"συμφωνεῖν" in Plato's Phaedo

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In the *Phaedo*, after describing his intellectual journeys in pursuit of "the cause of genesis and destruction" (*Ph.* 95e9-96a1), Socrates remarks that he eventually embarked on a "second voyage" (τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν) in quest of that cause (*Ph.* 99c9-d1). The "second voyage" involves an application of a method that uses hypotheses. Socrates describes the first step of this method in the following passage:

> But, anyhow, this was how I proceeded: hypothesizing on each occasion the account I judge strongest, I posit as true (τίθημι ὡς ἀληθῆ ὄντα) whatever seems to me to harmonize (συμφωνεῖν) with it, both about a cause and about everything else; and whatever does not (ἃ ἂν μή), [I posit] as not true (ὡς οὐκ ἀληθῆ). (*Ph.* 100a3-7)

His description of the second step of his method takes the form of advice to his audience:

> But if someone challenged (ἔχοιτο or ἔφοιτο)[1] the hypothesis itself, you would bid him farewell (χαιρεῖν ἐῴης), and you wouldn't answer until you have examined the results of that [hypothesis] (τὰ ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνης ὁρμηθέντα), to see if, in your view, they harmonize or do not harmonize (συμφωνεῖ ἢ διαφωνεῖ) with one another. (*Ph.* 101d3-5)

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[1] There is some controversy about this verb. The manuscripts support "ἔχοιτο". But if this is correct and we are to read this verb as I have suggested in my translation, then we must conclude that "ἔχεσθαι" shifts significantly in meaning from "to hold firmly on to" at 101d1 to "challenge" at 101d3. The correctness of "ἐχόμενος" at 101d1 seems fairly certain (but see P.M. Huby, "*Phaedo* 99d-102a," *Phronesis* 4 (1959), p. 14, n. 1 and Gallop's response in his notes to *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 235, n. 67), and it seems reasonably clear that it means "holding firmly on to". Yet it is difficult to read the verb at 101d5 as "holds firmly on to": as W.W. Tait observes, it is doubtful that Socrates is suggesting that we "answer" someone who *agrees* with our hypothesis ("Plato's Second Best Method", *Review of Metaphysics* 39 (1986), p. 475). Madvig emends "ἔχοιτο" to "ἔφοιτο", presumably to deal with this problem.

There is much that is mysterious about Socrates' description of the first two steps of the hypothetical method in the *Phaedo*.[2] But the interpretation of the word "συμφωνεῖν" has proved to be particularly problematic. Some have held that it is simply impossible to read this word univocally throughout Socrates' account.[3]

"To be consistent with" seems to be the most natural reading of "συμφωνεῖν". However, it is unlikely that Socrates would advocate, even in a "second best" method,[4] that we posit as true all propositions that seem to us to be consistent with our hypothesis. First, we will most likely have independent reasons to believe that a number of propositions that are consistent with our hypothesis are false. To posit them as true nevertheless would be irrational. Second, for any given hypothesis the propositions that are consistent with it will include hypotheses that are inconsistent with one another. But we cannot reasonably posit as true all propositions of this sort. And third, Socrates claims that by means of the hypothetical method he can demonstrate that the soul is immortal (*Ph.* 100c8-9). Yet it is not clear how showing that a proposition is *consistent* with a particular hypothesis would in any way provide a demonstration of the truth of that proposition. As Robinson remarks,

> The hypothetical method is intended to reach some particular conclusion. Socrates here wishes to conclude that soul is immortal. But the mere activity of positing every proposition that was consistent with the hypothesis would not lead in any given direction. It would merely amass a heap of assertions.[5]

A possible way of modifying the "consistency" reading would be to restrict the propositions posited as true to those that one does not have independent reason to believe are false. This modified version of the "logical

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[2] The hypothetical method has other steps, and Socrates' description of them gives rise to further questions. This paper will focus on Socrates' description of the first two steps.

[3] See, for example, Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1953), pp. 129-131, and David Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 169.

[4] The use of the phrase "δεύτερος πλοῦς" to mean "the next best way" is well attested (Liddell, Scott, et. al, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., s.v. "δεύτερος"). In the *Statesman* (300c) and *Philebus* (19c), Plato uses it to mean this. Aristotle uses it this way at *EN* 1109a35 and *Pol.* 1284b19. My own view, for which I cannot argue here, is that it is not the hypothetical method as such that is the δεύτερος πλοῦς, but rather a particular application of it. Specifically, the "second best" to which Socrates refers is his use of the hypothetical method when he appeals to the Theory of Forms to provide a rather incomplete explanation of generation and destruction.

[5] Robinson, p. 128.

consistency" (LC) reading of "συμφωνεῖν" would avoid the first problem that I mentioned above, but unfortunately not the last two.

Since the hypothetical method is intended to provide a demonstration of the truth of a particular proposition, one might think that the only intelligible reading of "συμφωνεῖν" here is "to entail logically" (LE). The hypothetical method provides a proof of a particular proposition by showing how it is logically entailed by a hypothesis that one's audience concedes (*Ph.* 100b7). Yet on this reading, we run into difficulties similar to those that cropped up with the LC reading. Socrates advises us to posit as false those propositions that appear not to συμφωνεῖν with our hypothesis. However, if we followed his advice we would be positing as false all sorts of propositions that we may otherwise have reason to believe are true. If we modify the LE reading of "συμφωνεῖν" in the same way that we did the LC view, we would avoid this problem. Nevertheless, Socrates' advice that we set down as false all propositions that we do not have independent reason to believe are true and which are not entailed by our hypothesis still seems wrong. The fact that a relevant proposition is not entailed by a hypothesis that we take to be true gives us no reason to believe that that proposition is false. Moreover, the set of all propositions that are not entailed by our hypothesis will include pairs of propositions that are negations of one another. But we cannot justifiably posit as false both members of a pair of such propositions.

Socrates recognizes that his description of his method has so far been rather vague:

--- "But I'd like to explain my meaning more clearly; because I don't imagine you understand it as yet".
--- "Not entirely, I must say!" said Cebes. (*Ph.* 100a7-9)

So he attempts to tighten-up his description by providing an example of an application of his method. Socrates explains how he hypothesized "that a beautiful, itself by itself, is something, and so are a good and a large and all the rest . . ." (*Ph.* 100b6-7; cf. 102b1). He chose this hypothesis because of its potential explanatory power: the Forms, on his view, are responsible for other things being fine, good, or large (*Ph.* 100d-e; 102b2-3). From this hypothesis, Socrates claims, he can prove the immortality of the soul (*Ph.* 100b8-9). He then describes how he rejected alternative explanatory hypotheses that were inconsistent with his favored hypothesis (*Ph.* 100c10-d3).

Some scholars have concluded from Socrates' description of this application of his method that when he says at 100a that he sets down as true those

propositions that seem to him to συμφωνεῖν with his hypothesis, he is referring to all of those propositions that are *entailed* by the hypothesis. When he says that he sets down as false all propositions that do not seem to συμφωνεῖν with his hypothesis, he is referring to those propositions that are *inconsistent* with it.[6] However, it is quite awkward to suppose that we must read the first occurrence and the second (implied) occurrence of "συμφωνεῖν" in two different ways within the same sentence: for at 100a Socrates seems to be saying that there is some *one* relation such that we are to posit as true everything that stands in that relation to the hypothesis and posit as false everything that does not.[7] Further, if we read the first occurrence of "συμφωνεῖν" at 100a5 as "entail", then not only the second (implied) occurrence of "συμφωνεῖν" at 100a6-7, but also the occurrence of "συμφωνεῖ" at 101d5, must be read differently. David Bostock, who favors the LE reading of the first occurrence of "συμφωνεῖν" at 100a5 and the LC reading of the second (implied) occurrence of "συμφωνεῖν" at 100a6-7, maintains that we are forced to adopt the LC reading of "συμφωνεῖ" at 101d5:

> in 100a when Socrates speaks of things which "accord" [Bostock's translation of "συμφωνεῖν"] . . . with the hypothesis he seems to have in mind things which follow from it (though also when he speaks of things which "do not accord" he seems to have in mind things which are not consistent with it). But it is altogether too much to suppose that the phrase "accord or discord" (συμφωνεῖ ἤ διαφωνεῖ) could be used to mean the things that follow or do not follow. Propositions that are in discord with one another must evidently be in disagreement, in conflict: it is not enough if they simply fail to follow from one another.[8]

I want to suggest that it is possible to avoid attributing to Plato this equivocation. If "συμφωνεῖν" is to be read univocally at 100a, and if Socrates' methodological advice is to be at all reasonable, it would seem that "συμφωνεῖν" must refer to a relation such that consistency is necessary but not sufficient, and logical entailment is sufficient but not necessary, for this relation to hold. One possibility is the relation of coherence. Consistency is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for coherence; and logical entailment is a sufficient, but not necessary, condition for coherence. A proposition *P* coheres with *Q* if and only if *P* is consistent with *Q* and stands in *either* a suitable inductive *or* deductive inferential relation to

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[6] See, for example, Robinson, p. 129; Bostock, p. 163; and R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 139.

[7] As we'll see below, Socrates is in fact saying something more complicated than this.

[8] Bostock, p. 169; see also pp. 166-170.

Q.[9] P συμφωνεῖ with Q if and only if Q gives one some reason to believe that P is true.[10]

According to this reading of Socrates' description of the first part of his method at 100a, we posit as true all propositions that are consistent with our hypothesis and stand in either a suitable inductive or deductive inferential relation to our hypothesis. We will posit as false all propositions that are inconsistent with our hypothesis or that stand in no suitable inferential relation to our hypothesis. On this reading, we accept all and only the propositions that we have reason to accept. To this extent, this reading of "συμφωνεῖν" fares better than the LC reading. Further, at least some of the propositions that we reject as false – namely, those that are inconsistent with our hypothesis – are propositions that we have some reason to reject. For this reason, the coherence reading of "συμφωνεῖν" is preferable to the LE reading. Nevertheless, it seems still that Socrates is advising us to reject as false many propositions about which it would be better to reserve judgment. For suppose that I am considering the proposition that the charge of a proton is spread over a distance of 10^{15} meters. This proposition is consistent with my beliefs, but, as far as I can tell, stands in none of the appropriate inductive or deductive inferential relations to them. Thus, according to the coherence reading, it does not appear to συμφωνεῖν with my beliefs. Yet it does not seem appropriate to reject this proposition as false. If we read "συμφωνεῖν" univocally, and if we suppose that "μὴ [συμφωνεῖν]" is the negation of "συμφωνεῖν" such that for any given proposition it either stands or fails to stand in one of these two relations to my beliefs, then we will inevitably run into trouble when attempting to interpret Socrates' methodological advice at 100a. For it is not the case that, for any given proposition, I either have reason to believe that it is true or I have reason to believe that it is false. In the case of most propositions, I have reason to withhold judgment.

A final possibility would be this. As we have seen, at 101d5 Socrates says that we should look at the results of our hypothesis to see whether they "harmonize or do not harmonize (συμφωνεῖ ἢ διαφωνεῖ) with one another." I have been assuming above that "συμφωνεῖν" and "μὴ [συμφωνεῖν]" ("to harmonize" and "not to harmonize") at 100a5-7 are exhaustive as well as exclusive. On the coherence reading of "συμφωνεῖν", this assumption had the unfortunate implication that Socrates is advising us to set down as

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[9] For an extended contemporary discussion of the concept of coherence, see Lawrence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 93-100.

[10] Notice that the συμφωνία relation is not symmetrical.

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false both members of pairs of propositions that are negations of one another and propositions about which it seems preferable to reserve judgment. However, "συμφωνεῖν" and "διαφωνεῖν", like the English "to agree" and "to disagree", may be contraries rather than contradictories. One can fail to agree without yet disagreeing – one can reserve judgment or utter something completely irrelevant. Similarly, perhaps one can fail to συμφωνεῖν and yet not διαφωνεῖ. On the coherence reading, a proposition P συμφωνεῖ with Q if and only if P is consistent with Q and P stands in either a suitable inductive or deductive inferential relation to Q. P συμφωνεῖ with Q just in case Q gives one some reason to believe that P is true. Perhaps "διαφωνεῖ" is not the negation of "συμφωνεῖ", but a proposition P διαφωνεῖ with Q if and only if P is inconsistent with Q.[11] On this reading, P διαφωνεῖ with Q just in case Q gives one reason to believe that P is false.

If we can read this account of "συμφωνεῖ" and "διαφωνεῖ" back into the contrast at 100a5 between "συμφωνεῖν" and "μὴ [συμφωνεῖν]", then we seem to get exactly the result that we want.[12] We accept as true propositions that are consistent with, and which stand in a suitable inductive or deductive relation to, our hypothesis; and we reject as false propositions that are inconsistent with our hypothesis. The infinitely many propositions that do not fit into either of these two categories and about which we should rightly reserve judgment are not posited either as true or as false.

At 101d, Socrates says that when our hypothesis is challenged, we should check to see whether each of its results συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with one another. Again, there are different ways in which we might interpret this advice. The first thing that we must determine is the nature of the objects that we are checking: What does Socrates mean by the phrase "the results

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[11] We have independent reason to believe that a proposition P διαφωνεῖ with Q if and only if P is inconsistent with Q. At *Gorgias* 482b-c Socrates infers from the fact that certain propositions διαφωνοῦσι that they are inconsistent. When Plato uses the word "διαφωνεῖν" on other occasions in the dialogues, propositions, people, and ideas διαφωνοῦσι because they conflict (*Statesman* 292b3-4 and *Laws* 689a3-b2, 691a, 860a). A proposition's failure to stand in an inductive or deductive relation to another proposition is never cited as an explanation for the fact that it διαφωνεῖ with it.

[12] It might seem a bit awkward to suppose that "συμφωνεῖν" and "μὴ [συμφωνεῖν]" are contraries rather than contradictories. However, in English negating a verb does not always result in negating the entire sentence. In ordinary language, "I do not agree" means the same as "I disagree" rather than the same as "It is not the case that I agree". And in Greek, the negation of "φημί" ("I say", "I affirm") – "οὐ φημί" – does not mean "It is not the case that I affirm", but rather "I deny" (cf. "οὐ δεῖ" and "οὐ βούλομαι").

of (τὰ ὁρμηθέντα) that [hypothesis]" (*Ph.* 101d4)? The word that Plato uses here is not the word that he generally uses when he means "logical consequences" – "συμβαίνοντα".[13] Nevertheless, as Robinson suggests, "probably every reader feels that the results Plato has in mind are only the propositions the hypothesis entails".[14] According to this suggestion, if something is a ὁρμηθέν of a hypothesis, then it is a logical consequence of this hypothesis. But is it also true that if something is a logical consequence of a hypothesis, then it is a ὁρμηθέν of that hypothesis? If the answer is yes, and if Socrates is asking us to consider *all* of the ὁρμηθέντα of our hypothesis, then Socrates is advising us to perform a task that is impossible to complete. For all hypotheses have an infinite number of logical consequences. So while it seems likely that all of the ὁρμηθέντα of our hypothesis that Socrates is advising us to check are logical consequences of our hypothesis, it is unlikely that the ὁρμηθέντα that he has in mind are *all* of its logical consequences. It's not at all clear how we should restrict the propositions that Socrates is asking us to consider, so that he would be asking us to consider a manageable number of logical consequences of our hypothesis. Perhaps Plato did not assume a clearly defined decision procedure for restricting them to a manageable number; rather he took it for granted that his audience would have an intuitive, if rough, idea of the difference between the logical consequences of our hypothesis that were worth considering and those that were not.[15] In any case, it would seem that when Socrates speaks of the "results of the hypothesis" he means those logical consequences of the hypothesis that are in some unspecified sense worth considering.

It is still not entirely clear what Socrates is advising us to do. For ease of exposition, let's assume that our hypothesis H has only four results – P, Q, R, and S. Socrates may be suggesting that we determine whether each of the

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[13] See *Gorgias* 479c5, 495b5, 496e5, 508b3; *Republic* 437a9; *Parmenides* 136a8, b3, 142b3; *Sophist* 251e5; *Philebus* 22a7.

[14] Robinson, p. 129.

[15] A similar difficulty arises for natural scientists. Each scientific theory (in combination with certain background assumptions) has an infinite number of empirical implications. While it is good science to test a theory by determining whether its empirical implications hold, it is not necessary to check each empirical implication. And although scientists do not have a clearly defined decision procedure for determining which empirical implications are worth checking and which are not, practical considerations (such as, amenability to testing) and methodological considerations (such as, the degree of support a particular positive answer would give to one's theory or the degree to which a negative answer would help one to determine where exactly one's theory goes wrong) allow them to decide non-arbitrarily which empirical implications are worth checking.

result of our hypothesis συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with each of the other results taken individually. According to this suggestion, if we were checking P, we would determine whether it συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with Q, with R, and with S. However, much of the outcome of such a check would be superfluous. Socrates is recommending this procedure as a test of the plausibility of one's hypothesis. But it is not necessary that any of the results of a hypothesis stand in a suitable inferential relation to *each* of the other results of a hypothesis in order for that hypothesis to count as plausible. Nor is it necessary that any of the results of a hypothesis be inconsistent with *each* of the other results of the hypothesis in order for that hypothesis to count as implausible. So perhaps when Socrates is telling us to determine whether each result of our hypothesis συμφωνεῖ with the other results, he is not telling us to determine whether each of the results συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with each of the other results taken individually, but rather to determine whether each of the results συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with the *conjunction* of the other results of the hypothesis. In the case of our hypothesis H, perhaps P συμφωνεῖ with the other results of the hypothesis just in case it is consistent with, and stands in a suitable inferential relation to, $(Q \& R \& S)$. Correspondingly, perhaps P διαφωνεῖ with the other results of the hypothesis just in case P is inconsistent with $(Q \& R \& S)$.

On this account of the conditions under which a result of a hypothesis συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with the other results, Socrates' procedure reveals whether a hypothesis is contradictory or non-contradictory. For all and only contradictory hypotheses will have a result that διαφωνεῖ with the conjunction of the other results of this same hypothesis: only a contradictory hypothesis has inconsistent results. On the other hand, if a result of every hypothesis is the hypothesis itself, then all and only non-contradictory hypotheses have results such that every result other than the hypothesis συμφωνεῖ with the conjunction of the other results of this hypothesis. For each result of such a non-contradictory hypothesis (other than the hypothesis itself) is consistent with, and will stand in an appropriate inferential relation to, the conjunction of the other results of the hypothesis.[16]

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[16] It's easy to see that the results of a non-contradictory hypothesis are consistent. It is less obvious, but nonetheless true, that all of the results (other than the hypothesis itself) stand in suitable inferential relations to one another. Such results stand in a suitable inferential relation to the conjunction of the other results of this hypothesis, because one conjunct of this conjunction is the hypothesis itself. Does it count against my thesis that one result of a non-contradictory hypothesis – the hypothesis itself – will not necessarily συμφωνεῖ with the other results of the hypothesis? Not at all. Socrates does not suggest that this step of the hypothetical method can give one any reason to believe that one's

If Socrates has in mind at 101d only challenges of the form, "Your hypothesis is contradictory," then this reading seems to be exactly right. The results of the procedure that Socrates advocates will indicate whether the challenge is correct. However, since Socrates does not explicitly restrict the nature of the challenge in this way, one might wonder whether any reading of 101d is available such that the results of following Socrates' advice would give one ammunition to respond to a wider variety of challenges. Perhaps we can find a clue to such a reading of Socrates' advice at 101d from our earlier efforts to make sense of his remarks at 100a. I noted above that when we are determining whether we should accept or reject a particular proposition, its consistency with all of the propositions we accept is relevant. Further, as Bostock notes, "what we normally have in mind when we speak of the consequences of a hypothesis are not strict consequences of that hypothesis by itself, but consequences which follow from it together with other things that we believe anyway".[17] Although Socrates literally says at 101d that we should determine whether each of the results of the *hypothesis* συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with the others, perhaps he means to suggest that we should check the results of the *conjunction* of our hypothesis and the other propositions to which we are committed (i.e., our background assumptions).

On this reading, we would discover a great deal if we were to follow Socrates' advice at 101d. If someone challenges our hypothesis, we should check each of the results of the conjunction of our hypothesis and the other propositions to which we are committed, to see whether each is consistent with or inconsistent with the conjunction of the other results. If the result under examination is consistent with the conjunction of the other results, then it may turn out that it also συμφωνεῖ with this conjunction; for if a result of the conjunction of our hypothesis and the other beliefs to which we are committed is this very conjunction, all results of the conjunction of our hypothesis and the other beliefs to which we are committed (other than this conjunction itself) will stand in a suitable inferential relation to the conjunction of the other results. If the result under examination is inconsistent with the conjunction of the other results, then it διαφωνεῖ with this conjunction. Socrates does not tell us what we should do if any of the results of this

hypothesis is true (though it may give one reason to believe that one's hypothesis is false). The attempt to discover positive reasons to believe that one's hypothesis is true occurs only at the next step of the hypothetical method: "and when you had to give an account of the hypothesis itself, you would give it in the same way, once again hypothesizing another hypothesis, whichever should seem best of those above . . ." (*Ph.* 101d5-7).

[17] Bostock, p. 170. See also Gallop, p. 189.

conjunction either συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with the conjunction of the other results. But presumably, if each of them συμφωνεῖ with the conjunction of the other results, then the person who has challenged our hypothesis has failed to show us that we have any reason to reject our hypothesis. If, on the other hand, any one of them διαφωνεῖ with this conjunction, then our response may depend on the source of the "dissonance". If the hypothesis, by itself, has inconsistent results, then we have reason to reject the hypothesis. If the conjunction of the hypothesis and the other propositions that we accept has a result that is inconsistent with the conjunction of the other results, then it seems that we have some choice when we are deciding how we should revise our belief-set. Our decision will most likely depend on the strength and number of the inferential relations that bind each of the conflicting propositions to the results of the other propositions that we accept.

Unfortunately, even this last suggestion cannot be entirely accurate. For unless we have only a few trivial beliefs, on this reading it would still be practically impossible to follow Socrates' advice at 101d.[18] To solve this puzzle we must look at another aspect of Socrates' advice at 101d that may initially strike us as odd: Socrates' description of our initial response to the challenger.

The second stage of the hypothetical method is undertaken at the impetus of a challenger. Yet Socrates says that when we are challenged, we should bid the challenger farewell ("χαιρεῖν ἐφῆς") and busily pursue the task of checking the results of our hypothesis (Ph. 101d3-5). This may seem to suggest that we should dismiss any challenger as an annoying distraction from our application of the hypothetical method. But this cannot be right, because on this reading the challenger seems to serve no significant role qua challenger in the transition to the second step of the method. Further, Socrates says that when we have completed our task of checking the results of our hypothesis, we must "answer" the challenger (Ph. 101d4). What do we say? If we have put his challenge completely out of our mind when we were engaged in the task of checking the results of our

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[18] One may wonder whether on this reading the procedure that Socrates advocates is even intelligible. For if it requires us to consider a conjunction of all of the propositions to which we are committed, and if we are committed to infinitely many propositions, then the procedure seems to require that we formulate for the purposes of consideration an infinitely long conjunction. Some have doubted whether we can make sense of the notion of an infinitely long conjunction: "conjunctions are expressions, and expressions, literally speaking, are only finite strings of marks" (W.V. Quine, *Methods of Logic*, 4th edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 203).

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hypothesis, then it is doubtful that we will say anything directly relevant to his challenge.

When Socrates suggests that we bid the challenger farewell until we have checked the results of our hypothesis, he does not mean that we should completely ignore the particular objection that the challenger has made. Presumably the procedure that Socrates imagines is difficult, and so he assumes that we will have to tell the challenger that we must think about his point and get back to him. If the challenger has claimed that our hypothesis is contradictory, then we can check whether each of the results of our hypothesis συμφωνεῖ or διαφωνεῖ with the others. But since this sort of challenge is not the only sort that would threaten our hypothesis, other propositions to which we are committed may be an object of concern. Yet we should not attempt to check the results of the conjunction of our hypothesis and *every* other proposition to which we are committed: even if it were possible to perform this task, most of the results that we would obtain would be irrelevant to any given challenge.

Perhaps the challenger restricts the range of the propositions that we must consider on any given occasion: he picks out and renders salient certain background assumptions that may give our hypothesis trouble. All propositions to which we are committed are fair game, but any given challenge will focus on a limited number of propositions. According to this suggestion, if the challenger claims, for example, that our hypothesis in conjunction with some other proposition to which we are committed has a result that is in conflict with some further proposition to which we are committed, then we must examine the results of the conjunction of our hypothesis and the background assumptions that the challenger picks out. If it turns out that none of the results of this conjunction διαφωνεῖ with the conjunction of the other results,[19] then the challenger has given us no reason to reject our hypothesis. If it turns out that any of the results of the conjunction διαφωνεῖ with the conjunction of the other results, then we have various options for rendering our belief-set coherent.

A final question is this: Is Socrates suggesting that we must wait until someone comes along and challenges our hypothesis before we examine its results? I think not. As Socrates shows in the *Gorgias,* we can be our own challenger.[20] If we don't have the benefit of the company of others who are interested in whether our hypothesis is true or false, we must make do with

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[19] As I indicated above, if none of the results of this conjunction διαφωνεῖ with the other results, then each of the results of the conjunction (other than the conjunction itself) συμφωνεῖ with the other results.

[20] *Gorgias* 506b-510a. See also Socrates' remarks at *Charmides* 166c6-e2.

ourselves, considering all of the possible objections to our hypothesis that we can imagine.

On this reading, the aspect of Socrates' methodological advice in the *Phaedo* that we have examined makes very good sense.[21]

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