Notes on Plato's *Phaedo*

1. Background
    a. The *Phaedo* tells the story of Socrates' final days. Taking place after the events depicted in the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito*, this dialogue serves as his swansong.
    b. Whereas the *Apology* had a fairly straightforward structure, consisting mainly of Socrates' monologues to the citizens of Athens (with a bit of back-and-forth with Meletus thrown in), the *Phaedo* is a full-blown dialogue. In fact, it operates as a dialogue on multiple levels. First we have the framing dialogue, which consists of the eponymous main character Phaedo's account of Socrates' final words, which he gives to Echecrates and others on his way home from Athens. Then we have the dialogue recounted by Phaedo, which takes place between Socrates and those who were with him in his final hours.
    c. First, let's take a closer look at the framing dialogue. Phaedo (the character) is on his way back from Athens after attending the trial and execution of Socrates. As he approaches his hometown of Elis in the Peloponnese, he runs into a group of Pythagoreans, the most vocal of which is Echecrates. These men are dubbed 'Pythagoreans' because they follow the teachings of Pythagoras. While most of us are familiar with his theorem, Pythagoras had much more to say on the topics of philosophy and mathematics. For our purposes here, we should only note these Pythagoreans would've been especially open to the mathematical examples Phaedo tells them Socrates made use of in his final conversation—e.g., the difference between odd and even numbers, etc.
    d. We shouldn't glide past this framing dialogue too swiftly, although it can be easy to forget it's there. The fact that Phaedo runs into Pythagoreans is itself potentially meaningful. It could, among other things, suggest that the version of Socrates' ideas he's sharing with them has already been re-shaped to suit their interests.
    e. It's also crucial for us to note that Plato makes a special point of saying that he himself was not present for Socrates' swansong. This inserts a gap between the author and the events recounted. Plato could perhaps be suggesting that the version of Socrates' words presented here is not meant to be as 'realistic' as the account we find in the Apology. This could be a modified Socrates, recalibrated to draw the attention of more intellectually adventurous listeners. (The Pythagorean refugees had different expectations than the jurymen of Athens, apparently!)
    f. The second dialogue, contained by the framing dialogue, recounts Socrates' final conversation with his supporters. Perhaps building on the esoteric remarks he made to the 'true jurymen' at the end of the *Apology*, here Socrates is unusually forthcoming with his own philosophical and religious commitments. Though he still has plenty of challenging questions for his interlocutors, he's also willing to put forth his own 'hypotheses' concerning why things are the way they are and how we can get to know that. Because it adds these hypotheses to the usual batch of methodical questions, this text is often associated with more complicated dialogues, like the *Republic*, the *Symposium*, and the *Meno*. And, like the Republic, it concludes with a lengthy myth that explores possibilities raised by the philosophers' inquiry while also going beyond the confines of philosophical proof. We shall have to pay special attention to the role that myth plays in bringing Socrates' philosophizing to its memorable conclusion.

2. The Final Conversation Begins (57a-62e)
    a. Setting the Stage
        i. The framing dialogue begins by jumping right into Echecrates' interrogation of Phaedo. He wants to know how close Phaedo got to the great man Socrates—to the trial, to the aftermath, to the moment of execution. Phaedo, for his part, seems more than happy to oblige.
        ii. Echecrates and his Pythagorean pals have already heard an account of how the trial played out. (We might ask: how close was the account they heard to the version we received from Plato's *Apology*?) What they want to hear about now is what Socrates said in those final hours leading up to his drinking of the poison hemlock.
        iii. They are surprised, however, to find out that the execution didn't take place until a good while after the trial concluded. Phaedo explains to them the reason for this. By chance, the Athenians had sent a ship of ceremonial tribute to the island of Delos the day before the trial. (58a) Every year, the Athenians would send such a ship, loaded with gifts for the god Apollo, who had a special association with that particular island. (Note how Apollo keeps coming up in these Socratic misadventures!) The Athenians did this to show gratitude to the god for his helpful role in the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, a myth which was especially dear to their hearts.
        iv. One of the sacred stipulations of this tribute-trip was that no one could be executed while the ship was traveling to and from Delos. The city of Athens had to be kept pure during this time, or else the status of its gift would be sullied. Since Socrates was sentenced to die just after the ship left port, he was granted a stay of execution for much longer than might have been expected. To his followers, this was a great stroke of luck. Socrates' attitude about this chance event was presumably more ambivalent.
        v. In fact, as Phaedo tells us, Socrates was not at all interested in delaying his death, since he was in no way afraid of dying. Here we pick up a theme we traced throughout the *Apology*. Philosophical practice, for Socrates, always has something to do with overcoming the fear of death. As Phaedo tells us, Socrates "appeared happy in both manner and words as he died nobly and without fear." (58e)
        vi. Phaedo and the other sympathizers weren't quite able to ascend to that level of tranquility, but still they strove not to collapse in utter pity. For his part, Phaedo says he felt "an unaccustomed mixture of pleasure and pain" (59a) as he attended to his hero's final words.
        vii. In addition to Phaedo, there were a number of other characters on the scene: Crito, whom we've run into a number of times, was joined by his son and at least ten others. Plato, Phaedo believes, was "ill." (59b) Again, this should cause to reflect on the layers of interpretation that might stand between Plato's text and the historical reality of Socrates' death. Also mentioned here are Simmias and Cebes, both foreigners from Thebes. As we'll see, these two will step up to serve as the main interlocutors in Socrates' final dialogue.
    b. The Highest Art
        i. The main dialogue begins around 59d, when Socrates' ship literally comes in. Now that the Delian mission has returned, everyone knows Socrates has but a little time remaining. Phaedo and company head over to have one last

discussion with the philosopher, only to find him spending time with his wife Xanthippe and their youngest child. Socrates, who always had a restrained estimate of how much quality family time was needed, sends his wife and son away so that the wisdom-lovers can get down to business. (60a) [Casual misogyny is unfortunately a recurring feature in many of these dialogues and in Ancient Greek culture more generally.]

ii. After Xanthippe is taken away, Socrates and the gang commence with some small talk. He begins with an allusive remark about the interdependence of pleasure and pain. Even though we tend to avoid pain and seek out pleasure, there's a strange cyclical relationship between the two. We don't really feel pleasure unless we're emerging out of some previously painful state, nor do we notice pain unless some prior sensation of pleasure is taken away. (60b-c) Socrates doesn't develop this line of thinking much here, but it does suggest that overly simplistic judgments about what's most pleasing or painful in life might not yet be taking into account the whole picture of life, in which pleasure and pain cycle through one another and so give birth to one another.

iii. Next, Socrates answers a question about why he's been spending his prison time putting the fables of Aesop into poetic verse. (Aesop's fables, as you might already know, are moralizing myths that use animalesque figures to communicate ethical messages.) He's also found the time to compose a new hymn to his favorite god, Apollo. This strikes his companions as somewhat odd, since he'd often repudiated the work of poets in favor of the philosophical lifestyle. (60d) [All of this poetic output has bred jealousy in rivals like Evenus, whom we heard about in the Apology as a particularly well-paid Sophist.]

iv. The reason Socrates gives for indulging his poetic side is this: he merely wanted to test out the prophetic value of a recurring dream he was having. Again: the philosopher is not afraid to reveal the divine messages he might be receiving from the gods. These dreams, he goes on to say, exhort him to "practice and cultivate the arts." (60e) But that's a rather vague exhortation. Which arts should he be focusing on? Craftsmanship? Politics or oratory or poetry? Just as he tested out the Delphic oracle by interrogating his fellow citizens, so Socrates tests out this dream-prophecy by trying his hand at poetics.

v. Still, seeing himself as no "teller of fables," (61b) Socrates leaves us with the impression that the art for him is the "art of philosophy," which he calls the "highest kind of art." (61a) Of course, later we'll see that he's not afraid to dip back into the realm of myth when it suits him. The question for us will be: how do we square Socrates' devotion to the art of philosophy with his tendency to draw from non-philosophical, even 'fabular' resources along the way?

c. To Be or Not To Be

i. Socrates then tells his companions that they should feel free to inform Evenus of Socrates' reasons for dabbling in poetry. Quite abruptly, he adds that Evenus should consider following him as soon as possible. From the context, it's clear that Socrates is inviting Evenus to join him in death. (61b)

ii. Somewhat shocked, Simmias the Theban steps up to say that Evenus is not likely to follow Socrates into an early grave. Perhaps feigning surprise, Socrates implies that, if Evenus is indeed a philosopher—as he claims to be—then he will be all the more ready to die. (61c-d)
iii. The first reaction his listeners have to this statement is to assume Socrates is talking about suicide. If he wants Evenus to follow him, then maybe he's telling Evenus to kill himself. Socrates hasn't quite gone that far, however. He himself seems unsure, at first, whether or not suicide is a permissible act or not. (61e)
iv. On the one hand, he argues, it does seem like there are many circumstances in which we'd say it's better for someone to die than live. (Perhaps someone can live on only to be tortured forever; or perhaps they choose to die with honor rather than be overtaken by an especially cruel enemy; etc.) On the other hand, this common sentiment doesn't give us a full-blown argument for why suicide would be acceptable. (62a-b)
v. One very strong argument against suicide, thinks Socrates, depends on the premise that we humans 'belong' to the gods—"the gods are our guardians and… men are one of their possessions." (62b) We are possessions of the divine. Because of that, we cannot destroy ourselves without destroying the property of our superiors. The gods are in charge of us, and so they'll be in charge on when we are allowed to expire.
vi. If we do indeed owe our lives to the gods in this way, then, at the very least, we'd need an excellent reason for robbing our masters of their possessions. Socrates seems to suggest that his own situation—in which he himself will drink down the poison hemlock, albeit at the behest of the city government—might count as such an excellent excuse.
vii. Barring such extenuating circumstances, though, this argument would suggest that we have a duty to try to stay alive as long as possible. Otherwise, we'd be fleeing a good master and destroying what belongs to the master. (In Socrates' case, Apollo would seem to play the part of the aggrieved owner.) This very pious line of argument would thus run counter to Socrates' oft-repeated claim that death is not to be avoided out of fear, but rather should perhaps be embraced as a great gift and blessing. (62d-e)

3. A Second Apology (63a-69e)
   a. Meeting the Gods
      i. Given this pious argument against premature death, Simmias and Cebes now feel justified in teaming up to push Socrates further. How can he treat death so lightly if it means he might be abandoning his service to the gods? Realizing the substance of the challenge, Socrates announces that he must begin a new *apologia* or defense of his position—perhaps not unlike the meandering defense he offered in court. (63b)
      ii. In order to support his attitude of acceptance toward death, Socrates invokes an idea of the afterlife, just as he began to do at the end of the *Apology*. Here, he begins by telling Simmias and Cebes that, far from abandoning the gods, he will in death be able to encounter the gods far more intimately.
      iii. As he puts it: "I should be wrong not to resent dying if I did not believe that I should go fist to other wise and good gods, and then to men who have died and are better than men are here. … That is why I am not so resentful,

because I have good hope that some future awaits men after death, as we have been told for years, a much better future than for the wicked." (63b-c)

iv. Death, for Socrates, brings with it the hope of a closer proximity to the gods who 'own' him. Therefore, he is not impious to welcome death. Far from fleeing the gods, he is fleeing to them.

v. Here we should note the oddly allusive way that Socrates introduces the idea of the afterlife—"as we have been told for years." Is the fact that we've been told something for years proof of its truth or rightness or goodness? That's tough to say. And Socrates isn't just claiming that the idea of an afterlife is widespread—he's even implying that the idea of postmortem retributive justice is shared by many. It's not just that we live on after we die, it's that there is some sort of reckoning of accounts in the afterlife. Those who've been wronged in the courtrooms of this life may still hope for justice in the next.

b. Preparation for Death

i. Now that Socrates has introduced the idea of some kind of judgment after death, we might begin to wonder how best we can prepare to undergo such a judgment. It's one thing to live as though you won't feel a thing after your body dies and is buried; it's quite another to live in the expectation that you will receive reward or punishment based on your actions, even after your body is dead and gone.

ii. Laying his cards on the table, Socrates opens his argument by saying that he thinks philosopher are "probably right" to face death with good cheer, since they're likely to wind up with blessings in the afterlife. (63e) This is a fairly pregnant use of the word "probably," I think we'd all agree. Is Socrates offering us an incontrovertible proof? Or he is starting to spin a fable? It will turn out to be a little bit of both, I'm afraid.

iii. Right away, Socrates adds: "the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death. Now if this is true, it would be strange indeed if they were eager for this all their lives and then resent it when what they have wanted and practiced for a long time comes upon them." (64a)

iv. Again, we must recall: for Socrates, philosophy is not mere theory. It's not idle thought, but thinking in practice. That's why he's always out and about in the city, conversing with people and trying to get to the bottom of what virtue and justice and goodness really are. You can't do this in an armchair. The aim of this practice, furthermore, is to prepare for death. Since death comes for us all, however much we may wish to evade it, this kind of practice would seem to be of great value for any and all of us.

v. At first, Simmias responds to all this with a chuckle. Sure, he says, philosophers welcome death. Anyone who's met a philosopher could tell you they're practically dead already! Though Socrates is usually up for a good joke, here he seems to double-down on the seriousness of his claim. Yes, it's true that philosophers are "nearly dead," but this is not some cheap slam against them. (64b-c) Though Socrates doesn't fully elaborate on this point here, he seems to be suggesting that philosophers are close to death in that they actually confront it and mediate on its possible outcomes. What's more, by cultivating the talents of the soul rather than that of the body, they are

approaching a state where the soul would be free of the body—not unlike the state of death, perhaps.

c. The Reasoning Soul and the Body-Obstacle
    i. At this point, we come to the topic of Socrates' anthropology—that is, how he divides up the components that make us human. In a very basic way, we can begin by casting Socrates as a 'dualist.' That is to say: he thinks humans are made up of two fairly distinct kinds of components—bodies and souls. Bodies are good at sensing and acting in the world, while souls do the work of thinking and thereby directing our sensing and acting.
    ii. By Socrates' lights, it seems almost obvious that these two components are in principle separable from one another. The distinction between the kinds of work done by body and by soul seem to suggest that these two components can take leave of one another without being immediately destroyed in themselves. In the case of death, then, we could entertain the possibility that, although the body dies and becomes an inanimate lump, the soul could live on in its non-bodily reasoning and thinking capacity.
    iii. Of course, this dualist hypothesis leaves itself open to all sorts of challenges, not the least of which is that posed by our modern, scientific brand of common-sense, according to which we simply are our bodies. When our body dies, we die, too—provided that there's no incorporeal (i.e. non-bodily) soul that's distinct from our material-mushy brain. Socrates, though he's often willing to entertain a wide range of arguments and hypotheses, doesn't spend a whole lot of time here considering the possibility that we simply are our mortal bodies. For him, the question of death takes as its premise the possibility that soul and body are separable things, and so their status as 'mortal' can be interrogated separately.
    iv. Death, then, can be Socratically defined as the separation of the soul from the body. (64c) If philosophers are practicing for this death-event, then we can say that they're training for the soul's potential flight from its body. The content of their practice should accordingly include activities that cultivate the soul's ability to exist on its own, without recourse to the body. On the flip side, activities which bring the soul into closer intimacy with and dependence upon the body would seem to work against this eventual escape of the soul from its bodily prison.
    v. Following this train of thought, Socrates then engages Simmias regarding a number of possible pleasures that might be enjoyed by philosophers and non-philosophers alike: food, drink, sex, fashion. (64d-e) The connection between all of these delights lies in the fact that they all operate by stimulating the body, the senses, the pleasure-organs. To use one's soul to figure out the best possible way to get fed or bedded is then to make the soul serve the body. Many of us probably know what this feels like.
    vi. Philosophers, however, should not aim to make the soul work for the body. On this, both Socrates and Simmias agree. In fact, the philosophical lifestyle is in large part defined by one's turning-away from such body-bound delights. So says Socrates: "the philosopher more than other men frees the soul from association with the body as much as possible…" (65a)
    vii. However moral we may take philosophers to be, they should still be defined not so much by their rejection of bodily pleasures as by their pursuit of true

knowledge. Again, recall that Socrates' divine mission is ultimately rooted in the matter of what it means to be wise, not just what it means to be moral (although the two do seem to be inescapably linked).

viii. So then we face the question: how do we know things? What part of us does the job of knowing? Is it the body? Socrates says no. The body may sense, but it does not do the work of knowing. That's what the soul is for—that's how it manages the body, by thinking about what to do with the body, perhaps even knowing what to do with the body. We use our bodies for sensing things, of course, but all of that sense-data gets swallowed up by the soul as it works toward true, certain, fixed knowledge about things.

ix. Because of all this, Socrates tends to see the body more as an obstacle than as an aid to learning. He implies that the soul, left to its own devices, could do a better job of gaining knowledge than it currently does by working via the body. "Is the body an obstacle when one associates with it in the search for knowledge?" he asks. (65a-b) The implied answer is yes.

x. Consequently, Socrates asks: "When then does the soul grasp the truth? For whenever it attempts to examine anything with the body, it is clearly deceived by it. … Is it not in reasoning if anywhere that any reality becomes clear to the soul?" (65b-c)

xi. Here Socrates introduces two key claims:

1. The soul's power of reasoning does not depend on the body. Even though it can reason on the basis of information given by the body (sense data), it is more secure in its knowledge when it reasons on the basis of its own thought alone. When it does so, it operates purely in the realm of reason, without relying on often-faulty physical appearances. (Think of the bent oar in the water…)
2. Reality—*ousia*—or 'what really is' is something best discovered by the soul itself, by thinking. Even though we may want to trust physical appearances, often we need to use our reason to actually get from changing appearances to unchanging facts about what's really true. This is a bold contention, one we'll have to interrogate further as we go.

xii. Socrates continues in this vein: "the soul reasons best when none of these senses troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor pleasure, but when it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality." (65c) It is when the soul pushes away from the body that it begins to reason more clearly. Freed of all of the distractions that come in through our senses, as well as the mistakes we make due to false sensations (cf. issues with depth perception, phantom sensations, etc.), the soul is better able to focus on its own rational reflections.

d. The Forms

i. At this point, Socrates somewhat abruptly introduces a new category of things into the conversation. To him, however, this is an organic continuation of the above discussion about the reasoning soul's remove from bodily sensation. Quite quickly, he gets Simmias to agree that there are such things as "the Just itself," "the Beautiful," the "Good," and so on. (65d)

ii. So what do Socrates and Simmias mean when they talk about "the Just" and things of that nature? Well, the nature of those things is precisely what will be at issue. But, for now, we should perhaps begin treating these very general-sounding things in a way that makes at least some sense to us. While we translate these words as "the Just" in order to preserve the Greek syntax (*to dikaion*), we may find ourselves sliding into talk about "Justice" or Beauty or Goodness. If that helps us get going in our thought about these realities, then we'll accept the use of such general nouns for the time being. In the long run, though, we will have to reflect on our own leap into the general noun and examine whether that fully captures what Socrates is getting at with the Just, the Beautiful, and so on…

iii. With that said, Socrates' abrupt shift might strike us as a little less strange. Do we not still talk of Justice, Beauty, Goodness? And wouldn't we agree that there isn't one specific 'thing' out there that can be identified as Justice or Beauty itself? Justice doesn't seem to be a physical body walking around in the world of phenomena, waiting to be seen and touched by us.

iv. Of course, we do see many particular things that we call just or beautiful or good—but those are not quite the same as Justice or Beauty itself. A crisp morning sunrise might be beautiful, but it is not Beauty itself. Rather, Socrates would have us say, we judge what is beautiful and what is not by referring to some general standard of what counts as beautiful. If we can start thinking about that referential standard, then we're getting close to thinking about what Socrates calls "the Just itself" or the Beautiful itself.

v. This standard—this reality or *ousia*—is what allows to look at a wide variety of different things and classify them as just and beautiful or unjust and un-beautiful. It's also what allows us to use the same word—beautiful—to talk about things that are utterly different in many respects, yet share the quality of being beautiful. For example: a sunrise is not very much like a statue of a god—except for the fact that both happen to be beautiful. The sunrise and statue are both beautiful not because they are both sunrises or statues, but because they both share in the quality of beauty—they both meet the standard set by the Beautiful itself (or perhaps 'Beauty'). (This sharing-in-the-same-quality, furthermore, can be described as a kind of 'participating' in the reality of the Beautiful. And many will go on to describe this as a kind of participation…)

vi. In sum, then, these 'realities' (*x* itself, *y* itself, etc.) can function both like *definitions* and like *causes*. What that means is this:

1. The idea of the Beautiful itself can help us *define* what we mean when we say that a particular thing is beautiful. Otherwise, we might fall into false definitions, which may sound plausible but turn out to fall short of applying to all beautiful things. For example: we might say that beauty is a certain symmetry of parts—which would apply well to a geometrical figure, but perhaps less so to a beautiful dance.
2. We can then take the idea of the Beautiful further and say that it doesn't just help us define what we mean when we tag things as beautiful, but it even *causes* things to be beautiful in the first place. This is a stronger claim, since it moves beyond the realm of our own minds ('what we mean') and into the realm of things themselves. If

we treat the Beautiful itself as the cause of things being beautiful or not, then we might begin to attribute some external reality to these realities—from the Beautiful itself to the Just and the Good.

vii. Now let's see what Socrates and Simmias have to say about these 'realities' or 'itselves' in this early passage. (We've gone a bit past what they say here, if only to try to provide some foundation to build on as we work our way through the intimidating doctrine of essential realities…) First, Socrates has Simmias agree that qualities like Justice are not things we sense using our bodies: "I am speaking of all things such as Bigness, Health, Strength, and, in a word, the reality of all other things, that which each of them essentially is. Is what is most true in them contemplated through the body, or is this the position: Whoever of us prepares himself best and most accurately to grasp that thing itself which he is investigating will come closest to the knowledge of it?" (65d-e)

viii. So we see that things like Justice and Beauty are the realities that underlie all of the particular, sensual, physical things we encounter in our lives. They are what define what those particular things 'essentially are.' They are what allow us to go from saying "That's a thing over there" to "That's a beautiful ship drifting back to harbor at sunset…"

ix. How then are we to prepare ourselves to grasp these underlying realities, if simply looking at and interacting with the physical world is not enough? Socrates replies: "he will do this most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears and, in a word, from the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it." (65e-66a)

x. In order to track down true realities, the soul has to at least begin to liberate itself from the body. Doing so might constitute what Socrates calls, in the voice of the 'true philosophers,' "a path to guide us out of our confusion." (66b) That confusion plagues us because our souls have gotten too intimate with the "evil" of the body, driven by "desire" and unable to think for itself: "no thought of any kind ever comes to us from the body." (66c)

xi. Here Socrates seems to be drawing a pretty firm line between (a) sense-data and (b) rational thought. The two sides do certainly interact. Our ability to think rationally can always be impeded by incoming sense-data (whether pain or pleasure), while our rational thinking can influence how we make use of the sense-data we get through the body. That interaction, however, should not lead us to confuse these two parts of the human: body and soul, we might say. As far as Socrates is concerned, overcoming this confusion of soul with body is the only way we can ever come to true knowledge, fixed and certain and no longer undermined by the deceptive and unreliable senses of the body.

xii. As he sums it up (still speaking in the dramatic character of the true philosopher): "It really has been shown to us that, if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself. It seems likely that we shall, only then, when we are

dead, attain that which we desire and of which we claim to be lovers, namely, wisdom, as our argument shows, not while we live; for if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death." (66e)

xiii. Here Socrates brings this whole argument about the soul's search for knowledge back into the service of his position on death. In this life, perhaps the best we can do is to try to put some space between our souls and our bodies by striving to think rationally, without recourse to sense-data or bodily desires. Still, as long as we live, we remain the body. Because of that, our thinking will always be related to bodily sensations and distractions. It's always going to be a challenge to philosophize, to set thinking aflight within these sluggish frames.

xiv. But if our souls were to be truly freed from bodies… Perhaps then, only then, we could think clearly and without distraction or confusion. And when is the soul most utterly and finally separated from its body? At death, of course. If our souls can survive that transition away from the body, then—Socrates suggests—they might be able to keep on thinking, with a new clarity and swiftness, with a new knowledge of the truth.

e. Purification as Liberation

i. If true reasoning and therefore certain knowledge only ever occurs after death, then what are we body-bound souls to do in this life? This is where we return to the matter of philosophical practice. Socrates does indeed have something of a training regimen in mind for us, which he classes as a kind of purification.

ii. As he puts it: "While we live, we shall be closest to knowledge if we refrain as much as possible from association with the body and do not join with it more than we must, if we are not infected with its nature but purify ourselves from it until the god himself frees us. In this way we shall escape the contamination of the body's folly; we shall be likely to be in the company of people of the same kind, and by our own efforts we shall know all that is pure, which is presumably the truth, for it is not permitted to the impure to attain the pure." (67a)

iii. This rhetoric of purity is stronger than what we've heard from the philosopher so far. It is not simply that the body distracts and deceives us; it contaminates us with its impurity. But if only pure soul can attain to pure truth, then we'll have to strive to prevent such contamination while we are alive. That's a tall order, given how intimately intertwined our psychological lives seem to be with our physical constitution.

iv. This ongoing purification of the soul can be seen as its preparation for freedom and independence from the body—through death, we recall. Look to Socrates' leading question: "does purification not turn out to be what we mentioned in our argument some time ago, namely, to separate the soul as far as possible from the body and accustom it to gather itself and collect itself out of every part of the body and to dwell by itself as far as it can both now and in the future, freed, as it were, from the bonds of the body?" (67c-d)

v. This gathering-up of the soul is meant to prepare the soul for death and thereby for knowledge. Philosophical training, then, should aim to cultivate

this gathering-up of the soul, this collecting oneself. Because of this work it does, we can say that philosophy aims at the moment of death: "those who practice philosophy in the right way are in training for dying and they fear death least of all men." (67e)

vi. There will be no pure knowledge before the event of death, Socrates reminds us. (68b) All we can hope for now is to purify our souls from bodily influence, straining to reason free of sensation. This work may never be complete now, but it can prepare us to continue our work in the afterlife, freed of every bodily contaminant.

f. True Virtue as Properly Motivated

i. By readying and steadying themselves to face death in this way, philosophers show what Socrates and Simmias agree is the truest "courage." (68c) This courage is also rooted in another facet of virtue: "moderation," which is needed if the soul is going to corral its bodily impulses and prevent them from derailing its own rational work. (68c-d)

ii. This occasional reference to courage and moderation then broadens out into a more general consideration of virtue. Here Socrates gets Simmias to agree that not everyone who appears to be virtuous is virtuous for the same reason. Some people are said to be courageous in the face of death, but they actually choose to accept death in order to escape a greater evil (e.g., torture), which they happen to fear more. Given their motivations, they can't be said to be truly courageous, since they chose to face what they feared less rather than what they feared more. They may have made a nice deal, a rational choice, but they didn't show true courage in the face of the absolutely worst.

iii. As Socrates puts it: "it is fear and terror that make all men brave, except the philosophers. Yet it is illogical to be brave through fear and cowardice." (68d)

iv. Likewise, the so-called moderation of most people is motivated by licentious desire. Many of us curb certain pleasures so that we can have access to other, more valued pleasures in the long run. (cf. Epicurus) Most people, then, demonstrate only a contradictory sort of moderation, which is ultimately rooted in hedonistic desire. Again, it might be a nice bargain, but trading pleasures for pleasures doesn't help you escape from the endless cycle of pleasure and pain. (68e-69a) [Recall here Socrates' ominous comment about pleasure and pain feeding on each other, occasioned by a quotidian stretching of the legs…]

v. Instead of exchanging pleasure for pleasure (as in faux-moderation) or pain for pain (as in faux-courage), we should be overcoming the cycle of pleasure and pain in order to approach true virtue—lasting, durable virtue—which is attainable only through wisdom.

vi. So says Socrates: "I fear this is not the right exchange to attain virtue, to exchange pleasures for pleasures, pains for pains, and fears for fears, the greater for the less like coins, but that the only valid currency for which all these things should be exchanges is wisdom. With this we have real courage and moderation and justice and, in a word, true virtue, with wisdom, whether pleasures and fears and all such things be present or absent. When these are exchanged for one another in separation from wisdom, such virtue is only an illusory appearance of virtue…" (69a-b)

vii. This higher kind of virtue, attainable through wisdom, would seem to be linked to the process of purification Socrates had just described. True courage and moderation and justice have little to do with the realm of bodily pleasure and pain, ultimately. Instead, they are shown best by a soul that knows it's going to die and therefore prepares itself through purification. Religious rites of purification here symbolize this rational purging of the soul from its bodily contamination, so that it can fly free into the afterlife. To overcome all the temptations of the bodily realm and really start to think is then the beginning of a long walk to the completion of virtue and wisdom.

viii. With that, Socrates concludes what we might call his second *apologia*. (69e) This speech was not in defense of himself, but in defense of the very idea of the soul's escape from the body in death. In that escape, he has argued, the lifelong practice of philosophy finds its fruition. Of course, we might still have a number of questions about how Socrates can actually be so sure about the immortality of the soul, let alone the perfect of that soul's knowledge in the afterlife. As it turns out, Cebes will share our concerns…

4. Living & Learning (70a-75e)
    a. Immortality & Metempsychosis
        i. Cebes has not been fully convinced by Socrates' defense of the soul's post-body existence. Or, rather, he says that many other people will fail to be convinced by the argument thus far. This is because they think that the soul simply dies with the body. Even if soul and body are two different parts of the human, they still die together, when the overall human passes away. Rather poetically, such men might say that the soul simply drifts away like "breath or smoke" once its body is dead. (70a) It will take a lot—both "faith and persuasive argument"—to convince such people that the soul not only survives bodily death, but even maintains its intellectual powers into the afterlife. (70b)
        ii. Socrates allows that he hasn't persuasively put to rest the idea that the soul is mortal. Here he again draws on some external evidence—namely, the already-circulating belief in something like reincarnation: "Let us examine… whether the souls of men who have died exist in the underworld or not. We recall an ancient theory that souls arriving there come from here, and then again that they arrive here and are born here from the dead." (70c)
        iii. This doctrine of reincarnation—or metempsychosis, the passing of souls from one place to another—will play a crucial role in the discussion to come. The question of immortality was, for Socrates, intimately linked to the idea that the soul might be reborn in different bodies over time. We haven't quite arrived at the idea that the immortal soul takes flight from the body and enters into a soul-realm never to return. Later, however, it could turn out that such a final escape from bodies is indeed possible.
        iv. One very attractive aspect of the theory of reincarnation is that it seems to fall in line with the general notion that nature operates in cycles. If we look to animals and plants, Socrates argues, we can see that they arise and pass away in seasons and generations. Older members of a species die so that they can make way for new members; older plants die so that their nutrients can enrich the soil out of which their descendants will grow. The circle of life rolls onward.

v. Socrates wants to examine whether or not human souls are also part of a natural life-cycle like this. He characterizes this cycle, perhaps confusingly, as opposites coming out of opposites. Again: we can make this less confusing by thinking about cycles of life and death in the natural world.

vi. The philosopher wants to go further with this idea of opposites cycling out of opposites, however. He wants it to explain not only natural processes of generation and differentiation, but also intellectual processes of generation and differentiation. And so he immediately jumps back into those favored qualities of his: beauty, justice, and so on. This examination aims to discover if these qualities also behave like natural phenomena, with opposites always playing off of opposites.

vii. He begins with a fairly down to other comparison: the bigger and the smaller. When we say that something gets bigger, we imply that it used to be smaller before. Every judgment of this kind seems to imply a relative comparison between two qualities, perhaps even within the same thing. So to say, "X is bigger" implies a relation to the opposite case, when "X is smaller." To say that something gets bigger or smaller is then always a relative predication. Big and small are qualities we define relative to one another, and so, even though they are opposites, they can be said to flow out of one another. Our understanding of big is based on our understanding of small—and vice versa. Opposites flow out of opposites. (70e)

viii. Socrates thinks we can say the same sorts of things about something being just. When we say that something is "more just," we imply a corresponding case that's "less just." The two only make sense relative to one another. Opposites flow out of opposites. (71a)

ix. With all of these comparative or relative judgments, there are two processes of "becoming" or "generation" involved. (71b-c) It's a two-way street, in other words. Smaller things grow into bigger things; bigger things shrink down to smaller things. More just states devolve into less just states; less just states rise up to be more just states. Here it's not a question of absolutes—big and small—but of relative judgments—bigger and smaller. These relatives terms operate on a spectrum, on which we are able to move in either direction.

x. Making another daring move, Socrates then argues that the relation between sleep and wakefulness operates on a similar kind of spectrum. These two are certainly opposites, yet the fact that they are introduced after all of these relative comparisons suggests that Socrates might thing that these are opposites on a spectrum, as opposed to absolutely detached conditions.

xi. Setting these finer points aside for now, we can at least say that Socrates sees sleep and wakefulness as exhibiting that natural cycle of opposites we saw above. We wake up after being asleep, we fall asleep after being awake. And these two processes follow each other in turn throughout the course of our lives. Round and round we go. (71c-d)

xii. Life and death, then, might also revolve through such a cycle, just like wakefulness and sleep. Socrates is drawing Cebes into his web, as usual: "And what comes to be from being dead? / One must agree that it is being alive." (71d)

xiii. If death follows life, then perhaps life follows from death. The natural world seems to be a swarming mass of cycles upon cycles, so why shouldn't human life and death work in the same way? That would seem to suggest that the ancient theory of reincarnation is rather reasonable, at least if we're willing to extend this natural model of circularity.

xiv. Life comes out of death—this is the possibility we're now exploring. In context, it means that souls, having abandoned their dead bodies and entered the underworld, later return to the realm of the living and inhabit new bodies. Reincarnation continues the cycle.

xv. By preserving the cycle, metempsychosis ensures that there is a process of becoming (or genesis) that corresponds to the process of becoming we find in death. Death is our becoming-dead; reincarnation is our becoming-alive again. It's a two-way street. There's a symmetry to these natural processes. Here Socrates seems to suggest that the symmetry of this theory shores up its claim to truth: "Is nature to be lame in this case?" (71e) If there were no rebirth, nature would be 'lame' in the sense that it would be one-sided. It would feature life-turning-into-death, but not death-turning-into-life. It wouldn't be balanced out on both sides.

xvi. Socrates expounds on this need for natural symmetry and balance: "If the two processes of becoming did not always balance each other as if they were going round in a circle, but generation proceeded from one point to its opposite in a straight line and it did not turn back again to the other opposite or take any turning, do you realize that all things would ultimately be in the same state, be affected in the same way, and cease to become?" (72b)

xvii. Linear progression would be the death of the universe. Eventually, all things would die and never come back. But, looking all around us, we see that there are all kinds of cycles that keep nature living on, despite the seeming death of particular plants and animals and humans. The circular flow of opposite into opposite is, for Socrates, the force of life itself. If death were to simply end life—full stop, end of story—then it would violate this natural life-cycle of things. This would be a very hard conclusion for him to accept. (Though how hard is it for us? We like our naturalism, yet we seem to have also accepted the power of linear time to crush the apparent immortality of nature's cycles…)

xviii. Finally, Socrates adds that there are two main factors supporting this theory of reincarnation:
   1. Everlasting sleep is usually said to be exceptional. Perhaps it is only reserved for a special few souls to escape the body and then rest forevermore, never to be reborn through metempsychosis. (72b-c)
   2. Preserving the cycles of opposites that make up nature allows us to account for natural diversity, rather than the linear decline of everything into the same null state. (Here he positions himself against Anaxagoras, who supposedly held that all things did tend toward a mixed state, rather than cycling through endless diversity; 72c)

xix. And so Socrates doubles down on his line of argument: "Coming to life again in truth exists, the living come to be from the dead, and the souls of the dead exist." (72e)

b. Anamnesis
   i. If the souls of the dead exist, then what are they doing down there in the underworld? And furthermore: what was going on with our souls before we entered our present bodies? If souls are good for knowing, it would probably be safe to say that they were engaged in some kind of knowing, some kind of intellectual activity. As it turns out, this would fit in nicely with a doctrine Socrates has already begun to explore—a little bit in the *Apology*, a lot more in the *Meno*. This is the doctrine of recollection (*anamnesis*), which aims to connect the pre-existence of our souls to our capacity for knowing things at all.
   ii. In response to Socrates' dual claim that life comes from death and that souls survive death, Cebes recalls the idea that knowledge is a kind of recollection of something once known but now forgotten: "such is also the case if that theory is true that you are accustomed to mention frequently, that for us learning is no other than recollection. According to this, we must at some previous time have learned what we now recollect. This is possible only if our soul existed somewhere before it took on this human shape." (72-73a)
   iii. Despite the potential dovetailing of the theories of immortality and recollection, Simmias is not immediately convinced by Cebes' claim here. He asks Cebes to elaborate more on the doctrine of recollection, since not everyone will recall all of its proofs.
   iv. And so Cebes obliges his fellow Theban: "There is on excellent argument," he says, "namely that when men are interrogated in the right manner, they always give the right answer of their own accord, and they could not do this if they did not possess the knowledge and the right explanation inside them." (73a)
   v. This argument ties the idea of recollection back to the method of Socratic questioning. The goal of Socrates' interrogations of people is not solely to reveal their ignorance—although that's part of it. Such questioning also aims to bring out whatever knowledge might be lying dormant within us, waiting for us to bring it forth out of the depths of our memory. In the *Meno*, Socrates successfully uses this kind of interrogation to prod a slave-boy into figuring out for himself how to calculate certain geometric truths. The idea is that such capabilities might already lie within us all; we need only re-awaken our knowledge by recollecting it from the abyss of our souls.
   vi. In addition to this argument for recollection on the basis of questioning, Socrates offers up several other psychological processes associated with recollecting:
      1. We often 'recollect' something not when we see that something itself, but rather when we see another thing that reminds us of that something: "When a man sees or hears or in some other way perceives one thing and not only knows that thing but also thinks of another thing of which the knowledge is not the same but different…" (73c)
      2. Recollection can also be a kind of recognition, such as when we see something or someone we haven't seen in a long time and have perhaps even forgotten about. However, when we see them again,

our knowledge of that person snaps back into place; we recognize them. (73d)

3. Our recollections can also be triggered by images or likeness of things, such as when a picture of a birds calls to mind some knowledge of that real bird. In such cases, we recall things through similarity. (73e)
4. Strangely, we can also recall things by way of dissimilarity. (74a) Perhaps we might see something that reminds of its opposite. Recollection need not operate through similarity, then.

vii. Regardless of all these varieties of recollection, its basic operation can be summed up in this way: "as long as the sight of one thing makes you think of another, whether it be similar or dissimilar, this must of necessity be recollection…" (74c)

viii. Again: the whole point of this digression into recollection is to connect it back to the question of the soul's immortality. Socrates wants to suggest that our capacity to recollect stretches back into the lives of our souls when they are apart from bodies. If the soul thinks most clearly when it is free of a body, then perhaps that is when it is able to know what's really real. Recollection would then be our piecemeal attempt to gain back that disembodied degree of knowledge, which our sluggish and desirous frames have caused us to forget.

c. Knowledge of What Is

i. At this point in the argument, Socrates ups the ante even further by connecting both immortality and recollection to his idea of the really real: the forms or "realities" that set the standard for our perception and judgment of the material world.

ii. Here, instead of the Just or the Beautiful, Socrates starts with the idea of "the Equal itself." (74a) He's drawing a distinction between things that are equal, on the one hand, and the very idea of Equality, on the other. We use the idea of Equality to determine whether things are equal to each other or not.

iii. Now any given material thing—here the example is a stick—isn't' necessarily equal or unequal in itself. Equal is a relative term. This stick might be equal in length to that stick, but unequal in length to some third stick over there. To make such judgments about things being equal to one another, we need some external standard that helps us think about what Equality means in general.

iv. And so, to perform the banal task of holding up two sticks to see if they're equal, we need to engage not only with material things (e.g. sticks), but also with seemingly immaterial notions of what it means for one thing to be equal to something else. You need both ingredients—things and forms; phenomena and realities—in order for judgments to get made.

v. Even though we need both ingredients, Socrates doesn't want us to confuse the two. Material bodies and immaterial forms remain two different kinds of things. Yet these two kinds of things are linked, are related to one another. For example, when we see two equal sticks, we are reminded of the idea of Equality. The material can trigger in us a recollection of the immaterial.

vi. Socrates wants this triggering to fall under the category of recollection-by-dissimilarity. Even though equal things are not the same as the Equal itself, such things can still cause the Equal itself to come to mind for us. In a sense,

this is what happens every time we apply the standard of Equality to make judgments about what seems equal to us in the material world.

vii. There is another funny thing about this relationship between things and forms. When we see material things and make judgments about them, those judgments are usually rough and somewhat inexact. For example: if we look as closely as possible, our two sticks might turn out not to be exactly equal to the tiniest fraction of a millimeter. In a sense, they fall short of true equality, which we think we grasp with our idea of the Equal itself, which connotes perfect equality. We measure reality against this standard of perfection.

viii. Socrates and his interlocutors class this falling-short as a kind of "deficiency." (74d) Every equal thing we see is something like a deficient version of true equality, as represented by the Equal itself.

ix. This deficiency, argues Socrates, suggests that we have had some sort of experience of the Equal itself as a reality, as a real object of our knowledge. Otherwise, how could we say that two roughly equal sticks fall short of perfect equality? As Socrates asks: "Whenever someone, on seeing something, realizes that that which he now sees wants to be like some other reality but falls short and cannot be like that other since it is inferior, do we agree that the one who thinks this must have prior knowledge of that to which he says it is like, but deficiently so? / Necessarily!" (74e)

x. A consequence follows: "We must then possess knowledge of the Equal before that time when we first saw the equal objects and realized that all these objects strive to be like the Equal but are deficient in this." (75a)

xi. The very fact that we can make sense of the world at all, in terms of equality and justice and beauty and so on, implies that we have some prior knowledge of what those general terms mean. None of them is reducible to a specific material thing or sense-perception, yet our sense-perceptions rely on this prior knowledge in order to make sense of the perceptible world.

xii. Says Socrates: "before we began to see or hear or otherwise perceive, we must have possessed knowledge of the Equal itself if we were about to refer our sense perceptions of equal objects to it, and realized that all of them were eager to be like it, but were inferior." (75b)

xiii. When, then, did we begin to use our senses to perceive things? We began to do so at birth. Yet Socrates thinks that, from the beginning, we referred all sense-perceptions to the forms as standards of perfection. Therefore, our knowledge of the forms must have been gained even before birth. This is how Socrates links the idea of the forms back to the topic of immortality: if the soul knew the forms before it sensed things through the body, then it must have come to know those forms in a pre-embodied state. It must have known the forms between incarnations.

xiv. Socrates again: "if we had this knowledge, we knew before birth and immediately after not only the Equal, but the Greater and the Smaller and all such things, for our present argument is no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious, and, as I say, about all those things which we mark with the seal of 'what it is,' both when we are putting questions and answering them. So we must have acquired knowledge of them all before we were born." (75c-d)

xv. This prior knowledge of 'what is' does not survive the passage through rebirth unscathed. Even if our souls have this kind of knowledge before we are born, we seem to be plagued by forgetting. Our education in life is thus a progressive remembering of underlying truths we once knew but have now forgotten: "if we acquired this knowledge before birth, then lost it at birth, and then later by the use of our senses in connection with those objects we mentioned, we recovered the knowledge we had before, would not what we call learning be the recovery of our own knowledge, and we are right to call this recollection?" (75e)

xvi. In sum: learning, as the recovery of lost knowledge, turns out to be a kind of recollection–*anamnesis*.

5. From Pre-Existence to Reincarnation (76a-82d)
   a. Forms Imply Pre-Existence of Soul
      i. So far, Socrates has labored to lay out the connection between forms (as underlying realities of quality-bearing things) and recollection. All of our learning, he says, is in fact the remembering of things we once knew. But far from than being the memory of specific worldly things, it instead seems to be the memory of the forms themselves. What we recollect in anamnesis is not this or that embodied thing, but rather the form, the standard that allows us to make sense of that thing we encounter.
      ii. The question, then, is when we gained and lost this knowledge of the forms. It is clear, first of all, that not everyone has complete access to the forms at all times. That's why we need to prod recollection along through elenchus. (76b)
      iii. Therefore, if we once had knowledge of the forms but now do not (for the most part), then when did this knowing first occur? And when did it turn into not-knowing? Asks Socrates: "When did our souls acquire the knowledge of them? Certainly not since we were born as men." (76c) The way we have 'forgotten' the forms is not like the way we've forgotten people we've met in the past. We never had an experience in our lives where we first learned of the forms from the sensual outside world. Rather, our first encounter with the forms in this life is already a recollection of them—which suggests that we already knew them before our supposedly 'first' thought of them.
      iv. In other words: I don't deduce Beauty itself from my perception of the world, then forget the form of Beauty itself, then remember it later. Instead, the first time I recognize the world as beautiful, I experience this as a recollection of a perfect standard of Beauty in my thought.
      v. If we don't learn the forms in our childhood, then, we must learn them before our childhood. This, to Socrates, suggests that the soul exists before it enter into an infant body, which then grows up and regains its lost knowledge through anamnesis: "our souls also existed apart from the body before they took on human form, and they had intelligence." (76c)
      vi. Our souls pre-exist our bodies not in some vague sense, as a kind of neutral life-force, but rather as intelligent agents. They are already able to know things. And what do they know? The forms—the standards and causes of all quality-bearing bodies.

vii. For Socrates, then, the doctrines of the forms and of the immortality of the soul go together: "If those realities we are always talking about exist, the Beautiful and the Good and all that kind of reality, and we refer all the things we perceive to that reality, discovering that it existed before and is ours, and we compare these things with it, then, just as they exist, so our soul must exist before we are born. If these realities do not exist, then this argument is altogether futile." (76d-e)

viii. Much depends on the doctrine of the forms, then. If we do not in fact have reference to timeless standards of qualities, then this argument for the soul's pre-existence—predicated on its pre-existent knowledge of those standards—falls apart. Epistemology here seems to have a real effect on the very character of the soul.

b. Can a Soul Be Scattered?

i. Tying the pre-existence of the soul to the reality of the forms seems to be enough to convince Simmias that Socrates is on the right track. Cebes has a reservation, however. He's willing to accept that the soul pre-exists because it has prior knowledge of the forms, but he doesn't think this proves that the soul continues to exist after death. Perhaps there is a period of pre-existence knowledge, then a life of ignorance and anamnesis, finally leading to total annihilation. (77b)

ii. In response, Socrates reminds Cebes of their earlier agreement that "every living thing must come from the dead." (77d) The force of his reminder is this: the soul pre-exists the living body, but the soul itself has to come from somewhere. Rather than simply hanging around in the soul-realm for a quasi-infinite amount of time until it enters its body, the soul in fact comes into that pre-existent realm out of a prior bodily life. Its old body died; the soul lived on; it gained or regained knowledge of the forms; then it entered another body and lost most of that knowledge. Repeat.

iii. The image is that of a cycle of life and death, the soul revolving through bodies and the bodiless realm in an alternating fashion. Cebes' complaint is a serious one, but Socrates faults it for not according with the cyclical process of becoming that they'd agreed on earlier. This circle of life and death would also seem to suggest an infinite progression of time, rather than a singular point when all things began. Looking forward and backward, we see souls cycling in and out of bodies. An instant of soul-creation isn't really described here. The question of whether we can ever break this cycle in the future, however, will continue to be a live one for Socrates.

iv. Socrates next shifts the stakes of the argument somewhat, faulting Simmias and Cebes for thinking of the soul as if it were some subtly material substance. They are afraid that "the wind would really dissolve and scatter the soul" upon the body's death. (77d) Simmias and Cebes are in need of a "charmer" who will sing away their fear of death. (78a) But is Socrates such a charmer? Or is he selling something more than a song?

v. Regardless, Socrates remains very skeptical of the idea that the soul is something that can be "scattered" at all. (78b) Only composite things, made up of smaller parts, can be scattered, he argues. But it's not immediately clear that the soul is a composite thing, a compound of other things.

vi. Next, Socrates links this distinction between the composite and the non-composite to the distinction between what remains the same and what varies over time: "Are not the things that always remain the same and in the same state most likely not to be composite, whereas those that vary from one time to another and are never the same are composite?" (78c)

vii. Before leaping into the question of whether the soul remains the same or changes over time, Socrates again brings us back to the forms. Recall that his doctrine of immortality seems to depend on the reality of those forms. Here he argues: "let us then return to those same things with which we were dealing earlier, to that reality of whose existence we are giving an account in our questions and answers; are they ever the same and in the same state, or do they vary from one time to another; can the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing in itself, the real, ever be affected by any change whatever? Or does each of them that really is, being uniform by itself, remain the same and never in any way tolerate any change whatever?" (78c-d)

viii. Cebes concurs that the forms, as real and perfect standards of the qualities in things, must remain the same. If they always varied, like material things do, then they would hardly work as firm standards for those things.

ix. We now begin to see a series of distinctions, joined by the connective tissue of Socrates' argument:
1. Varying over Time→Composite→Sense-Perceptible→Visible→Body
2. Abiding in Sameness→Non-composite→Thinkable→Invisible→Soul

c. Detoxing from Bodily Drunkenness

i. Socrates compares the effect the body has on the soul to intoxication. Dragging down into the mire of embodied variation, the soul "is confused and dizzy, as if it were drunk." (79c) Just as a drunken person—hypothetical, of course!—sways this way and that, their vision blurred, so the drunken soul finds itself storm-tossed in the sea of change that's all around us. Its goal is to grab for a life-preserver, some modicum of stability amidst torrential instability. Or, to keep with the metaphor of the drunk, it needs to find itself a good detox program.

ii. Socrates describes such a detox program to Cebes in the form of a leading question: "But when the soul investigates by itself it passes into the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging, and being akin to this, it always stays with it whenever it is by itself and can do so; it ceases to stray and remains in the same state as it is in touch with things of the same kind, and its experience then is what is called wisdom?" (79d)

iii. The soul, thinks Socrates, is more akin to what is stable than to what is changing. The more stable it is, the 'better' it is at being a soul. The less stable it is, the worse it is at being a soul. In the latter case, the soul begins to act like a body—to get drunk—or even take orders from the body, chasing after the bodily sensations and impulses. This inverts what Socrates takes to be the 'natural' order. The soul, akin to divine stability, should rule the body, akin to mortal instability. (80a-b)

iv. Here again we find a series of linked oppositions, which we might map out as follows:
1. Soul: divine: deathless: intelligible: uniform: indissoluble: same: ruler
2. Body: human: mortal: multiform: unintelligible: soluble: different: ruled

v. Recalling the question of whether a soul can be scattered or not, Socrates next reiterates that, while bodies are soluble things that can be dissolved, souls are indissoluble. (80b) Intelligible things do not corrode and decay like non-intelligible, corporeal things.
vi. When a soul is drunk, however, it might confuse its indissolubility with the body's tendency to dissolve after death. To overcome this confusion, one must purify oneself from the contamination of the body, from the contaminating thought that we are nothing but our bodies. And how do we begin to purify ourselves before the final purification of death? Why, through philosophy, of course!
vii. As Socrates reminds us: "If it [the soul] is pure when it leaves the body and drags nothing bodily with it, as it had no willing association with the body in life, but avoided it and gathered itself together by itself and always practiced this, which is no other than practicing philosophy in the right way, in fact, training to die easily. Or is this not training for death?" (80e)
viii. Such purification through philosophy prepares the soul to face the "invisible" realm on the intelligible, of the "divine and immortal and wise," and even be "happy" there. (81a) Again, Socrates introduces happiness somewhat abruptly, as it follows along with the soul's cleansing of bodily influence. The implication, ultimately, is that we are truly happiest in death.
ix. Before death, however, the soul is "permeated by the physical," weighed down by the body on all sides. This might cause the soul to feel "heavy" even after the death of the body. Unpurified and unprepared for the bodiless realm, it strains to hold onto its bodily shape. Somewhat surprisingly, Socrates uses this heaviness of unprepared souls to explain the apparition of ghosts around graves. And what are ghosts but dead souls imperfectly preserving a shady sketch of their once-live bodily forms? (81c-d)
x. The ghosts that haunt their graves are souls of "inferior men," Socrates and Cebes agree. (81d) They wander about until their desire for a body thrust them back into one. And now we're back at the doctrine of reincarnation.
xi. If wandering ghosts are lesser men, asks Cebes, then where do they go once they've stopped wandering? What kind of bodies do they inhabit next? This question raises the possibility of a reincarnational hierarchy. Not every lost soul returns to an equally fine body. The quality of one's soul decides the quality of the body one will inhabit in their next life. Socrates' (half-joking?) hierarchy ends up looking like this (82a-c):
    1. Deification: the souls of purified philosophers become like gods, no longer dragged down to the bodily realm
    2. Social Insects: pragmatic people who are moderate for less-than-philosophical reasons become industrious but unimaginative worker-bees, ants, etc. (or perhaps even similar kinds of humans again!)
    3. Predators: unjust people and tyrannical souls continue to hunt their prey in the bodies of wolves and hawks
    4. Donkeys: body-drunken souls, lacking in moderation, come back as sluggish beasts
xii. Presumably, most of us would want to join the first category. Socrates, anyway, seeks to let his soul flourish into a godlike status. If the practice of

philosophy is training for death, then after the finish line would lie this possibility of deification.

xiii. To get there, Socrates says that we must purify ourselves through the love of learning rather than love of the body: "those who practice philosophy in the right way keep away from all bodily passions, master them and do not surrender themselves to them." (82c) True philosophers must, in other words, "care for their own soul." (82d) That is the detox program the soul needs if it is ever going to kick its body-binging.

6. Interrogating the Soul (82e-88c)
   a. The Cage of the Senses
      i. If we are to properly care for the soul, we'll have to free it from the cage of its bodily senses and desires. (82e) Since investigation through the senses is "full of deceit," the soul must learn how to investigation truth on its own if it wishes to be purified and set free. (83a)
      ii. This, according to Socrates, is what philosophical practice looks like: "Philosophy then persuades the soul to withdraw from the senses insofar as it is not compelled to use them and bids the soul to gather itself together by itself, to trust only itself and whatever reality, existing by itself, the soul by itself understands, and not to consider as true whatever it examines by other means, for this is different in different circumstances and is sensible and visible, whereas what the soul itself sees is intelligible and invisible." (83a-b)
      iii. Seeking to cultivating the soul's knowledge, the philosopher begins to realize that the greatest evil is not the highest degree of physical pain, but instead the fact that pleasure and pain trick us into thinking that sensory stimuli are to be trusted as truest reality. Pleasure and pain seal the soul shut within its bodily cage. (83c-d)
      iv. Rather than letting itself be sealed in by sensation, the philosophical soul should seek neither pleasure nor pain, but instead a kind of tranquility: "The soul of the philosopher achieves a calm from such emotions; it follows reason and ever stays with it, contemplating the true, the divine, which is not the object of opinion." (84b)
         1. Here Socrates and Plato anticipate in some ways the teachings of Stoicism. The Stoics were another school in ancient Greek philosophy, known for their cultivation of *apatheia*—a philosophical sort of unfeeling that allows us to gain a more reasoned perspective on our tumultuous environment and our place within it.
      v. Seeking this tranquility in the face of stimuli is what it means to escape from evil by gathering up the soul. Untroubled by sensations or desires, the soul would be free to realize its own unity. Disentangled from the body, it could no longer be "scattered and dissipated." (84b)
   b. Hope in the Afterlife
      i. After this ode to the soul's escape from its bodily cage, Plato tells us that there was "a long silence." (84c) Following this moment of wordless reflection, Simmias and Cebes begin whispering to one another. Socrates, realizing they want him to continue on with his argument for the immortality of the soul, asks them what more they want to know.
      ii. When Simmias responds by apologizing for bothering Socrates with all these questions at such an unfortunate time, the philosopher laughs at his

apprentice. The whole point, Socrates reminds us, is that the present situation is not at all a misfortune. (84e) It is in fact the best fortune, the best twist of fate—provided that what Socrates believes about the afterlife turns out to be true.

iii. For his part, Socrates thinks we have good reason to be hopeful. He compares his own situation to that of a swan about to die. Here he references an ancient belief that swans sang most beautifully just before their deaths, inspired as they were by the god Apollo. This was their swansong. It signaled their hope that they were leaving this life to attain a better fate. Socrates has also been dedicated to Apollo, as we've heard time and time again. Perhaps he too is now singing his last song, prophesying more clearly than ever as he approaches the afterlife. (85a-b)

iv. Simmias, impressed by this comparison, responds by conceding that, even if we may never know precisely what happens after death, it is best if we hold on to the divine doctrine of the soul's immortality as a kind of life-raft. (85c-d) Taking refuge on the best theories humankind has come up with thus far—such as that of reincarnation—we can continue our search for an even sturdier vessel, one that can see us through the storm of life and help us reach the mortal shore in good condition.

c. What If The Soul Is A Harmony?

i. Having confirmed that Socrates is happy to be about to drink the poison, Simmias presses on with his philosophical questioning. Even though we've moved passed the original premise of dualism (soul and body), through the doctrine of the forms, up to the call for the soul's intellectual purification from the sensual realm, Simmias is still stuck at stage one. He is still not entirely sure what the soul actually is.

ii. Rather than being some invisible or immaterial thing that hangs around with the body, he asks, why can't the soul instead be something like the "harmony" of the body's different parts moving in beautiful concert? Just as the strings on an instrument produce a charming sound that is something other than the instrument, perhaps the body performs and the soul is the result of that performance. In that way, the soul would still be somehow different from the body, yet it would depend on the body for its existence. If the instrument were broken, no harmony could be played. Likewise, if the body were destroyed, the soul could not be summoned into being. (86a-c)

iii. Rather than immediately offering up a counter-position to Simmias' soul-as-harmony hypothesis, Socrates slyly compliments the younger man for expressing himself so well. The harmony hypothesis does have a certain charm to it, since it allows us to explain how the soul can be something other than the body, yet still dependent on the right ordering of the body for its existence. Perhaps our own sense that consciousness arises out of the proper functioning of neural matter is not so different.

iv. Regardless, before offering up a counterargument, Socrates instead notices that Cebes, too, has a line of questioning he wants to open up. The philosopher decides that it's best to air everyone's grievances about the soul all at once, before building an argument to show why the immortality of the soul survives all such challenges.

d. What If The Body Is A Cloak?

i. Cebes begins by saying that, even if the soul does pre-exist the body (as Socrates claims), that doesn't mean we know that it can survive separation from the body or destruction of the body. Pre-existence doesn't necessarily imply post-existence. (87a)
ii. Still, Cebes doesn't want to go as far as Simmias did. He doesn't think the soul depends on the body, is on the same level as the body, or is somehow inferior to the body. (87b) He agrees with Socrates that the soul is superior to the body. But the question is: 'how' superior is the soul to the body? Even if it hangs around for a bit after death, maybe even jumping into a new body at some point, that does not mean that it lives forever. We still have a long way to go to get to full immortality.
iii. Whereas Simmias turned to a musical analogy, Cebes favors sartorial imagery. What if, he asks, the body is like the soul's cloak? Just as a man may wear many cloaks over the course of his life, yet still die in the last cloak he wore, perhaps the soul 'wears' many bodies over the course of its life, which is rather long but not infinite. The soul could still die after wearing its last body in a string of bodies. As it wears out these bodies, so too does the soul itself wear out. A minimal notion of reincarnation thus falls short of everlasting immortality. (87c-88b)
iv. The consequence of this possibility of wear-and-tear on the soul is that we begin to lose sight of any certainty regarding the afterlife. Even if neither Simmias nor Cebes offer up knockout blows against Socrates, they've still introduced enough doubt into our minds that we might be foolish to face death with the philosopher's unbreakable courage.
v. As Cebes concludes: "any man who faces death with confidence is foolish, unless he can prove that the soul is altogether immortal. If he cannot, a man about to die must of necessity always fear for his soul, lest the present separation of the soul from the body bring about the complete destruction of the soul." (88b)
vi. At this point, the dialogue lapses back into Phaedo's own voice, as he tells Echecrates how depressed he and the other listeners were upon hearing Cebes' conclusion. They had all been convinced by Socrates' prior arguments for immortality—or so they'd thought. But now, having heard of the harmony hypothesis and the cloak question, they fear they are falling back into the realm of "no certainty." (88c)

7. Saving the Soul through Rational Discourse (88d-95e)
   a. Against Misology
      i. Our interlude with Phaedo and Echecrates is brief. While admitting that he and the other listeners were depressed at this point in Socrates' final conversation, Phaedo hastens to add that they were soon to be comforted by another counterargument courtesy of their hero.
      ii. Telling Phaedo himself that there's no need to mourn (or cut his hair), Socrates further cautions the young man not to turn against the dialectical enterprise. Even if rational argument—the work of logos—often leads us to question our comfortable assumptions and thereby risk falling into uncertainty or even despair, that doesn't mean we should give up on reasoned discussion altogether.

iii. Socrates calls people who experience such a degree of rationality-fatigue "misologues," on the model of "misanthropy." Just as misanthropes hate human beings based on their experience of a few bad apples, so misologues hate reasoned argument based on a few bad experiences where rational argument debunked their cherished beliefs. He warns Phaedo to avoid such misology at any cost: "There is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate reasonable discourse." (89d)

iv. The risk of this evil is everywhere in philosophy. Exploring oppositions and exploiting contradictions, the philosopher risks following into a relativistic abyss, where there is nothing left but the sheer play of contradictions. This is the path of utter skepticism, and it's not one that Socrates wants us to take. (90b)

v. Two unfortunate possibilities seems to be laid before us. Either we will become disgusted with the endless contradictions uncovered by dialectic, turning against philosophy itself and living in willful ignorance, or we will embrace endless contradiction, turning into a pack of stuck-up skeptics. Socrates wants us to sail through a narrow pass between these two dangerous outcroppings.

vi. Rather than blaming arguments themselves for the risk of despair, Socrates advises, we should blame ourselves. If we hold one thing to be true and then rational discussion reveals it to be false, then the fault lies with us. If we had subjected that initial proposition to reasoned debate from day one, we could've avoided this upheaval. Such occasions should give us reason to increase the vigilance of our reason, not to throw it out the window. A philosopher who blames arguments rather than himself must "spend the rest of his life hating and reviling reasoned discussion and so be deprived of truth and knowledge of reality." (90d)

b. Debunking the Harmony Hypothesis

i. After exhorting his companions to trudge on with their rational work, Socrates leads the way by continuing to debate the definition of the soul. He does so first by returning to Simmias' suggestion that the soul is a kind of harmony produced by the body. As we'll see, Socrates attacks this hypothesis from a few different angles:

1. Harmony contradicts Anamnesis

a. Socrates' initial move here is to juxtapose the harmony hypothesis with his hypothesis about recollection. Once again, Simmis and Cebes both assent to the teaching that learning is a kind of recollection in the soul. (92a) Socrates then uses Simmias' consent to recollection as a point of access for an attack on the hypothesis that the soul is a harmony.

b. Socrates' wager is that the propositions "learning is anamnesis" and "the soul is a harmony" contradict each other, since a harmony cannot pre-existence the instruments that bring it into existence. Let's see what he means.

c. If the soul is a harmony produced by the body, Socrates reminds Simmias, then the soul is in some way dependent on the body for its existence. Just as a flute must exist before a

flute-song can be heard, so the body must exist before it can produce the soul as the harmony of its bodily parts. However, if anamnesis is true, then the soul must pre-exist the body, since that is the only way it can know the forms prior to entering into the realm of embodied confusion. If the harmony hypothesis is true, then the anamnesis hypothesis cannot be true.

d. Asked to make this dramatic choice between two intriguing hypotheses, Simmias decides to preserve anamnesis and jettison harmony. As he concedes: "our soul was said to exist also before it came into the body, just as the reality does that is of the kind that we qualify by the words 'what it is.'" (92e) Simmias wants to privilege this hypothesis about the soul's pre-existence in the presence of the forms—the what-it-is—even at the expense of the harmony hypothesis.

2. Souls Don't Have Degrees
    a. Next, Socrates turns to an attack on the harmony hypothesis that doesn't depend on the controversial anamnesis hypothesis. If a soul is a harmony, he asks, then does that mean that specific souls can be 'more' or 'less' a soul? Are there 'degrees' of souls?
    b. Socrates asks this because harmonies, it would seem, can be ranked by degree. When someone tries to play a song on their guitar, there are many different levels of harmony that can be attained. Someone might be note-perfect in their playing, or they might fall far short of that standard. That is why we can rank musicians relative to one another, based on their relative skills at producing harmonies.
    c. But this would lead to a strange consequence for the soul. (93b-d) If the definition of a soul was a harmony, then any soul would have to be equally harmonious. To be soul would simply be to be a harmony. We couldn't differentiate between more or less harmonious souls.
    d. To say that a soul was less harmonious would then be to say that it is 'less' of a soul. But Socrates and Simmias agree that there's no such thing as a degree of soul. Rather, a soul just is a soul. It doesn't allow of more or less.
    e. Now, this leaves open the possibility that we can use the word 'harmonious' to describe souls. Perhaps we can indeed say that there are more and less harmonious souls—but this would mean that the souls themselves were not defined as harmonies. Rather, a soul is a thing that can turn out to be harmonious (or not), but it doesn't become a soul in the first place because it is a harmony.
    f. This is all a roundabout way of saying that 'harmony' falls short of giving us a definition of soul. It is, at best, an extra quality that we can look for in souls. Harmony might be a

prerequisite for a soul to be a 'good soul,' but it's not a prerequisite for something to be a soul at all.

3. The Soul Plays the Body
    a. The final point Socrates makes against the harmony hypothesis here has to do with the question of what rules what. Does the soul rule the body? Or does the body rule the soul?
    b. We've already seen that Socrates prefers to talk of the soul ruling the body. The soul, being something intellectual and invisible, is closer to the realm of knowledge and the divine than the body is. It is above the body on the cosmic hierarchy. This means it should call the shots. Since it is the thinking-thing, it should be the one to plan what the body does. To get this backward is to fail to live the philosophical life. (94c-e)
    c. Mapping this onto the harmony hypothesis, we can say that it makes little sense for the body to be the instrument that performs the soul-as-harmony. If anything, the soul should be instrument that plays the body. The soul is the maestro that conducts the music. Or, at the very least, it is the musician that plays its instrument more or less harmoniously. The instrument, however, should never play the musician.

8. The Dialectical Search for Causes (96a-103a)
    a. The Insufficiency of Natural Science
        i. After debunking Simmias' harmony hypothesis, Socrates turns to Cebes' complaint. As we should recall, Cebes was worried that the soul went through bodies like a man goes through cloaks. We may wear out many bodies, but we're still going to die wearing our last cloak. That is: just because the soul lives through more than one body (according to the reincarnation hypothesis), that doesn't mean the soul will truly live forever. Complete immortality, which goes further than a few measly lifetime, still has yet to be proved. (95c-e)
        ii. Recognizing that this is a more difficult question to face than the harmony issue, Socrates pauses for a while. Once again, it looks like he will have to turn to the hypothesis of the forms in order to shore up his hypothesis of the soul's immortality.
        iii. When introducing the forms this time around, Socrates starts with a bit of intellectual autobiography. When he was younger, he tells us, he wanted to seek out knowledge by studying "natural science." This method tries to get us toward knowledge by starting with the data of our sense-perceptions, then moving through memory and opinion, ultimately arriving at the establishment of stable knowledge. In this way, we can proceed from commonsense observations to a reliable understanding of how the world works. (96a-c)
        iv. Strangely, however, Socrates found that the scientific study of nature ended up destabilizing rather than stabilizing his knowledge. Many of the sense-perceptual or commonsense observations he had taken for granted turned

out not to be well-founded. Instead of learning the truest knowledge, he began to un-learn what he thought he knew. (96c)

v. So what was so unsatisfying about these natural-scientific researches? For Socrates, it was the fact that they couldn't tell him about the "causes" of things. (96e) Sure, you can pile up any number of data gleaned from sense-perceptions—e.g., this man is taller than that man—but this falls short of telling us 'why' things are the way they are. True knowledge, Socrates implies, should have as its object the true causes of things. It should answer not just what- or how-questions, but why-questions most of all.

vi. Since he no longer believes that natural science can lead to true knowledge of causes, Socrates has gone on to develop "a confused method" of his own. (97b) This method, he tells us, first came to him when he heard Anaxagoras' statement that mind (nous) "directs and is the cause of everything." (97c) Recall that Anaxagoras often pops up as a foil for Socrates whenever the latter wants to distinguish his own philosophy from natural science.

vii. Developing this one-liner in his own direction, Socrates interprets Anaxagoras as saying that there is a normative component to natural causation. As he puts it: "If then one wished to know the cause of each thing, why it comes to be or perishes or exists, one had to find what was the best way for it to be, or to be acted upon, or to act. On these premises then it befitted a man to investigate only, about this and other things, what is best. The same man must inevitably also know what is worse, for that is part of the same knowledge." (97c-d)

viii. Yet Anaxagoras, it turns out, didn't interpret his own words in this way. Rather, he stuck with the natural-scientific method. Because of that, he would propose natural causes—like air and water—for natural things. (98c-d) It was Socrates' intervention, then, that made Anaxagoras' statement into a remark about the normative shape of nature. By 'normative' here, we mean that Socrates sees value as effectively there already in the realm of facts. To ask 'why is *x x*?' is to ask 'why is it best for *x* to be *x*?' Mind—*nous*—would then be the force that shapes factual nature according to value or value-judgments in advance. This world-making power of mind will turn out to have a lot to do with the *a priori* work done by the forms in the shaping of our sensory world. (Here we see Plato developing the hypothesis of the forms not just epistemologically, but metaphysically.)

b. True Causes versus Causal Prerequisites

i. If true knowledge holds as its objects the causes of things, then we'll have to make sure we know what 'true causes' really look like. As it turns out, there are many different things, both visible and otherwise, which we could categorize as 'causes' of other things. But not all causes are equally causal. Some causes are merely prerequisites—they're necessary but not sufficient for their effects. (E.g., you need wood for there to be a wooden chair, but simply having wood doesn't get you a chair! You'd also need a carpenter, tools, etc.)

ii. A true cause, however, would be the actually decisive factor that leads to a certain effect. Such a cause would be both necessary and sufficient for its effect. Even more than that, it would be directly linked to its effect, so that

one cause couldn't have any number of different effects. Plato is thus making Socrates defend a very strict definition of true causes.

iii. As a basic example to help us grasp this, Socrates offers up his own situation. What is the cause, he asks, of his sitting there in prison? Is it because he has certain bones and muscles that work together to put him in a sitting position? No—it is because "it seemed best" to the Athenians to lock him up and it seemed "more right" to Socrates to stay and take his punishment. These value-judgments by the Athenians have a better claim to being a "true cause" than does the natural configuration of his body, thinks Socrates. His body could have gotten up and ran away at any time, but his mind decided it was better to stay. (98d-99a)

iv. Most people, says Socrates, don't make such careful distinctions between true causes and mere prerequisites: "Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause." (99b) Part of his philosophical awakening, then, has to do with opening his eyes to what really has causal power—as opposed to the conditions under which such causal power acts.

v. The problem with natural science, ultimately, is that it is incapable of moving beyond chains of material connections and arriving at the true causes of things. It misses out on the possibility that mind directs nature by organizing it in terms of value, not simply observable fact. To keep searching for an ultimate material cause—water, air, fire—is a vain enterprise. (99c-d)

vi. Giving up on this dead end, Socrates then turned to a new method: dialectic. He moved from the space of things to the realm of words. This is how we would proceed: "taking as my hypothesis in each case the theory that seemed to me the most compelling, I would consider as true, about cause and everything else, whatever agreed with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree." (100a)

vii. In other words: Socrates would not use philosophical dialectic to test out certain hypotheses. We've seen him do this throughout the dialogue—with the immortality of the soul, with recollection, with the forms. But it's only now that he's pulling back the curtain to let us see how the machine works. In addition to being opposed to natural science, dialectic also signals a shift away from the more open-ended Socratic method (*elenchus*) we saw in the *Apology*. Now he's not just using questions to reveal others' contradictions, he's actually willing to put forth positive doctrines and test them out. Of course, such an examination will have to proceed by way of questions and exploratory discussions—by way of *dialektikē*.

viii. Dialectic, then, is going to help us in our search for true causes. The hypothesis we'll be working with here is, as usual, the forms. Socrates plans to bring the forms into our conversation about causality, in order to see if they can't get us past the apparent aporia of natural, value-free causation.

ix. As Socrates tells it: "I am going to try to show you the kind of cause with which I have concerned myself. I turn back to those oft-mentioned things and proceed from them. I assume the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest. If you grant me these and agree that they exist, I hope to show you the cause as a result, and to find the soul to be immortal." (100b)

c. Cling to the Forms
   i. Socrates is asking a lot of the forms, it seems. Not only are they meant to help us explain causality; they're also meant to help us explain learning-as-recollection and, as we're reminded here, the very immortality of the soul.
   ii. So how are forms supposed to explain causation? Well, for one thing, Socrates suggests that the forms simply are the causes: "I think that, if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason that that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything." (100c)
   iii. The claim that forms are causes is both difficult to accept and elegant in its simplicity. Socrates can no longer accept the sophisticated causes of the natural scientists. They may sound complex and scientifically intimidating, but all too often they turn out to be imperfect and inconsistent. Natural science tries to tell us too much and therefore ends us telling us the wrong things. The philosophy of forms, however, tells us less, but in doing so it gives us a more secure framework for thinking in general.
   iv. Forms, then, are the safest, simplest causes of particular things and their particular qualities: "I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively, and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. That, I think, is the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error. This is the safe answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful." (100d-e)
   v. Next Socrates exhorts both Simmias and Cebes to cling to this formal hypothesis, since it is one of the best and most straightforward accounts of causation yet to be discovered. Still, it remains a hypothesis, which means it can be called into question. When that happens, we can only resort to the dialectical exploration of other hypotheses. In any case, we must avoid confusing hypotheses, at least if we are to preserve the dialectical integrity of philosophical discussion. (101d-e)
   vi. At this point, Echecrates breaks in to applaud Socrates' words. The hypothesis of the forms seems to appease his Pythagorean ears…
   vii. Echecrates' interruption is brief and so we straightaway return to Phaedo's telling of the story. Socrates' next move is to suggest that the formal hypothesis helps us get past the problem of the 'compresence of opposites.' We should recall here all of the discussion earlier about how opposites seem to be generated by opposites, often in a cyclical fashion. Here, though, we dig deeper into the problem of one thing containing two opposite qualities at the very same time.
   viii. For example: We could call Simmias 'tall,' since he's taller than Socrates. But we could also call Simmias 'short,' since he's shorter than Phaedo. So we end

up with a Simmias that's both tall and short. Both opposites are present (or com-present) in him.

ix. For Socrates, this is a problem, since one thing should never coincide with his opposite. The fact that our relative judgments about material things does seem to suggest that opposites co-exist within such things should tell us that there is something inadequate about those judgments. They fall short of telling us why Simmias is tall or short; they offer up only relative comparisons, which shift based on the contingency of the relation and the comparison.

x. If we want to understand the true causes of qualities, then, we'll have to move past these relative judgments. This should allow us to escape the problem of the compresence of opposites. Indeed, Socrates thinks that the forms, as the true causes of qualities, keep opposites from mixing in with one another: "Tallness, being tall, cannot venture to be small. In the same way, the short in us is unwilling to become or to be tall ever, nor does any other of the opposites become or be its opposite while still being what it was; either it goes away or is destroyed when that happens." (102e-103a)

xi. As we'll see in the subsequent passages, Socrates' claim that the forms can keep opposite qualities from commingling within the same particular thing will be crucial for his ultimate defense of the soul's immortality.

9. From the Forms to the Immortality of the Soul (103a-115a)
    a. Participation in the Forms
        i. After bringing the forms in to attack the compresence of opposites, Socrates is immediately challenged by one of his listeners. Didn't we hear earlier that opposites flow out of opposites in a cycle? So why is it a problem for two opposites to be together in the same thing? Is Socrates contradicting himself?
        ii. No—of course not! (Says Socrates, anyway.) Whereas before Socrates had been speaking of the cycle of opposites in the world of things, now he is talking about the way that the forms escape from all mingling of opposites. We can't mix up the material realm of visible, particular things and the invisible realm of formal realities, discoverable only through the soul's reasoning.
        iii. As Socrates corrects his listener: "you do not understand the difference between what is said now and what was said then, which was that an opposite thing came from an opposite thing; now we say that the opposite itself could never become opposite to itself, neither that in us nor that in nature. Then, my friend, we were talking of things that have opposite qualities and naming these after them, but now we say that these opposites themselves, from the presence of which in them things get their name, never can tolerate the coming to be from one another." (103b-c)
        iv. In other words:
            1. Opposite things (particulars) do proceed from opposite things.
                a. E.g., good people can become bad people and vice versa.
                b. E.g., living people can become dead people and vice versa.
            2. Opposites themselves (forms) cannot proceed from opposites.
                a. E.g., goodness cannot become badness.
                b. E.g., life itself cannot become death itself.

v. Just because all particular things participate in certain forms and thereby display certain qualities, that doesn't mean that particular things behave like forms do. Forms must remain pure—they must remain stable causes of stable qualities, so that they can be the objects of stable knowledge. Particular things, meanwhile, fluctuate over time, displaying different qualities that give rise to the instability of our sense-perceptual experience of them.
vi. However, there do seem to be certain particulars that are seemingly attached to the forms in which they participate. For these particulars, it is impossible to not participate in the forms that give them their identity.
vii. Socrates' example here is mathematical. He asks us to look at odd numbers. (103e-104a) Odd numbers are particular things, and there are many of them—3, 5, 7… Each of these particular numbers participates in the form of Oddness—that is both what makes them odd (metaphysics) and how we know they're odd (epistemology). For an odd number to be an odd number, it must always participate in Oddness. Unlike, say, an ever-changing body, it can't shift from one opposite to the other, from Hotness to Coldness. Rather, the idea of an "even number 3" is simply nonsensical. In Socrates terms, the 3 flees before the Even—any particular odd number cannot bear to be attached to the Form of the Even, which would obliterate its oddness. If the Form of the Odd is present in the number, then the Form of the Even cannot be present there—and vice versa.
viii. Here Socrates seems to be introducing us to a special sub-class of particular things, which we might call "especially form-participating particulars." These things won't allow themselves to join up with their formal opposites. In the face of the opposite, they can only flee or perish. So:
    1. The Form of Odd cannot touch the Form of Even
    2. Odd Numbers cannot touch the Form of Even
        a. … also since we know odd numbers must always participate in the Form of Odd…
ix. This makes odd numbers rather different from many other particulars. A body, for example, can participate in Smallness and Largeness over the course of its life, without fleeing or perishing in the face of opposites. Instead, it lives in the cycle of those opposites. But numbers seem to work differently. Perhaps this has to do with their stability and their invisibility, two qualities that are sadly lacking form the realm of growing and changing bodies.
x. As Socrates sums up this doctrine of especially form-participating things: "Not only does the opposite not admit its opposite, but that which brings along some opposite into that which it occupies; that which brings this along will not admit the opposite to that which it brings along." (105a)
xi. In other words: Forms do not admit their opposites. Particular things that always participate in their forms also do not admit the opposites of those forms.

b. The Soul's Participation in the Form of Life
    i. Once again, we've delved down into the depths of the formal hypothesis. Ascending back out, we now reconnect with the guiding question of the whole dialogue: is the hypothesis of the soul's immortality sound? All of this difficult talk about forms not admitting their opposites must be brought to

bear upon the soul's fate. But how do we get from one hypothesis to the other?

ii. Let's start by asking what the soul is. Is the soul a particular thing? Yes, it would seem so. And what form does the particular soul participate in? Perhaps it participates in more than one form, but the form it seems to participate in with especial intimacy is the Form of Life. At bottom, that is what the soul brings to the dualistic constitution of the human being. A body is just a corpse unless it is quickened to life by the force of life—by a soul, in other words.

iii. By definition, then, the soul participates in the Form of Life and brings that Form with it wherever it goes. If it's present in a body, it gives life to that body. If it's absent from a body, that body lies dead as a corpse. The soul is that which always brings life along with it. (105c-d)

iv. But what have we just learned about particular things that always bring their Forms along with them? They cannot admit into themselves whatever's opposite to their Forms! The soul, invisible thing that it is, perhaps functions like its fellow invisible, the number.

v. As Socrates implies: "the soul will never admit the opposite of that which it brings along." (105d) And what does it bring along? Life. What is the opposite of Life? Death. The soul, Socrates and Cebes agree, is then a thing that doesn't admit death into itself. It is "the deathless." (105e)

vi. Being the kind of thing that always brings Life with it, the soul is in a special position. We saw above that other things can either flee or perish when their opposing Form comes to town. Snow, for example, does not flee when the Form of Heat is present—it simply melts, perishes. It is destroyed. How then can we be sure that the soul is not destroyed by Death as its opposite?

vii. Socrates' answer is that, since destruction is simply another name for death, it would be a contradiction to say that the deathless soul admits death into itself under the name 'destruction.' (106d) Because the soul is a thing most intimate to the Form of Life, it can never be destroyed by Death. At worst, perhaps, it can flee—flee in the face of the death of its body. (The soul engages in flight, not fight.)

viii. And so: "when death comes to man, the mortal part of him dies, it seems, but his deathless part goes away safe and indestructible, yielding the place to death." (106e)

c. The Myth of the Afterlife

i. So what is the payoff of all that philosophizing about the soul's immortality? We've piled up other hypotheses—recollection, forms—in order to support this central hypothesis, but are we truly convinced that it is true beyond the shadow of a doubt? Simmias isn't, as he tells Socrates. He sees the logical connection between the steps they've taken, but there's still an element of doubt within him, which he attributes to human weakness. (107a)

ii. Socrates, rather than scolding Simmias for his idiocy, applauds him for his honesty and his unwillingness to leap into the realm of absolute certainty. For all of the above, the immortality of the soul remains a hypothesis. We can and should, Socrates warns us, continue to re-examine it and its premises, even if we do find ourselves convinced at the moment.

iii. Says Socrates: "our first hypotheses require clearer examination, even though we find them convincing. And if you analyze them adequately, you will, I think, follow the argument as far as a man can, and if the conclusion is clear, you will look no further." (105b) Of course, we have not arrived at that point of final rest yet. Because of that, this hypothesis of immortality remains an invitation for humankind to ask questions about its ultimate ends. Looked at in the right way, we can see in Socrates' words the beginning of a new dialogue—the dialogue of the history of philosophy, at least as it concerns human finitude.

iv. For now, though, Socrates is happy to press on toward the consequences of his hypothesis concerning immortality. If—and it's a big if!—the soul is immortal, then Socrates thinks we should also hold that the only escape from evil is education in goodness and wisdom. Recall that philosophy is the practice for death, our preparation in this life for the next. Only by training our souls in this way can we escape the endless cycle of reincarnation—here implicitly evil because explicitly embodied—and attain the stability of true knowledge.

v. As Socrates puts it: "now that the soul appears to be immortal, there is no escape from evil or salvation for it except by becoming as good and wise as possible, for the soul goes to the underworld possessing nothing but its education and upbringing, which are said to bring the greatest benefit or harm to the dead right at the beginning of the journey yonder." (107d)

vi. This part shouldn't be terribly surprising. We've already heard Socrates telling us that philosophy is the practice for death; now he's just backing that up with his immortality hypothesis. He goes on to add that purified, well-ordered, wiser souls are familiar with the disembodied side of life, so they can better follow their divine guides—daimons, again—once they pass over into the afterlife. (108a-c)

vii. What is a tad surprising is that Socrates doesn't stop there. He goes on to add much about the afterlife scene and how it fits into a depiction of the whole world. Here he shifts from the genre of philosophical dialogue into something more like mythmaking. We'll have to think more about why Plato has Socrates turn to myth here—as he often does near the end of dialogues—and what we ourselves can learn from this interaction between philosophizing and storytelling.

viii. Socrates wants to tell us about the shape of the earth. Like us, he thinks it's a sphere; so far, so good. But he also holds that this spherical earth has layers. While we may think we live on the surface of the earth, we actually live in one of its hollows—or caves—seeing everything only through a distorting haze. We're not quite able to poke our heads up into the higher realm of the 'ether.' (109a-e)

ix. There is then a kind of cosmic hierarchy, of which we occupy but one part. We are in no way at the top of this hierarchy. Socrates tells Simmias that he's happy to say more about the higher level of reality, "if this is the moment to tell a tale." (110a) (Is it, though?) Above us, in the ethereal realm, lives the true surface of the earth. Those who live there are able to gaze up directly at the heavens, whereas we only get a distorted view from a level or two down. This higher plane is home to a pure sky and a pure earth; unmixed colors and

freedom from decay are evident there. A higher breed of humans live up there, breathing ether and seeing the gods up close. (111a-e)

d. Reward & Punishment
    i. Just as we are not at the top of the cosmic hierarchy, neither are we at the bottom. It can get worse—much worse. Below our hollow are deeper and deeper caverns, the worst of which is Tartarus. Some people's souls might wind up trapped in its depths. Many souls, stuck somewhere in the middle, will wander around other forsaken corners of this postmortem cartography (usually around the Lake of Acheron, where they await metempsychosis). It takes skill, preparation, practice to navigate our way out of the hollows and avoid the fates of endless reincarnation—or something worse. (112a-113c)
    ii. In Socrates' vision of the afterlife, then, we can begin to see the outlines of a system of reward and punishment. Those who are philosophically prepared can ascend toward the presence of the gods; those who are unprepared risk falling into the lowest pits. And how is it possible to tell the prepared from the unprepared? How to separate the two groups? A judgment will be needed.
    iii. And a judgment is what we get: "When the dead arrive at the place to which each has been led by his guardian spirit, they are first judged as to whether they have led a good and pious life. Those who have lived an average life make their way to the Acheron and embark upon such vessels as there are for them and proceed to the lake. There they dwell and are purified by penalties for any wrongdoing they may have committed; they are also suitably reward for their good deeds as each deserves." (113d-e)
    iv. The *Apology* already hinted that there would be a higher court of appeals and a more divine judgment than that conducted in Athens. Here, in the *Phaedo*, we see Plato exploring what such a higher judgment might look like. Just as there is a comic hierarchy, so is there is a hierarchy of possible afterlives:
        1. Pure Philosophers → unimaginable beauty
        2. The Pious → Surface of the Earth
        3. The Average → Punishment, Reward, then Rebirth
        4. The Petty Criminals → Temporary Punishment with Possible Parole
        5. The Wicked → Tartarus Forever
    v. These are the possible consequences of the soul's immortality. Of course, Socrates is quick to admit that the myth he's just spun is not meant to be taken as scientific fact. Nevertheless, he argues, the very idea of a postmortem judgment is worth considering, since it will lead the soul to attend to its own divine potential, its own gifts, its own virtues. Even if it's a lie, it's a noble one.
    vi. As Socrates puts it: "No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale." (114d)

10. Approaching the Instant of Death (115a-118)
    a. I Am My Soul

i. In the end, then, Socrates has left his immortality hypothesis open to question and his myth open to interpretation. Still, it is clear that he thinks that the care of our souls is of the utmost importance. The cultivation of wisdom and virtue should be prioritized, even if we can never quite know for sure that we'll out live our bodies. We must nevertheless prepare for the possibility, which means training ourselves in "moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom, and truth." (115a)
ii. Another consequence that follows from the discussion here is that, for Socrates, we simply are our souls. Even if the human being seems to always be made up of a soul and a body, it's now looking like the body is not a necessary part of the human equation. To live on as a soul without a body is the goal. The body, as contaminant, holds us back from attaining our virtue, from becoming truly human, if only for the first time in death.
iii. This identification of self with soul is made quite clear by a joke Socrates makes in his final moments. As the philosophical debate has drawn to a close, Crito and company are now making the very quotidian arrangements concerning Socrates' repose. They want to know how Socrates would like 'himself' to be buried.
iv. Socrates responds, "In any way you like, if you can catch me and I do not escape you!" (115c-d) After all this talk, Crito still doesn't get that Socrates isn't the dead body that he'll be leaving behind. Socrates is his soul—nothing else. Burial is irrelevant to him. They can do whatever they want with his body. His soul will already be traversing the afterlife, straining to follow the daimonic guide away from Acheron and Tartarus, up towards the ethereal and perhaps even the divine.

b. Death A Blessing—Under the Right Conditions
i. Despite all this, as usual, everyone else except Socrates remains upset. His family comes for one last visit and then departs again. Next, a policeman shows up to let everyone know the cup of poison hemlock is on its way. The man expresses regret that such a noble guy like Socrates should have to poison himself at the behest of the state, but, at the end of the day, he's just following orders. (Quite a common excuse!) (116a-e)
ii. In response to the policeman, Socrates shows no animosity, but rather asks for the poison. Crito, still blind to philosophy, tells Socrates he can still delay until sundown. But what would be the point? If Socrates has had one consistent message throughout the *Apology* and *Phaedo*, it's that death is neither to be feared nor to be delayed when it must come. A little more life is never enough to satisfy; better to prepare for the afterlife and what it may hold in store.
iii. In the philosopher's words: "I do not expect any benefit from drinking the poison a little alter, except to become ridiculous in my own eyes for clinging to life…" (117a)
iv. Cheerfully, and cracking wise until the end, Socrates takes the cup when it comes. Still pious, of course, he offers a final prayer to the gods. All the friends of Socrates, still unconvinced emotionally if not intellectually, begin to weep for him and decry the injustice. Scolding them, he says that a man should die in good-omened silence. Piety and humor remain intimates in this final scene. (117b-d)

v. Everyone seems to hold back their tears as Socrates slowly dies from the poison. As his body goes numb, he is able to croak out one last line to the ever-loyal (if slow-to-follow) Crito. "We owe a cock to Asclepius," he tells his old friend. (118a) Asclepius, the god of healing, was owed a sacrifice—a fowl would usually suffice—whenever he had done his work and cured someone's illness. By making these his final words, Socrates seems to be telling us that his death is not the culmination of an illness, but rather the cure for the secret sickness that is embodied life.