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How the Philosopher's Work of Death in *Phaedo* Might be understood as Dramatic?

The *Phaedo* is a masterpiece of the ancient Greek literature and is a portrayal of Plato's philosophy. In addition to expressing his philosophical thinking, the setting and context of the narrative follows the classic Greek tragedies formation, particularly Aesops and Theseus mythologies, in describing Socrates's last moments. In comprehension its dramatic presentation, modern critics have attempted to consolidate such techniques through analyzing the philosophical arguments. Thus, in understanding the *Phaedo* as a dramatic literary piece, it is imperative to study Plato's presentation of the immortality of the soul, despite the bodily death of Socrates. Here, the paper discusses Socrates view about the soul in relation to his imminent death while drinking the poison.

The understanding of Socrates's theory of the soul immortality is presented in a dramatic manner. Through creating illustrations for his perspective by the use of the Endymion myth in addition to putting into the context the Anaxagoras's theory, he states that all things in the world began with chaos. Plato authors this dialog from the perspective of Phaedo, who narrates the occurrences to Echecrates. Thus, the aspect of the story permits the addition of various dramatic features that improve the audience's imagery of the events and increase understanding of Socrates's emotions. For instance, the philosopher has a family expelled from the occasion, which is an effort towards ensuring that emotions do not impede the important discourse on the soul and death. In addition to rejecting any forms of pity for the fate of the main hero at the

beginning of the discourse, the readers can note that *Phaedo* is affectionately touching the boy's head. Such details add an insight concerning Socrates's feelings and improve the readers' general understanding of the happenings in the court.

According to Socrates, there is nothing more important in the world than the soul. In fact, he urges the inhabitants of the city to protect the soul of the metropolis, but to disregard every other thing. In his punishment, the council of leaders of Athens decided to preserve his (Socrates's) soul, through freeing it from his body. However, according to Socrates, he had initially decided to free his soul from his body in any other way but not suicide. According to the *Apology*, the philosopher wanted to preserve his soul, but after opposing the city's establishment, the authority decided to separate his soul from the body.

“And we must suppose, my dear fellow, that the corporeal is heavy, oppressive, earthly, and visible. So the soul which is tainted by its presence is weighed down and dragged back into the visible world, through fear, as they say, of Hades or the invisible, and hovers about tombs and graveyards...” (Plato *Phaedo* 81d)

The immortality of the soul as presented by Socrates is dramatic, because it is an uncommon belief. According to the philosopher's belief, the soul continues to live after the death of the body. In fact, the writer argues that life is derived from the soul, which lives eternally and holds intelligence even after death. Through mentioning a theory stating that just as deceased obtain their souls from the living, the latter's souls are attained from the dead.

The dramatic element is not based on whether the soul exists after death or not, but refers to a personal choice to dedicate oneself to the philosophy of life. Here, Plato presents the debate in the *Phaedo* as a sophisticated tool influence personal emotions and an analysis that will

strengthen personal confidence in philosophy. The states of death and life are defined in realism as contraries, which do not include any form of a third probability. However, according to the *Phaedo*, the third possibility is the perpetual life of the soul and its eternal possession of intelligence. The main argument by Cebes is that the soul and the body are conjoined in life. In fact, he adds that the body's indulgences and decision-making abilities are guided by the soul. Thus, the form of association between the body and the soul in life is also extended to death.

“But, I suppose, if at the time of its release the soul is tainted and impure, because it has always associated with the body and cared for it and loved it, and has been so beguiled by the body and its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment, and if it is accustomed to hate and fear and avoid what is invisible and hidden from our eyes, but intelligible and comprehensible by philosophy—if the soul is in this state, do you think that it will escape independent and uncontaminated?” (Plato *Phaedo* 81b-81c)

Cebes correctly notes the contradictory nature of Socrates statement and indicates that if the second part is true, the first part doesn't make sense. According to the philosopher's first statement on the immortality of the soul, there is a reduction of the various aspects of life to a few entities. Although the interlocutors are unwilling to dispute his wisdom, Cebes interjects and convinces him to proceed to the next proof of the recollection theory. Despite having no dialectic refutation, the concept is challenged by the dramatic aspects of the dialogue. As a result, the persistent comical interjections as the interlocutors attempt to understand the theory is an indication that the theory is misunderstood despite the explanation provided.

Thus, since the body creates unnecessary tension for the soul, the latter should refrain from allowing the tension to direct its course. In fact, the soul should maintain its composure and concentrate only on things that affect it. In addition to avoiding any derailment, the soul should attribute no truth to things that it perceives as subject to changes, because such things are visible and sensible, which are against what the soul is able to see, only invisible and intelligible aspects. This means that philosophers indicate that in such cases, the soul should seize the opportunity and dissociate itself from the body. As a result, it will refrain from the griefs, desires, and pleasures, which has long-term effects on those who indulge in such bodily desires (Plato *Phaedo* 83b).

Despite lamenting that no charmer will replace Socrates, Simmias argues that the theory of recollection is insufficient. Here, he states that if it were, it would provide an explanation for the soul's existence before birth and not after the death. However, the third argument by Socrates maintains that the existence of the soul is not associated with the body, which implores that during the termination of life, it stays aloof from physical things. As a result, the death of the body is physical, which does not affect the existence of the non-physical soul. The premise of this argument is that the soul has a limited or no association with the body. However, Socrates appears unconvinced by his own statement. In his dilemma, he wonders whether there is any connection between the body and soul, stating that if it were the case, the body should not be held hostage by the soul. In fact, Socrates appears to dispute the non-physicality of the soul when he concludes his statement by stating that the individuals who care for their souls accord them higher priority over their bodies and are different from the other people who pursue a course of destructions.

“And so, Cebes, those who care about their souls and do not subordinate them to the body dissociate themselves firmly from these others and refuse to accompany them on their haphazard journey, and, believing that it is wrong to oppose philosophy with her offer of liberation and purification, they turn and follow her wherever she leads.” (Plato *Phaedo* 82d)

Despite Socrates reservations on his own theory, Simmias and Cebes appear dissatisfied with the above argument and are interrupted while whispering. At this juncture, the philosopher adds that the objections and the doubts about his theory of the absent relationship between the soul and the body are valid if an in-depth analysis can be conducted on the explanation. However, after several significant explanations, Socrates decides to address Simmias’s argument that the soul is an attunement and Cebes’s statement that the soul, similarly to a tailor’s last overcoat, may outlast the wearer. The philosopher’s refutation of Simmias’s perspective is founded on initial debates, because it is based on the notion of the soul existence before the body. Consequently, the soul cannot be likened to an attunement since it exists before the body. However, this explanation depends on the debates that Simmias and Cebes initially indicated to be unsatisfactory. Thus, if the previous statements which were meant to verify the existence of the soul before the body were overruled as inadequate, then this rejection must be also unfair as it depends on the previous arguments.

While assessing Cebes’s argument, Socrates refutes it based on the suggestion that the soul, which essentially holds life, cannot attain the death and but lives eternally, departs before death, and exists independently. In affirmation of his rejection, the philosopher provides an analogy of the relationship between snow and fire. Here, Socrates provides that when snow is subjected to heat, it alters its form but must retreat or will melt. However, he continues that snow

is ruined by heat and cannot escape fire. Socrates's likening of the soul and death to snow and heat is dramatic, but somehow convinces Cebes and Simmias.

Socrates delves into his myth on the abodes of the soul of the death of the body. According to the various philosophical perspectives on Plato's writing, Socrates usually provides a myth after a thorough debate on a topic. The provision of a myth at the end of this debate shows that both the philosophers and interlocutors have exhausted the possible logical rationales on the dilemma, which gives an opportunity for speculation. In other places, when Socrates debates the existence and nature of the soul, he also introduces a myth, which is important in his belief that absolute scientific knowledge is unattainable. Thus, it is imperative to provide a similar symbolical, and hypothetical explanation of the nature of the aspects that cannot be understood. This occurs in the *Phaedo*, when the writer is issuing his speech on the existence and nature of love. Here, he indicates that the nature of the soul cannot be fully explained by humans; only a god can understand and explain it. However, he continues that the factors that resemble the soul can only be inconclusively understood by human beings.

In line with this thought, also shared by Plato, the jurisdiction of the gods is not totally understood by mortals. Thus, the immortality of the soul, which makes it similar to the gods, also prevents it from being comprehended through logos (human reasoning). Thus, Socrates's personal creation of the myths indicates that he does not subscribe to the immortality of the soul. However, this is not to provide that the myths have no philosophical validity.

The *Phaedo* concludes with another major instance of an emotional dramatic moment. While drinking his poison from the chalice, the interlocutors begin to mourn his imminent demise. In his characteristic nature, Socrates encourages them not to weep, because he had initially sought to avoid such instances by expelling children and women from the venue. To

show that he believes that his soul will survive despite his body's death, he drinks the poison. However, according to how his friends lament, it both means that they will miss him when he dies and that they do not believe in his argument about the immortality of the soul.

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Works Cited

Plato. *Phaedo*. New York: Start Classics, 2013. Print.

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