell-Scott (LSJ) allows that verbs indicating wonder may take εἰ instead of ὅτι.⁸² However, the LSJ further indicates that this replacement is used "to express the object of the feeling *in a hypothetical form*". For instance, at one point Cebes says to Socrates, "πάνυ ἐθαύμαζον εἴ τι ἕξει τις χρήσασθαι τῷ λόγῳ αὐτοῦ"⁸³ This use of εἰ is noticeably different from the use at 62a. Most noticeably, the use at 62a is twice preceded by ἴσως, 'perhaps.' The

⁸¹ Dorter 1982 (p.12).

⁸² The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon, 13805.B.V.

⁸³ *Phd.* 95a9-b1.

precedent, I take it, serves to emphasize the caution with which Socrates offers his forthcoming comments. Moreover, the statement at 95a-b refers to an argument that Socrates has already delivered; in addition, the verb is simply rendered in the imperfect tense. It would be odd, then, to make a conditional statement about a feature of an argument that has already been uttered. Imagine, for instance, that I have just argued that the sky is blue. It would be odd for someone to reply, “it was surprising to me if you said the sky was blue.” By contrast, 62a imagines Cebes’ response to a forthcoming argument. Given that (1) Socrates’ usages of εἰ cautiously predict his interlocutors’ responses (e.g., it *will* appear strange to you...) and that (2) he pairs the particle with a speculative adverb, we should take it to mean ‘if’ *not* ‘that.’ And so, Socrates’ ‘θαυμαστόν ...εἰ’ statements should be taken tentatively, not assertively.

(iii) τεθνάναι and ζῆν are two contrasting states. I argue that Plato explicitly compares these terms as two states: the state of being dead and the state of living. The proposition conveys that for some people at some times it is better for their souls and bodies to be separate from each other than for their souls and bodies to be enjoined. Translating τεθνάναι and ζῆν accurately captures these two symmetrical states.

The symmetry revealed in my preferred translation is often obscured. For example, Grube translates 62a2-3, “...better at certain time and for certain people *to die than to live*.”⁸⁴ In this translation, the completion of action conveyed by the perfect tense of τεθνάναι is lost. With it, the parallel states that I take Plato to naturally compare here is obscured. On Grube’s translation, and others which fail to faithfully render τεθνάναι, it would seem that Plato compares the event of death or process of dying with the state of being alive. So, it would seem better to die than to be alive. On this mistaken interpretation, Plato would seem to contrast compatible outcomes, at

⁸⁴ See also Burnet 1911, Hackforth 1955, Rowe 1993.

least if one takes τεθνάναι to refer to the process of dying. A person can surely be dying and alive. In fact, a person cannot be dying and *not* be alive. Dying is a process which culminates in the cessation of life; the process of dying itself occurs during life. More powerfully, the state which appropriately contrasts the process of dying is the process of coming to be alive, e.g., birth. Plato clearly does not mean to convey here that it is better for some people at some times to be born than to die (even if this turns out to be true). He is in the course of delivering an argument against killing oneself and so he is obviously concerned with why for some people at some times the state of life would be comparatively worse than the *state* of death.⁸⁵ The asymmetry alone may not be a compelling enough reason to disprefer the translation ‘dying’ for τεθνάναι. However, τεθνάναι may be reasonably read to mean the state of being dead and that the word appears in the perfect tense is an overriding reason to prefer this reasonable translation to its otherwise defensible alternative, ‘dying.’

I have offered my stance on three contested interpretive points: I defend that (1) θαυμαστός be rendered ‘strange,’ and (2) εἰ, ‘if’ to convey Socrates non-commitment to the propositions sketched in 62a. I have argued too that (3) τεθνάναι be taken faithfully to mean ‘to be dead,’ contrasted with the state of being alive, ζῆν. These three interpretative choices are undoubtedly controversial in the literature on 62a. However, none especially bear on my insight into the passage, what I term the Preview Reading. In what follows, I present and defend this reading at two levels, grammatically, so to speak, and contextually.

I contend that the Preview Reading is supported by the passage itself on the basis of the first τοῦτο at 62a2. This τοῦτο, I suggest, refers to an account as to the wrongness of suicide, i.e., a suicide prohibition. This meaning seems natural given the structure of Socrates’ response to

⁸⁵ Burnet offers, in my opinion, a weak defense of taking τεθνάναι to mean ‘process of dying,’ he refers to a *Crito* usage. Rowe concedes that ‘to be dead’ is *at least* just as appropriate as ‘process of dying.’

Cebes' question. Socrates begins his remarks by suggesting that Cebes may yet hear an explanation for the wrongness of suicide; he follows this assurance with preliminary comments on one such account. Namely, he states that such an account is not simple. On my interpretation of the τοῦτο, the sentence beginning at 62a2 conveys, "It will appear strange to you if *the account of suicide's wrongness* is simple, i.e., without exception." Socrates expects Cebes to be skeptical that the suicide prohibition applies to everyone, even those for whom death is better than life.

I have defended that the suicide prohibition is the appropriate referent of τοῦτο. Such an interpretation supports the Preview Reading of the 62a remarks from Socrates. Setting the suicide prohibition as the referent of τοῦτο identifies the prohibition as the subject of the passage. In this way, Plato primes the reader for the ensuing, more detailed arguments against self-killing. What's more, the 62a passage serves as an outline to his argument against suicide. The 62a2 instance of τοῦτο indicates that for Socrates the suicide prohibition applies indiscriminately. Socrates seems to again evoke this proposition through the Enclosure Argument, remarking that *we humans* — that is, everyone, without exception⁸⁶ — must neither free ourselves nor escape from our bodies.⁸⁷

I have argued that τοῦτο refers to Cebes preceding comments at 61e, with the result that τοῦτο refers to an account of suicide's wrongness, i.e., a suicide prohibition; this view is shared by at least two commentators.⁸⁸ Contradictorily, many commentators — following Burnet — understand the τοῦτο to be anticipatory, referring to the forthcoming sentiment 'τὸ βέλτιον εἶναι

⁸⁶ I later explain how I think Socrates remark that divinely authorized self-killing is permissible squares with his insistence that there are no exceptions to the prohibition.

⁸⁷ "οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οὐ δεῖ δὴ ἑαυτὸν ἐκ ταύτης λύειν οὐδ' ἀποδιδράσκειν" (62b4-5)

⁸⁸ Tarán 1966 and Gallop 1975 also seems to endorse this reading.

ζῆν ἢ τεθνάναι⁸⁹. Moreover, Burnet asserts that this sentiment to which τοῦτο refers — τὸ βέλτιον εἶναι ζῆν ἢ τεθνάναι — only acquires a definite meaning as the sentence proceeds. Taking the τοῦτο anticipatorily, 62a may be interpreted as Gallop suggests, “perhaps it will appear questionable⁹⁰ to you whether this — i.e., that life is *always* preferable to death — is simple, i.e., true without exception.” I reject construing the τοῦτο anticipatorily. As Gallop notes⁹¹, the main challenge to this interpretation is that the doctrine on which it relies goes unstated in the text. Of course, we may well expect Cebes to reject that life is unexceptionally better than death; Cebes will reasonably agree that for certain people at certain times it is better to be dead than to live. Cebes will find it wondrous or surprising, however, that those people for whom death is better than life must not proceed to death without having received permission from the gods. So, Burnet’s doctrine fits neatly into the narrative of the passage at 62a. However, the doctrine Burnet reads into the τοῦτο is a product of his own making. Neither the sentence, ‘τὸ βέλτιον εἶναι ζῆν ἢ τεθνάναι,’ nor even its sentiment, that ‘without exception life is preferable to death,’ can be found in the text. Gallop restates the issue of the so-called anticipatory τοῦτο well, “But how could [τοῦτο] ‘anticipate’ something that is nowhere expressly said?”⁹²

It is reasonable to assume that Burnet constructed the doctrine which the τοῦτο is meant to anticipate in order to explain Cebes’ surprise over the suicide prohibition. That said, Cebes’ wonder over the suicide prohibition is easily explained on my preferred interpretation of τοῦτο. Socrates expects Cebes to question whether in all cases suicide is impermissible. Reading τοῦτο to refer backwardly to that which Cebes may hear, i.e., the suicide prohibition, the sentence at

⁸⁹ This sentence does not appear in the text. Rather, Burnet constructs a sentiment he finds in the text and attributes that sentiment to the τοῦτο of 62a2; Hackforth and Rowe take up this interpretation explicitly.

⁹⁰ To make the doctrine Burnet introduces makes sense, the sentence must be rendered so as to convey Cebes’ skepticism at the truth of the doctrine.

⁹¹ Gallop 1975 (pp. 80-81).

⁹² Gallop 1975 (p. 81).

62a2-3 conveys, “perhaps it may appear wondrous (i.e., strange) to you if the suicide prohibition does not admit of exceptions.” So, my reading is just as intelligible as Burnet’s. More importantly, my reading is textually feasible, which Burnet’s is *not*. Thus, we should not take the τοῦτο anticipatorily. Instead, we should take the τοῦτο to refer to the suicide prohibition.

Thus far, I have defended three interpretive stances concerning 62a. I first argued that we translate θαυμαστόν as ‘strange’ to mean ‘a matter of wonder.’ This translation preserves the meaning of the word without suggesting that Cebes expect to be shocked by what Socrates will soon say. I next argue that Socrates does not endorse the propositions he utters at 62a. Instead, Socrates offers each proposition provisionally; he defends the claims during his presentation of the suicide prohibition at 62b-c. Finally, I insist that we read τεθνάναι and ζῆν to signify contrasting states, the state of being dead and the state of being alive. Reading the terms asymmetrically, while perhaps plausible, is not preferable to reading the terms symmetrically. I then argue that we take Cebes’ remarks at 61e as the appropriate referent of the τοῦτο in line 62a2. Resultingly, 62a concerns the account of suicide’s wrongness, not, as Burnet and others have argued for, that it is better to be alive than to be dead. In Chapter 3, I present Plato’s argument against self-killing at 62b-c. I begin discussion of the prohibition by substantiating the Preview Reading of 62a. 62a, I will show, foreshadows the suicide prohibition.

Chapter 3: The Enclosure Argument

At 62b-c, Plato delivers an argument against self-killing. In Chapters 3 and 4, I explicate the arguments this account contains. I suggest we take the argument in two parts. What I call the Enclosure Argument runs from 62b2-6; what I term the Guardian Argument follows from 62b2-c9. This chapter is entirely concerned with the Enclosure Argument. On my reading, the Argument goes that the body is a kind of enclosure from which we must neither free ourselves nor run away.

I turn next to a translation intervention. I argue that we take φρουρά as ‘enclosure’ instead of either common translation ‘guard’ or ‘prison.’ I further contend that the Enclosure Argument suggests that the body restricts the soul and also protects the soul. I reconstruct two defenses of the latter claim: first, I suggest an ‘Orphic’ explanation that the body protects the soul. I call this Reading 1a. I then, perhaps surprisingly, offer a Platonic explanation to the same effect which I call Reading 1b. I suggest a further reading, dubbed Reading 2, on which Plato explains that the soul is charged with protecting the body. I begin this chapter by substantiating my Preview Reading of 62a. I offer first a brief description of 62b-c in order to ground the arguments I make in defense of the Preview Reading.

I. Against Self-killing

At 62b2-c9, Socrates lays out his position on suicide. He says,

ὁ μὲν οὖν ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενος περὶ αὐτῶν λόγος, ὡς ἔν τινι φρουρᾷ ἐσμεν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οὐ δεῖ δὴ ἑαυτὸν ἐκ ταύτης λύειν οὐδ’ ἀποδιδράσκειν, μέγας τέ τις μοι φαίνεται καὶ οὐ ῥάδιος διδεῖν·

There is the account in the language of the mysteries about this, that we humans are in a kind of enclosure⁹³, and one must not free themselves and one must not run away. This seems to me great and not easy to discern.⁹⁴

⁹³ φρουρᾷ.

⁹⁴ Translation my own.

He continues,

οὐ μέντοι ἀλλὰ τόδε γέ μοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Κέβης,
εἶ λέγεσθαι, τὸ θεοὺς εἶναι ἡμῶν τοὺς
ἐπιμελουμένους καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους
ἐν τῶν κτημάτων τοῖς θεοῖς εἶναι. ἢ σοὶ οὐ
δοκεῖ οὕτως;

Ἔμοιγε, φησὶν ὁ Κέβης.

Οὐκοῦν, ἢ δ' ὅς, καὶ σὺ ἂν τῶν σαυτοῦ
κτημάτων εἴ τι αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἀποκτείνουσι, μὴ
σημήναντός σου ὅτι βούλει αὐτὸ τεθάναι,
χαλεπαίνοις ἂν αὐτῷ καί, εἴ τινα ἔχοις
τιμωρίαν, τιμωροῖο ἄν;

Πάνυ γ', ἔφη.

Ἴσως τοίνυν ταύτη οὐκ ἄλογον μὴ πρότερον
αὐτὸν ἀποκτείνουσι δεῖν, πρὶν ἀνάγκην τινὰ
θεὸς ἐπιπέμψῃ, ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν νῦν ἡμῖν
παροῦσαν.

But this, however, seems to me, at least,
Cebes, well said, that the gods are our
caretakers and we humans are among the
possessions of the gods. Or do you not think
so?

I do, said Cebes.

And if one of your possessions killed itself
and you had not given a sign that you
wished for it to die would you not be angry?
And if you had some kind of vengeance you
would exact revenge?

Certainly, he said.

Therefore, in like manner, it is not
unreasonable that one must not first kill
themselves before a god sent some
necessity, just as is now the present situation
for myself.⁹⁵

I will refer to 62b2-5 as the Enclosure Argument and I call 62b5-9 the Guardian Argument. The Enclosure Argument indicates that we should not kill ourselves because our bodies are enclosures of sorts from which we should neither free ourselves nor run away from. The Guardian Argument provides a second reason against suicide. The Argument holds that we should not kill ourselves because killing ourselves defies the will of the gods to whom we belong as possessions. With the prohibition now on the table, I turn to my explication of the Preview Reading of 62a.

II. Concluding thoughts on 62a

I suggest that 62a offers a skeletal formulation of the forthcoming suicide prohibition. Particularly, each proposition offered at 62a is a conclusion for which Socrates will soon offer supporting premises; having garnered assent from his interlocutors for the explicated claim, Socrates tacitly wins approval for the conclusions these arguments yield. With an eye to the

⁹⁵ Translation my own.

structure of 62a-c, we can observe that Plato utilizes a flipped argumentative model, beginning with the conclusion and later fleshing out the argument.

Socrates offers three propositions at 62a which he will argue for and reconcile: (i) the suicide prohibition does not admit of exceptions (ii) it is better for some people to be dead than to be alive and (iii) those for whom death is better than life should nevertheless refrain from killing themselves until they receive divine permission to do so. For each proposition, I examine its explication in the ensuing dialogue, with particular attention to its echo in 62b-c.

(i) The suicide prohibition does not admit of exceptions. I lift this proposition from 62a2-3 where Socrates says, “But perhaps it will appear strange to you if this alone of all things is simple...” As I have indicated, I read this sentence to mean ‘perhaps it will appear strange to Cebes if the account of suicide’s wrongness admits of no exceptions.’ Socrates twice expresses this sentiment more carefully at 62c: at 62c1-3 he tells Cebes that were a piece of his property to kill itself without permission, he would be angry; at lines 7-8 he specifies that this sign (σημῆναι) is a necessity sent by the gods. Taken together, Plato indicates in the suicide prohibition that self-killing is impermissible *unless the gods explicitly permit a person to kill themselves*.

The sentiment expressed at 62b may initially seem opposed to that expressed in the preamble. In the first case, on my construal at least, Socrates seems to say that suicide is always impermissible. In the second case, it may appear that Socrates says that there are exceptions. Namely, it may seem that Socrates says that a person may kill themselves if they have received permission from the gods.

This tension is easily resolved: Plato means that there are no people to whom the prohibition does not apply. Note that while Socrates will ultimately defend this conclusion, at

62a he is careful to offer it only provisionally. Socrates suggests that there are people for whom being dead is better than being alive. If this turns out to be the case, the prohibition will apply to them, too. Socrates here floats the proposition that philosophers are subject to the same restrictions as non-philosophers. In the next chapter, I will defend that these obligations — to obey the rule of the gods — are attributable to *all* humans' enslavement to the gods.

(ii) It is better for some people to be dead than to be alive. At 62a3-5, Socrates supposes that it will appear strange to Cebes if it is not the case with people, just as with everything else, there are some people at some times for whom death is better than life. Socrates begins with an extension of his claim about exceptionality. He seems to say, “the suicide prohibition, unlike other prohibitions (everything else), really admits of no exceptions; this *even though* there are some people for whom death is better than life.” This interpretation relies on the claim that there are some people for whom death is better than life. Elsewhere, Plato endorses this claim. Specifically, Plato thinks that death is better for philosophers than life. I will briefly review my argument in defense of this claim in order to bolster the plausibility of my reading of 62a3-5.

62a3-5 cautiously offers a claim that Plato will spend much time arguing for, that philosophers are better off dead than alive. I have spent much time explicating this claim in Chapter 1. To reiterate, this proposition is explicated through Plato's successive definitions of death at 64c and 67c-d. In discussion of these definition, I showed that philosophers work to estrange their souls from their bodies as much as is possible. For a person to estrange their soul from their body is for them to die psychologically. One may achieve psychological death in life to a degree; complete psychological death is achievable when the soul becomes disembodied. Put differently, complete estrangement from the body is achievable only when the soul is physically apart from the body. I call the separation (i.e., the state) of the soul from the body physical death.

This context in mind, we may reasonably interpret the proposition at 62a3-5 to invoke Plato's description of death.

In light of Plato's comments on death, we may consider a richer reading of 62a3-5. Socrates' suggestion that it is better at some times and for some people to be dead than to be alive may be fleshed out: it is better for philosophers (i.e., certain people) who have achieved psychological death (i.e., certain time) to exist apart from their bodies (i.e., to be physically and psychologically dead) than to live (i.e., be embodied). Read in this way, the suggestion at 62a3-5 primes both the readers and in-text interlocuters for a robust discussion of the philosopher's desire and fittingness for death.

The sentiment expressed at 62a3-5 — that it is better for some people to be dead than to live — in some way preempts 62c1-3 in the way that the preceding sentence does. Just as with the previous line, Socrates highlights a tension Cebes' grapples with. This tension is expressed in his initial question at 61d where Cebes wonders why the philosopher ought not kill herself despite her desire for death. Socrates quickly does away with this tension by asserting that the gods will send some sign when a person can kill herself. I have hopefully further eased the tension between the universality of the prohibition and divine permissibility of philosopher suicide by reminding us of Plato's view of death. The philosopher is unique in that she alone is capable of achieving complete psychological death. The philosopher is better off dead than alive⁹⁶ and so eligible for some sign from the gods permitting her to die.

(iii) Those for whom death is better than life should nevertheless refrain from killing themselves but must await some other well-doer. This sentence most explicitly preempts the suicide prohibition in that it reads as a succinct statement of it. The meaning is, of course, that

⁹⁶ I think it will turn out that for Plato there are other for whom death is better than life. Cf. *Grg.* 505a, *Rep.* 410, *Cri.* 47e.

though it is better for the philosopher to be dead than to be alive, she still must not avail herself of suicide until she receives some sign from the gods that she may kill herself. I have offered an argument making sense of divine permission in relation to proposition (i)⁹⁷, so I will not restate that case in detail here. I will emphasize though, that the 62c1-3 passage directly echoes the sentiment expressed in 62a.

Socrates concludes his remarks at 62a, “And perhaps it appears strange to you if the following is the case: those people are not permitted to do well for themselves, but must await some other well-doer.” Of course, this proposition is echoed and expounded upon by way of analogy at 62b. Those for whom death is better than life, Socrates states, are not allowed to benefit themselves for two reasons: we must neither free ourselves from nor flee our bodies, and second, we, possessions of the gods, must not defy our good masters unless given permission by the gods to do so. The gods are the ‘well-doers’ Socrates says the reasonably suicidal must receive permission from in order to kill themselves; the proposition at 62a explicitly previews what is to come shortly. That the philosopher should not kill herself, despite the benefit of suicide to her, is the point that Plato takes care to explicate plainly at 62b-c; this statement at 62a is the conclusion toward which the suicide prohibition aims.

Socrates begins 62b-c with a promise to sharpen the account of suicide’s wrongness. Referring to his initial formulation at 62a he says, “Indeed, it does seem unreasonable when put this way, but perhaps there is some reason.”⁹⁸ Here, I take it, Socrates sets out to rephrase the content of 62a — i.e., what is ‘put in this way’ — such that his interlocutors comprehend and ultimately endorse his argument. Moreover, he fleshes out and endorses the propositions stated at

⁹⁷ I will also take this subject up again in Chapter 4.

⁹⁸ *Phd.* 62b. Tr. Grube, lightly amended. καὶ γὰρ ἂν δόξειεν, ἔφη ὁ Σωκράτης, οὕτω γ’ εἶναι ἄλογον: οὐ μέντοι ἀλλ’ ἴσως γ’ ἔχει τινὰ λόγον.

62a. In what follows, Socrates articulates an argument against suicide that he undoubtedly endorses. Completing his argument against suicide he says, “it is not unreasonable that one must not first kill themselves before a god sent some necessity...”⁹⁹ Departing from the tentativeness conveyed at 62a, he ends 62c declaratively; it is clear that he is stating what he takes to be the case.

Thus conclude my comments on 62a. I have aimed my discussion of the passage at thoroughly making the case that Plato intends 62a to preempt the suicide prohibition at 62b-c, that each proposition it contains is substantiated through arguments given at 62b-c and insofar as Socrates endorses his later formulation of the prohibition, he ultimately too will endorse those initial propositions. I turn next to an investigation of the Enclosure Argument. I begin by detailing Plato’s usage of the word φρουρά. Ultimately, I defend ‘enclosure’ as a candidate translation of φρουρά in Plato.

III. Φρουρά

At 62b4, Plato is often taken to refer to prison using word uncommon among his contemporaries, and indeed rare within his own corpus: φρουρά.¹⁰⁰ Strikingly, excluding usages in the *Laws*¹⁰¹, Plato only uses φρουρά three times: once each in *Phaedo*, *Critias*, and *Gorgias*. By comparison, Plato uses the standard δεσμοτήριον sixteen times¹⁰² throughout his corpus.

⁹⁹ *Phd.* 69c. Translation my own.

¹⁰⁰ I take Grube as a demonstrative case here. Rowe 1993, Bluck 1955, Bostock 1986, Gallop 1975, Beets 1997, Dorter 1982, and Ebrey 2022 all either translate *phroura* as prison, or offer it as one of two equally plausible options. I will discuss this options in detail shortly.

¹⁰¹ I exclude the four usages of φρουρά in *Laws* from this count. I exclude all discussion of *Laws* from the present investigation of Plato’s prison language. In that text, we get Plato’s most fleshed out penology. As such, any use of prison language is worthy of careful investigation concerning how it fits with other punitive or prison words in context, and whether it is used technically to mark a particular Platonic (or rather, Magnesian) idea of prison.

¹⁰² Again, excluding *Laws*, in which he uses δεσμοτήριον twice.

In what follows, I carefully investigate Plato’s references to prison in the texts to do with the trial and death of Socrates; I separately review all three usages of φρουρά. As a result of this comparison, I suggest a new interpretation of φρουρά to mean ‘enclosure.’ Plato, I will show, intentionally uses φρουρά *not* δεσμωτήριον in the Enclosure Argument, because he does not mean to refer to ‘prison,’ but simply to an ‘enclosure.’ I argue further that this meaning implies two readings. First and most straightforwardly, the body *protects* and *restricts* the soul insofar as an enclosure may function in a protective or restrictive capacity. I invoke Plato’s description of Orphic doctrine in *Cratylus* 400c to substantiate this reading. I term this ‘Reading 1a.’ I argue, too, that there is evidence for a Platonic interpretation of the passage which yields the same result: that the body both restricts and protects the soul. I dub this reading ‘Reading 1b.’ I then offer a second reading of the passage derived from nearby textual context: the body restricts the soul and the soul protects the body. On this reading, while the passage still implies restriction and protection, the *soul* protects the body. I offer a robust Platonic defense of this reading. I term this second reading, ‘Reading 2.’

IV. Prison language in *Phaedo*: uses of δεσμωτήριον

In *Phaedo*, Plato repeatedly refers to prison. In most instances, he uses δεσμωτήριον. Plato most often uses δεσμωτήριον to plainly refer to a location, the physical Athenian prison. For instance, at the start of *Phaedo*, Echecrates asks Phaedo, “Were you with Socrates yourself, Phaedo, on the day when he drank the poison in prison (τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ), or did someone else tell you about it?”¹⁰³ On the next Stephanus page, Phaedo explains Socrates’ long detainment, concluding, “That is why Socrates was in prison (τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ) a long time between his trial

¹⁰³ *Phd.* 57a2. Tr. Grube.

and his execution.”¹⁰⁴ Phaedo continues to set the scene at 59d-e. He says, “...We foregathered at daybreak at the court where the trial took place, for it was close to the prison (τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου), and each day we used to wait around talking until the prison (τὸ δεσμωτήριον) should open.... On this day we gathered rather early, because we left the prison (τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου) on the previous evening...”¹⁰⁵ As in *Phaedo*, Plato overwhelmingly uses δεσμωτήριον to refer to the Athenian prison throughout his corpus. Relevantly, he refers to prison as δεσμωτήριον in recounting the trial and death of Socrates.

In *Apology* Plato refers to prison at 37b-c. Having been found guilty of impiety and corruption of the youth, Socrates assesses the possible punishments. He says, “Am I then to choose in preference to [death] something that I know very well to be an evil and assess the penalty at that? Imprisonment (δεσμοῦ)? Why should I live in prison (δεσμωτηρίῳ)...? A fine, and imprisonment (δεδέσθαι) until I pay it?”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in *Crito*, Socrates says of Thessaly, “There you will find the greatest license and disorder, and they may enjoy hearing from you how absurdly you escaped from prison (τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου) in some disguise...”¹⁰⁷ At *Phaedo* 57-58 and the excerpted passages from *Apology* and *Crito*, Plato straightforwardly uses δεσμωτήριον to indicate the physical Athenian prison itself, a location.

¹⁰⁴ *Phd.* 58c5. Tr. Grube.

¹⁰⁵ *Phd.* 59d-e. Tr. Grube.

¹⁰⁶ *Ap.* 37b-c, tr. Grube. This passage is cited by Danielle Allen as evidence that, contrary to the prevailing view before her 1997 paper on the subject, imprisonment was sometimes imposed in Athens as a punishment *per se* (imprisonment was not exclusively used as coercive, additional, or custodial measure).

¹⁰⁷ *Cri.* 53d. Tr. Grube.

V. Φρουρά as ‘Enclosure’

At 62b4, rebuking suicide, Socrates says “...we men are in a τιτι φρουρᾷ¹⁰⁸, and one must not free themselves and one must not run away.¹⁰⁹ Scholars most often translate φρουρά at 62b4 as ‘prison.’¹¹⁰ However, they have also suggested alternative interpretations of the word, among them: military outpost (Bluck 1955), ward¹¹¹, *in ward* (Burnet 1911, Archer-Hind 1894), watch¹¹², guardhouse (Bostock 1986), garrison (Gallop 1975), and garrison *duty* (Archer-Hind 1894). The most salient feature of each reading, in my view, is whether it implies that Plato intends φρουρά to either primarily or exclusively imply restriction or protection. On a strictly restrictive reading of φρουρά, the body entraps the soul and the soul is bound within the body. Interpretations of φρουρά which suggest restriction — namely ‘prison’ — align with this strictly restrictive reading. Contrastingly, a strictly protective reading implies that the body keeps the soul safe. ‘Guard,’ ‘watch,’ ‘guardhouse,’ ‘garrison,’¹¹³ ‘garrison duty,’ ‘military post,’ and ‘ward’ are all interpretations consistent with a strict protective reading.

In each of Plato’s two other uses of φρουρά, he uses the word to imply either restriction or protection. At the close of *Gorgias*, Plato seems to use φρουρά to imply restriction. He describes the path vicious souls take: they are sent to the φρουρά to await their suffering.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Tr. Grube, lightly amended.

¹⁰⁹ Tr. Grube, lightly amended.

¹¹⁰ Including Bluck 1955, Bostock 1986, Grube 1977, Rowe 1993, Gallop 1975, Beets 1997 and Dorter 1982.

¹¹¹ Strachan 1970 interprets the difference between ‘ward’ and ‘in ward’ to be that the former is ambiguous between an active and passive meaning, while the latter is strictly passive (e.g., passively on guard duty, not actively watching). Moreover, ‘in ward’ implies protection, ‘ward’ (at least sometimes) implies punishment (p.216).

¹¹² Archer-Hind 1894 (p.11); Cicero translates φρουρά as *custodia*.

¹¹³ Garrison refers to a military post or body of troops assigned to protect a location. Garrison can mean military post. However, at least as the term is currently used in the U.S. Army, military post does not refer to a set of troops, and so is not interchangeable with garrison.

¹¹⁴ *Grg.* 525a6-7, ἰδὼν δὲ ἀτίμως ταύτην ἀπέπεμψεν εὐθὺς τῆς φρουρᾶς, οἷ μέλλει ἐλθοῦσα ἀναπλῆναι τὰ προσήκοντα πάθη.

Delivering the eschatological myth of the dialogue to Callicles, Socrates describes the judgement of the vicious person's soul, "And when he [Rhadamanthus¹¹⁵] had seen it, he dismissed this soul in dishonor straight from τῆς φρουρᾶς, to a place where it went to await suffering its appropriate fate."¹¹⁶ In this context, φρουρά is used to denote restriction of the soul; the φρουρά is a place where souls are detained.

The context of Plato's use of φρουρά in *Critias* is quite different. In the course his story, Critias describes palaces of Atlantis. He says, "The φρουρά for the most reliable soldiers (δορυφόρων¹¹⁷) was established near the acropolis on the smaller ring of islands. And dwellings (οικήσεις) were built on the acropolis for the most reliable [soldiers] of all, surrounding the kings themselves."¹¹⁸ In this passage, the φρουρά is a site of protection, it describes some sort of (non-punitive) accommodation. This usage of φρουρά is notably different from that in *Gorgias*. Whether or not either passage is strictly restrictive or strictly protective, each is decidedly more aligned with one of those two senses. By contrast, it is much more difficult to adjudicate which of the two senses of φρουρά the usage in *Phaedo* most conveys.

In his commentary on the *Phaedo*, Burnet tries to bridge the strictly restrictive and protective interpretations at 62b4 by suggesting that φρουρά is ambiguous between 'watch' and 'prison' and accordingly be read 'in ward'¹¹⁹; he offers various ancient passages in support of either common translation.¹²⁰ An ambiguous reading of φρουρά yields that it is plausible that

¹¹⁵ One of the two judges designated to judge the souls of those from Asia.

¹¹⁶ *Crit.* 525a6-7. tr. Zeyl, lightly amended.

¹¹⁷ Δορυφόρος is literally 'spear-bearer'.

¹¹⁸ *Crit.* 117d1-3. Tr. Zeyl, lightly amended.

¹¹⁹ Burnet pulls this translation from Archer-Hind, who himself takes 'in ward' for Cicero's *custodia*. Burnet himself, I think rightly, points out that Cicero's translation is some version of 'watch.' It is unclear what Burnet finds attractive about this reading, I take it that, as I've tentatively suggested, he thinks it may either mean 'watch' or 'prison.'

¹²⁰ Burnet 1911 (p. 23). Here Burnet cites, for instance, *Grg.* 525a6-7 and the Cicero translation cited in n. 111.

Plato means to assert either that the body is a prison or watch from which we must neither flee nor emancipate ourselves. I take Burnet to say that φρουρά sometimes clearly means prison and sometimes clearly means watch, so we can read the usage at 62b4 as ambiguous between the two meanings; either meaning is equally plausible. Put differently, for Burnet, unambiguous uses of φρουρά demonstrate the term's ambiguity. I tentatively suggest we may take his 'ambiguity' to just mean 'more than one interpretive option is available,' not that all interpretive options actually reflect authorial or speaker intent. For instance, if a boxer says they are going to look at a ring later, they may plausibly mean to refer *either* to a boxing ring, or a piece of jewelry. The statement cannot be construed, though, as referring to *both* a boxing ring and a piece of jewelry. Similarly, I suggest that for Burnet 'in ward' leaves room for either well-supported translations for which he has too little convincing evidence to decide between.

I agree with Burnet insofar as I think that the usage of φρουρά in *Phaedo* does not clearly align only with one of the two candidate translations Burnet discusses.¹²¹ However, deviating from Burnet's reading, I offer up a single translation of φρουρά which *does* manage to at once capture both restrictive and protective force: 'enclosure.' Moreover, I will offer 'enclosure' as a candidate for a standard translation of φρουρά in Plato.¹²² To substantiate this point, I show that the instances of φρουρά in *Gorgias* and *Critias* are also best translated as 'enclosure.'¹²³

The first passage is a clear usage to mean 'prison,' the second, 'watch.'

¹²¹ In his discussion of the Orphic body-prison doctrine, Edmonds III 2013 (pp.278-9) also argues that φρουρά does not have a simply restrictive meaning, and, in fact, the body is in some ways protective of the soul.

¹²² Cf. Loraux 1995 (pp. 155-6).

¹²³ Kamen 2013 (pp. 91-2) recommends 'pen' as a possible meaning but doesn't strongly endorse it. She suggest that it in some sense means pen, in some sense prison and in some sense garrison.

Before turning to my defense of my proposed translation, I will address what I consider the strongest counterargument against it. Namely, Socrates' comments on the body at 82d-e may at first glance militate strongly in favor of reading φρουρά as 'prison.' He says,

“The lovers of learning know that when philosophy gets hold of their soul, it is bound in (διαδεδεμένην) and glued to the body and that it is forced to examine other things through it as through a cage (εἰργμοῦ) and not by itself... Philosophy sees that the worst feature of this caging (τοῦ εἰργμοῦ) is that it is due to desires, so that the bound person (ὁ δεδεμένος) himself is an accomplice to his own incarceration (δεδέσθαι) most of all.”¹²⁴

At first glance, this passage may seem to indicate that Plato thinks that the body is a prison. Plato thrice refers to bondage; this connection is meaningful given the etymological connection between bondage and imprisonment. One may take, for instance, ὁ δεδεμένος and δεδέσθαι to mean prisoner and imprisonment, respectively. Moreover, Plato says that the soul is forced to look through the body as through a cage. Cage, of course, is a type of enclosure that may connote punishment. Certainly, cage connotes punishment more strongly than the neutral 'enclosure.' On the basis of this passage, a reader may think that Plato holds the view in *Phaedo* that the body is some sort of prison.¹²⁵ They may think then that the alternative 'enclosure' is an inadequate rendering of φρουρά.

While this passage is undoubtedly helpful in understanding Plato's view of the body in *Phaedo*, I do not think that it strongly supports reading φρουρά as 'prison.' The most telling evidence in favor of my suspicion is that Plato does not once in this passage identify what type of thing the body itself is in this passage. Plato spends much time describing what the soul and philosopher are like in relation to the body. The soul is bound and glued to the body. We can

¹²⁴ *Phd.* 82d-83a. Tr. Grube 1977, lightly amended.

¹²⁵ Ebrey 2023 (pp. 56-8), for example, calls partially on this passage to defend a reading of the suicide prohibition on which Plato's entire argument against suicide is that the body is a prison. We can avoid reincarnation into such a prison by purifying our souls in life; death halts this purification which guarantees another round of embodiment.

glean from this description that Plato thinks that the body restricts the soul. More strongly, I think we can rightly suppose that Plato suggests here that the body physically restricts the body. The body is not like, for instance, an age limit. An age limit is a restriction which a person may break without any physical effect to the restriction itself. If a 16-year-old orders a drink at a bar, the bar's age limit is physically unaffected. By contrast, the body cannot be breached without physical effect. Plato thus describes the soul as physically restrained to the body. The soul, he tells us, is tied or bound and stuck to the body. Plato also describes the philosopher as a bound person. Of course, insofar as he has just told us that the soul is bound to the body, the person bound in it is a bound person.

Finally, Plato tells us that the philosopher's soul is forced to examine things as through a cage. First, this statement analogizes the philosopher's experience of the body with cage, it does not declare that the body is a cage. This distinction is important. Plato, I take it, means to describe the way that the body influences the soul to examine interpret objects. The body mediates the soul's interaction with objects. Imagine, for instance, I moved through the world in a plastic bubble which I never left. Were I to live in a bubble, all my encounters with the world would be mediated through my plastic shell. Though this bubble may share features with a prison — namely that it is an enclosure — it is not itself a prison. Similarly, the body is like a cage which mediates the soul's interactions with objects. This does not imply that the body is itself a prison, even if it shares features with it. In addition, I again stress that if Plato meant to call the body a prison, he would. The closest we have to a description of the body here is perhaps *είργμός*, not Plato's preferred *δεσμωτήριον*.

In all, I think this passage indicates that Plato thinks the body is restrictive to the soul. However, I do not think that this passage decisively demonstrates that Plato thinks the body is a

prison. Particularly, I notice that Plato takes care to never describe the body in this passage. Instead, Plato describes the effect the body has on the soul. I hope to have persuasively deflated the argument that we take φρουρά to mean ‘prison.’ In what follows, I offer reasons to take my preferred translation. I contend that even if ‘prison’ is still a plausible rendering of φρουρά, ‘enclosure’ is just as plausible, and far preferable.

The term φρουρά should be taken as ‘enclosure’ just to mean a sealed off area. I suggest this term largely for its generality. ‘Enclosure’ may in context convey protection or restriction. An enclosure may be effectively protective and restrictive. For instance, a dog crate protects its occupant from endangering themselves *and* restricts the dog from destroying what lies outside the crate. ‘Enclosure’ accesses these two senses through its generality, not, as Burnet’s suggested ‘in ward,’ from ambiguity. Ambiguity can be resolved; generality does not necessarily invite further specification. For instance, whether the boxer meant to refer to a piece of jewelry or a boxing ring can be easily determined; what’s more, clarifying the intended or most plausible use helps us make sense of the boxer’s comment. However, if I remark, ‘here comes the train’ I do not mean to comment on whether it’s a freight train or a passenger train. I use a general term because the gist of my comment does not at all depend on the species, so to speak, of train.

To underscore the usefulness of generality, let us compare the term ‘enclosure’ to the often preferred ‘prison.’ A prison is a kind of enclosure; ‘prison’ is specific, while ‘enclosure’ is generic. The term prison implies punishment and suggests something about its inhabitant, namely that the imprisoned has been accused or convicted of having committed some crime.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Though also true of the contemporary prison, I mean here to identify the common uses of the ancient Athenian prison. Most classicists who work on this topic identify two main uses of the prison: to hold people before trial and to serve as punishment in *lieu* of another penalty (like our concept of ‘debtors prison’). See Folch 2021, Hunter 1997. I am persuaded by Allen 1997 (and so also Barkan 1936) that prison sentences were also sometimes used as punishments themselves. Folch 2021 takes up, but does not himself defend, this view, as well.

By contrast, ‘enclosure’ is neither inherently nor definitionally punitive. ‘Enclosure’ implies nothing about the circumstances under which a subject has ended up in an enclosure, nor the features of that enclosure itself.

I put forward that φρουρά in Plato may be translated ‘enclosure;’ ‘enclosure’ is an apt translation of φρουρά in both *Critias* and *Gorgias*. Recall again the passage from the *Gorgias*, “And when he [Rhadamanthus¹²⁷] had seen it, he dismissed this soul in dishonor from τῆς φρουρᾶς, to a place where it went to await suffering its appropriate fate.”¹²⁸ Φρουρά is used to describe a site of detainment. The vicious soul awaits its sentence, so to speak, in the φρουρά. ‘Enclosure’ then is a natural translation of φρουρά here. ‘Enclosure’ is neutral with respect to punishment — an attractive feature given the description of the φρουρά as a space where a soul *awaits* passage to another space where it will meet its fate. Detainment in the φρουρά is not in and of itself a punishment.¹²⁹ Moreover, φρουρά is usefully vague with respect to the contours of the enclosure — the use of φρουρά conveys that it does not matter whether in fact this enclosure was a cell, or a cage or a locked room; what *does* matter is that this space served as a site of containment for the vicious soul. The word φρουρά deemphasizes the baggage that specificity suffers (e.g., prison implies punishment, cage implies captivity, etc.) and emphasizes the function of the space, in this case, detainment.

I return now to the *Critias* passage. Critias says, “The φρουρά for the most reliable soldiers (δορυφόρων¹³⁰) was established on the smaller ring of islands. And dwellings (οικήσεις) were built on the acropolis for the most reliable of all, surrounding the kings themselves.”¹³¹

¹²⁷ One of the two judges designated to judge the souls of those from Asia.

¹²⁸ 525a6-7, tr. Zeyl, lightly amended.

¹²⁹ Interesting cross over with general theories of Athenian prisons. Cf. Allen 1997.

¹³⁰ Δορυφόρος is literally ‘spear-bearer’.

¹³¹ 117d1-3, tr. Clay, lightly amended.

Here, ‘enclosure’ usefully exaggerates the contrast present in the Greek between the accommodations the most valued soldiers receive, οικήσεις, and the accommodations for the lowlier soldiers, the φρουρά. The passage reads something like, while the lowly soldiers were situated some ways away from the acropolis, with some sort of accommodation (it does not much matter of what sort), the valued soldiers are situated on the acropolis, in οικήσεις no less.

In light of my endorsement of ‘enclosure’ for φρουρά, I suggest a new translation of *Phaedo* 62b. I suggest that we read the passage, “There is the account in the language of the mysteries about this, that we men are in a kind of enclosure, and one must not free themselves and one must not run away.” I put forward that Plato may well have intended φρουρά to simultaneously convey restriction and protection in *Phaedo*. I take as evidence two textual features: the verbs λύω and ἀποδιδράσκω. Socrates demands that one must (δεῖ) neither free oneself — λύειν — nor run away — ἀποδιδράσκειν — from their φρουρά. The infinitives, connected by οὐ... οὐδε, are meant to be taken as a pair. Each verb emphasizes one of the two senses of φρουρά. In the first case, Socrates tells us that a person must not free herself, λύειν, from her φρουρά. Emancipation implies an earlier *lack* of freedom, we must not free ourselves from some restriction. This interpretation is consistent with Plato’s other uses of λύω in *Phaedo*. At 59e6 and 60a1, *Phaedo* uses λύω to describe a kind of unfettering¹³², a release from a physical restriction. I contend then that λύειν suggests the restrictive reading. So, the sentiment in our passage that ‘the body is a φρουρά from which we must not free ourselves’ means that the body contains us, and we must not unfasten ourselves from it.

¹³² “**Λύουσι** γάρ,” ἔφη, “οἱ ἔνδεκα Σωκράτη καὶ παραγγέλλουσιν ὅπως ἂν τῆδε τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τελευτᾶ.” (59e6-7), κατελαμβάνομεν τὸν μὲν Σωκράτη ἄρτι **λελυμένον** (60a1)

I further submit that ἀποδιδράσκειν is consistent with the protective reading of φρουρά. That φρουρά to some extent implies protection is evident from its etymology. The word φρουρά comes from the prefix προ- and the verb ὀράω. Taken literally, φρουρά means something like ‘looking forward on behalf of something’ or ‘looking out for something.’ These explications of the word support reading φρουρά protectively because the sense that a φρουρά takes care on behalf of something else is inherent in the word. I argue further that the protection that the φρουρά indicates runs in two directions — simultaneously the body protects the soul *and* the soul protects the body. The soul protects the body from moral deterioration; at the same time the gods place the soul into a φρουρά in order that the φρουρά in some way looks out for the soul.

Socrates urges that one must not ἀποδιδράσκειν, run away, from their φρουρά. To me, ‘run away’ is reasonably understood to imply abandonment. Socrates, I posit, urges us against abandoning the protection our bodies offer us. Moreover, Plato implies that the body reciprocally enjoys protection from the soul; in fact, the gods assign the soul to protect the body. It would be wrong for us to shirk this divine responsibility, and so it would be wrong for us to kill ourselves. I contend that ἀποδιδράσκειν supports both these readings. On the one hand, the soul would be wrong to abandon the body which offers it protection. On the one hand, the soul must not run away from the body which it is tasked with protecting. I invoke *Crito* 52d in support of lifting this bidirectional protective relation from *Phaedo*. In what follows, I explain how we might read ἀποδιδράσκειν to suggest that the body protects the soul. I hold off on showing that ἀποδιδράσκειν may also suggest that the soul protects the body. I make this case in a broader context: in the course of defending that Plato thinks that the soul protects the body. I call this ensuing defense Reading 2.

I will now just show that ἀποδιδράσκειν plausibly indicates that the body protects the soul. At *Crito* 52d1, Socrates inhabits the character of Athenian laws, "...and you pay no heed to us, the laws, as you plan to destroy us, and you act like the meanest type of slave by trying to run away (ἀποδιδράσκειν), contrary to your commitments and your agreement to live as a citizen under us."¹³³ The location of the conversation, the location from which Socrates is refusing to escape, is prison. I read this *Crito* passage as expressing that to run away is abandon the city which looks out for the best interests of its citizens. Socrates reminds Crito, for instance, that the city birthed him, cared for him, and educated him.¹³⁴ Socrates narrates the laws, "we have given you and all other citizens a share of all the good things we could."¹³⁵ Were Socrates to run away from the city which has provided for him all his life would be akin to a slave running away from a good master. It would not be in the best interest of either Socrates or the slave to abandon that which has offered them protection.¹³⁶ Similarly in *Phaedo*, I interpret ἀποδιδράσκειν to mean that the body keeps the soul safe from harm. I will shortly defend the perhaps surprising underlying claim that *according to Plato*, the body is protective of the soul. In section VIII, I will argue that we may also read *Crito* 52d1 in support of the supposition that the soul protects the body.

The two verbs λύειν and ἀποδιδράσκειν support reading φρουρά as conveying both restriction and protection. Just as, for instance, a playpen both prevents a baby from escaping and protects her from outside harm, the body is an enclosure which both protects and restricts the soul. Moreover, the soul is divinely tasked with protecting the body in the same way that a tenant

¹³³ *Cri.* 52d1. Tr. Grube.

¹³⁴ *Cri.* 51c-d.

¹³⁵ *Cri.* 51c-d. Tr. Grube 1977.

¹³⁶ Not to mention, as we will soon see in the Guardian Argument, to abandon one's master would rightfully inspire anger in them.

is entrusted by their landlord with the responsibility of protecting their home. I have shown that λύειν may reasonably be taken restrictively, ἀποδιδράσκειν, protectively. Moreover, I have noted the οὐ... οὐδέ construction connects the infinitives, which both take φρουρά as their object. On the basis of these paired infinitives, we have good evidence that Plato plausibly means φρουρά to carry restrictive and protective force, so we may well read φρουρά as ‘enclosure.’

VI. Reading 1a

Phaedo 62b4 is standardly fitted into an Orphic context.¹³⁷ The ‘language of mysteries’¹³⁸, the line goes, is a reference to the Orphic mystic rites. Moreover, Simmias and Cebes follow Philolaus¹³⁹, himself a well-known Pythagorean.¹⁴⁰ In what follows, I reconstruct an ‘Orphic’ reading of the Enclosure Argument on the basis of the so-called Orphic body-prison doctrine.

First, a word on Orphism and its scope. ‘Orphism’ is in fact a series of tenets and practices associated with Orpheus.¹⁴¹ Orphism is not a systematic philosophic theory. We suspect that so-called Orphic tenets, practices and beliefs are Orphic just in virtue of the people and contexts with which the tenets and practices are associated. Further, it would be a mistake to infer that a belief is Orphic by its similarity to an Orphic principle. For instance, the widely accepted Orphic commitment to metempsychosis does not allow us to infer that the eschatological myth of the *Phaedo*, which also invokes reincarnation, is decidedly Orphic.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ I hold the view that Orphism is distinguishable from Pythagoreanism. Importantly for our investigation, Pythagoreanism was much more systematic than Orphism. Additionally, Orphism alone of the two was associated with rituals and rites, not Pythagoreanism. For a thorough accounting of the differences between the two traditions, see Betegh 2014.

¹³⁸ ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενος, *Phd.* 62b3.

¹³⁹ See Bordoy 2013 for a good summary of Philolaus. He notably indicates skepticism over whether Philolaus existed at all (and, resultingly, whether Clement was right to attribute a quote to him).

¹⁴⁰ *Phd.* 61d6-7.

¹⁴¹ The character Orpheus was likely a mythic figure; rituals and mysteries were often associated with Orpheus.

¹⁴² This is, of course, a topic that has been discussed. Cf. Torjussen 2008 (p.74); Edmonds III 2021 (p. 117) emphatically puts it, “...there was no set of eschatological ideas that could be found exclusively in

Moreover, Orphism is sometimes invoked just to signify an odd ritual. Stian Sudell Torjussen puts it well, saying, “Orphism has been used, both by ancient and modern authors, as a label to classify otherwise un-categorizable phenomena.”¹⁴³ Given the vastness and disunion of the content of so-called Orphic beliefs and practices, every mention of Orphism in the dissertation is implicitly tentative and qualified. By ‘Orphism’ or ‘Orphic’ I always mean ‘some belief, principle, or tenet (or set thereof) associated with followers of Orpheus;’ these beliefs, principles, etc. are not of necessity related to one another and certainly do not hang together in some systematized way. To emphasize, there is no such thing as unified Orphic theory. However, the terms ‘Orphism’ and ‘Orphic’ are still practically useful to refer to beliefs, tenets, etc. associated with the tradition. Hereafter, I use the terms in this attenuated way.

Whatever the status of Orphism as a theory, it is clear that ancient, and for that matter present-day, commentators attribute certain views to the tradition. One such view is that there is an Orphic belief that the body is like a prison. Orphism, as relayed and interpreted by ancient authors, teaches that the soul is trapped in the body. In likely references to Orphism, the body is called a tomb, net, or cage, for instance.¹⁴⁴ Aristotle, for instance, associates the likening of the body to a net with Orphism in *Generation of Animals*. He says, “...as is said in the verse ascribed to Orpheus, for there he says that an animal comes into being in the same way as the knitting of a net.” Plato too seems to evoke this so-called Orphic body-prison doctrine at *Phaedo* 62b. I turn to *Cratylus* for evidence.

the poems attributed to Orpheus or associated only with the rituals he was thought to have founded; and there was no separate Orphic vision of the underworld, and no special Orphic cosmology setting out peculiarly Orphic doctrines.” Bernabé 2010 (p.422) similarly remarks, “what we call Orphism is not a doctrinal system, unique, dogmatic and always coherent. Various authors decided to ascribe their own poems to Orpheus, a mythical character, in order to give them the prestige of a great name and the status of revealed texts, which would consequently be true.”

¹⁴³ Torjussen 2008 (p.68).

¹⁴⁴ Edmonds III 2021.

My reading of the two verbs, taking λύειν restrictively and ἀποδιδράσκειν protectively, aligns with Plato’s invocation of the Orphic ‘body-prison’ doctrine as articulated by Plato at *Cratylus* 400c.¹⁴⁵ Socrates says, “I think it is most likely that the followers of Orpheus who gave the body its name, with the idea that the soul¹⁴⁶ is being punished for something, and that the body is an encirclement (περίβολον) like a prison (δεσμωτηρίου εικόνα) in which the soul is preserved (σώζεται) — as the name ‘*somā*’ itself suggests¹⁴⁷ — until the penalty is paid; for, on this view, not even a single letter of the word needs to be changed.”¹⁴⁸ Here Socrates explicitly reports his interpretation of Orphic doctrine, making important comments about the relationship between the body and soul. Interestingly, Socrates provides a description of the kind of vessel the body is and the body’s relationship to the soul. Socrates indicates that Orphics believe that punishment awaits the soul and that the soul is detained in the body while it awaits that punishment.

Importantly, embodiment *itself* is not a punishment. Rather, the body houses the soul, thus enabling it to repay its penalty. I take it that the soul can only repay its penalty while embodied; the soul is σώζεται *until* the penalty is paid. Plato’s choice of the verb, σώζεται is

¹⁴⁵ I exclude the reference to the body as a tomb that immediately precedes this quote as it is unclear whether that is an obvious reference to the followers of Orpheus. Contrastingly, the view that the body is a prison is explicitly attributed to followers of Orpheus. Most important to our purposes is gleaning Plato’s usage of Orphic beliefs, not tracing the beliefs themselves. Edmonds 2013 pp. 270-1 is helpful on this point, “*The idea that Socrates attributes to them is specifically the idea that the soul is in the body for punishment, like a prison*, but it is unclear how many of the etymologies in the passage may have come from an Orphic text. The adversative μέντοι does suggest that the τινες who give the σῶμα–σῆμα etymology may be different people from οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα, but it is entirely possible that, in a text such as the Derveni papyrus, the author (who is certainly someone who might be described as ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα) might have provided the whole series of etymologies in the exegesis of a verse of Orpheus.” (emphasis added).

¹⁴⁶ Plato’s identification of the soul here supports a reading of *Phaedo* 62b on which οἱ ἄνθρωποι refers, too to the soul (the soul is identified with the person).

¹⁴⁷ The thought seems to be that the first syllable of each word sound like the other. This is, of course, an instance of Plato’s invented etymology in *Cratylus*.

¹⁴⁸ Tr. Reeve, lightly amended.

telling. The word is used often to mean ‘save,’ ‘preserve’ or ‘keep alive’ in the sense of rescuing someone from death.¹⁴⁹ The verb emphasizes that the body in some way *sustains* the soul. The language suggests strongly that the body plays a role in enabling the soul to perform its activities. The body does not merely *encase* the soul, it to some extent *preserves* it.

On the other hand, the body is also restrictive, it *is* some sort of encirclement *like* a prison. Plato’s language here emphasizes that a body is itself, some sort of enclosure. It is only like a prison insofar as it is an enclosure which holds an object while that object pays some penalty; however, the enclosure itself is not punitive. Had he meant to more closely associate the body with prison, or declare the body a prison, it seems likely that he would have done so outright. Instead, Plato takes care to specify that the body is in some way like a prison, namely it also holds its object while it pays some penalty.

In *Phaedo* too, Plato qualifies his description of the body, he says that the body is a *kind of* (τινι) enclosure. One might read this to mean that the body is a certain kind of enclosure, e.g., a prison, a cage, a trap, a crate. I suggest alternatively that we read the τινι as an *alienans* τις¹⁵⁰ to mean that the body is an enclosure, understood weakly — to use Burnyeat’s language, the body is an enclosure from which you cannot expect everything you would normally expect of an enclosure; an enclosure of sorts.¹⁵¹ Plato seems to resist offering any specificity regarding the type of vessel the body is or is like. Qualifying a generic term, φρουρά, emphatically expresses that the body is simply some kind of enclosing thing, the specifics of which are unimportant to our discussion. What *is* important is that the enclosure functions to restrict and protect its occupant. While there may be terms which capture both of those senses, Plato offers the barest

¹⁴⁹ 58b1-2, *Crito* 44b6, c1.

¹⁵⁰ Burnyeat 2002 (pp. 36-7).

¹⁵¹ Burnyeat 2002 (p.37).

object that has these two functions in order to not traffic in any extraneous connotations. It is clear at least that Plato did not mean *τινι* to indicate some more specific term. Plato is careful not to drag in any implication a more precise term carries, it would be odd then to invite the reader to herself imagine such a tainted term, e.g., cage or prison.

It is worth noting that some readers may interpret the *τινι* as evidence that Plato uses *φρουρά* here to mean prison. The qualification, the thinking goes, sufficiently indicates Plato's departure from the overly punitive connotations I have argued he likely aims to avoid through use of *φρουρά*. On this reading, *τινι φρουρά* may be translated 'some kind of prison' to mean 'in some way like a prison.' This translation suggests that the body is a prison to an extent — a body shares some features with a prison but is not literally a prison insofar as it does not, I take it, share some essential feature with prisons — one reasonable contender for such a feature is punitiveness. Despite its appeal, I reject this interpretation on the grounds that, again, if Plato meant to refer to a prison — even if just to indicate some similarity to a prison — he would use the term *δεσμωτήριον*. This inclination is bolstered by Plato's description of Orphic doctrine at *Cratylus* 400c, where he describes the body as a *δεσμωτηρίου εικόνα*. In *Cratylus*, Plato unquestionably means to report that there is an Orphic belief that the body is in some important way like a prison. Sharply contrasting this language, he uses a qualified generic term, *τινι φρουρά*, to describe what the body is like in *Phaedo*. Here, Plato tries to commit himself to the least determinate description of the body in *Phaedo*, describing it loosely as 'a kind of enclosure' to mean 'an enclosure of sorts.'¹⁵²

¹⁵² Note that this reading is compatible with a reading of the text that Plato later specifies what kind of enclosure the body is. For example, Ebrey argues that at 82e Plato means to pick up this argument and specify that the body is in fact an *εἰργμός*. Whether or not this is the case does not bear on my reading of pp. 62b-29c.

Thus far, I have shown that on Plato's retelling of an Orphic belief, the body is some sort of enclosure which protects the soul in the sense that it preserves or saves the soul. We may then naturally wonder, from what does the soul need protection by the body? Shortly, I will provide a Platonic answer to this question, what I call Reading 1b. Now, I will present the Orphic view of the soul in order to clarify how the body encloses the soul.

There is no surviving Orphic explanation of the constitution of the soul. However, there is good evidence that the Orphics believe the soul is material: there are surviving ancient reports of Orphism which tell that the soul enters the body through the air.¹⁵³ In the first book of *De Anima*, for instance, Aristotle reports that Pythagoreans¹⁵⁴ believe the soul is ingested from the air. He explains, "The doctrine of the Pythagoreans seems to rest upon the same ideas; some of them declared the motes in air, others what moved them, to be soul."¹⁵⁵ Moreover, that the soul travels on air is consistent with similar, contemporary views. For instance, atomists assert that the soul is composed of finer, lighter atoms than the body (and all other objects).¹⁵⁶

Given its materiality and fineness, the body protects the soul by keeping it safely contained. As the *Cratylus* 400c passage states, the body preserves or keeps safe the soul. The view Aristotle attributes to Orphism of the light, airy, constitution of the body clarifies the protective relation between the body and soul: the body keeps the soul safe from dispersal.

I have forwarded a tentative suggestion of the Orphic view of the relationship between the body and soul and the Orphic view of the constitution of the soul. While Plato makes use of

¹⁵³ Edmonds III 2013 (pp.287-290).

¹⁵⁴ Whatever the actual relation of Orphism and Pythagoreanism, it is certainly true that the latter emerged from the former *and* that the view of the soul riding on air is present in Orphism. So, we can take Aristotle's claim here to apply equally to Orphism and Pythagoreanism (without having to identify one with the other).

¹⁵⁵ *De an.* 404a16-19.

¹⁵⁶ IN DA, Aristotle treats these features of the soul — its mobility and fineness — as standard across early views of the soul. These features well explain, too, why the soul needs containment.

these Orphic beliefs, I suggest that he does not endorse them without caveat or modification. Rather, Plato takes up from Orphism just what is useful to his present argument against suicide, namely that the body encloses the soul. Plato distances himself from Orphism in part by utilizing different language to report the standard Orphic view, e.g., *Cratylus* 400c, on the one hand, and his adapted Orphic view, on the other. In *Phaedo* Plato describes the body as a φρουρά, he refers to Orphism obliquely as “the language of mysteries.” Contrastingly, in *Cratylus*, he refers to the body in turn as a περίβολον and kind of δεσμωτήριον, he also attributes this view directly to ‘followers of Orpheus.’ Plato certainly was not trafficking in a rich, developed, eschatology along with his reference to Orphism.¹⁵⁷ Instead, he takes up one tenet of the doctrine useful to strengthening his argument.^{158 159}

The *Phaedo* and *Cratylus* passages reveal that for Plato the Orphic ‘body-prison’ doctrine teaches that the body is some sort of enclosure which protects and restricts the soul. The body is only like a prison insofar the soul accepts its punishment *while* embodied, embodiment itself is not obviously indicated as a punishment in and of itself. Orphic doctrine, as mediated through Plato, teaches that the body restricts the soul and the body protects the soul.¹⁶⁰ I call this formulation Reading 1a. Reading 1a is derived from Orphic beliefs and *Cratylus* substantiation. In the *Cratylus* passage I utilize in defense of Reading 1a, Plato takes care to position Socrates as a reporter of Orphic doctrine. In what follows, I offer evidence that there is a purely Platonic case to be made that the body protects the soul. I term the Platonic argument for the body’s protection of the soul Reading 1b.

¹⁵⁷ In fact, it is disputable rather such a thing as “Orphic Eschatology” even exists, see Edmonds III 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Edmonds III 2013, n. 107, Plato does the same in *Timaeus* (p.278)

¹⁵⁹ To illustrate the distance between Orphism and Plato’s usage of Orphic tenets, consider how contemporary analytic philosophers utilize virtue ethics.

¹⁶⁰ There is much more to be said about Orphism and Plato. However, a thorough investigation of Orphic resonances in Plato is beyond the scope of this chapter.

VII. Reading 1b

For Plato, like the Orphics, the body is undeniably restrictive to its inhabitant. Repeatedly in *Phaedo*, for instance, Plato remarks that the body is a distraction to the soul and, particularly for the philosopher, a hindrance to soul purification.¹⁶¹ Socrates says, “And it is then that the soul of the philosopher most disdains the body, flees (φεύγει) from it and seeks to be by itself.”¹⁶² Most annoyingly, thinks Plato, the body infects all intellectual activity the philosophers participate in.¹⁶³ The body restricts the soul from apprehending what is real, i.e., the Forms; this hindrance is most salient to philosophers, who seek the truth most of all.

Plato undeniably casts the body as restrictive. It may seem surprising then that Plato thinks the body provides protection for the body. The picture of the soul which emerges in *Timaeus* sheds light on this question. In *Timaeus*, we learn that the immortal soul part combines with mortal soul parts in the body.¹⁶⁴ The body holds the mortal and immortal parts of the soul together in such a way that each soul part is correctly positioned.¹⁶⁵ The mortal soul parts are positioned below the immortal soul part, for instance; the appetitive soul part is “tied down like a beast” as far away from the immortal soul part as is possible.¹⁶⁶ Strikingly, Plato tells us further that the gods placed the spirited soul part in the heart so that “when the spirit within the heart should reach its peak, the heart might pound against something that gives way to it and be cooled down [i.e., the lungs]. By laboring less, *it might be better able to join spirit in serving reason.*”¹⁶⁷ Insofar as humans are mortal, we have mortal soul parts. The body fixes our soul parts — both

¹⁶¹ See 65a-67b for an especially rich passage detailing the philosopher’s disgust with the body.

¹⁶² 65d. Tr. Grube.

¹⁶³ 66d. Tr. Grube.

¹⁶⁴ *Tim.* 69c-d.

¹⁶⁵ *Tim.* 69d-72d.

¹⁶⁶ *Tim.* 70e. Tr. Zeyl.

¹⁶⁷ *Tim.* 70d. Tr. Zeyl. Emphasis added.

mortal and immortal — into place such that we are well constructed to follow reason.

Embodiment literally ensures that we hang together properly and so protects from being unnecessarily disordered. Embodiment, I suggest, protects the soul insofar as it fixes the soul into the correct order: the immortal soul part sits above the spirited and appetitive soul parts. Moreover, the inferior soul parts are insulated and tied down to dampen their influence.

Plato seems to describe the body’s capacity to protect the soul in *Timaeus*, as well.

Having described the nature and formation of the soul, Plato proceeds to discuss “how the rest of the body came to be.”¹⁶⁸ Plato begins by describing how the soul is bound within the body. He says, “For life’s chains, as long as the soul remains bound to the body, are bound within the marrow, giving roots for the mortal race.”¹⁶⁹ He next supposes that while the brain houses the divine portion of the soul, the god impregnates elongated, round, strips of marrow with the mortal part of the soul. Having described the division of the soul into the brain (itself a kind of marrow) and all other marrow, he concludes, “And from these (marrow) as from anchors he put out bonds (δεσμοῦς) to fasten¹⁷⁰ the whole soul and so he proceeded to construct our bodies all around this marrow, beginning with the formation of solid bone as a covering (στέγασμα) for the sake of safety (ἔνεκα ἀσφαλείας) for whole of it.”¹⁷¹ For Plato, the soul is imbedded in the marrow and fastened together; and bone is draped around this formation. So much for the how the soul tethered to the body — the soul is bound within material marrow. Plato turns next to the function of bone.

¹⁶⁸ *Tim.* 72e1-2. Tr. Zeyl.

¹⁶⁹ *Tim.* 73b. Tr. Zeyl.

¹⁷⁰ No verb appears here in the Greek. Zeyl inserts ‘secure’ which is, I think, too strong. I substitute ‘fasten’ in order to make the sentence readable without tempting us to put any argumentative weight on the verb.

¹⁷¹ *Tim.* 73d5-e1. Tr. Zeyl, lightly amended.

Plato casts bone as protective of the soul. He says, “And so, to preserve (διασώζων) all of the seed¹⁷², he fenced (συνέφραξεν) it in with a stony enclosure (περιβόλω).”¹⁷³ Plato expresses strongly here that the body serves to protect the soul. The context of the text also suggests Plato’s strong commitment to the view — in his primary cosmogonical treatise, in an explicit explanation of his view of the relationship between the body and soul, Plato states that the body is an enclosure for the soul which is constructed for its safekeeping. Moreover, this line is strikingly similar to *Cratylus* 400c — here too Plato refers to the body as a περίβολος and highlights that the body saves or preserves (διασώζω) the soul. We may then reasonably take Plato’s restatement of this claim in *Cratylus* as an endorsement of it. In both texts, Plato affirms that the god encloses the soul within the body in order to keep it safe.

Timaeus offers yet one more piece of evidence supportive of a Platonic interpretation of the body to soul protective relation. He says of the relationship between the soul and body, “Moreover, the god thought that bone as such was rather too brittle and inflexible, and also that repeatedly getting extremely hot and cold by turns *would cause it to disintegrate and to destroy in short order the seed within it*. This is why he contrived to make sinews and flesh.”¹⁷⁴ Similarly he says of the head, “...our maker made our heads bushy.... His intention was that this (i.e., hair), not bare flesh, ought to provide a covering (στέγασμα) for the sake of safety¹⁷⁵ (ἔνεκα ἀσφαλείας) for the part of the head that holds the brain: it was light and just right for providing shade in summer and shelter in winter...”¹⁷⁶ The god conjures sinews and flesh and hair,

¹⁷² ‘Seed’ being just soul impregnated marrow (*Tim.* 73c).

¹⁷³ *Tim.* 74a. Tr. Zeyl.

¹⁷⁴ *Tim.* 74b1-3. Tr. Zeyl.

¹⁷⁵ Zeyl translates ἔνεκα ἀσφαλείας as ‘protective.’ I choose instead ‘for the sake of safety.’ Not only is this translation better insofar as it is more faithful to the text, it also supports my claim that the body is constructed in order to safeguard the soul.

¹⁷⁶ *Tim.* 76c5-d3 Zeyl, lightly amended.

themselves material bodily parts, in order to combine with bone to protect the soul as best as possible. The body facilitates the soul's activities while the soul is embodied. In fact, Plato calls the body the vehicle (ὄχημά) of the immortal soul part.¹⁷⁷ Were it not for sinews, flesh, and hair, the bones (which I have shown Plato thinks protect the soul) the body would yield to extreme temperatures, thus destroying the soul housed within them.¹⁷⁸ *Timaeus* 65-76 reveals that for Plato, the body saves or preserves the soul in the sense that it keeps the marrow in which it is bound safe from external, physical harm; such is one way to render Reading 1b.

A perhaps more speculative, but more contextually apt, rendering of Reading 1b can be lifted from the Recollection Argument found in *Phaedo*. I suggest that though Plato emphasizes the relationship between the philosopher and her body as a restrictive relation, the relationship between the non-philosopher and her body may well be protective. The Recollection Argument¹⁷⁹, I will argue, strengthens the plausibility of this interpretation.

The philosopher has habituated her soul toward appropriate desires, ultimately truth and wisdom. Plato seems to suggest that the full-fledged philosopher, the person who has achieved psychological death while embodied, achieves this status over the course of multiple lifetimes. Once more musing about what awaits him after death, Socrates says, "...there is good hope that on arriving where I am going, if anywhere, I shall acquire what has been our chief preoccupation (πραγματεία) in our past life..."¹⁸⁰ Just as more and more dirt lifts from mud-stained clothing

¹⁷⁷ *Tim.* 69c.

¹⁷⁸ This formulation may seem to imply that I think the soul is subject to destruction, i.e., that the soul is not immortal. However, I think the *Timaeus* paints a picture on which the immortal soul combines with the mortal soul to conduct its activities while embodied. Damage to one part of the soul, I posit, harms the others. Moreover, the immortality of the a thing doesn't necessarily immunize it against harm.

¹⁷⁹ Here I am only concerned with recollection as discussed in *Phaedo*; I am not interested in invoking or fitting the *Phaedo* account with those that appear elsewhere, most relevantly, in *Meno* and *Republic* except in connection with views I report, namely Bedu-Addo's view of recollection in *Phaedo*.

¹⁸⁰ *Phd.* 67b9-10. Tr. Grube.

after each wash, so, too, does the soul purify progressively over the course of many lifetimes. Socrates seems to suggest that he has finally achieved maximal purification in life and is thus likely to achieve eternal disembodiment following his imminent physical death.

The philosopher's progressive purification over lifetimes, I suppose, is enabled by the soul's capacity for recollection. Plato seems to argue that sense perception may trigger recollection of Forms¹⁸¹: philosophers rightly identify material objects as in some way deficient because they realize, through past acquaintance with knowledge to do with a Form — knowledge with which they were born — that material objects are less real than Forms.¹⁸² To use Socrates' example of sticks, imagine one has three sticks lined up. The first two are the same length, the third is longer than the first two. Just as mention of Simmias might call to mind Cebes, dissimilarity of the third stick to the first two calls to mind Equality, a quality highlighted precisely by the inequality of the sticks. What's more, the two sticks of equal length call to mind Equality insofar as they seem to resemble it. So, interaction with the material world via the senses may recall for the philosopher untapped knowledge of the Forms.

Sense perception plays a crucial role in the process of distinguishing qualities of material objects from the Forms themselves; a person can only recall their prior knowledge of a Form by observing (via sense perception) some deficient example of it. Socrates stresses of prior knowledge, "Then surely we also agree that this conception of ours derives from seeing or touching or some other sense perception, and cannot come into our mind in any other way, for all these senses, I say, are the same."¹⁸³ He goes on, "Our sense perceptions must surely make us

¹⁸¹ This is not to commit myself to the claim that sense-perception is sufficient to confer knowledge, to take Gail Fine's tack (2021, p. 144).

¹⁸² Most work on the topic find the deficiency in the difference in reality between material objects and the Forms. For a contrary view, see Svavarsson (2009, p.71), who argues that the deficiency of sensible objects is that "they suffer conflicting appearances."

¹⁸³ 75a

realize that all we perceive through them is striving to reach that which is Equal but falls short of it....”¹⁸⁴ A person taps into that knowledge via sense perception.¹⁸⁵

As written, I take it that Plato’s Recollection Argument details how the *philosopher*¹⁸⁶ recalls prior knowledge of the Forms. However, adopting Bedu-Addo’s two-tiered reconstruction of recollection in *Phaedo*, I contend that non-philosophers, too may recollect prior knowledge, to some extent. This being the case, embodiment saves the souls of non-philosophers — embodiment enables non-philosophers to engage in worthwhile activities so that they may activate or retrieve their dormant knowledge of the Forms. Briefly, Bedu-Addo argues for two kinds of recollection. On R₁, recollection is a gradual process of learning accessible to everyone¹⁸⁷; R₁ is lifted from *Meno*. Contrastingly, R₂ is attainable only by philosophers, R₂ is immediate recollection of Forms triggered by sense perception. Plato clearly forwards R₂ in *Phaedo*. However, Bedu-Addo suggests that it is necessary that R₁ be true for R₂ to be possible. R₂, I take it, is the culmination of R₁, in some cases over the course of many lifetimes. Gradual learning constitutes a kind of awakening to the Forms, and only once this type of recollection is achieved, can a person immediately recall the Forms, R₂. R₁ is foundation to R₂.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ 75b

¹⁸⁵ For a robust account of the centrality of sense perception to soul development, see Campbell 2022.

¹⁸⁶ See Scott 1995 for a full-fledged argument to this effect. Note too that claiming that only philosophers have the capacity for recollection does not preclude the possibility that *everyone* has knowledge of the Forms (the thought being, that knowledge is inactive for non-philosophers and active for philosophers); for what it’s worth, I disagree with this claim. Innatism is, of course, is also highly disputed. For a contrary view in the context of *Phaedo*, see Fine 2021, in which she centrally aims to show that recollection does not presuppose innatism. For a strong defense of what, to me, amounts to a defense of the relationship between innatism and recollection in *Phaedo*, see Dimas 2003, in which he claims that Plato implicitly argues, “the very knowledge the soul is caused to recover through its encounters with various perceptible manifestations of equality *is also what accounts for its epistemic capacity to respond as it does when becoming perceptually exposed to them.*” (p.210, emphasis added)

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Scott 1995 (p.54), Morgan 1984 (p. 238).

¹⁸⁸ The primary advantage of this view, by both Bedu-Addo’s lights and my own, is that it dissolves tension between Plato’s repeated, emphatic assertions about the terribleness of the embodiment for philosophers with his story of recollection in *Phaedo*.

Sense-experience, thinks Bedu-Addo, is a necessary condition for R₁; a person must apprehend material object in order to begin to trigger her unconscious recollection of the Forms. A person is not, for instance, born with active knowledge of the Forms. Sense-experience is necessary for initial recollection, R₁, the body is necessary for sense-experience. And so, the body is necessary for R₁. The body, then, keeps the soul safe in that it facilitates and enables the soul's coming to know the Forms. And so, there is intra-textual evidence in *Phaedo* to support a Platonic reading of the protective relation of the body towards the soul.

I have put forward two plausible explanations for Reading 1b, a Platonic description of the body's safekeeping of the soul. On the one hand, there is an explanation found in *Timaeus*: the soul is attached to marrow which the body encases to protect. On the other hand, sense-experience, and so embodiment, may antecedently be necessary to recall dormant knowledge of the Forms. And so, the body saves the soul for purification. These two explanations are reasonable and compatible. There is clearly indication that Plato believes the body to have some protective role over the soul.

Thus far, I have shown that on Orphic and Platonic views — so far as we can plausibly reconstruct — the body preserves the soul. I have termed the corresponding readings describing this protective relation Readings 1 and 1b, respectively. I turn next to what I call Reading 2. On this second reading, the soul is protective of the body, and the body restricts the soul in 62b2-4. Briefly, I argue that Plato means to suggest that we ought not abandon our bodies. I return to the *Crito* 52 passage in defense of this second reading.

VIII. Reading 2

We may reasonably read 62b to convey that the soul protects the body. We may redeploy the argument that ἀποδιδράσκειν be taken protectively; in this case, we can take it to imply the

soul's protection of the body. Drawing our attention again to *Crito* 52b-d, I will argue that we analogize the laws, city, and citizens, on the one hand, to the gods, body and soul on the other. Just as citizens are bound by law to protect the city, the soul is deputized by the gods to protect the body. I conclude that Plato intended a double reading: at once, the body protects or preserves the soul and the soul protects or saves the body. Establishing a bidirectional protection relation bolsters Plato's argument against suicide.

I have argued that ἀποδιδράσκειν be taken protectively and λύειν restrictively. Resultingly, I showed, we should understand 62b to mean that the body both restricts the soul and protects the soul. We can equally apply this reading to the other half of the bidirectional protection relation. I have shown that ἀποδιδράσκειν suggests protection. Moreover, I forward that the verb is neutral with respect to the direction, so to speak, of that protection. The verb plausibly suggests that the soul protects the body; the passage from which I develop the protective connotation of ἀποδιδράσκειν provides good evidence for this view. Recall that at *Crito* 52d Socrates voices Athenian laws' reaction to his potential escape from prison. He says, "...and you pay no heed to us, the laws, as you plan to destroy us, and you act like the meanest type of slave by trying to run away (ἀποδιδράσκειν), contrary to your commitments and your agreement to live as a citizen under us."¹⁸⁹ Athens has birthed, reared and educated him¹⁹⁰, in return, Socrates is expected to uphold and obey its laws. Similarly, we can interpret ἀποδιδράσκειν at 62b to mean that just as a citizen must not abandon the city, the soul must not run away from the body which the gods have entrusted to it. We, identified as our souls, are in some way duty-bound to protect our bodies.

¹⁸⁹ Tr. Grube.

¹⁹⁰ *Cri.* 51c8-9, ἡμεῖς γὰρ σε γεννήσαντες, ἐκθρέψαντες, παιδεύσαντες.

One reasonable objection to the comparison to *Crito* is that the laws make explicit that a citizen enters willingly into an agreement with the city and when a citizen disobeys the laws she breaches that agreement. A soul, on the other hand, does not consent to embodiment. The comparison between *Crito* and *Phaedo*, I think, is still apt, at least for the philosopher. The philosopher, like the citizen, consents to certain political duties: the citizen enjoys life in the city in exchange for upholding its laws, the philosopher pursues philosophy in exchange for guiding non-philosophers to live as best they can.¹⁹¹ In short, insofar as the philosopher consents to her political duty just as the citizen does, comparing his comments in *Crito* to those in *Phaedo* is a useful exercise. Read together, the two texts show Plato conceives of some protective relations borne of reciprocal obligation: owing to the benefits of citizenship, the citizen must abide by the city's laws. Similarly, the gods entrust us with bodies which we are obligated to preserve.

Further evidence for Reading 2 is found in an implicit proposition of Platonic psychology: The soul must keep the body in good condition so as to not further degrade *itself*. In service of this goal, the soul protects the body from corruption. This point is well-explained in *Timaeus*. At 88a-b, Socrates describes two cases where the soul and body are not evenly matched — in one case, the soul is more powerful than the weak body in which it is housed, in the other case, a large body is paired with a weak soul. Both cases beget bodily and psychic disease. Socrates next explains how to avoid these imbalances, “From both of these conditions there is in fact one way to preserve (σωτηρία) oneself, and that is not to exercise the soul without exercising the body, nor the body without the soul, so that each may be balanced by the other and so be sound.”¹⁹² This excerpt affirms that for Plato for the soul and body to be in their best condition, the soul preserves the body *and* the body preserves the soul.

¹⁹¹ I will shortly make a more robust case for this point in relation to the Guardian Argument.

¹⁹² *Tim.* 88b5-c1. Tr. Zeyl, lightly amended.

As I have established, the body protects the soul. In order for the soul to thrive, it must parallelly take care to exercise the body. Socrates further instructs the person concerned with their body to exercise their soul. He then says of the person preoccupied with their soul development, “And the various bodily parts should be cultivated (θεραπευτέον) in this same way, in imitation of the structure of the universe.”¹⁹³ Moreover, exercising the body is protective. Should one correctly exercise their body, “He will not allow one hostile element to position itself next to another and so breed wars and disease in the body.”¹⁹⁴ Though exercise, the soul quite literally protects the body from corrupting forces, namely war and disease.

Timaeus stresses the mutuality of the protection relations between the soul and the body. The soul and body must both be exercised in order to maintain balance between them. Alternatively, Plato delivers a hierarchical explanation of the soul’s protection of the body: the soul rightly rules the body. In *Phaedo*, Plato remarks on the relationship of the body and soul to one another in the midst of delivering his argument for the kinship of the soul to the divine. He says, “When the soul and body are together, nature orders (προστάττει) the one to be subject and to be ruled (ἄρχεiv), and the other to rule and be master (δεσπόζειν).”¹⁹⁵ Given their propensity to be ordered in this way, the soul more akin to the divine than the mortal and the body is more akin to the mortal than the divine. Moreover, the nature of the divine is to rule and lead. Insofar as the soul is akin to the divine, it is by nature suited to rule (ἄρχω) and lead (ἡγεμονεύω). Contrastingly, it is in mortal things’ natures to *be* ruled (ἄρχεσθαι) and to be slaves (δουλεύω). Just as the gods as our divine masters protect us¹⁹⁶, the soul has the task of protecting the body insofar as the soul rules the body.

¹⁹³ *Tim.* 88c7-d1. Tr. Zeyl.

¹⁹⁴ *Tim.* 88e4-6. Tr. Zeyl.

¹⁹⁵ *Phd.* 79e8-80a2. Tr. Grube.

¹⁹⁶ For instance, as we have just seen, the gods fix our souls in the correct order within our bodies.

Reading 2 holds that for Plato, the soul is protective of the body. I further submit that 62b-c simultaneously conveys Readings 1a, 1b and 2 to convey bidirectional protective relations between the soul and body. The body protects the soul in that it insulates the soul from dispersal and protection from damage on the Orphic and Platonic pictures, respectively. Moreover, it seems plausible that the body preserves the soul in that it facilitates recollection. Conversely, the soul protects the body from disease through exercise. More importantly, though, the soul is meant to rule the body. Designated its ruler, the soul is entrusted by the gods with care of the body.

In all, I interpret the Enclosure Argument to express that the body is a kind of enclosure insofar as it keeps the soul contained. We humans should neither free ourselves from this enclosure nor run away from it for two reasons. First, the body preserves the soul. On the Orphic picture, the body protects the soul from dispersal. On the Platonic reading, the body, through sense-perception, ultimately enables the soul to recollect the Forms, and in this way preserves the soul. Second, we ought not abandon our bodies because we are obligated to protect and rule our bodies and the soul protects the body from corruption. So, to kill ourselves would violate the mutual protective obligations our bodies and souls have to one another; thus it would be wrong to kill ourselves.

In the following chapter, I submit my interpretation of the Guardian Argument. I suggest that the Argument establishes that the gods are our masters and we humans are enslaved to them. Accordingly, we would be wrong to kill ourselves for the same reason an enslaved person would be wrong to defy their good master. I conclude by positing that the relationship of ruler to the ruled is a feature of both the Enclosure and Guardian Arguments. In the first case, it would be wrong for us to kill ourselves because the soul is responsible for taking care of the body insofar

as the body is under the soul's rule. We humans, contrastingly, are not to defy our godly masters by killing ourselves. However, we may be relieved of our responsibility to our bodies if the gods give us some sign that they would like for us to be dead. Recalling language Plato uses at 64c and 67c-d, I contend that the freedom that death constitutes is freedom from our bodily charges.

Chapter 4: The Suicide Prohibition

At the close of Chapter 3, I draw our attention to a passage where Plato describes the soul as the rightful ruler over the body. Insofar as the soul is most akin to the divine, it is suited to rule. Conversely, the body is best suited to be ruled because it is akin to the mortal. I turn now to identifying a companion argument in the remainder of the suicide prohibition. I forward that the Guardian Argument centrally highlights the relationship of gods to humans to explain why we ought not kill ourselves. Particularly, I suggest that the Guardian Argument casts the gods as masters of humans; correspondingly humans are enslaved to them. Resultingly, suicide is wrong because it constitutes a slave acting in defiance of their good master. I conclude by offering a suggestion for how the Enclosure and Guardian Arguments fit together: I posit that each Argument emphasizes right rule; the soul rightly rules the body and gods rightly rule humans. Gods, I argue, are a special type of ruler insofar as they are masters over humans. We humans are correspondingly enslaved to them. We must not abandon the bodies which (1) we are tasked with protecting and (2) enable us to perform the tasks the gods assign us. Moreover, the Guardian Argument tells us that killing ourselves constitutes defying our divine masters. We should not defy our good masters, and so we should not kill ourselves.

I. Enslavement and the Guardian Argument

Having given one reason against self-killing, Socrates then offers a second, longer argument to complete his account. He says,

οὐ μέντοι ἀλλὰ τόδε γέ μοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Κέβης,
εὖ λέγεσθαι, τὸ θεοὺς εἶναι ἡμῶν τοὺς
ἐπιμελουμένους καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους
ἐν τῶν κτημάτων τοῖς θεοῖς εἶναι. ἢ σοὶ οὐ
δοκεῖ οὕτως;

Ἔμοιγε, φησὶν ὁ Κέβης.

Οὐκοῦν, ἦ δ' ὅς, καὶ σὺ ἂν τῶν σαυτοῦ
κτημάτων εἴ τι αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἀποκτείνουσι, μὴ
σημήναντός σου ὅτι βούλει αὐτὸ τεθνάναι,
χαλεπαίνουσι ἂν αὐτῷ καί, εἴ τινα ἔχοις
τιμωρίαν, τιμωροῖο ἄν;

Πάνυ γ', ἔφη.

Ἴσως τοίνυν ταύτη οὐκ ἄλογον μὴ πρότερον
αὐτὸν ἀποκτείνουσι δεῖν, πρὶν ἀνάγκην τινὰ
θεὸς ἐπιπέμψῃ, ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν νῦν ἡμῖν
παροῦσαν.

But this, however, seems to me, at least,
Cebes, well said, that the gods are our
caretakers and we humans are among the
possessions of the gods. Or do you not think
so?

I do, said Cebes.

And if one of your possessions killed itself
and you had not given a sign that you
wished for it to be dead would you not be
angry? And if you had some kind of
vengeance, you would exact revenge?

Certainly, he said.

Therefore, in like manner, it is not
unreasonable that one must not first kill
themselves before a god sent some
necessity, just as is now the present situation
for myself.

I take it that the Guardian Argument is meant to convey that we humans are slaves of the gods, thus our only chance at emancipation is through the gods' manumission. The gods as masters would rightfully enact vengeance on us, their slaves, should we do what they had not asked of us — namely, if we killed ourselves before the gods have given us permission to do so. In what follows, I lay out the argument for reading the passage as an invocation of slavery and mastery. The observation that casting humans as possessions implies some kind of ownership is not new. However, there has been little extended defense that the type of ownership invoked is slavery.¹⁹⁷ My task then is to thoroughly prove that Plato means to invoke slavery and explain how he puts the concept to use.

¹⁹⁷ The notable exception being Kamen 2013a.

Plato refers to humans as the possessions of gods; we should understand this to mean that humans are enslaved to the gods. We may glean this in part from the historical context in which Plato was writing and on which we reasonably assume much of his commentary on slavery is based. In ancient Athens, those who were enslaved are well established to count as property (κτῆμα), and identified as such.¹⁹⁸ Enslaved people are listed among property owned by persons convicted of a crime and enslaved people appear on lists of possessions to be bequeathed after death.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, enslaved people were eligible to be bought and sold by free citizens, further indicating their social and *de facto* legal status as property, not fully persons.²⁰⁰ Crudely, enslaved people were in some contexts referred to as ἀνδράποδον, a word developed in contrast with τετράποδα to refer to livestock;²⁰¹ the word and its origin indicate that enslaved persons were considered living property.

Plato, too, considered enslaved people to be appropriately categorized as possessions of their masters. That Plato considered enslaved persons property is thoroughly evidenced in *Laws*.²⁰² In Book VI, for instance, the Athenian Stranger identifies slaves as a difficult sort of property;²⁰³ Plato says that the Messenian citizens possess many slaves.²⁰⁴ Plato again explicitly counts slaves among property in Book XI. Completing a discussion of how to resolve property

¹⁹⁸ Forsdyke 2021 (p. 9)

¹⁹⁹ Forsdyke (pp. 32-4)

²⁰⁰ Forsdyke (pp. 21, ch. 4)

²⁰¹ Forsdyke (p. 29), Morrow 1939 (p. 25), Long 2019 (p.179). Forsdyke and Morrow both point to its usage in *Iliad* (VII, 475); for his part, Plato uses the word a number of times, as well. However, it is not obvious to me that Plato meant the term to indicate that slaves are like livestock given his frequent comparison of ruling humans to animal husbandry. (Notably he does this in both *Statesmen* and *Republic*.) This comparison may lend strength to reading φρουρά as ‘enclosure’ — if Plato considers enslaved people to be, effectively, human livestock, it makes sense to describe them being housed in an enclosure, like non-human livestock. Note too that while Morrow thinks that humans can be property, they are not treated identically to other living property (i.e., livestock).

²⁰² In what follows, I consider just usages of κτῆμα.

²⁰³ *Leg.* 776b-c. Tr.

²⁰⁴ *Leg.* 777c1.

disputes, the Athenian Stranger addresses how a free citizen may reclaim a person enslaved to him (or his friend or relative).²⁰⁵ At each of these examples from *Laws*, Plato explicitly refers to enslaved people as κτήμα of their ‘masters.’ It is clear then that, as was overwhelmingly common among his contemporaries, Plato understands enslaved people to be property, and imports this basic assumption into his philosophical work.²⁰⁶

Up to this point, I have shown that humans may count as possessions; slaves are human possessions. It also seems likely that for Plato slaves were the only humans who counted as possessions.²⁰⁷ It seems unlikely, for example, that Plato would categorize people under the purview of others — wives and children — property. So, while wives and children are certainly subordinated to men, they are not enslaved to men.²⁰⁸ Admittedly, Plato does not state explicitly that wives and children of free men are not property. However, in his descriptions of property he does not mention wives and children. I look primarily to evidence in *Statesman* to support this claim. In *Statesman*, the Visitor counts slaves among possessions in a way that suggests to me that only slaves count as human property. The Visitor indicates that ruling slaves is different from ruling other living property. He says, “As for what relates to possession (κτῆσιν) of tame living creatures, apart from slaves, the art of herd-rearing ... will clearly be seen to have caught them all.”²⁰⁹ Here, the Visitor seems to mark slaves as distinct from other living property in virtue of being human. Were wives and children among possessions, surely they too would be excepted from this category of living property subject to herd-rearing. In *Republic*, Plato

²⁰⁵ *Leg.* 914c-e.

²⁰⁶ This is not imply anything about the extent to which Plato *theorized* about slavery, which I take to be very little, and almost exclusively constrained to *Laws*.

²⁰⁷ It certainly seems likely that free women in Athens were subordinated to free men, but nonetheless experienced citizenship different. For a brief overview, see Kamen 2013b.

²⁰⁸ Forsdyke 2021 (p.9) notes that κτήμα is “a term that usually denotes movable property – furniture, money, livestock and, of course, slaves.”

²⁰⁹ *Pol.* 289c. Tr. Rowe.

describes wives and children as being shared in common by free men, not as possessions.²¹⁰

Wives and children are shared among men, and men are reciprocally shared among free women and children as husbands and fathers. There are no private, nuclear family units. Plato does not indicate that men own or possess free women and children. To analogize, speaking of my siblings, I say that I *have* two brothers. In saying I have brothers, I indicate that there are two people who relate to me in a particular way; they are my siblings. My brothers are not mine unqualifiedly. I do not, for instance, say that I have Will and John. Rather, I am associated with these two people in a particular way: as siblings. To further demonstrate, I may say that I have two neighbors. This sentence indicates my association with the people who live near me. The sentence does not, obviously, imply that I *possess* my neighbors. While Plato counts wives and children among the people subject to rule, he does not count them as possessions. Rather, he indicates that members of each group — free children, free women, and free men — share the same association with members of the other two groups. All the women are wives to all the men, all the men are husbands to the women, and all the children are shared by free women and men. This description of association and relationships vastly differs from Plato’s discussion of slaves. Slaves are explicitly called possessions and referred to as such. The only human possessions, it seems, are slaves.²¹¹

In *Laws*, Plato repeatedly indicates that enslaved people are among their masters’ possessions. Elsewhere, Plato seems to establish that humans are enslaved to the gods. At *Critias* 109b, the eponymous character sets the scene. He first describes the division of land among the

²¹⁰ *Rep.* 457c-d. “τὰς γυναῖκας ταύτας τῶν ἀνδρῶν τούτων πάντων πάσας εἶναι κοινάς, ἰδίᾳ δὲ μηδενὶ μηδεμίαν συνοικεῖν: καὶ τοὺς παῖδας αὐτῶν κοινούς...”

²¹¹ We may of course look to Book 1 of Aristotle’s *Politics* as a useful contemporary work to show that slaves are considered property. In *Politics*, Aristotle counts slaves among possessions of the household; he famously, and crudely, considers slaves “living tools”.

gods. In doing so, he says, “Once [the gods] had settled them, they began to raise (ἔτρεφον) us as their own possessions (κτῆματα) and livestock (θρέμματα), as do shepherds their sheep.”²¹² This passage brings to mind the description of slaves as ἀνδράποδον, effectively human livestock, a description which Plato himself uses at various points. Insofar as ἀνδράποδον was commonly used to refer to enslaved people, its invocation here can be reasonably understood similarly. Alongside the textual evidence, the reference to humans as κτῆμα in the first place suggests their subservience. Classifying a person as a possession²¹³ alongside non-human animals and material objects implies she is — to some extent — subject to the whims of whoever ‘owns’ her. Putting starkly the dehumanizing effect of this classification, a human possession may have no more ability to exercise her agency than her domestic non-human counterparts.²¹⁴

Thus far, I have shown that Athenian society considered slaves property, as did Plato. In addition, humans are enslaved to the gods and counts them among the gods’ possessions. Undoubtedly, I contend, Plato invokes κτῆμα in the Guardian Argument to imply that we humans are enslaved to the gods. In addition to the Platonic evidence I have already offered, the passage and its surrounding dialogue strongly militate in favor of this reading. In the first place, as I have just explained, enslaved people in ancient Athens were referred to and, more importantly, understood to qualify as property. And so, marking humans among the possessions of the gods is to indicate their enslavement to them. Second, Plato compares the gods’ rule over us to a free citizen’s (Cebes’) rule over his possessions, considering how a free citizen might

²¹² *Crit.* 109b-c. Tr. Clay. Plato then says people are disanalogous to sheep because we are best persuaded to act, not compelled by force.

²¹³ In the sense of counting a person among another’s possessions, alongside material goods.

²¹⁴ Plato seems at times to acknowledge the humanity of enslaved people, but ultimately (as in, through the end of his comments in *Laws*) never objects to the practice. Of course, there has long been a discussion of whether slavery is practiced in *Republic’s kallipolis* — which is to say, Plato never addresses head-on the humanity of enslaved people, and we are left to reconstruct a plausible picture with what we have left. Cf. *Laws* 777b.

respond to one of their possessions killing itself. Perhaps obviously, but still worth noting, other humans are the only common possessions which free citizens might own which have the capacity to knowingly and intentionally kill themselves in such a way as to provoke anger. It is unlikely, for instance, that a cow will intentionally kill itself. Insofar as Plato explicitly compares Cebes with the gods, the enslaved people over whom Cebes rules are analogous to humans over whom the gods rule. Plato explicitly analogizes gods and their possessions to humans and their possessions, of whom I have established the only candidate referents are enslaved persons. And so, Plato means to imply analogously that humans are enslaved to the gods.

I have shown that Plato invites us to think that humans are enslaved to the gods. Plato also commits himself to the corresponding relation: that the gods are our masters. Following the Guardian Argument, Plato does not object to Cebes' characterization of the gods as our masters.²¹⁵ More strongly, Socrates assents to Simmias' assertion that Socrates *himself* has identified the gods as masters. Simmias says, "...you are bearing leaving us so lightly, and leaving those true masters (ἀληθῶς δεσπότεας), *as you say yourself*, the gods."²¹⁶ To which Socrates affirmatively replies and subsequently identifies the gods as the masters of humans. Having committed himself to offering a convincing defense that he rightfully welcomes death, he supposes that on death he will "...come to gods who are exceedingly good masters (δεσπότεας πάνυ ἀγαθοῦς)."²¹⁷ Here, Socrates confirms his interlocutors' characterization of the gods as masters.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ *Phd.* 62e-63a.

²¹⁶ *Phd.* 63a. Tr. Grube.

²¹⁷ *Phd.* 63c2. Translation my own.

²¹⁸ Cf. *Euthyp.* 13d.

Interestingly, Plato deviates from the softer term he earlier used to refer to the gods at 62b7, ἐπιμελέομαι²¹⁹. While ἐπιμελέομαι implies care, δεσπότης simply implies mastery and superiority. However, Plato twice qualifies δεσπότης — at 63a, Simmias calls the gods ἀληθῶς δεσπότης, Plato then calls the gods δεσπότης πάνυ ἀγαθοὺς at 63c. In both instances, I suspect that Plato means to emphatically declare the gods our masters but deny that they rule wrongly. The gods are not only our appropriate masters (i.e., *true* masters), the thought goes, they are also exceedingly good. These qualifications distinguish the gods as especially good masters to whom we should gladly submit. This aligns with Plato’s characterization of the gods as benevolent in the texts concerning the trial and death of Socrates. Plato casts the gods as good in both *Apology* and *Phaedo*. The gods, Plato maintains, are certainly good to him. At the close of *Apology*, Socrates reassures the jury that the good among them have nothing to fear on death, and furthermore, “his affairs are not neglected by the gods.”²²⁰ Socrates echoes this sentiment at *Phaedo* 69e, hoping that on death he will find “good masters and good friends.”²²¹ Again, he calls the gods “good and wise” at 80d. We may naturally wonder, though, whether Plato’s description of the gods’ behavior in the Guardian Argument is consistent with their unflinching benevolence.

In the Guardian Argument, Plato seems to imply that the gods enact vengeance. First, Plato invites Cebes to imagine *his* slave disobeyed him, killing themselves without his permission. Cebes, Plato supposes, would exact vengeance against his defiant slave. Similarly,

²¹⁹ This is sometimes translated ‘guardians,’ which I do not object to (cf. Grube). I find ‘caretaker’ better captures the Greek, and so I’ve gone for that slightly more faithful translation. Bostock interestingly offers ‘shepherds’ and parenthetically “or slave-holders” as interpretations, not explicit translations. Nevertheless, each are interesting suggestions. Of course, I concur with the second. The first seems to erase any obligation humans have toward the god, and so I reject it.

²²⁰ *Apol.* 41d1-2.

²²¹ *Phd.* 69e.

we can infer, we would expect the gods to punish us should we kill ourselves without their permission. We should not be surprised if the gods punished us for defying their rule, just as humans who enslave people would — we are led to think — understandably punish such insubordination. The comparison suggests that humans and gods share a capacity for vengeance, a supposition that runs counter to a conception of the gods as benevolent.²²² The gods, one might think, cannot at once be unfailingly benevolent and prone to indulging vengeance. Moreover, we might wonder whether divinity admits of vengeance in the first place. In what follows, I attempt to resolve this tension. I argue that Plato may well have thought that benevolent masters can punish the people whom they enslave, without negatively affecting a judgement of their character. My point is that ‘benevolent mastery’ is oxymoronic — unbridled benevolence is incompatible with slavery if slavery is correctly understood as a practice which is essentially harmful to the enslaved.²²³ However, on a conception of slavery which considers enslavement good for those subject to it, punishment may be consistent with good mastery. Insofar as Plato considers slavery good for the enslaved when the master is superior to the enslaved, then, a rightful master can exact revenge against those enslaved to them and still count as benevolent. Plato approves of slavery when an inferior thing is subjugated to a superior one.²²⁴

He conceives of what seems to him a humane practice of slavery in *Laws*. He details,

“The best way to train slaves is to refrain from arrogantly ill-treating them, and to harm them even less (assuming that’s possible) than you would your equals. You see, when a man can hurt someone as often as he likes, he’ll soon show whether or not his respect for justice is natural and unfeigned and springs from a genuine hatred of injustice. If his attitude to his slaves and his conduct towards them are free of any taint of impiety and injustice, he’ll be splendidly effective at sowing the seeds of virtue.”²²⁵

²²² Cf. Ebrey 2023 (p.56-7).

²²³ This obvious supposition is opposed strongly by both Plato and Aristotle.

²²⁴ See Kamen 2013a (pp. 86-8) for a discussion of Plato’s conditions for ‘good slavery’ and relevant texts. See also Socrates response to Thrasymachus’s claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger in *Republic* I; also *Leg.* 906d.

²²⁵ *Leg.* 777d-e. Tr. Saunders.

In this passage, the Athenian Stranger advises masters against excessively punishing slaves because to do so signals a deficiency of virtue in the master. The gods, of course, are free from vice and so are positioned as our masters to endow us, as best as possible, with concern for virtue. The gods fulfill the conditions for good mastery outlined here. The Athenian Stranger next explains when a master may acceptably punish those enslaved to them. “Even so,” he continues, “we should certainly punish slaves if they deserve it, and not spoil them by simply giving them a warning, as we would for free men.”²²⁶ We may apply this description of the best kind of master to the gods themselves — the best masters by Plato’s lights. The gods may justifiably punish humans when warranted.

Plato’s description of good slavery dictates that masters not excessively punish the enslaved. However, it nonetheless recommends that masters punish those enslaved to them when appropriate, presumably when the enslaved have acted against their wishes or orders. Masters, then may justifiably punish instances of unauthorized self-killing. We may construe humans’ limitations as slaves to the gods: a person may not perform an action which interferes with or disables her from performing the tasks the gods have assigned her. Using this rule, and the tasks which Socrates states he is god-ordered to perform, we can reconstruct an explanation for why the gods would have justifiably punished him had he killed himself before they gave him permission to do so.

Socrates would have been eligible for punishment by the gods had he killed himself before the gods allowed. In *Apology*, Socrates tells the jury that the gods have placed him in the city to be a philosopher.²²⁷ At 28e, he explains that he carries on as he does at the behest of the

²²⁶ *Leg.* 777e-778a. Tr. Saunders. I take it that Plato means that while we would give free men a warning, slaves are not granted one.

²²⁷ Long (p.182) draws similar attention to this 28e passage.

gods, saying the gods ordered (τάττοντος) him to live as a philosopher, that is, “to examine himself and others.”²²⁸ At 29d, Socrates resolves to obey (πείσομαι) the order of the gods to practice philosophy, whatever the earthly consequences. At 30e, Socrates famously compares himself to a gadfly upon the city, a great horse. He justifies his activity: “It is to fulfill some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city.”²²⁹ Throughout *Apology*, Socrates clearly states what he believes the gods have ordered him to do.²³⁰ Insofar as his masters have ordered him to practice philosophy, the doing of which involves examining others, Socrates rightly commits to doing so. Practicing philosophy is a task assigned to him by his masters, who have at the time of the trial, issued no indication that they wish for Socrates to abandon the task. If he were to disobey this order, the gods may rightly punish him. Insofar as killing himself would prevent him from performing the tasks the gods have ordered that he do, self-killing is punishable by the gods.²³¹

Like Socrates, all humans owe service to the gods in virtue of being enslaved to them. As Long puts it, “...the claim that we are slaves of the gods ought to suggest that the gods give us tasks and functions.”²³² Long supposes that humans obey divine orders which benefit other humans but that gods cannot benefit from the activities of humans. I agree with this claim and offer Platonic substantiation. In *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks, “What [the gods] give to us is obvious to all. There is for us no good that we do not receive from them, but how are they benefitted by

²²⁸ *Ap.* 28e. Tr. Grube.

²²⁹ *Ap.* 28e. Tr Grube.

²³⁰ This aligns nicely with another feature of Plato’s *Laws* description of slavery. At 778a, he says, “Virtually everything you say to a slave should be an order, and you should never become at all familiar with them — neither the women nor the men.”

²³¹ Of course, they may, and do, deliver special permission to die.

²³² Long (p.182) As Long notes, this picks up a line of questioning from *Euthyphro*. At 13e Socrates asks Euthyphro, “Tell me then, by Zeus, what is the excellent aim that the gods achieve, using us as servants?”

what they receive from us?"²³³ Of course, Euthyphro fails to offer a satisfying response. Long's suggestion seems most plausible. There is no task that we humans can perform which will benefit the gods themselves. We may find *Republic* instructive in providing a template for the tasks the gods want for us to perform. Of course, members of the auxiliary and craftsperson classes are also enslaved to the gods insofar as they are humans. We may conceive of their god-ordered task as obeying the guardians and doing their work. The philosopher is tasked with ruling the remaining classes well, in accordance with reason and in promotion of virtue. The tasks — ruling, obeying and doing one's job — promote virtue, and so satisfy the interests of the gods, even though they do not benefit the gods directly. To return to the Guardian Argument, killing oneself disables a person from performing any of these tasks and is thus punishable by the gods.

Thus concludes my resolution to the problem of vengeful gods. I have argued that the gods as benevolent masters may punish humans. I have shown that for Plato good masters may punish those enslaved to them when deserved. I have further argued that for Plato the enslaved deserve punishment when they disobey orders or act in such a way as to prevent themselves from obeying their master's orders. For instance, Socrates would be eligible for punishment were he to kill himself because self-killing would prevent him from questioning people. Moreover, all humans have tasks which they must perform in service to the gods. Self-killing disables a person, whatever their class, from doing what their masters, the gods, have asked of them. The gods then are justified in punishing a person for killing herself *and* should be deemed no less benevolent for doing so. Next, I discuss cases where the gods issue a sign that a person may, in fact, kill

²³³ *Euthyp.* 14e-15a. Tr. Grube.

herself. Particularly, I examine Socrates' description of divine sign with respect to death²³⁴ and clarify what Plato means by 'necessity' and whether it is interchangeable with 'sign.'

II. Divine signs and necessity to die

Analogizing an enslaved person's defiance of their human master to that of a human enslaved to the gods, Socrates carves out an exception to the ban on self-killing. A master may give an enslaved person a sign that they wish for them to be dead (σημήναντός σου ὅτι βούλει αὐτὸ τεθνάναι). I begin by examining Socrates' characterization of his divine influence, so to speak, in *Apology*.

Socrates makes much of his connection to the divine in *Apology*. Beginning in childhood, Socrates says, he has heard a divine or spiritual sign. The sign is apotroptic; it cautions him against acting in certain ways but does not encourage him to act otherwise.²³⁵ Socrates talks about this voice as though it is a divine power with which he is endowed; he later counts prophesy among his gifts.²³⁶ He has accepted his sentence to death, he explains, for if it were wrong for him to die, his godly voice would — as it is wont to do — turn him against it. Socrates sets out to discuss death by first excusing his own. He begins by reiterating that the gods speak to him through their sign,

“At all previous times my familiar prophetic power (μαντική), my spiritual manifestation (τοῦ δαιμονίου), frequently opposed me, even in small matters, when I was about to do something wrong, but now that, as you can see for yourselves, I was faced with what one might think, and what is generally thought to be, the worst of evils, my divine sign (τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ σημεῖον) has not opposed me.... Yet in other talk it often held me back in the middle of my speaking, but now it has opposed no word or deed of mine.”²³⁷

²³⁴ I do not here wade into debates about whether or how the divine sign might fit with reason.

²³⁵ *Ap.* 31d.

²³⁶ He asserts that he has this power at *Phd.* 85a-b. This lends weight to his prophecy that his detractors will continue to face disturbance delivered at *Ap.* 39c-d.

²³⁷ *Ap.* 40a-b. Tr. Grube.

Here, Socrates establishes the variety of ways divine sign works through him. The sign is like a prophetic power in that it compels him to act or not to act depending on the ultimate outcome of his action. In this case, the divine sign does *not* compel him against fighting the judgment against him. Socrates characterizes the voice as piping up against even trivial matters, so its silence on this hugely consequential matter can only count as its endorsement of the outcome.

Socrates then speculates as to why the gods have not intervened in his defense, “What do I think is the reason for this?” He begins, “I will tell you. What has happened to me may well be a good thing, and those of us who believe death to be an evil are certainly mistaken. I have convincing proof of this, for it is impossible that my familiar sign did not oppose me if I was not about to do what is right.”²³⁸ It is striking that Socrates frames his discussion of death in response to the absence of a divine sign to oppose his trial, his conviction, or his sentence. The subtextual suggestion is that the gods have not urged Socrates to strenuously fight each judgement against him because death may well benefit him. Socrates summarizes the insight he’s gleaned from his divine sign, “... it is clear to me that it was better for me to be dead now and to escape from trouble. That is why my divine sign did not oppose me at any point.”²³⁹ We may read this line, ‘the gods have affirmed that it is better at this time for Socrates to die than to live.’ This foreshadows a proposition I have shown that Plato soon asserts at *Phaedo* 62a and defends over the course of *Phaedo*: for some people at some times it is better to be dead than to be alive. We may summarize Plato’s defense of this claim: psychological death is the means by which the philosopher achieves truth and wisdom. The philosopher achieves psychological death as much as is possible in life. However, full psychological death requires disembodiment. So, the

²³⁸ *Ap.* 40b-c. Tr. Grube.

²³⁹ *Ap.* 41d. Tr. Grube.

philosopher is better off dead than alive. The sign's indication conforms with the general principle 'some people are better off dead than alive' though it neither relies on that principle nor necessarily supports it.²⁴⁰

Briefly, we may wonder about the relationship between the divine sign through which Socrates receives word from the gods and the orders he receives from them. At *Apology* 33c, Socrates explains how his orders are issued. He says of his method of questioning, "To do this has, as I say, been commanded (προστέτακται) of me by the god, by means of oracles and dreams,²⁴¹ and in every other way that a divine manifestation has ever commanded (προσέταξε) a man to do something."²⁴² Socrates seems to say that his god-issued task was communicated via divine sign. I imagine Socrates would tell this story similarly to how he narrated the sign indicating that he may die. The god, via divine sign, indicated that Socrates accept death, choosing *not to discourage* Socrates from accepting his judgement. Similarly, I suspect, Socrates would tell that the god did not discourage him from examining anyone who takes themselves to know anything. In fact, the gods revealed his task to him through divine steering, so to speak. At *Apology* 21a-d, Socrates describes how the oracle at Delphi revealed his task. Socrates is puzzled by the report that the oracle has declared him the wisest of men. Socrates, of course, takes himself to know nothing at all. He thus consulted a sophistic man and through examining this man came to resolve his puzzlement. Socrates determined that he does not think he knows what he does not know. As Socrates tells it, this exchange begins his work of examining. Socrates received an order from the gods via an oracle. He was guided to interpret the content of the order — namely that the gods ordered him to examine others — by the absence of interference from

²⁴⁰ Ehli 2017 p. 227, invokes McPherran 2013.

²⁴¹ Think too of Socrates' dreams at the start of both *Crito* and *Phaedo* (*Cr.* 44a, *Phd.* 60e-61b).

²⁴² *Ap.* 33c. Tr. Grube.

the gods when he examined first the sophist, then anyone else he encountered who purported to know something.

Socrates tells us that the gods would discourage him from completing even the smallest of wrong actions, surely if his pestering were wrong, they would have given indication. And so, Socrates came to understand his god-issued task via divine sign. The task and divine sign are distinct from one another. However, the divine sign is, in effect, a channel through which the gods share information. The gods thus convey their demands of Socrates, one of their human possessions, via that channel.

Socrates remarks that the gods may send some necessity to die,²⁴³ as they have now done for Socrates; a person should not kill herself before receiving such indication of such necessity. Plato takes care to compare necessity with sign via analogy. First, he tells us that Cebes, or any master, would be justified in exacting revenge against a person enslaved to them who killed themselves without a sign that their master wished for them to be dead. Plato then sets the analogy. He says, *in like manner* (ἴσως) one must not first kill themselves before a god sent has some necessity (ἀνάγκην). Cebes — a stand in for any human ‘master’ — corresponds to the godly master of Plato’s conclusion; the people enslaved to the human master correspond to the gods’ human chattel. So, just as enslaved people must await some sign to kill themselves, we humans as property of the gods must await the same, here construed as some ‘necessity.’ Why, though, might Plato analogize divine sign in the first case with *necessity* in the second? I concur with Long’s take: “The combination of his beliefs and circumstances makes Socrates regard only one option (staying in prison and being executed) as worth choosing.”²⁴⁴ Divine sign instructs through abstention; the divine sign has not indicated against Socrates accepting his judgment.

²⁴³ Socrates expresses this sentiment at *Crito* 46d, as well.

²⁴⁴ Long 2019 (p. 183-4).

Moreover, Socrates spends the whole of *Crito* arguing that he must obey the laws of the city he has consented to live under. Socrates' good reason conforms with the divine sign and together they produce only one path forward for Socrates: to submit to his execution. As Long summarizes, "the gods can deliver as a sign some 'necessity' whose force depends on the agent's views of just behaviour, in Socrates' case as a citizen of Athens."²⁴⁵ As I see it, divine sign is a unidirectional line of communications which the gods established with Socrates, and perhaps *only* Socrates. The sign itself is multiform; it may present as an oracular message, a dream, a voice. Orders may be gleaned via divine sign, but they are not, I maintain, one and the same. Necessity is a singular path forward which reason and the gods recommend.

I have argued that we read the Guardian Argument principally as an argument based on the relationship between masters and slaves. This yields a simple interpretation of the Argument: killing ourselves would disable us from performing the tasks our masters have assigned to us; and so, we must not kill ourselves. I offer a final piece of evidence in support of this claim: Plato's choice of narrator. Phaedo of Elis was himself likely a slave whom Socrates helped to free.²⁴⁶ Moreover, Phaedo achieved some degree of success as a philosopher, having been taught by Socrates.²⁴⁷ I posit that Plato carefully chose Phaedo as the narrator of the text in order to frame the text's narrative arc. Substantively, Plato spends much time arguing that the soul is immortal. The text is framed, however, by Socrates' death. Plato means to emphasize, I imagine, that one may free her soul through philosophy. Further, just as Socrates has freed Phaedo and led him to philosophy, he has received a sign that the gods have freed him and lead him to commune

²⁴⁵ Long (p.184). He talks about this necessity in the context of *Republic*, I think the *Crito* context is just as apt.

²⁴⁶ Dušanić 1993. Phaedo was a prisoner of war and likely a sex worker captured between the ages of 18 and 20. Boys-Stones 2003, Kamen 2013a.

²⁴⁷ Kamen 2013a.

with the forms.²⁴⁸ It is striking and important, I think, that Plato chooses Phaedo, whose biography is largely shaped by his manumission, to deliver the text.

III. A unified suicide prohibition

The majority of existing readings of the suicide prohibition discard either the Guardian Argument or Enclosure Argument *or* consider the Guardian Argument the sole argument against suicide.²⁴⁹ I argue instead that we read the arguments as related to and supportive of one another. I suggest that each of the two parts of the prohibition argues that suicide is wrong because it in some way defies or undermines right rule. With respect to the Enclosure Argument, self-killing constitutes the soul's abandonment of the body which it is assigned to protect (and which reciprocally offers it protection). Complementarily, the Guardian Argument says that we humans ought not defy our good masters by killing ourselves. I further suggest an explanation for how we might read the Enclosure and Guardian Arguments together in a way consistent with, but not explicitly indicated by, Plato. On my cohesive rendering of the suicide prohibition, suicide disables us from performing the tasks our godly masters assign to us. In the first case, suicide prevents us from protecting our bodies from moral deterioration. Additionally, suicide prevents us from carrying out our roles in the city. Insofar as death prevents us from serving the gods, we must not intentionally die without the permission of the gods. So, generally, we must not kill ourselves. In what remains, I return to previous commitments I have made which support my cohesive reading. I then examine a feature of the text which seems to me to support my reading: I point to Socrates' two suggestions that each of the arguments of the prohibition is reasonable. I

²⁴⁸ Deborah Kamen 2013a argues well for this point, making sense of the sacrificial cock as an offering to repay Socrates' manumission.

²⁴⁹ For sole focus on the Guardian Argument, see Eckstein 1981, Cooper 2002, Bluck 1955, Ahrens Dorf 1995, Beets 1997, Bostock 1986, Long 2019. For a defense of a hybrid reading, see Warren 2001. For a rare defense of a reading *just* in favor of the Enclosure Argument, see Ebrey 2023.

first briefly notice the prohibition's emphasis on rule highlights what that rule denies us — freedom. Death constitutes freedom from the body.

Philosophers desire freedom from the body. Freedom from the body is achievable through psychological death. As Deborah Kamen notes, this language used to describe death at 67d is used in the context of manumission, as well.²⁵⁰ This freedom is the soul's estrangement from the body, *as much as is possible* in life. Plato maintains that complete psychological death, and so complete emancipation from the body, may only be granted by the gods. As Plato puts it, philosophers “purify ourselves from [the body] *until the god himself frees us.*”²⁵¹ Though the practice of philosophy may reassert the soul's primacy over the body, philosophizing, purifying the soul, cannot displace the soul completely from the body. Put another way, psychological death cannot bring about physical death. Furthermore, the philosopher only stands to benefit in the way she desires from her death if she is granted freedom from the body by the gods. To use Socrates' term, a philosopher may only achieve complete psychological death when she receives divine sign that the gods want for her to be dead. Inasmuch as that freedom — the activity of the philosopher's soul when she is dead — consists in the soul's communion with the gods, a divine sign permitting death is akin to an *invitation* from the gods to join them. That said, the gods do not grant the soul freedom from their mastery — Plato looks forward to meeting good masters on death — rather, the gods grant the soul freedom from the body.²⁵²

Thus far, I have shown a thematic unity between the two arguments of the suicide prohibition: right rule. The soul rightly rules the body and humans are rightly enslaved to the

²⁵⁰ Kamen 2013a (p.92-3).

²⁵¹ *Phd.* 67a. Tr. Grube.

²⁵² Kamen 2013a seems to suggest this, as well, but doesn't state explicitly that humans are not granted freedom from the body. (pp. 95-6) We may be interested, too in how this conforms to the practice of freed slaves owing their former masters service, as attested to historically and proposed in *Laws*.

gods. Humans may achieve psychological death as much as is possible in life. Those who achieve psychological death in life are eligible to receive a sign from the gods that the gods would like for them to be dead, so they may kill themselves. As my explication reveals, I take *both* the Enclosure and Guardian Arguments to figure into Plato's account of the wrongness of self-killing.²⁵³ I now turn to the framing of the passage to further support my case in favor of the coherence of the passage.

A textual feature militates in favor of the prohibition's coherence: Plato casts each of the two arguments in terms of their reasonability. In each case, Socrates signals the reader to refer to the propositions he has tentatively offered at 62a. In fact, immediately before delivering the Enclosure Argument, Socrates says, "and perhaps this²⁵⁴ seems unreasonable, but perhaps there is reason to it."²⁵⁵ I take it that the Enclosure Argument is thus a reason that self-killing is wrong, an argument substantiating the claim and a distinct piece of the account. In parallel, Socrates invokes reason immediately following the Guardian Argument. He says, *it is not unreasonable* that one must not kill herself before a god has indicated some necessity. Again, I take it that the reference to reason marks the Guardian Argument as a plank of the account. Plato makes reference to reason separately for each of the arguments. I subsequently think then that we may read each argument as playing a role in the account against self-killing.

In this chapter, I have suggested that we read each the Enclosure and Guardian Arguments as a comment on the relationship between ruler and the ruled. I have explicated the Guardian Argument in defense of this reading. I have shown that Plato plausibly meant to evoke slavery and in doing so invited us to buttress the argument with what we know of slavery in

²⁵³ Cf. Cooper 2002, Archer-Hind 1984, Eckstein 1981, Bluck 1955, and Ahrens Dorf 1995.

²⁵⁴ I take the referent to be 'these propositions which comprise an account against self-killing,' i.e., the contents of 62a.

²⁵⁵ *Phd.* 62b1. καὶ γὰρ ἂν δόξειεν... οὕτω γ' εἶναι ἄλογον: οὐ μέντοι ἀλλ' ἴσως γ' ἔχει τινὰ λόγον.

Athens. Additionally, I have offered a suggestion for how we might distinguish Socrates' divine sign from necessity and the orders which the gods transmit to Socrates.

I concluded my investigation of the prohibition by showing that the two arguments should be read together. Moreover, Plato likely meant them to be read in tandem as two arguments comprising an account against self-killing. I make the following of the suicide prohibition at 62b-c: when one kills themselves, they physically separate their soul from their body. Physically separating the soul from the body (without the explicit permission of the gods) is wrong because it (1) makes the soul vulnerable to external harm, and (2) disables the soul from protecting the body from moral deterioration. Moreover, the gods have assigned us to perform tasks which promote virtue; our bodies enable us to perform these tasks. The gods are our masters, so to defy their orders would be wrong. So, it would be wrong to abandon the tasks the gods have assigned us. Thus, it would be wrong to kill ourselves.

Plato takes care to exempt Socrates from this prohibition. It is permissible to kill oneself if the gods have indicated that they would like for you to be dead. I suppose that in order to receive this sign, a person needs to have achieved psychological death in life. Moreover, it seems likely that circumstances dictate, too, that a person may die (e.g., a death sentence). So, some people for whom death is better than life may receive a sign from the gods inviting them to die. Curiously, it is not clear whether anyone but Socrates will ever meet the criteria for exemption from the suicide prohibition.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ This does not preclude the conceptual possibility.

Conclusion

Over the course of this dissertation, I have principally engaged in untangling and interpreting Plato's view of death and self-killing offered in the early pages of *Phaedo*. I begin the dissertation by working out the concept of death Plato has in mind when he prohibits suicide. I first distinguish between the phenomena we and Plato might mean to invoke when talking about death — the process of dying, the event of death, and the state of being dead. I lift two definitions of death from the first few pages of *Phaedo*. I contend that Plato defines death as the physical separation of the soul from the body at 64c; I term this physical death. Plato then introduces another concept of death, which I call psychological death. Psychological death occurs when a person separates their soul as much as possible from their body. In the case of psychological death, I prefer to call this separation un-encumbering. The soul tries as best it can to steal away by itself and remain unpersuaded by bodily desires.

Having described the two kinds of death I think Plato offers early in *Phaedo*, I compare them. My comparison of the concepts yields six observations: (i) it is not possible for a person to avoid physical death; (ii) only some people may die psychologically, though philosophers are the most likely to die psychologically; (iii) it is possible for a person to have physically died without having psychologically died; (iv) it is possible for a person to have psychologically died without having physically died; (v) it is possible for a person to have psychologically died and physically died; and (vi) it is unlikely that one may die psychologically after dying physically.

A general conception of death can be rendered: for a person to die is for her soul to separate (i.e., disunify) from her body. Psychological and physical death are both kinds of death. More precisely, the two deaths both concern separation of the body and soul of a person. The two deaths share a concept regarding the same objects with respect to the same agent.

Plato's concept of death in early *Phaedo* grounds the suicide prohibition insofar as it clarifies what kind of death Plato means to prohibit and, more importantly, why a philosopher might desire death. Pinning down Plato's early conceptions of death allows us to explain that the suicide prohibition discourages us from precipitating our own physical deaths. We may be motivated to die physically since we would like to achieve complete psychological death.

As I explain at the close of the first chapter, I intentionally read Plato's early comments on death in their context. I take care not to read substantive philosophic commitments Plato makes elsewhere (e.g., the soul's immortality, soul tripartition) into the passages at *Phaedo* 64c and 67c-d. That said, further investigation into questions the purview of this short passage is, I think, worthwhile and interesting. To start, it will be useful to consider more carefully how Plato's comments early in *Phaedo* interact with his later commitment to soul tripartition. On the tripartite conception of the soul, the appetitive soul part issues appetitive desires. Contrastingly, in *Phaedo* appetitive desires are ascribed to the body. The *Phaedo* conception of the body implies that the body is to some extent vital.

On the tripartite picture, the body is akin to a puppet; the soul is composed of a set of puppet masters, two of whom — the appetitive and spirited soul parts — are directed to move the body in accordance with the orders of the third, reason. There is hierarchy among the soul parts. However, it would perhaps be odd to describe the relationship between the soul and body as hierarchal on the tripartite model because the body is totally inanimate without the soul; it cannot move itself from within and certainly does not generate any preference for which direction to move toward. That is, on the tripartite model, the body itself does not issue desires to be pursued.

By sharp contrast, on the *Phaedo* picture, the body issues desires. The soul may correspondingly satisfy or not satisfy those desires. To use a case which highlights the

plausibility of this picture, sometimes I, a vegetarian, crave meat. However, I do not enjoy meat; my meat craving possibly corresponds to a slight iron deficiency. My desire for meat may seem like a desire *of my body*. When I crave meat, it feels like my body wants something in order to maintain itself. In this case, it seems like my body itself issues a desire, and my soul responds by refusing to indulge that desire. This example, I think, highlights the way in which on a concept of the body which allows that it issues its own desires, the body seems to some extent *vital*. The body seems active and alive, even if it cannot by itself fulfil its own desires.

The body, I argue, seems to some extent vital in *Phaedo*. We might wonder then whether Plato thinks that the body is *deathless*. A living person composed of body and soul²⁵⁷ is subject to death insofar as death — whether physical or psychological — is the separation of the soul and body. Death necessarily involves body and soul. We know that the soul alone is not subject to death because it is immortal. We may wonder, though, whether a body that issues its own desires is the type of thing which may die. Can the body, even if for a short time, issue desires after death? If so, is this evidence that the body alone is among the objects eligible to die?

I suspect that the *Timaeus* will serve as a useful comparative text to shed light on these questions. Plato's division of the mortal from immortal soul parts — all of which are bound up in the body — may be useful in militating in favor of or against the body's potential for death. A predictable Platonic response to my suggestion that the body alone may be subject to death is that the soul imbues the body with life, and so any life-like qualities that the body exhibits are attributable to the soul. I am not necessarily denying this claim. I am rather suggesting that there may be a tension between how Plato sometimes describes the body in *Phaedo* — as seemingly vital — and his view of the soul as the sole thing which imbues a being with life.

²⁵⁷ Again, this is not to deny that a person is identified with her soul.

The second chapter marks the start of my discussion of suicide. I begin by explicating the comments immediately preceding the prohibition. I argue in favor of three interpretive claims: that (1) θαυμαστόν is best translated ‘strange,’ (2) Socrates only offers the propositions 62a provisionally, and (3) Plato means τεθνάναι and ζῆν to signify two opposing states. I do not imagine that these observations are novel. However, I undertake the work of relitigating this passage in order to demonstrate how it fits with my interpretation of the text. It seems to me that taking θαυμαστόν as ‘strange’ instead of ‘astonish,’ for instance, foreshadows well Cebes and Simmias’ slow acceptance of the argument against self-killing. ‘Strange’ seems to me to convey, “this may seem odd now, but I (Socrates) will satisfactorily explain it.” Moreover, Simmias and Cebes admit to having heard *something* about suicide from Philolaus. Presumably then, they will be sympathetic to Socrates’ forthcoming account. Based on context, we would expect Socrates’ interlocutors to be unfamiliar with the particularities of his argument against suicide. We would not, however, expect them to be shocked by an argument against suicide, particularly one which shares features with the Orphic suggestion that the body is a prison. By contrast, as I have said, ‘astonish’ connotes shock. Were Cebes and Simmias truly shocked, I think, Socrates would have to do far more work to convince them of his view. To analogize, I would be shocked if someone told me that the Earth is ring shaped with a hole running through its center. I would, however, merely find it strange, but plausible, if someone told me that the Earth is shaped like an egg. The latter suggestion is plausible to me, given what I think I know about the Earth — namely, that the Earth is round. The first suggestion would surprise me because it defies what I think I know about the shape of the Earth. Similarly, I think, Simmias and Cebes are prepared to accept an account of the wrongness of suicide, especially one which reminds them of the Pythagorean

thinkers with whom they are acquainted. In light of this familiarity, it would be odd, I think, to characterize their reaction to Socrates' non-committal comments on suicide as *astonishment*.

Next I suggest that Socrates does not endorse the comments he makes at 62a. This reading seems relatively straightforward to me on account of Plato's use of $\epsilon\iota$ to clearly indicate a lack of commitment. I will only speculate that Plato tentatively — instead of confidently — offers the contents of 62a because he wants his interlocutors to ultimately accept what he has said. Socrates has just told us that Cebes and Simmias may find his suggestions strange. So, he need not further alienate them by stating his arguments against suicide from the outset. My remarks on Plato's intent regarding his cautious introduction to the topic of suicide indicate my perspective on his dialectical strategy in 62a-c. I think that Plato floats a set of propositions which he soon substantiates; I return to this point in Chapter 3. That said, I do not think that Plato employs this strategy through the whole of *Phaedo*. Relevantly, for instance, I take care to argue that Plato intends to offer two distinct definitions of death at 64 and 67. I do not endorse an alternative view on which the view of death articulated at 67 grows out of, and replaces, the view delivered at 64.

I will provide a final note on my interpretation of 62a. My reading of $\tau\epsilon\theta\nu\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\iota$ and $\zeta\eta\nu$ to indicate two opposing states in part stems from my discussion of the parallel conditions of death and life which I lay out in Chapter 1. For each phenomenon — the process, event and state of death — there is a corresponding process, event and state of life. It would seem odd to me that Plato would abandon the symmetry for which his careful language makes room in favor of contrasting a process with a state.

So much for how the second chapter fits with Chapters 1 and 3. I conclude my comments on the second chapter by enthusiastically suggesting an area for further investigation: what

suicide is for Plato. At the start of Chapter 2, I suggest that in *Phaedo* all instances of self-killing qualify as suicide for Plato. This is radically different from how most present-day readers characterize the phenomenon. I now wonder whether self-killing is so different from suicide as currently conceived as to constitute a different phenomenon entirely. Is it reasonable, for instance, to call Socrates' state-sanctioned execution suicide?²⁵⁸ On what basis might we reasonably call this suicide? Has a person sentenced to death who does not physically resist her execution died by suicide? Considering difficult cases may persuade us to classify self-inflicted deaths committed under extenuating or constricting circumstances (i.e., executions) separately from suicides. We may instead, however, be persuaded to adopt a broader conception of suicide which includes all instances of self-killing. Put another way, through examining difficult cases we may be persuaded to adopt Socrates' conception of suicide. Maybe we go for a middle way. We may conclude that suicide generally is self-killing and delineate different kinds of the phenomenon. For instance, we may construct a category of 'coerced suicide' to include all cases where a person kills herself under duress from an authority. (Of course, this category may be designated by any number of conditions.)

We might also investigate an unstated view we may reasonably attribute to Plato: there are some people for whom death is better than life,²⁵⁹ and those people for whom death is better than life may reasonably wish to kill themselves. We may similarly consider for whom, if anyone, death is better than life, particularly, who belongs to this group who does not imminently

²⁵⁸ There has historically been lots of interest in whether Socrates' death counts as an instance of suicide (Cf. Frey 1978, Duff 1983, Walton 1980). I am suggesting that we study whether Plato's conception of suicide is useful. There has also been useful work on ancient conceptions of suicide, more generally (Cf. Garrison 1991, Naiden 2015).

²⁵⁹ Implicit in Plato's account is that death is better than life for a person when death is better for a person herself than life. Death, for instance, is better for a philosopher than life because death enables her to achieve her goals. By contrast, it has been argued that there are people for whom death is better than life because their communities will benefit from their death. Cf. Cholbi 2010.

face death. (Put another way, who is most analogous to the philosopher who desires death but does not, to her knowledge, imminently face it?) In any case, a comparative study of Platonic suicide with present-day accounts of the act will I think undoubtedly yield interesting and philosophically useful results.

I turn to a discussion of Plato's argument against suicide in Chapters 3-4. Through both chapters, I substantiate my Preview Reading of 62a. I argue that 62a be read as a preview of what is to come. Namely, that we are given three propositions in 62a which Socrates later argues for: (1) the suicide prohibition does not admit of exceptions; (2) it is better for some people to be dead than to be alive; and (3) those for whom death is better than life should nevertheless refrain from killing themselves but must await some other well-doer. Socrates' comments at 62 also preempt ensuing discussion of the *desirability* of death. Throughout *Phaedo*, Socrates repeats that philosophers want death because death offers them freedom from their bodies. I think Plato explicates what is better for a person (e.g., it is better for a person to be dead than to live) to indicate what is desirable for them. The alternative reading which I disprefer is that Plato means to indicate that it is better for a person herself or her community that she be dead rather than alive.

I disprefer this interpretation because I think Plato indicates elsewhere that there are people whose deaths would benefit themselves or their communities. The death of evil people, for example, may halt the body's tightening grasp on the soul and allow for the soul to be rehabilitated in death. Moreover, Plato seems to think that the deaths of the incurably evil and disabled people benefit the people in these groups themselves and the city. In Book III of *Republic*, Socrates says to Glaucon, "But as for those whose bodies are naturally unhealthy or whose souls are incurably evil, *won't they let the former die of their own accord* and put the

latter to death?” He then says of this solution, “That seems to be best *for the ones who suffer such treatment* and for the city.”²⁶⁰ The supposition that disabled people are better off dead — both for their own sakes and the sake of the city — is appalling and morally objectionable. We may wonder how deep this ableism runs for Plato. For instance, we may wonder whether Plato thinks that what he considers deficiency of the body reflects the condition of the soul (particularly in light of the comments in *Timaeus* with respect to the relationship between the soul and body).

Having argued that we read 62a as looking forward to what is to come, I consider the two arguments of the suicide prohibition. I spend much time defending the claim that we take φρουρά as ‘enclosure.’ I argue that there is good Platonic evidence to prefer this translation over ‘prison’ or ‘watch.’ As I note, Plato uses φρουρά infrequently, instead referring to prison most often as δεσμοτήριον. I explicitly avoid invoking *Laws* in investigating Plato’s usage of these terms. This comparison, I think, is worth lengthy investigation. Specifically, I suspect that *Phaedo* is an important text in the development of Plato’s early penology. Perhaps Plato floats the term φρουρά instead of δεσμοτήριον to do away with the negative connotations that δεσμοτήριον carries with it. We know, for instance, that Plato’s penology ultimately relies on rehabilitation, a goal with which δεσμοτήριον does not seem to align insofar as it implies punishment. Moreover, δεσμοτήριον is used in Plato and other historical texts to refer to the Athenian prison. Plato’s concept of punishment (for the purpose of rehabilitation) in *Laws* is intentionally distinct from that system. So, perhaps *Phaedo* was an early testing ground for Plato to work out how exactly he wants to describe detainment or punishment so as not to traffic in preconceptions about the Athenian prison. We may, moreover, read the suite of dialogues

²⁶⁰ *Rep.* 410a. Tr. Grube.

concerning the trial and death of Socrates as an indication of or clue toward Plato's early penology. In each, Plato considers punishment and imprisonment. Comparing Plato's use of words to do with prison and punishment with those he offers in *Laws* will undoubtedly be a generative and interesting project.

Next I interpret the Enclosure Argument to convey that the body restricts the soul; the soul and body mutually protect one another. I expect the claim that Plato puts forward that the body protects the soul to be surprising. I myself found it a surprising feature of the Enclosure Argument. I think that one effect of this protective relation is that it offers more support still for the suicide prohibition. Even if, we might think, the body restricts us and prevents us from achieving our goals, there are compelling reasons to remain united with it. One such reason is that it protects our soul until such a time that the gods indicate we may leave it. I am motivated to stay in my house when hazards await me outside even when my desires can only be satisfied outside my house. I may desire, for example, to go to an ice cream shop while a fire rages outside my home. As frustrated as I may be, it is in my best interest to wait until the fire is put out and the smoke has cleared to leave. Similarly, as much as the philosopher wants to escape her body, to do so might make her soul — at least the mortal part and the immortal part to the degree that it requires the mortal part — vulnerable to harm.

I also deliver an Orphic explanation for how the body protects the soul. I suggest that the body protects the airy soul from dispersal. I undertake a very narrow study of Orphism in the dissertation. I am only concerned with understanding Plato's mention at *Phaedo* 62a; I think *Cratylus* 400c is a sufficient comparative text. However, there is much said — and more still to be said — about Plato's references to Orphic beliefs across his body of work. For my purposes, one generative area for further study is an investigation of Orphic resonances in Platonic

eschatology. At *Phaedo* 69c, for instance, Socrates posits, “it is likely that those who established the mystic rites for us ... said that whoever arrives in the underworld uninitiated and unsanctified will wallow in the mire, whereas he who arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with the gods.”²⁶¹ At first glance, this passage suggests that Plato interprets Orphic doctrine to dictate that unpurified souls will be punished in the afterlife by being left to ‘wallow in the mire.’ While I accept that there is no such thing as Orphic eschatology, I do wonder still whether Plato’s reference to purification signals that his own eschatology — at least in *Phaedo* — is influenced by or meant to evoke some number of Orphic beliefs. Moreover, it would be a worthwhile exercise to distinguish references to the Orphic tradition from references to the Pythagorean tradition, when possible. We may look to *Gorgias* 492-3 to see how Plato invokes Orphism in ethical discussions.

This is all to say, it is useful for us presently to refer to ‘Orphism’ to mark a set of beliefs, even though that set is grouped only by what we know of their lineage, not a worked out, interconnected theory. Similarly, Plato might refer to Orphism to evoke the set of beliefs, not just the belief he gestures to. So, on investigation, I wonder whether we can determine whether Plato, in service of developing his own highly systematized philosophy, strategically wove Orphic references through *Phaedo* so as to evoke Orphism throughout the text, not just where he explicitly flags Orphic beliefs.

Having offered a reading of the Enclosure Argument, I turn to the Guardian Argument. I argue that we read the Guardian Argument as prohibiting suicide on the basis of our duty to obey the gods, our masters. To me, it is clear that in *Phaedo*, Plato construes the gods as just that, our

²⁶¹ *Phd.* 69c. Tr. Grube.

masters. We relate to them correspondingly as slaves. I suggest that this rule and the rule of the soul over the body unite the suicide prohibition.

I consider Plato's reference to Socrates' sign from the gods only to explicate how it fits with a reading of the Guardian Argument centered on mastery and ruling. The gods indicate that Socrates must die through sign and circumstance. The gods do not signal to Socrates that he should fight his trial which culminates in a sentence of death. The gods signal that he may die, and self-inflicted execution is the means available to him to achieve death. As I have interpreted the text, the gods' sign to Socrates permitting him to die frees him from the body in which his soul languishes. Importantly, I do not think that the gods relinquish their rule of Socrates on death.

After release from his body on death, Socrates' soul dwells among the gods. However, his soul is still subordinated to the gods. Socrates, for instance, supposes that on death he "shall come to gods who are very good masters"²⁶² when speculating about what awaits him. To me this suggests that Socrates conceives of the gods as his masters, even in death. Moreover, speculating similarly at the end of *Apology*, Socrates considers what he will do in death (if anything awaits him). He says, "Most important, I could spend my time testing and examining people there as I do here, as to who among them is wise, and who thinks he is, but is not."²⁶³ In this passage Socrates imagines continuing the work the gods have assigned to him into death. Perhaps, then, he interprets this divine duty as unrestricted to embodiment.

Socrates' suggestion that he heed the gods' orders even after death signals that he still imagines that he will stand in some sort of subordinate relation to them in death as he did in life. That is not to say the nature of the gods' rule over Socrates — that of masters over a slave —

²⁶² *Phd.* 63c. Tr. Grube.

²⁶³ *Ap.* 41b. Tr. Grube.

stays constant after death. For instance, it might turn out that while embodied, Socrates is enslaved to the gods, but while disembodied he is subject to a less dramatic kind of rule. There is historical context which aligns with this suspicion: formerly enslaved people were often required²⁶⁴ or expected to serve their former masters after manumission.²⁶⁵ Plato himself also dictates that manumitted slaves serve their former masters in *Laws*.²⁶⁶ In sum, I tentatively suggest that Socrates is still subject to the gods' rule after death.²⁶⁷ It would be interesting and fruitful, I think, to test whether the supposition that disembodied pure souls are subject to godly rule in death is present in other Platonic texts. Specifically, I recommend comparison to *Phaedrus* in which Plato depicts the ascension of the pure soul.

I hope to have worked out a cohesive and compelling view of the suicide prohibition. We may contrast this view with Plato's comments on suicide at *Laws* 873c-d.²⁶⁸ Here, Plato indicates in far more detail who is exempted from punishment for suicide and what punishment for suicide should be. He begins by defining suicide. Someone has killed herself when she "uses violence to take her fate out of the hands of destiny."²⁶⁹ To me, this definition summarizes what he's said in the suicide prohibition in *Phaedo*. Moreover, the definition *bakes in* that prohibition. To die by suicide is to take fate away from destiny. Similarly, Plato tells us in *Phaedo* that it is wrong to die by suicide *because* to do so would count as defying the gods. Plato's later characterization of suicide in *Laws* bakes in the wrongness of the act. In *Phaedo*, by contrast, Plato's description of suicide as any instance of self-killing is neutral with respect to its moral status. The prohibition is

²⁶⁴ When subject to conditional or deferred (*paramone*) manumission. Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005 (p. 222).

²⁶⁵ Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005 (pp. 222-4).

²⁶⁶ Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005 (pp. 224); *Leg.* 915a.

²⁶⁷ Of course, this is my tentative suggestion just on the basis of what we learn in *Phaedo*.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Christensen 2020b.

²⁶⁹ *Leg.* 873c. Tr. Saunders.

supplemental to the definition insofar as it explains the wrongness of the act. Plato streamlines these two pieces in *Laws*, baking the wrongness of suicide into its description.

Plato accounts, too, for exception cases in which self-killing is permissible. He resketches the boundaries of the concept of suicide such that the following cases no longer qualify as suicide: A person who has killed themselves has not died by suicide if they kill themselves “in obedience to any legal decision of his state,” if their “hand is forced by the pressure of some excruciating and unavoidable misfortune,” if they “has not fallen into some irremediable disgrace that he cannot live with,” or if they “imposes this unjust judgement on himself in a spirit of slothful and abject cowardice.”²⁷⁰ Socrates’ death is again exempted as a permissible case of self-killing; so too are all the difficult cases which persist in present-day discussions of suicide. I wonder whether we might characterize the more developed concept of suicide in *Laws* as being just that, a conception of *suicide*, not all cases of self-killing generally. Suicide is, as Plato indicates in *Phaedo*, always impermissible and wrong. Self-killing is sometimes permissible, unless it is a suicide. Surely there is more to be said on the topic. The work the dissertation does toward understanding Plato’s comments on the topic in *Phaedo* is helpful in understanding his contrasting comments in *Laws*.

Looking outside Plato, we may compare Plato’s comments on suicide in both *Phaedo* and *Laws* to Aristotle’s comments on the topic in *NE* V. Aristotle says,

“The answer to the question whether it is possible to treat oneself unjustly or not is evidence from what has been said. For part of what is just is what is prescribed by the law in accordance with excellence as a whole: for instance, in cases where the law does not enjoin killing oneself (and it forbids this action except where it enjoins it)...someone who through anger cuts his own throat does this voluntarily, contrary to what reason prescribes—and does something that the law forbids: in that case he is acting unjustly. But unjustly to whom? Or is it to the city—not himself? For he is a voluntary recipient of the action, and no one is voluntarily treated unjustly.

²⁷⁰ *Leg.* 873c-d. Tr. Saunders.

This is why in fact the city imposes a penalty, and a certain dishonor is attached to the person who has done away with himself, on the grounds that he is acting unjustly towards the city.”²⁷¹

This passage offers an incredibly interesting counterpart to Plato’s account of suicide’s wrongness. Like Plato, Aristotle locates an agent aside from the person who has killed herself as suffering the harm caused by suicide. Unlike Plato, who suggests that the gods are wronged when we kill ourselves, Aristotle instead indicates that the city suffers this wrong. We may invoke *Crito* in examining the connection between these two accounts. There, Socrates explains why he should not escape prison: to do so would violate the laws he has agreed to live under. Escaping prison, he thinks, is to disrespect the city.

In all, the dissertation generates multiple avenues for further investigation. A focused study of just Plato’s discussion of suicide and death in early *Phaedo* provides a solid foundation from which to launch these investigations. This study may be applied to Plato’s penology, studies of ancient conceptions of suicide, Plato’s early psychology, and Plato on slavery, to name just some areas for future work.

²⁷¹ *NE* 1138a5-10. Tr. Broadie-Rowe.

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