



The Death of Socrates, David, 1787.

Selections from the
Phaedo
by Plato

[The *Phaedo* tells the story of Socrates' final moments spent, as one would expect, in philosophical dialogue with his friends. The main subject of the dialogue is the immortality of the soul. The *Phaedo* is one of Plato's middle period dialogues and, as such, reveals much of Plato's own philosophy. In the arguments Socrates puts forth for the immortality of the soul we find a clear exposition of both Plato's metaphysics as well as his epistemology. In the first section we find Socrates explaining to his friends why a true philosopher does not fear death. Philosophy is here described as a preparation for death.]

ECHECRATES: Were you there with Socrates yourself, Phaedo, when he was executed, or did you hear about it from somebody else? 57

PHAEDO: No, I was there myself, Echecrates.

ECHECRATES: Then what did the master say before he died, and how did he meet his end? I should very much like to know. None of the people in Phlius go to Athens much in these days, and it is a long time since we had any visitor from there who could give us any definite information, except that he was executed by drinking hemlock. Nobody could tell us anything more than that. b

PHAEDO: Then haven't you even heard how his trial went? 58

ECHECRATES: Yes, someone told us about that, and we were surprised because there was obviously a long interval between it and the execution. How was that, Phaedo?

PHAEDO: A fortunate coincidence, Echecrates. It so happened that on the day before the trial they had just finished garlanding the stern of the ship which Athens sends to Delos.

ECHECRATES : What ship is that?

PHAEDO: The Athenians say that it is the one in which Theseus sailed away to Crete with the seven youths and seven maidens, and saved their lives and his own as well. The story says that the Athenians made a vow to Apollo that if these young people's lives were saved they would send a solemn mission to Delos every year, and ever since then they have kept their vow to the god, right down to the present day. They have a law that as soon as this mission begins the city must be kept pure, and no public executions may take place until the ship has reached Delos and returned again, which sometimes takes a long time, if the winds happen to hold it back. The mission is considered to begin as soon as the priest of Apollo has garlanded the stern of the ship, and this happened, as I say, on the day before the trial. That is why Socrates spent such a long time in prison between his trial and execution.

ECHECRATES: But what about the actual circumstances of his death, Phaedo? What was said and done, and which of the master's companions were with him? Or did the authorities refuse them admission, so that he passed away without a friend at his side?

PHAEDO: Oh no, some of them were there—quite a number, in fact.

ECHECRATES: I wish you would be kind enough to give us, a really detailed account—unless you are pressed for time.

PHAEDO: No, not at all. I will try to describe it for you. Nothing gives me more pleasure than recalling the memory of Socrates, either by talking myself or by listening to someone else.

ECHECRATES: Well, Phaedo, you will find that your audience feels just the same about it. Now try to describe every detail as carefully as you can.

PHAEDO: In the first place, my own feelings at the time were quite extraordinary. It never occurred to me to feel sorry for him, as you might have expected me to feel at the deathbed of a very dear friend. The master seemed quite happy, Echecrates, both in his manner and in what he said; he met his death so fearlessly and nobly. I could not help feeling that even on his way to the other world he would be under the providence of God, and that when he arrived there all would be well with him, if it ever has been so with anybody. So I felt no sorrow at all, as you might have expected on such a solemn occasion, and at the same time I felt no pleasure at being occupied in our usual philosophical discussions—that was the form that our conversation took. I felt an absolutely incomprehensible emotion, a sort of curious blend of pleasure and pain combined, as my mind took it in that in a little while my friend was going to die. All of us who were there were affected in much the same way, between laughing and crying; one of us in particular, Apollodorus—you know what he is like, don't you?

ECHECRATES: Of course I do.

PHAEDO: Well, he quite lost control of himself, and I and the others were very much upset.

ECHECRATES: Who were actually there, Phaedo?

PHAEDO: Why, of the local people there were this man Apollodorus, and Critobulus and his father, and then there were Hermogenes and Epigenes and Aeschines and Antisthenes. Oh yes, and Ctesippus of Paeonia, and Menexenus, and some other local people. I believe that Plato was ill.

ECHECRATES: Were there any visitors from outside?

PHAEDO: Yes, Simmias of Thebes, with Cebes and Phaedondas, and Euclides and Terpsion from Megara.

ECHECRATES: Why, weren't Aristippus and Cleombrotus there?

PHAEDO: No, they were in Aegina, apparently.

ECHECRATES: Was there anybody else?

PHAEDO: I think that's about all. d

ECHECRATES: Well, what form did the discussion take?

PHAEDO: I will try to tell you all about it from the very beginning; We had all made it our regular practice, even in the period before, to visit Socrates every day. We used to meet at daybreak by the courthouse where the trial was held, because it was close to the prison. We always spent some time in conversation while we waited for the door to open, which was never very early; and when it did open, we used to go in to see Socrates, and generally spent the day with him. On this particular day we met earlier than usual, because when we left the prison on the evening before, we heard that the boat had just arrived back from Delos; so we urged one another to meet at the same place as early as possible. When we arrived, the porter, instead of letting us in as usual, told us to wait and not to come in until he gave us the word. The commissioners are taking off Socrates' chains, he said, and warning him that he is to die today. 60

After a short interval he came back and told us to go in. When we went inside we found Socrates just released from his chains, and Xanthippe—you know her!— sitting by him with the little boy on her knee. As soon as Xanthippe saw us she broke out into the sort of remark you would expect from a woman, Oh, Socrates, this is the last time that you and your friends will be able to talk together!

Socrates looked at Crito. Crito, he said, someone had better take her home. b

Some of Crito's servants led her away crying hysterically. Socrates sat up on the bed and drew up his leg and massaged it, saying as he did so, What a queer thing it is, my friends, this sensation which is popularly called pleasure! It is remarkable how closely it is connected with its conventional opposite, pain. They will never come to a man both at once, but if you pursue one of them and catch it, you are nearly always compelled to have the other as well; they are like two bodies attached to the same head. I am sure that if Aesop had thought of it he would have made up a fable about them, something like this— God wanted to stop their continual quarreling; and when he found that it was impossible, he fastened their heads together; so wherever one of them appears, the other is sure to follow after. That is exactly what seems to be happening to me. I had a pain in my leg from the fetter, and now I feel the pleasure coming that follows it. c

Here Cebes broke in and said, Oh yes, Socrates, I am glad you reminded me. Evenus asked me a day or two ago, as others have done before, about the lyrics which you have been composing lately by adapting Aesop's fables and 'The Prelude' to Apollo. He wanted to know what induced you to write them now after you had gone to prison, when you had never done anything of the kind before. If you would like me to be able to answer Evenus when he asks me again— as I am sure he will— tell me what I am to say. d

Tell him the truth, said Socrates, that I did not compose them to rival either him or his poetry—which I knew would not be easy. I did it in the attempt to discover the meaning of certain dreams, and to clear my conscience, in case this was the art which I had been told to practice. It is like this, you see. In the course of my life I have often had the same dream, appearing in different forms at different times, but always saying the same thing, 'Socrates, practice and cultivate the arts.' In the past I used to think that it was impelling and exhorting me to do what I was actually doing; I mean that the dream, like a spectator encouraging a runner in a race, was, urging me on to do what I was doing already, that is, practicing the arts, because philosophy is the greatest of the arts, and I was practicing it. But ever since my trial, while the festival of the god has been delaying my execution, I have felt that perhaps it might be this popular form of art that the dream intended me to practice, in which case I ought to practice it and not disobey. I thought it would be safer not to take my departure before I had 61

cleared my conscience by writing poetry and so obeying the dream. I began with some verses in honor of the god whose festival it was. When I had finished my hymn, I reflected that a poet, if he is to be worthy of the name, ought to work on imaginative themes, not descriptive ones, and I was not good at inventing stories. So I availed myself of some of Aesop's fables which were ready to hand and familiar to me, and I versified the first of them that suggested themselves. You can tell Evenus this, Cebes, and bid him farewell from me, and tell him, if he is wise, to follow me as quickly as he can. I shall be going today, it seems; those are my country's orders. c

What a piece of advice for Evenus, Socrates! said Simmias. I have had a good deal to do with him before now, and from what I know of him he will not be at all ready to obey you.

Why? he asked. Isn't Evenus a philosopher?

So I believe, said Simmias.

Well then, he will be quite willing, just like anyone else who is properly grounded in philosophy. However, he will hardly do himself violence, because they say that it is not legitimate. d

As he spoke he lowered his feet to the ground, and sat like this for the rest of the discussion.

Cebes now asked him, Socrates, what do you mean by saying that it is not legitimate to do oneself violence, although a philosopher will be willing to follow a friend who dies?

Why, Cebes, have you and Simmias never heard about these things while you have been with Philolaus?

Nothing definite, Socrates. e

Well, even my information is only based on hearsay, but I don't mind at all telling you what I have heard. I suppose that for one who is soon to leave this world there is no more suitable occupation than inquiring into our views about the future life, and trying to imagine what it is like. What else can one do in the time before sunset?

Tell me then, Socrates, what are the grounds for saying that suicide is not legitimate? I have heard it described as wrong before now, as you suggested, both by Philolaus, when he was staying with us, and by others as well, but I have never yet heard any definite explanation for it. 62

Well, you must not lose heart, he said. Perhaps you will hear one someday. However, no doubt you will feel it strange that this should be the one question that has an unqualified answer—I mean, if it never happens in the case of life and death, as it does in all other connections, that sometimes and for some people death is better than life. And it probably seems strange to you that it should not be right for those to whom death would be an advantage to benefit themselves, but that they should have to await the services of someone else.

Cebes laughed gently and, dropping into his own dialect, said, Aye, that it does.

Yes, went on Socrates, put in that way it certainly might seem unreasonable, though perhaps it has some justification. The allegory which the mystics tell us—that we men are put in a sort of guard post, from which one must not release oneself or run away—seems to me to be a high doctrine with difficult implications. All the same, Cebes, I believe that this much is true; that the gods are our keepers, and we men are one of their possessions. Don't you think so? b

Yes, I do, said Cebes.

Then take your own case. If one of your possessions were to destroy itself without intimation from you that you wanted it to die, wouldn't you be angry with it and punish it, if you had any means of doing so? c

Certainly.

So if you look at it in this way I suppose it is not unreasonable to say that we must not put an end to ourselves until God sends some compulsion like the one which we are facing now.

That seems likely, I admit, said Cebes. But what you were saying just now, that philosophers would be readily willing to die—that seems illogical, Socrates, assuming that we were right in saying a moment ago that God is our keeper and we are his possessions. If this service is directed by the gods, who are the very best of masters, it is inexplicable that the very wisest of men should not be grieved at quitting it, because he surely cannot expect to provide for himself any better when he is free. On the other hand a stupid person might get the idea that it would be to his advantage to escape from his master. He might not reason it out that one should not escape from a good master, but remain with him as long as possible, and so he might run away unreflectingly. A sensible man would wish to remain always with his superior. If you look at it in this way, Socrates, the probable thing is just the opposite of what we said just now. It is natural for the wise to be grieved when they die, and for fools to be happy. d
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When Socrates had listened to this he seemed to me to be amused at Cebes' persistence, and looking round at us he said, You know, Cebes is always investigating arguments, and he is not at all willing to accept every statement at its face value.

Simmias said, Well, but, Socrates, I think that this time there is something in what he says. Why should a really wise man want to desert masters who are better than himself, and to get rid of them so lightly? I think Cebes is aiming his criticism at you, because you are making so light of leaving us, and the gods too, who as you admit are good masters. b

What you and Cebes say is perfectly fair, said Socrates. You mean, I suppose, that I must make a formal defense against this charge.

Exactly, said Simmias.

Very well then, let me try to make a more convincing defense to you than I made at my trial. If I did not expect to enter the company, first, of other wise and good gods, and secondly of men now dead who are better than those who are in this world now, it is true that I should be wrong in not grieving at death. As it is, you can be assured that I expect to find myself among good men. I would not insist particularly on this point, but on the other I assure you that I shall insist most strongly—that I shall find there divine masters who are supremely good. That is why I am not so much distressed as I might be, and why I have a firm hope that there is something in store for those who have died, and, as we have been told for many years, something much better for the good than for the wicked. c

Well, what is your idea, Socrates? asked Simmias. Do you mean to keep this knowledge to yourself now that you are leaving us, or will you communicate it to us too? I think that we ought to have a share in this comfort; besides, it will serve as your defense, if we are satisfied with what you say. d

Very well, I will try, he replied. But before I begin, Crito here seems to have been wanting to say something for some time. Let us find out what it is.

Only this, Socrates, said Crito, that the man who is to give you the poison has been asking me for a long time to tell you to talk as little as possible. He says that talking makes you heated, and that you ought not to do anything to affect the action of the poison. Otherwise it is sometimes necessary to take a second dose, or even a third. e

That is his affair, said Socrates. Let him make his own preparations for administering it twice or three times if necessary.

I was pretty sure you would say that, said Crito, but he's been bothering me for a long time.

Never mind him, said Socrates. Now for you, my jury. I want to explain to you how it seems to me natural that a man who has really devoted his life to philosophy should be cheerful in the face of death, and confident of finding the greatest blessing in the next world when his life is finished. I will try to make clear to you, Simmias and Cebes, how this can be so. 64

Ordinary people seem not to realize that those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death. If this is true, and they have actually been looking forward to death all their lives, it would of course be absurd to be troubled when the thing comes for which they have so long been preparing and looking forward. b

Simmias laughed and said, Upon my word, Socrates, you have made me laugh, though I was not at all in the mood for it. I am sure that if they heard what you said, most people would think—and our fellow countrymen would heartily agree—that it was a very good hit at the philosophers to say that they are half dead already, and that they, the normal people, are quite aware that death would serve the philosophers right.

And they would be quite correct, Simmias—except in thinking that they are ‘quite aware.’ They are not at all aware in what sense true philosophers are half dead, or in what sense they deserve death, or what sort of death they deserve. But let us dismiss them and talk among ourselves. Do we believe that there is such a thing as death? c

Most certainly, said Simmias, taking up the role of answering.

Is it simply the release of the soul from the body? Is death nothing more or less than this, the separate condition of the body by itself when it is released from the soul, and the separate condition by itself of the soul when released from the body? Is death anything else than this?

No, just that. d

Well then, my boy, see whether you agree with me. I fancy that this will help us to find out the answer to our problem. Do you think that it is right for a philosopher to concern himself with the so-called pleasures connected with food and drink?

Certainly not, Socrates, said Simmias.

What about sexual pleasures?

No, not at all.

And what about the other attentions that we pay to our bodies? Do you think that a philosopher attaches any importance to them? I mean things like providing himself with smart clothes and shoes and other bodily ornaments; do you think that he values them or despises them—in so far as there is no real necessity for him to go in for that sort of thing? e

I think the true philosopher despises them, he said.

Then it is your opinion in general that a man of this kind is not concerned with the body, but keeps his attention directed as much as he can away from it and toward the soul?

Yes, it is. 65

So it is clear first of all in the case of physical pleasures that the philosopher frees his soul from association with the body, so far as is possible, to a greater extent than other men?

It seems so.

And most people think, do they not, Simmias, that a man who finds no pleasure and takes no part in these things does not deserve to live, and that anyone who thinks nothing of physical pleasures has one foot in the grave?

That is perfectly true.

Now take the acquisition of knowledge. Is the body a hindrance or not, if one takes it into partnership to share an investigation? What I mean is this. Is there any certainty in human sight and hearing, or is it true, as the poets are always dinning into our ears, that we neither hear nor see anything accurately? Yet if these senses are not clear and accurate, the rest can hardly be so, because they are all inferior to the first two. Don't you agree? b

Certainly.

Then when is it that the soul attains to truth? When it tries to investigate anything with the help of the body, it is obviously led astray. c

Quite so.

Is it not in the course of reflection, if at all, that the soul gets a clear view of facts?

Yes.

Surely the soul can best reflect when it is free of all distractions such as hearing or sight or pain or pleasure of any kind—that is, when it ignores the body and becomes as far as possible independent, avoiding all physical contacts and associations as much as it can, in its search for reality.

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That is so.

Then here too—in despising the body and avoiding it, and endeavoring to become independent—the philosopher’s soul is ahead of all the rest.

It seems so.

Here are some more questions, Simmias. Do we recognize such a thing as absolute uprightness?

Indeed we do.

And absolute beauty and goodness too?

Of course.

Have you ever seen any of these things with your eyes?

Certainly not, said he.

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Well, have you ever apprehended them with any other bodily sense? By ‘them’ I mean not only absolute tallness or health or strength, but the real nature of any given thing—what it actually is. Is it through the body that we get the truest perception of them? Isn’t it true that in any inquiry you are likely to attain more nearly to knowledge of your object in proportion to the care and accuracy with which you have prepared yourself to understand that object in itself?

Certainly.

Don’t you think that the person who is likely to succeed in this attempt most perfectly is the one who approaches each object, as far as possible, with the unaided intellect, without taking account of any sense of sight in his thinking, or dragging any other sense into his reckoning—the man who pursues the truth by applying his pure and unadulterated thought to the pure and unadulterated object, cutting himself off as much as possible from his eyes and ears and virtually all the rest of his body, as an impediment which by its presence prevents the soul from attaining to truth and clear thinking? Is not this the person, Simmias, who will reach the goal of reality, if anybody can?

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What you say is absolutely true, Socrates, said Simmias.

All these considerations, said Socrates, must surely prompt serious philosophers to review the position in some such way as this. It looks as though this were a bypath leading to the right track. So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be truth.

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In the first place, the body provides us with innumerable distractions in the pursuit of our necessary sustenance, and any diseases which attack us hinder our quest for reality. Besides, the body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything. Wars and revolutions and battles are due simply and solely to the body and its desires.

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All wars are undertaken for the acquisition of wealth, and the reason why we have to acquire wealth is the body, because we are slaves in its service. That is why, on all these accounts, we have so little time for philosophy. Worst of all, if we do obtain any leisure from the body’s claims and turn to some line of inquiry, the body intrudes once more into our investigations, interrupting, disturbing, distracting, and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth. We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. It seems,

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to judge from the argument, that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead, and not in our lifetime. If no pure knowledge is possible in the company of the body, then either it is totally impossible to acquire knowledge, or it is only possible after death, because it is only then that the soul will be separate and independent of the body. It seems that so long as we are alive, we shall continue closest to knowledge if we avoid as much as we can all contact and association with the body, except when they are absolutely necessary, and instead of allowing ourselves to become infected with its nature, purify ourselves from it until God himself gives us deliverance. In this way, by keeping ourselves uncontaminated by the follies of the body, we shall probably reach the company of others like ourselves and gain direct knowledge of all that is pure and uncontaminated—that is, presumably, of truth. For one who is not pure himself to attain to the realm of purity would no doubt be a breach of universal justice.

Something to this effect, Simmias, is what I imagine all real lovers of learning must think themselves and say to one another. Don't you agree with me?

Most emphatically, Socrates.

Very well, then, said Socrates, if this is true, there is good reason for anyone who reaches the end of this journey which lies before me to hope that there, if anywhere, he will attain the object to which all our efforts have been directed during my past life. So this journey which is now ordained for me carries a happy prospect for any other man also who believes that his mind has been prepared by purification.

It does indeed, said Simmias.

And purification, as we saw some time ago in our discussion, consists in separating the soul as much as possible from the body, and accustoming it to withdraw from all contact with the body and concentrate itself by itself, and to have its dwelling, so far as it can, both now and in the future, alone by itself, freed from the shackles of the body. Does not that follow?

Yes, it does, said Simmias.

Is not what we call death a freeing and separation of soul from body?

Certainly, he said.

And the desire to free the soul is found chiefly, or rather only, in the true philosopher. In fact the philosopher's occupation consists precisely in the freeing and separation of soul from body. Isn't that so?

Apparently.

Well then, as I said at the beginning, if a man has trained himself throughout his life to live in a state as close as possible to death, would it not be ridiculous for him to be distressed when death comes to him?

It would, of course.

Then it is a fact, Simmias, that true philosophers make dying their profession, and that to them of all men death is least alarming. Look at it in this way. If they are thoroughly dissatisfied with the body, and long to have their souls independent of it, when this happens would it not be entirely unreasonable to be frightened and distressed? Would they not naturally be glad to set out for the place where there is a prospect of attaining the object of their lifelong desire—which is wisdom—and of escaping from an unwelcome association? Surely there are many who have chosen of their own free will to follow dead lovers and wives and sons to the next world, in the hope of seeing and meeting there the persons whom they loved. If this is so, will a true lover of wisdom who has firmly grasped this same conviction—that he will never attain to wisdom worthy of the name elsewhere than in the next world—will he be grieved at dying? Will he not be glad to make that journey? We must suppose so, my dear boy, that is, if he is a real philosopher, because then he will be of the firm belief that he will never find

wisdom in all its purity in any other place. If this is so, would it not be quite unreasonable, as I said just now, for such a man to be afraid of death? c

It would, indeed. . . .

So if you see anyone distressed at the prospect of dying, said Socrates, it will be proof enough that he is a lover not of wisdom but of the body. As a matter of fact, I suppose he is also a lover of wealth and reputation—one or the other, or both. . . .

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[Socrates' argument that a true philosopher does not fear death, and that philosophy is actually a preparation for death, for separating the soul from the body, obviously depends upon the immortality of the soul. At this point Socrates begins laying out a number of arguments for the immortality of the soul. The first two arguments aim to establish that the soul existed prior to this life. The second of these arguments, which we pick up here, involves one of Plato's famous epistemological theories—that all learning is really recollection, that when we gain knowledge, we are really only recollecting what we already knew before birth. After this argument, Socrates gives another argument which aims to establish that the soul lives on after death. It is in this argument that we find an exposition of Plato's metaphysics in which the invisible and imperishable realm of the Forms is distinguished from the visible and perishable realm of sensible things.] 73

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And if you don't find that convincing, Simmias, said Socrates, see whether this appeals to you. I suppose that you find it hard to understand how what we call learning can be recollection?

Not at all, said Simmias. All that I want is to be helped to do what we are talking about—to recollect. I can practically remember enough to satisfy me already, from Cebes' approach to the subject, but I should be nonetheless glad to hear how you meant to approach it. c

I look at it in this way, said Socrates. We are agreed, I suppose, that if a person is to be reminded of anything, he must first know it at some time or other?

Quite so.

Are we also agreed in calling it recollection when knowledge comes in a particular way? I will explain what I mean. Suppose that a person on seeing or hearing or otherwise noticing one thing not only becomes conscious of that thing but also thinks of a something else which is an object of a different sort of knowledge. Are we not justified in saying that he was reminded of the object which he thought of? d

What do you mean?

Let me give you an example. A human being and a musical instrument, I suppose you will agree, are different objects of knowledge.

Yes, certainly.

Well, you know what happens to lovers when they see a musical instrument or a piece of clothing or any other private property of the person whom they love. When they recognize the thing, their minds conjure up a picture of its owner. That is recollection. In the same way the sight of Simmias often reminds one of Cebes, and of course there are thousands of other examples.

Yes, of course there are, said Simmias. e

So by recollection we mean the sort of experience which I have just described, especially when it happens with reference to things which we had not seen for such a long time that we had forgotten them.

Quite so.

Well, then, is it possible for a person who sees a picture of a horse or a musical instrument to be reminded of a person, or for someone who sees a picture of Simmias to be reminded of Cebes?

Perfectly.

And is it possible for someone who sees a portrait of Simmias to be reminded of Simmias himself? 74

Yes, it is.

Does it not follow from all this that recollection may be caused either by similar or by dissimilar objects?

Yes, it does.

When you are reminded by similarity, surely you must also be conscious whether the similarity is perfect or only partial.

Yes, you must.

Here is a further step, said Socrates. We admit, I suppose, that there is such a thing as equality—not the equality of stick to stick and stone to stone, and so on, but something beyond all that and distinct from it—absolute equality. Are we to admit this or not? *b*

Yes indeed, said Simmias, most emphatically.

And do we know what it is?

Certainly.

Where did we get our knowledge? Was it not from the particular examples that we mentioned just now? Was it not from seeing equal sticks or stones or other equal objects that we got the notion of equality, although it is something quite distinct from them? Look at it in this way. Is it not true that equal stones and sticks sometimes, without changing in themselves, appear equal to one person and unequal to another? *c*

Certainly.

Well, now, have you ever thought that things which were absolutely equal were unequal, or that equality was inequality?

No, never, Socrates.

Then these equal things are not the same as absolute equality.

Not in the least, as I see it, Socrates.

And yet it is these equal things that have suggested and conveyed to you your knowledge of absolute equality, although they are distinct from it?

Perfectly true.

Whether it is similar to them or dissimilar?

Certainly. *d*

It makes no difference, said Socrates. So long as the sight of one thing suggests another to you, it must be a cause of recollection, whether the two things are alike or not.

Quite so.

Well, now, he said, what do we find in the case of the equal sticks and other things of which we were speaking just now? Do they seem to us to be equal in the sense of absolute equality, or do they fall short of it in so far as they only approximate to equality? Or don't they fall short at all?

They do, said Simmias, a long way.

Suppose that when you see something you say to yourself, This thing which I can see has a tendency to be like something else, but it falls short and cannot be really like it, only a poor imitation. Don't you agree with me that anyone who receives that impression must in fact have previous knowledge of that thing which he says that the other resembles, but inadequately? *e*

Certainly he must.

Very well, then, is that our position with regard to equal things and absolute equality?

Exactly. *75*

Then we must have had some previous knowledge of equality before the time when we first saw equal things and realized that they were striving after equality, but fell short of it.

That is so.

And at the same time we are agreed also upon this point, that we have not and could not have acquired this notion of equality except by sight or touch or one of the other senses. I am treating them as being all the same.

They are the same, Socrates, for the purpose of our argument.

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So it must be through the senses that we obtained the notion that all sensible equals are striving after absolute equality but falling short of it. Is that correct?

Yes, it is.

So before we began to see and hear and use our other senses we must somewhere have acquired the knowledge that there is such a thing as absolute equality. Otherwise we could never have realized, by using it as a standard for comparison, that all equal objects of sense are desirous of being like it, but are only imperfect copies.

That is the logical conclusion, Socrates.

Did we not begin to see and hear and possess our other senses from the moment of birth?

c

Certainly.

But we admitted that we must have obtained our knowledge of equality before we obtained them.

Yes.

So we must have obtained it before birth.

So it seems.

Then if we obtained it before our birth, and possessed it when we were born, we had knowledge, both before and at the moment of birth, not only of equality and relative magnitudes, but of all absolute standards. Our present argument applies no more to equality than it does to absolute beauty, goodness, uprightness, holiness, and, as I maintain, all those characteristics which we designate in our discussions by the term ‘absolute.’ So we must have obtained knowledge of all these characteristics before our birth.

d

That is so.

And unless we invariably forget it after obtaining it we must always be born *knowing* and continue to *know* all through our lives, because ‘to know’ means simply to retain the knowledge which one has acquired, and not to lose it. Is not what we call ‘forgetting’ simply the loss of knowledge, Simmias?

e

Most certainly, Socrates.

And if it is true that we acquired our knowledge before our birth, and lost it at the moment of birth, but afterward, by the exercise of our senses upon sensible objects, recover the knowledge which we had once before, I suppose that what we call learning will be the recovery of our own knowledge, and surely we should be right in calling this recollection.

76

Quite so.

Yes, because we saw that it is possible for the perception of an object by sight or hearing or any of the other senses to suggest to the percipient, through association, whether, there is any similarity or not, another object which he has forgotten. So, as I maintain, there are two alternatives. Either we are all born with knowledge of these standards, and retain it throughout our lives, or else, when we speak of people learning, they are simply recollecting what they knew before. In other words, learning is recollection.

Yes, that must be so, Socrates.

Which do you choose, then, Simmias? That we are born with knowledge, or that we recollect after we are born the things of which we possessed knowledge before we were born?

b

I don't know which to choose on the spur of the moment, Socrates.

Well, here is another choice for you to make. What do you think about this? Can a person who knows a subject thoroughly explain what he knows?

Most certainly he can.

Do you think that everyone can explain these questions about which we have just been talking?

I should like to think so, said Simmias, but I am very much afraid that by this time tomorrow there will be no one on this earth who can do it properly.

So you don't think, Simmias, that everyone has knowledge about them?

Far from it.

Then they just recollect what they once learned.

That must be the right answer.

When do our souls acquire this knowledge? It cannot be after the beginning of our mortal life.

No, of course not.

Then it must be before.,

Yes.

Then our souls had a previous existence, Simmias, before they took on this human shape. They were independent of our bodies, and they were possessed of intelligence.

Unless perhaps it is at the moment of birth that we acquire knowledge of these things, Socrates. There is still that time available.

No doubt, my dear fellow, but just tell me, what other time is there to lose it in? We have just agreed that we do not possess it when we are born. Do we lose it at the same moment that we acquire it? Or can you suggest any other time?

No, of course not, Socrates. I didn't realize what nonsense I was talking.

Well, how do we stand now, Simmias? If all these absolute realities, such as beauty and goodness, which we are always talking about, really exist, if it is to them, as we rediscover our own former knowledge of them, that we refer, as copies to their patterns, all the objects of our physical perception—if these realities exist, does it not follow that our souls must exist too even before our birth, whereas if they do not exist, our discussion would seem to be a waste of time? Is this the position, that it is logically just as certain that our souls exist before our birth as it is that these realities exist, and that if the one is impossible, so is the other?

It is perfectly obvious to me, Socrates, said Simmias, that the same logical necessity applies to both. It suits me very well that your argument should rely upon the point that our soul's existence before our birth stands or falls with the existence of your grade of reality. I cannot imagine anything more self-evident than the fact that absolute beauty and goodness and all the rest that you mentioned just now exist in the fullest possible sense. In my opinion the proof is quite satisfactory.

What about Cebes? said Socrates. We must convince Cebes too.

To the best of my belief he is satisfied, replied Simmias. It is true that he is the most obstinate person in the world at resisting an argument, but I should think that he needs nothing more to convince him that our souls existed before our birth. As for their existing after we are dead as well, even I don't feel that that has been proved, Socrates. Cebes' objection still holds—the common fear that a man's soul may be disintegrated at the very moment of his death, and that this may be the end of its existence. Supposing that it *is* born and constituted from some source or other, and exists before it enters a human body. After it has entered one, is there any reason why, at the moment of release, it should not come to an end and be destroyed itself?

Quite right, Simmias, said Cebes. It seems that we have got the proof of one half of what we wanted—that the soul existed before birth—but now we need also to prove that it will exist after death no less than before birth, if our proof is to be complete.

As a matter of fact, my dear Simmias and Cebes, said Socrates, it is proved already, if you will combine this last argument with the one about which we agreed before, that every living thing comes from the dead. If the soul exists before birth, and if when it proceeds toward life and is born it must be born from death or the dead state, surely it must also exist afterdeath, if it must be born again. So the point which you mention has been proved already. But in spite of this I believe that you and Simmias would like to spin out the discussion still more. You are afraid, as children are, that when the soul emerges from the body the wind may really puff it away and scatter it, especially when a person does not die on a calm day but with a gale blowing. d

Cebes laughed. Suppose that we are afraid, Socrates, he said, and try to convince us. Or rather don't suppose that it is we that are afraid. Probably even in us there is a little boy who has these childish terrors. Try to persuade him not to be afraid of death as though it were a bogey. e

What you should do, said Socrates, is to say a magic spell over him every day until you have charmed his fears away. 78

But, Socrates, said Simmias, where shall we find a magician who understands these spells now that you . . . are leaving us?

Greece is a large country, Cebes, he replied, which must have good men in it, and there are many foreign races too. You must ransack all of them in your search for this magician, without sparing money or trouble, because you could not spend your money more opportunely on any other object. And you must search also by your own united efforts, because it is probable that you would not easily find anyone better fitted for the task. b

We will see to that, said Cebes. But let us return to the point where we left off, if you have no objection.

Of course not. Why should I?

Thank you, said Cebes.

We ought, I think, said Socrates, to ask ourselves this. What sort of thing is it that would naturally suffer the fate of being dispersed? For what sort of thing should we fear this fate, and for what should we not? When we have answered this, we should next consider to which class the soul belongs, and then we shall know whether to feel confidence or fear about the fate of our souls. c

Quite true.

Would you not expect a composite object or a natural compound to be liable to break up where it was put together? And ought not anything which is really incomposite to be the one thing of all others which is not affected in this way?

That seems to be the case, said Cebes.

Is it not extremely probable that what is always constant and invariable is incomposite, and what is inconstant and variable is composite?

That is how it seems to me. d

Then let us return to the same examples which we were discussing before. Does that absolute reality which we define in our discussions remain always constant and invariable, or not? Does absolute equality or beauty or any other independent entity which really exists ever admit change of any kind? Or does each one of these uniform and independent entities remain always constant and invariable, never admitting any alteration in any respect or in any sense?

They must be constant and invariable, Socrates, said Cebes. e

Well, what about the concrete instances of beauty—such as men, horses, clothes, and so on—or of equality, or any other members of a class corresponding to an absolute entity? Are they constant, or are they, on the contrary, scarcely ever in the same relation in any sense either to themselves or to one another?

With them, Socrates, it is just the opposite; they are never free from variation. 79

And these concrete objects you can touch and see and perceive by your other senses, but those constant entities you cannot possibly apprehend except by thinking; they are invisible to our sight.

That is perfectly true, said Cebes.

So you think that we should assume two classes of things, one visible and the other invisible?

Yes, we should.

The invisible being invariable, and the visible never being the same?

Yes, we should assume that too. *b*

Well, now, said Socrates, are we not part body, part soul?

Certainly.

Then to which class do we say that the body would have the closer resemblance and relation?

Quite obviously to the visible.

And the soul, is it visible or invisible?

Invisible to men, at any rate, Socrates, he said.

But surely we have been speaking of things visible or invisible to our human nature. Do you think that we had some other nature in view?

No, human nature.

What do we say about the soul, then? Is it visible or invisible?

Not visible.

Invisible, then?

Yes.

So soul is more like the invisible, and body more like the visible? *c*

That follows inevitably, Socrates.

Did we not say some time ago that when the soul uses the instrumentality of the body for any inquiry, whether through sight or hearing or any other sense—because using the body implies using the senses—it is drawn away by the body into the realm of the variable, and loses its way and becomes confused and dizzy, as though it were fuddled, through contact with things of a similar nature?

Certainly. *d*

But when it investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer, but remains, in that realm of the absolute, constant and invariable, through contact with beings of a similar nature. And this condition of the soul we call wisdom.

An excellent description, and perfectly true, Socrates.

Very well, then, in the light of all that we have said, both now and before, to which class do you think that the soul bears the closer resemblance and relation? *e*

I think, Socrates, said Cebes, that even the dullest person would agree, from this line of reasoning, that the soul is in every possible way more like the invariable than the variable.

And the body?

To the other.

Look at it in this way too. When soul and body are both in the same place, nature teaches the one to serve and be subject, the other to rule and govern. In this relation which do you think resembles the divine and which the mortal part? Don't you think that it is the nature of the divine to rule and direct, and that of the mortal to be subject and serve? *80*

I do.

Then which does the soul resemble?

Obviously, Socrates, soul resembles the divine, and body the mortal.

Now, Cebes, he said, see whether this is our conclusion from all that we have said. The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent. Can we adduce any conflicting argument, my dear Cebes, to show that this is not so? b

No, we cannot.

Very well, then, in that case is it not natural for body to disintegrate rapidly, but for soul to be quite or very nearly indissoluble? c

Certainly.

Of course you know that when a person dies, although it is natural for the visible and physical part of him, which lies here in the visible world and which we call his corpse, to decay and fall to pieces and be dissipated, none of this happens to it immediately. It remains as it was for quite a long time, even if death takes place when the body is well nourished and in the warm season. Indeed, when the body is dried and embalmed, as in Egypt, it remains almost intact for an incredible time, and even if the rest of the body decays, some parts of it—the bones and sinews and anything else like them—are practically everlasting. That is so, is it not? d

Yes.

But the soul, the invisible part, which goes away to a place that is, like itself, glorious, pure, and invisible—the true Hades or unseen world—into the presence of the good and wise God, where, if God so wills, my soul must shortly go—will it, if its very nature is such as I have described, be dispersed and destroyed at the moment of its release from the body, as is the popular view? Far from it, my dear Simmias and Cebes. The truth is much more like this. If at its release the soul is pure and carries with it no contamination of the body, because it has never willingly associated with it in life, but has shunned it and kept itself separate as its regular practice—in other words, if it has pursued philosophy in the right way and really practiced how to face death easily—this is what ‘practicing death’ means, isn't it? e

Most decidedly.

Very well, if this is its condition, then it departs to that place which is, like itself, invisible, divine, immortal, and wise, where, on its arrival, happiness awaits it, and release from uncertainty and folly, from fears and uncontrolled desires, and all other human evils, and where, as they say of the initiates in the Mysteries, it really spends the rest of time with God. Shall we adopt this view, Cebes, or some other? 81

This one, by all means, said Cebes. b

But, I suppose, if at the time of its release the soul is tainted and impure, because it has always associated with the body and cared for it and loved it, and has been so beguiled by the body and its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment, and if it is accustomed to hate and fear and avoid what is invisible and hidden from our eyes, but intelligible and comprehensible by philosophy—if the soul is in this state, do you think that it will escape independent and uncontaminated? c

That would be quite impossible, he said.

On the contrary, it will, I imagine, be permeated by the corporeal, which fellowship and intercourse with the body will have ingrained in its very nature through constant association and long practice.

Certainly.

And we must suppose, my dear fellow, that the corporeal is heavy, oppressive, earthly, and visible. So the soul which is tainted by its presence is weighed down and dragged back into the

visible world, through fear, as they say, of Hades or the invisible, and hovers about tombs and graveyards. The shadowy apparitions which have actually been seen there are the ghosts of those souls which have not got clear away, but still retain, some portion of the visible, which is why they can be seen. d

That seems likely enough, Socrates.

Yes, it does, Cebes. Of course these are not the souls of the good, but of the wicked, and they are compelled to wander about these places as a punishment for their bad conduct in the past. They continue wandering until at last, through craving for the corporeal, which unceasingly pursues them, they are imprisoned once more in a body. And as you might expect, they are attached to the same sort of character or nature which they have developed during life. e

What sort do you mean, Socrates?

Well, those who have cultivated gluttony or selfishness or drunkenness, instead of taking pains to avoid them, are likely to assume the form of donkeys and other perverse animals. Don't you think so? 82

Yes, that is very likely.

And those who have deliberately preferred a life of irresponsible lawlessness and violence become wolves and hawks and kites, unless we can suggest any other more likely animals.

No, the ones which you mention are exactly right.

So it is easy to imagine into what sort of animals all the other kinds of soul will go, in accordance with their conduct during life.

Yes, certainly.

I suppose that the happiest people, and those who reach the best destination, are the ones who have cultivated the goodness of an ordinary citizen—what is called self-control and integrity—which is acquired by habit and practice, without the help of philosophy and reason. b

How are these the happiest?

Because they will probably pass into some other kind of social and disciplined creature like bees, wasps, and ants, or even back into the human race again, becoming decent citizens.

Very likely.

But no soul which has not practiced philosophy, and is not absolutely pure when it leaves the body, may attain to the divine nature; that is only for the lover of wisdom. This is the reason, my dear Simmias and Cebes, why true philosophers abstain from all bodily desires and withstand them and do not yield to them. It is not because they are afraid of financial loss or poverty, like the average man who thinks of money first, nor because they shrink from dishonor and a bad reputation, like those who are ambitious for distinction and authority. c

No, those would be unworthy motives, Socrates, said Cebes. d

They would indeed, he agreed. And so, Cebes, those who care about their souls and do not subordinate them to the body dissociate themselves firmly from these others and refuse to accompany them on their haphazard journey, and, believing that it is wrong to oppose philosophy with her offer of liberation and purification, they turn and follow her wherever she leads.

What do you mean, Socrates?

I will explain, he said. Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance. And philosophy can see that the imprisonment is ingeniously effected by the prisoner's own active desire, which makes him first accessory to his own confinement. Well, philosophy takes over the soul in this condition and by gentle persuasion tries to set it free. She points out that observation by means of the eyes and ears and all the other senses is entirely deceptive, and she urges the soul to refrain from using them unless it is necessary to do so, and 83

encourages it to collect and concentrate itself by itself, trusting nothing but its own independent judgment upon objects considered in themselves, and attributing no truth to anything which it views indirectly as being subject to variation, because such objects are sensible and visible but what the soul itself sees is intelligible and invisible. Now the soul of the true philosopher feels that it must not reject this opportunity for release, and so it abstains as far as possible from pleasures and desires and griefs, because it reflects that the result of giving way to pleasure or fear or desire is not as might be supposed the trivial misfortune of becoming ill or wasting money through self-indulgence, but the last and worst calamity of all, which the sufferer does not recognize. b
c

What is that, Socrates? asked Cebes.

When anyone's soul feels a keen pleasure or pain it cannot help supposing that whatever causes the most violent emotion is the plainest and truest reality, which it is not. It is chiefly visible things that have this effect, isn't it?

Quite so.

Is it not on this sort of occasion that soul passes most completely into the bondage of body? d

How do you make that out?

Because every pleasure or pain has a sort of rivet with which it fastens the soul to the body and pins it down and makes it corporeal, accepting as true whatever the body certifies. The result of agreeing with the body and finding pleasure in the same things is, I imagine, that it cannot help becoming like it in character and training, so that it can never get entirely away to the unseen world, but is always saturated with the body when it sets out, and so soon falls back again into another body, where it takes root and grows. Consequently, it is excluded from all fellowship with the pure and uniform and divine. e

Yes, that is perfectly true, Socrates, said Cebes.

It is for these reasons, Cebes, that true philosophers exhibit self-control and courage—not for the reason which are generally supposed. Or do you think that the popular view is right?

No, certainly not. 84

No, indeed. A philosopher's soul will take the view which I have described. It will not first expect to be set free by philosophy, and then allow pleasure and pain to reduce it once more to bondage, thus taking upon itself an endless task, like Penelope when she undid her own weaving. No, this soul secures immunity from its desires by following reason and abiding always in her company, and by contemplating the true and divine and un conjecturable, and drawing inspiration from it, because such a soul believes that this is the right way to live while life endures, and that after death it reaches a place which is kindred and similar to its own nature, and there is rid forever of human ills. After such a training, my dear Simmias and Cebes, the soul can have no grounds for fearing that on its separation from the body it will be blown away and scattered by the winds, and so disappear into thin air, and cease to exist altogether. b

There was silence for some time after Socrates had said this. He himself, to judge from his appearance, was still occupied with the argument which he had just been stating, and so were most of us, but Simmias and Cebes went on talking in a low voice. c

When Socrates noticed them he said, Why, do you feel that my account is inadequate? Of course it is still open to a number of doubts and objections, if you want to examine it in detail. If it is something else that you two are considering, never mind, but if you feel any difficulty about our discussion, don't hesitate to put forward your own views, and point out any way in which you think that my account could be improved. And by all means make use of my services too, if you think I can help at all to solve the difficulty. . . . d

[This final section picks up at the end of a story Socrates tells about what happens to the soul after death. The dialogue then closes with the scene in which Socrates drinks the hemlock and speaks his last words.]

But those who are judged to have lived a life of surpassing holiness—these are they who are released and set free from confinement in these regions of the earth, and passing upward to their pure abode, make their dwelling upon the earth's surface. And of these such as have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live thereafter altogether without bodies, and reach habitations even more beautiful, which it is not easy to portray—nor is there time to do so now. But the reasons which we have already described provide ground enough, as you can see, Simmias, forleaving nothing undone to attain during life some measure of goodness and wisdom, for the prize is glorious and the hope great. 114c
d

Of course, no reasonable man ought to insist that the facts are exactly as I have described them. But that either this or something very like it is a true account of our souls and their future habitations—since we have clear evidence that the soul is immortal—this, I think, is both a reasonable contention and a belief worth risking, for the risk is a noble one. We should use such accounts to inspire ourselves with confidence, and that is why I have already drawn out my tale so long. e

There is one way, then, in which a man can be free from all anxiety about the fate of his soul—if in life he has abandoned bodily pleasures and adornments, as foreign to his purpose and likely to do more harm than good, and has devoted himself to the pleasures of acquiring knowledge, and so by decking his soul not with a borrowed beauty but with its own—with self-control, and goodness, and courage, and liberality and truth—has fitted himself to await his journey in the next world. You, Simmias and Cebes and the rest, will each make this journey someday in the future, but for me the fated hour, as a tragic character might say, calls even now. In other words, it is about time that I took my bath. I prefer to have a bath before drinking the poison, rather than give the women the trouble of washing me when I am dead. 115
b

When he had finished speaking, Crito said, Very well, Socrates. But have you no directions for the others or myself about your children or anything else? What can we do to please you best?

Nothing new, Crito, said Socrates, just what I am always telling you. If you look after yourselves, whatever you do will please me and mine and you too, even if you don't agree with me now. On the other hand, if you neglect yourselves and fail to follow the line of life as I have laid it down both now and in the past, however fervently you agree with me now, it will do no good at all. c

We shall try our best to do as you say, said Crito. But how shall we bury you?

Any way you like, replied Socrates, that is, if you can catch me and I don't slip through your fingers.

He laughed gently as he spoke, and turning to us went on, I can't persuade Crito that I am this Socrates here who is talking to you now and marshaling all the arguments. He thinks that I am the one whom he will see presently lying dead, and he asks how he is to bury me! As for my long and elaborate explanation that when I have drunk the poison I shall remain with you no longer, but depart to a state of heavenly happiness, this attempt to console both you and myself seems to be wasted on him. You must give an assurance to Crito for me—the opposite of the one which he gave to the court which tried me. He undertook that I should stay, but you must assure him that when I am dead I shall not stay, but depart and be gone. That will help Crito to bear it more easily, and keep him from being distressed on my account when he sees my body being burned or buried, as if something dreadful were happening to me, or from saying at the funeral that it is Socrates whom he is laying out or carrying to the grave or d
e

burying. Believe me, my dear friend Crito, misstatements are not merely jarring in their immediate context; they also have a bad effect upon the soul. No, you must keep up your spirits and say that it is only my body that you are burying, and you can bury it as you please, in whatever way you think is most proper. 116

With these words he got up and went into another room to bathe, and Crito went after him, but told us to wait. So we waited, discussing and reviewing what had been said, or else dwelling upon the greatness of the calamity which had befallen us, for we felt just as though we were losing a father and should be orphans for the rest of our lives. Meanwhile, when Socrates had taken his bath, his children were brought to see him—he had two little sons and one big boy—and the women of his household, you know, arrived. He talked to them in Crito's presence and gave them directions about carrying out his wishes. Then he told the women and children to go away, and came back himself to join us. *b*

It was now nearly sunset, because he had spent a long time inside. He came and sat down, fresh from the bath, and he had only been talking for a few minutes when the prison officer came in, and walked up to him. *c*

Socrates, he said, at any rate I shall not have to find fault with you, as I do with others, for getting angry with me and cursing when I tell them to drink the poison—carrying out government orders. I have come to know during this time that you are the noblest and the gentlest and the bravest of all the men that have ever come here, and now especially I am sure that you are not angry with me, but with them, because you know who are responsible. So now—you know what I have come to say—good-by, and try to bear what must be as easily as you can. *d*

As he spoke he burst into tears, and turning round, went away.

Socrates looked up at him and said, Good-by to you, too. We will do as you say.

Then addressing us he went on, What a charming person! All the time I have been here he has visited me, and sometimes had discussions with me, and shown me the greatest kindness—and how generous of him now to shed tears for me at parting! But come, Crito, let us do as he says. Someone had better bring in the poison, if it is ready-prepared; if not, tell the man to prepare it. *e*

But surely, Socrates, said Crito, the sun is still upon the mountains; it has not gone down yet. Besides, I know that in other cases people have dinner and enjoy their wine, and sometime the company of those whom they love, long after they receive the warning, and only drink the poison quite late at night. No need to hurry. There is still plenty of time.

It is natural that these people whom you speak of should act in that way, Crito, said Socrates, because they think that they gain by it. And it is also natural that I should not, because I believe that I should gain nothing by drinking the poison a little later—I should only make myself ridiculous in my own eyes if I clung to life and hugged it when it has no more to offer. Come, do as I say and don't make difficulties. *117*

At this Crito made a sign to his servant, who was standing near by. The servant went out and after spending a considerable time returned with the man who was to administer the poison. He was carrying it ready-prepared in a cup.

When Socrates saw him he said, Well, my good fellow, you understand these things. What ought I to do?

Just drink it, he said, and then walk about until you feel a weight in your legs, and then lie down. Then it will act of its own accord. *b*

As he spoke he handed the cup to Socrates, who received it quite cheerfully, Echecrates, without a tremor, without any change of color or expression, and said, looking up under his brows with his usual steady gaze, What do you say about pouring a libation from this drink? Is it permitted, or not?

We only prepare what we regard as the normal dose, Socrates, he replied. c

I see, said Socrates. But I suppose I am allowed, or rather bound, to pray the gods that my removal from this world to the other may be prosperous. This is my prayer, then, and I hope that it may be granted.

With these words, quite calmly and with no sign of distaste, he drained the cup in one breath.

Up till this time most of us had been fairly successful in keeping back our tears, but when we saw that he was drinking, that he had actually drunk it, we could do so no longer. In spite of myself the tears came pouring out, so that I covered my face and wept brokenheartedly—not d for him, but for my own calamity in losing such a friend. Crito had given up even before me, and had gone out when he could not restrain his tears. But Apollodorus, who had never stopped crying even before, now broke out into such a storm of passionate weeping that he made everyone in the room break down, except Socrates himself, who said, Really, my friends, what a way to behave! Why, that was my main reason for sending away the women, to prevent this e sort of disturbance, because I am told that one should make one's end in a tranquil frame of mind. Calm yourselves and try to be brave.

This made us feel ashamed, and we controlled our tears. Socrates walked about, and presently, saying that his legs were heavy, lay down on his back—that was what the man recommended. The man he was the same one who had administered the poison—kept his hand upon Socrates, and after a little while examined his feet and legs, then pinched his foot hard 118 and asked if he felt it. Socrates said no. Then he did the same to his legs, and moving gradually upward in this way let us see that he was getting cold and numb. Presently he felt him again and said that when it reached the heart, Socrates would be gone.

The coldness was spreading about as far as his waist when Socrates uncovered his face, for he had covered it up, and said—they were his last words—Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius.¹ See to it, and don't forget.

No, it shall be done, said Crito. Are you sure that there is nothing else?

Socrates made no reply to this question, but after a little while he stirred, and when the man uncovered him, his eyes were fixed. When Crito saw this, he closed the mouth and eyes.

Such, Echecrates, was the end of our comrade, who was, we may fairly say, of all those whom we knew in our time, the bravest and also the wisest and most upright man.

Plato. *Phaedo* in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1954.

1. Asclepius is the god of healing.