

# Interpretation

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# Interpretation

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# Some Observations About Plato's *Phaedo*

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The essay below falls into four unequal parts:

1. An introduction that places the *Phaedo* among the other dialogues concerning the last days of Socrates,
2. A section analyzing and appraising the first of the dialogue's four major arguments for the soul's not dying,
3. A section in which the similes of the cloak and the lyre are studied in some detail,
4. A concluding section about Platonic Forms.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, all three, purport to be "apologies," (an accused man's formal reply to a plaintiff's charge against him), albeit before different audiences.<sup>1</sup>

In the dialogue that bears the name *Apology*, Socrates is in court. The formal charge against him is impiety and corruption of the young. Roughly, this seems to mean that by questioning the authority of those who shape public opinion—in Athens these were the poets, craftsmen, and politicians—he undermined civic solidarity to such a degree as to have harmed the body politic. The jurors who hear and judge him represent the city of Athens entire. Here, in court, it is his life as a public personage that he is explaining and, in that sense, defending. He is also exhibiting it.

In the *Crito* Socrates is in jail. The accusation, brought by the friend and agemate after whom the dialogue is named, is that Socrates, in accepting the Athenian jurors' verdict and staying in jail to await execution, is acting irresponsibly toward his family and intimates. It is his death, or rather, his acceptance of death at the city's instance, that Socrates is explaining and justifying to *Crito*.

In the *Phaedo* we are made to overhear an eyewitness' account of how Socrates conducted himself the day he drank the hemlock. *Phaedo* is the name of that eyewitness.

*Phaedo* reports that even on his last day, in the midst of friends who might be expected decently to still their own grief and to try to support Socrates'

equanimity in the face of death, Socrates still is “defending himself,” this time against the “accusation” that in choosing death he is acting against his own interest. Or at least, as Socrates’ young Theban friend Cebes puts it, that a man of sense ought to be troubled at dying (62,63), as Socrates appears not to be.

Cebes’ remark, to be fair to the young man, actually takes the mild form of wondering how the various things said by Socrates hang together. He feels stung by Socrates’ strange dictum that, while it would be wrong for a man to do violence to himself because he is not his own, but the god’s property, nevertheless, if he is a philosopher, he will die gladly.

Socrates’ saying would not be strange if it meant that philosophers do cheerfully and without groaning what we all must willy-nilly, or if it meant that, once a man sees clearly that death must soon come because he has made certain choices (98e), he becomes resigned to the outcome and, if he is the type of human being who derives pleasure from seeing why things are and must be as they are, he will not be bitter in his resignation. He may even, intermittently, experience a fierce joy at seeing the curve of his career with such utter clarity.

But, as we all know, Socrates’ words are much harsher and darker than this. He declares that “ . . . those who pursue philosophy aright keep rehearsing dying and being dead, nought else” (64a, *epiteedeuousin*).

What can he mean?

A first and moderately clear answer is given at 64c–69e. In the eyes of those whose sense of life derives from such pleasures as eating, drinking, sex, fancy clothes, people who do not exert themselves to obtain such goods, who even despise their momentary selves (and others) for taking them seriously, look “as good as dead already.”

I am not at all sure that people who spend much time or money on fine food, or try the role of Don Juan, or devote their holiday time off to shopping sprees, experience the goods on which they gorge themselves as mere pleasures of the body, since even in the case of the pleasures of eating and drinking, and manifestly in the other cases, other people, their look of approval or envy, and thus their fellowship, are normally involved. Frequently some modicum of skill and connoisseurship enter as well. Still, it is probably fair to say that to a Spinoza or a Newton the majority of human beings look as though their lives were oriented toward finding opportunity for indulging their body.

A second interpretation of the philosophic life’s being a regimen of dying is given at 66d. Philosophers do not, according to Socrates, lack all acquisitive impulses. They want to “acquire” wisdom and knowledge. But they find, so he reports, that fellowship with their body and what their body gives them direct access to interferes with their obtaining what they are after. So, as much as possible, they dissociate themselves from its lusts and passions; they despise and sit in judgment on the deliveries of eyes and ears, allying themselves instead to reasoning and calculating and all such powers of the soul as transcend the bodily.

One may (and should) protest that philosopher-scientists are hardly the only ones who, when they find their concentration broken by a headache or hunger pangs or too great heat or cold, resent their embodied condition. The same holds for generals, poets, painters, businessmen. And isn't it absurd to reserve reasoning and calculating strictly for philosopher-scientists? Why is it the philosopher more than other men that gets singled out as a despiser of the body?

The question might not seem relevant to the purposes of the *Phaedo*, except that we do not as yet know exactly what the dialogue's objectives are. Now we, and the immediate, named audience for *Phaedo*'s narrative, namely Echeocrates and his fellow citizens from Phlius (cf. Diogenes Laertius viii. 46), are expressly told by *Phaedo* that philosophy is the dialogue's theme (59a).

Philosophers, says Socrates, differ from other men in terms of what they desire and what they say they are lovers of (*hou epithoumen te kai phamen erastai einai*). They are not men who lack passion but men mastered by a different passion than are the majority. Now no matter how devoted to his enterprise a general, a poet, a businessman is, no matter how hard he drives himself, he cannot, in Socrates' terms, long for separation from the body, because the things that are real to him—the troops, terrain, supplies, the risk of defeat, the hope for victory; the lyric, the ode, the play; the factory, the business partnership, the money owed to him or by him—though I believe not one of them is simply bodily (here I want to quarrel with what Socrates says at 66d), do all involve things that can be touched, seen, heard. What is more, these enterprises, even if engaged in by people who believe in plain living and high thinking, call for some sort of love and respect for the bodily.

At least according to the section of the *Phaedo* now under examination (66 ff.), the philosopher, intent upon truth, has no such love and respect, whether for his own body, bodily desires, and sensory faculties, or for the bodily and perceptually accessible features of things other than himself, including his friends.

“When, then, does the soul encounter truth? Because when it tries to consider anything with the body it is evidently deceived by it. . . . In thought or reasoning, then, *if at all*, something of what genuinely is becomes manifest to it. . . . But it thinks best when none of these [bodily] things troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor any pleasure, when the soul is, to the extent possible, alone by itself and takes leave of the body. ” (65b)

Since the opening thesis of the present section of the dialogue was that being dead can be defined as the state in which body and soul are severed from one another, each having reached a condition of being alone and by itself (*auto kath hauto*), we have, verbally, justified Socrates' dark saying that in dying the philosopher “does what he wishes,” obtains a good long sought (67d, 68a).

Fortunately, the dialogue arranges for Cebes to protest in our behalf. Being the well-bred youth he is, he doesn't put the question quite so rudely. Still, he

in effect asks what all along we have been muttering to ourselves: Doesn't Socrates' opening definition of death suppose the very thing that we least believe, namely, that when, as people say, the soul leaves a man's body, it continues to be something independent and coherent that has power and intelligence (*dunamis kai phronesis*)? The form which Cebes' protest takes is that he reminds Socrates of a familiar "model" for the soul, namely, that it is what we, today, would call a gas, like air, which, when it is released from the bodily container that held it in, becomes an unidentifiable part of the atmosphere. The word Cebes uses to express this thought is the Greek stand-in for our Latinate word "spirit," viz. *pneuma* (70a).

Here is how Socrates responds to what the dialogue describes as the common fear that no integral soul will be left over upon death, only an integral body, the corpse:

According to many folk traditions, the souls of grandparents or great grandparents wait in Hades for rebirth in their descendants (Jews and ancient Greeks both often name their sons after deceased grandparents). Socrates is no fundamentalist about these old stories. Still, if it could be established that the living have nothing else to come from except what has died, then (says Socrates) the folk tradition might gain support and, in turn, give support to the philosopher's hope that death brings, not extinction, but consummation of his deepest desire—an interval at least of complete independence from the body.

We have set the stage for the first argument for the soul's immortality, the argument "from opposites" (70c–72e).

Opposites, or contrariety, have, of course, been with us from the beginning (58e, 60b). Notice also that we are told by Phaedo, our eyewitness, that he and his friends assembled in jail at daybreak and that Socrates died as the sun was going down (61e, 116b, e).

## 2. ARGUMENTS

Isn't it the case, says Socrates, that change and generation always proceed from opposite to opposite, the noble from the shameful, the just from the unjust, the greater from the smaller, the weaker from the stronger, the slower from the quicker, the worse from the better? If this holds true universally, then it holds also for life, at least, if to live (*zen*) has an opposite, as being awake has the opposite being asleep. Manifestly there is an opposite to life (whether we consider the infinitive, the participle, or the adjective of the word root), the very thing we are all waiting for, death.

Now in all the enumerated instances of paired opposites the extremes are linked by a genesis between them: Between the greater and the lesser thing (*pragma*) there is increase and diminution which, as they go on (there is a verbal substitution of infinitive for noun), amount to being-on-the-increase or

being-on-the-decrease. That is to say, not only are there opposite poles, there are also opposite processes of moving between the poles. (cf. Aristotle's definition of motion as "the actuality of the potential qua potential.") The person now asleep wakes up and continues in a wakeful state; next falls asleep and continues in a sleeping state. And we have seen this cycle repeat itself.

Admittedly, we have not actually observed returning to life as we have observed dying. But don't considerations of symmetry make the inference that there is such a process of returning from Hades plausible?

And if, just as the man awake comes from the man asleep, the man alive comes from the man dead, then we seem to have demonstrated what we wanted to establish, namely, that dead men's souls do not after separation from their bodies disintegrate but abide somewhere.

Moreover, consider the consequences of denying the inference from symmetry:

"If generation did not proceed from opposite to opposite and back again, going round, as it were in a circle, but always went forward in a straight line, without turning back or curving, then, you know, in the end all things would have the same shape and be in the same condition and stop being generated." (72b)

How good an argument is this? How seriously is it being offered?

I find these questions much harder to answer than do some other readers of the dialogue whose comments I have heard or read. My difficulties are of four kinds at least:

1. Unless one settles precisely what conclusion is to be established by what premises and what degree and kind of cogency the author of the argument claims for it, how can one decide the goodness or badness of the argument? What I mean becomes evident if one considers that if one disregards the fabric of the given premises and conclusion, a Democritean materialist argument can be seen in or culled from the various things Socrates says, e.g. that round soul-atoms must abide to be available for reintegration with other atoms so as to constitute some new living being.

2. Mustn't one clear up the ambiguity of my phrase "how seriously is it being offered" by disentangling Socrates' "offering" from Plato's? How does one go about doing this?

3. Supposing that one has articulated what the argument is and what strength it purports to have and one finds fault with it, can one now safely infer that Socrates and/or Plato knew that the argument was weak?

4. Again, supposing that one has somehow satisfied oneself that Socrates and/or Plato were knowingly offering poor arguments for the soul's immortality, what do they stand to gain? What is the point?

True enough, where I humorlessly insist on premises, conclusion, logical cogency, and all that sort of thing, the dialogue has Socrates talk gaily of being

far from impartial as to the outcome of arguments for the soul's immortality, thus not a kosher witness. And I would immediately join the reader who accuses me of obtuseness in not taking into account that Socrates' friends (both in the dialogue—the ones with him in jail as well as the ones who assemble with Phaedo to call Socrates to mind after his death; and outside it—ourselves, who are reading what Plato wrote) need consolation and might receive it even from poor arguments. Moreover, when Plato, later in the dialogue (85d), makes Cebes' friend Simmias speak of arguments (or speeches or accounts) of the soul and its fate as *life rafts*, we are told in so many words that anything like mathematical cogency is foresworn. Still, the fact remains that Socrates is portrayed as spending his last day amidst his friends laying out very elaborate arguments to prove that his soul will live on. To treat these as mere divertissement, cannot be right. Therefore I feel obliged to state what fault I find with them.

My chief difficulty with the reasoning so far is this: As we learn from a later section of the dialogue (103), Socrates means to be speaking of opposite things (*pragmata*) rather than of opposite qualities (*auto to enantion*) when he refers to the poles between which the processes that carry from one extreme to the other stretch. We know that the waking Socrates, who, early in the dialogue (60e), told his friends of a recurring dream that commanded him to make music, dreamt this dream while in a condition of sleeping. Our lives on earth are cycles the arcs of which are living wakefully and living sleepingly. Other people who watch us and, more mysteriously, we ourselves, through memory, know that the same individual traverses these two arcs. The question under discussion, namely, whether the state of being dead will be a state of the soul's finally gaining the independence from the body and the purity for which, according to Socrates' report, some human beings long, requires that we consider how much or how little an individual's life on earth, as consisting of these two arcs of sleeping and waking, is like another cycle, whose existence we are inquiring into.

This other cycle would consist of the two arcs—(a) life on earth, from being born, through acme (the stretch around the meridian), to death; (b) life under the earth, in Hades, the invisible realm.

Now in addition to the difficulty that I have in fitting the two circles together (the waking-sleeping circle ought to be part of the being alive–being dead circle, but can it?), I find it hard to know who or what is the thing (*pragma*) that traverses now the life-on-earth arc, now the life-under-the-earth arc.

If this thing is, for example, Socrates, who is a composite of soul and body, what reason is there to hope that in Hades the soul will be released from the task of ruling over and caring for its body, free at last to devote itself entirely to wisdom?

Both the astral paradigm which, I am confident, inspired much of the argument now under examination, and the sleeping-waking paradigm seem to re-

quire that the thing over and under the earth be Socrates as ensouled body or embodied soul: Sleeping and waking as well as being now above, now below the horizon are attributes of animated bodies. Bear in mind that the stars are living beings for Plato, and Aristotle; for Ptolemy as well.

If, on the other hand, throwing away the just-mentioned analogies, we try the hypothesis that the thing which traverses the life-on-earth arc is the embodied soul of Socrates, whereas the thing that traverses the Hades arc is exclusively Socrates' soul, his body having been left in the visible world as a corpse, then aren't we talking about two different things rather than about one thing with contrary attributes?

Of course, the opening definition of death, according to which the process of dying is the process of loosening soul from body and the state of being dead is the state of each, soul and body, existing "itself by itself" (*auto kath' hauto*), could be taken to amount to a denial of what was perhaps too confidently asserted in the last sentence: Mightn't being Socrates consist in being Socrates' soul, so that his present incarnated existence would be one among many adventures of this same thing, the soul of Socrates?

Many passages in the *Phaedo* (115d, 111c, 107c), and in other dialogues as well (*Republic* x. 608 ff., *Phaedrus* 245, *Meno* 86, *Symposium* 212, *Timaeus* 41, *Laws* x, xii), play with Pythagorean-Empedoclean-Indian ideas of transmigration to point a moral, the moral being that how we conduct ourselves in our present life matters as though for all eternity.

According to these passages, the soul of Socrates continues as a soul with its individual past life at least in the sense that this soul's next life episode, whether incarnate or sans body, is chosen or bestowed because of the choices that were made in the course of the immediately preceding life.

One is tempted to demythologize such talk about transmigration by combining it with the folk belief that our ancestors do not die but are reincarnated in ourselves, as we shall be in future generations. That would amount to urging something like what is said in the Old Testament, that the evil which we do lives beyond us till the third or fourth generation, in grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Whether one ought to take Socrates' words in this rationalizing way is the thing I find hard to determine. On a rationalized reading, the story of the man in the myth of Er, who chooses a next life of evil because his previous life of virtue was based solely on habit unenlightened by reflection, would be taken to apply, say, to Polemarchus/Cephalus and their descendants.

The reader may lack sympathy for my laboring over and belaboring of the question of what exactly Plato's Socrates and Plato intended. Why be so literal minded and humorless, precisely on this question of what Plato meant to be taken literally and what metaphorically, what was said seriously and what was said jokingly?

So I had better confess that, whether reading or listening, I feel guilty when

I am caught, or catch myself, plugging in a sense that suits me, instead of straining for, guessing at, the other fellow's sense. It seems to me that, both in conversation and when we read, we are often much too quick to rule out meanings which we believe to be obviously wrong or trivial. Sometimes we even puff ourselves up in pride that we sophisticates know how to read between the lines, know that this or that is said solely to pacify the vulgar, or again, that it is not to be taken straight but obliquely (ironically). We conceive of ourselves as humbly embracing the sane exegetic principle that wise men cannot err in obvious ways. But don't we sometimes make this exegetic principle axiomatic because our vanity is gratified that the wise author picked us to be his elect readers, we being the ones who have what it takes to determine in what tone of voice a wise author's falsehoods or fallacies were pronounced?

It seems to me that the delicate business of hearing another person out is made impossible if we disallow that what he or she means is something we would not want to mean. To put it paradoxically, I believe it is a mark of disrespect to eliminate the possibility that an author's argument or imagery or theory may be wanting, in clarity or cogency or both. What I am attending to is the difference between "reverend interpretation" (as the scholastics called it) of a canonical legal or other community-building and community-sustaining text, such as the Bible or the myths used by the Greek tragedians, and reverend interpretation of the text left us by an individual designing author.

As already said, I do find the argument from opposites wanting, yet wanting in an interesting way, since what the argument clearly leaves unclear is the identity of the "thing," Socrates.

The two "middle" arguments—.

1. The argument according to which the learning soul has a richer store of mental possessions to draw on than it could have accumulated over any one span of life from birth to death (73a–77c) and must, therefore, have pre-existed;

2. The argument according to which the mind has the attributes of its objects so that, if *they* are simple and thereby indissoluble, *it* must be (78b–84b)—even though, as I believe, they too fail, do nevertheless address the question with which the first argument left us, namely, who or what Socrates is. They will be taken up in the context of Part 4 of this essay, where I try to examine what the *Phaedo* tells us about Platonic Forms.

I repeat, it looks to me as though the dialogue sets its readers the task of judging whether Socrates has acquitted himself of the charge of acting contrary to his own good in leaving life, thus, by his own standards, irrationally. Whether this fact sits easily with us or not, the arguments for the soul's immortality purport to be his "defense," so we are obliged to take them seriously. If nevertheless I turn for the present to another topic, in Part 3 of this essay, it is in order to prepare for taking the arguments seriously.

### 3. RECOLLECTION, CLOAKS, AND LYRES

Toga and lyre, characteristic belongings of an Athenian youth, turn up early and late in our dialogue and in speeches by Socrates as well as in speeches by the two Theban friends Simmias and Cebes. To the two "models" for soul which we have so far encountered—

1. That the soul is a sort of ether which is expelled from the body at death (77e) and which then either rises separately to a place above the atmosphere or immediately after leaving the body gets dispersed in the surrounding air (Cebes);

2. That the soul is something like a star (rising above the horizon when the man or hero is born, culminating when he is fully mature and active, slipping below the horizon when he dies) (Socrates). (Cf. Ptolemy, *Almagest* I.3, p. 7, Great Books of the Western World edition.)—

Simmias and Cebes add two other models—that the soul is something like the harmony of a lyre (Simmias' contribution), and that the soul is something like a weaver of togas (Cebes' contribution).

My self-assigned task in the present section of this essay is to comment on some of the surprising uses to which the last two images are put by Plato. Socrates says:

"When someone, upon seeing or hearing or in some other way perceiving something, not only recognizes/identifies/knows that thing, but becomes aware of (*ennoesei*) another, the knowledge of which is not the same (*aute*) but different (*alle*), do we not rightly say that he is being reminded of that of which he is made mindful (*hou ten ennoian elaben*)? . . . For example, the knowledge of a man is different from the knowledge of a lyre. . . . But you know very well that lovers, when they see a lyre or toga or something else that their darling uses habitually, tend to have the following experience (*paschousi*): They notice the lyre (*egnosan te ten lyran*) and also seize hold in their mind (*en tei dianoiai*) of the form (*eidos*) of the boy whose lyre it is—which is a being reminded. So too someone who sees Simmias is often reminded of Cebes. And there are lots of examples like these. . . .

Isn't this type of experience some variety of remembering, especially when it happens to someone in connection with things which were forgotten because for long he neither saw them nor meditated on them?

Can a person who sees a drawn horse or a drawn lyre be reminded of a man, or when he sees a drawn Simmias, can he be reminded of Cebes?

But it is also possible for someone to see a drawn Simmias and to be reminded of Simmias himself, isn't it? Now don't all these examples go to show that similars and dissimilars both can prompt remembrance?

It became apparent that it is possible, when perceiving a thing visually or through hearing or apprehending it by some other sense, to become aware from it of something else, which had been forgotten but which consorted/was associated

with the other thing; and this may happen whether the two things are similar or dissimilar.” (73c ff.)

Allow me to present you with a slightly doctored extract from the notebook in which I recorded my first observations and reflections on the passage just translated:

1. Socrates does not distinguish “being reminded” from “deliberate recall.”<sup>22</sup>

2. Only examples of the former, that is, “being reminded,” are given.

3. The emphasis falls on pointing out that “unlikes” and “likes” indifferently come in trains. But more, and more elaborate, examples of unlikes conjuring up an associated unlike are given, as though association by resemblance were held to be more plausible *prima facie* and the fact that unlikes too have this power of evoking each other needed special pleading.

4. While it would be misleading to assimilate the pairing of Socrates’ unlikes to mere Humean “association by contiguity” (since Simmias and Cebes are *friends* and the cloak and lyre *belong to* the beloved, so that a more intimate relation than “spatio-temporal propinquity” is supposed to tie the unlikes to each other), the contrast that would normally be made between “association by resemblance” and “association by contiguity” nevertheless applies: Resemblance is an internal, contiguity an external relation. I call the relation between the toga and its owner “external” in that the beloved may give his toga to another without either the beloved or the toga thereby undergoing alteration; hence their coupling for the mind may become undone. Contrarywise, the relation between a portrait of Socrates and Socrates, or a drawing of horses and horses, is “internal” in that, when one tries the thought experiment of removing the relation between the associated terms while keeping the terms the same, one fails: The look-alikes stay alike for as long as each is itself.

The example of the relation between Simmias and Cebes seems to me interesting because it is not easy to decide whether it is strictly external: Is Simmias still himself, still the same, when (as seems conceivable) he is no longer Cebes’ friend?

To learn what to make of the features of Socrates’ address to Simmias just noted, we must place the passage in immediate and wider context.

We then notice that not Socrates but Cebes was the one who first brought up the theme of “recollection” (*anamnesis*, 72e), in order to assist Socrates in his effort of proving the soul’s immortality. Cebes, however, unlike Socrates, speaks of recollection pretty much as though he were quoting from the *Meno*:

“Cebes, interrupting, said ‘That also holds if it is true, as you, Socrates, are fond of saying, that our learning (*mathesis*) is nothing else than recollection (*anamnesis*). According to that argument we necessarily knew (perfect of *manthanein*) at some previous time the things that we now call to mind. But that would be impossible if our soul did not exist somewhere before it was born in this human form (*eidōs*).’”

When Cebes' friend Simmias begs for "proof" of the Socratic "thesis" that learning is nothing other than recollection (where Meno asked to be "taught" that so it is), Cebes obliges. He says:

"Here is the best argument: When people are questioned, if someone puts the questions well, they say everything themselves (*autoi*), the way it is. And yet, if there weren't knowledge and right reason/correct speech (*orthos logos*) within them (*autois*), they would not be able to do this."

Cebes seems to be talking about recollection as deliberate calling to mind, making an effort to answer a question, which in the circumstances supposed, of studying, e.g. mathematics, involves checking for truth and consistency and is not the sort of automatic triggering of the mind that Socrates seems to be talking about in the passage with which I began.

Self-control (*soophrosune*) is one of Socrates's most striking characteristics (cf. 114e).

Upon reading the *Meno* one is led to believe that this poise and sanity of Socrates is due to his unusually highly developed capacity to "recollect" or "call to mind" (cf. Leibniz's *New Essays* bk ii, ch.21, pp. 186ff.). But one is also led to believe that Socrates held that "natively" this ability belongs to all human beings; that making things, their antecedents and consequences and their mutual connections, clear and vivid to oneself is "natural" though strenuous, and that avoiding the strain, "not making the effort," is some sort of distortion of our nature. Given these facts, it seemed odd to me that in the *Phaedo* Socrates should talk about recollection as though it were mere free associating.

Moreover, a later portion of the *Phaedo* (97ff.) confirms that to be Socrates is to prize deliberateness: Socrates there explains to his friends how thrilled he was when, as a young man (presumably going through the same stage of life at which Simmias and Cebes are now) he heard that a certain philosopher by the name of Anaxagoras had written a book propounding the thesis that Intelligence or Mind is what arranged and caused each and all things. Socrates couldn't wait to read the book but found himself sorely disappointed. Anaxagoras did not come through on his promise. Whatever Anaxagoras might have meant in saying that Mind is the world's Ruler, the detailed working out of his cosmogony showed that he did not mean that the way each and all things in heaven and on earth are is due to their being deliberately so arranged. So Socrates gave up on Anaxagoras.

Not only Anaxagoras, but also Simmias and Cebes are found fault with by Socrates (93ff.) because their "theories," I mean their "models" for the relations of soul to body, being strictly biological, pay no attention to and perhaps don't even leave room for distinctively moral and intellectual agency (initiative, self-rule).

So, I repeat, at second and third meditation on the piece of the dialogue with

which I began Part 3 of this essay, it struck me as curious that Plato should have given the “lines” about recollection as mere free association to Socrates and given Cebes the “lines” about recollection as deliberate calling to mind. Being mildly surprised by what looked to me like a sort of reversal of roles, I thought to myself that I should explain this anomaly.<sup>3</sup> Of course to experience the anomaly as an anomaly one would have to be pretty firmly settled in the conviction that the Platonic dialogues are artifacts made by the dramatist Plato, not stenographic records of overheard conversations. Well, then, this was the prior conviction in me. I was a “sophisticated” reader.

Here are some of the questions I asked myself as I tried to account for what had struck me as a minor anomaly:

1. Wasn't I going overboard with my fastidious sorting out of which speech or argument “befits” which dramatic personage? Aren't Platonic dialogues primarily invitations to investigation, and doesn't that mean that the things that are being investigated and the arguments, analogies, and experiences brought in for this purpose are more important than whom they “belong to”? In “real life,” I mean, the real life of the mind of human beings, each of us is full of questions and proposals that “belong to” our opponents in argument. Why shouldn't the dialogues mime this fact?

2. Had I, perhaps, been careless of differences between the things later (85e ff. and 87b ff.) said by the two Theban friends about body and soul and their relation? Though the two men's theories—that the soul is the body's harmony (Simmias' offering), and that it is the weaver and reweaver of bodily tissue (Cebes' contribution)—are alike in that both are offered to argue against the soul's immortality, Cebes' image does give some sort of agency to the soul. Simmias' image, on the other hand, though capable of the most fascinating elaboration, is offered as though, when the ratios happen to fall out right, a mess of gut and harder stuff becomes a living (*empsuchon*) being. It then occurred to me that Cebes should probably be understood as assigning a sort of Aristotelian artisan-role to the soul. The soul, like any craftsman working within a set craft-tradition, executes a “weaving plan” that it did not itself contrive but inherited. Conceivably this is also the spirit in which his quoted remarks about the person who is doing the recollecting having “knowledge within” that becomes “uttered” under favorable circumstances should be interpreted.

3. As the example of the association couple Simmias-Cebes itself had shown me when I took stock of the fact that the way in which friends are connected is more intimate than the way in which a cloak and its owner are connected (see above), I had been simpleminded in considering only the “extremes” of being involuntarily prompted to find some “out of mind” thing “in mind” and of prompting oneself to gain access to some “in mind” thing. The “anomaly” that got me going was a kind of artifact of the microscope of my too-willful fixing on “extremes” without intermediate cases. This self-correction was confirmed when I looked again at Cebes' speech—the fact that another person's questions

and diagrams figure in his explanation to Simmias of the notion that learning is recollection shows that there are gradations between automatic and deliberate recollection (Plato's thought, spelled out in *Sophist* 263d, that even solitary thinking is conversational has a bearing here).

I exhibit this tiny slice of intellectual autobiography because it seems to me the quickest way of insinuating that what the speeches of Cebes and Socrates about recollection, taken together, might be "about" is *thinking or investigating*, i.e., the finding and making of connections and the subsequent critical examination of the strength and nature of these connections.

There is simply no alternative to starting on any investigation one happens to undertake with the opinions one happens to have, for instance the opinion that Platonic dialogues are dramas, or the opinion that recollection means, in the *Meno*, deliberate calling to mind rather than free association, or the opinion that these two—free association and self-critical recall of relevant instances—are "opposites." When one brings these convictions, which are already "in" oneself, to bear on some present question, one tries to make them hang together with what is now being investigated and with each other. As one keeps going, one finds out that one must nuance, rearrange, or even drop some of these convictions (cf. *Phaedo* 100).

So it doesn't matter if I was misguided when, initially, I felt that "free association" is not what we normally associate with Socrates (cf. the quotation from the *Odyssey* at 94d). What matters is that thinking can be self-corrective because there are constraints upon what conviction or observation or theory can be woven together or made to harmonize with what other conviction, observation, feeling, or theory. (Cf. 100 and 92c; cf. also how the weaving image is used in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, the weaver's shuttle in the *Cratylus*.) The second thing that matters is that one can make a fresh start.

Let's do that. Here is my new question about the same old thing, namely, the passage about recollection with which Part 3 of this essay began. Why is it important for the purposes that Plato had in writing the *Phaedo* that unlikes too may function as mutual reminders?

I answer three ways—

1. In terms of writing's relation to speaking,
2. In terms of body's relation to soul,
3. In terms of speech's relation to Platonic forms.

To state my hypothesis compactly, I believe that the *Phaedo* shows that Plato thinks (or wants us to think) (1) of writing as a sign of speaking, (2) of body as a sign of soul, and (3) of speaking as a sign of

- a. informed things,
- b. informed minds,
- c. forms themselves.

I select for elaboration just the second of these suggestions, viz. that body is a sign of soul.<sup>4</sup>

By examining in some detail how cloak and lyre illustrate the body-soul

relation we can, I think, explain why Socrates is made to dwell on the fact that things which are unlike each other nevertheless form “couples” and why he is portrayed as paying more attention than is usual with him to involuntary recollection.

Isn't it remarkable that Socrates illustrates recollection by the same things, toga and lyre (73), which the two young men from Thebes use as similes for the body (87b and 86a)?

It looks to me as though Socrates was made to speak of how the mere toga has the power of reminding the lover of the absent beloved, the toga's user and owner (as does the mere lyre when the beloved has gone elsewhere) in order to both acknowledge and wean himself away from love of himself as an incarnate individual. Grieving is to be limited and desire reoriented.

The most compendious description of the emotional effect intended by Plato's arranging for Socrates' examples of “reminders” to turn out to be also examples of the human body is, I think, this:

Lovers' yearning to see the uncloaked form of their beloved is to be thought of as capable of becoming wholly transferred to the beloved's invisible self through the model of a “continued proportion”—garment : bodily form (eidos) :: bodily eidos : self. And this “continued proportion” is conceived as continuing until it reaches (*haptetai*, 65b) “beauty's self and beauty's giver” (cf. *Charmides* 154c ff., *Symposium* 211b).

When, on the other hand, Simmias is made to wonder whether the soul isn't as dependent on the body as is the *harmonia* of the lyre on the gut strung tautly on bent wood so as to make a musical instrument, this is, among other things, an insisting on the right to grieve over the loss of Socrates as a real and permanent loss.

In Socrates' speech to “convince” Simmias that “learning is nothing but recollection,” toga and lyre are only loosely connected with what they “belong to”; that is, in retrospect we realize that Socrates is made to speak of body and soul as separable, much as Aristotle, in the third book of the *De Anima* (see also 403a 10, 404a 26, 405a 14, 408b 19f., 410b 15), deems the mortal individual human being to be separable from immortal Mind.

In the two Thebans' speeches, body and soul fit each other much more tightly: The toga that covers the old weaver is a product of his craft, and the lyre-specific *harmonia* (the word also means dovetailing) is “in” its build, though not only in its build, since it is also “in” its sounds (86c). Thus, as Simmias and Cebes come to employ Socrates' images, soul is “of” its body pretty much as in the *De Anima* Book II definition of the soul, where soul is “from” or “first actuality” of a body that is “organized.”

So it looks to me as though the dialogue presents us with “contrary” accounts of the soul's nature and its relation to the body: According to the first, the soul is something that has or wears a body as the beloved wears or owns a cloak or a lyre. According to the second, the body is something that has or owns a soul as a lyre has “harmony” when its strings' tensions are just right.

The fact that Socrates and the two Thebans are portrayed as using “the same things” (toga and lyre) to speak so differently of the body-soul relation may be telling us about a perplexity which Plato himself could articulate but not resolve. Needless to say, neither can I.

The fact that Plato makes the arguments “from recollection” and “from the soul’s kinship with the forms” look like “inner” arguments by “wrapping” them in the two different arguments “from opposites” confirms one’s impression that he “leans toward” identifying self and soul with mind. (Cf. how, according to Hesiod, men deceived Zeus by “wrapping” their offerings of bare bones in luscious slices of fat!) Moreover, Plato arranges for all the interlocutors, even those who figure in the “frame” of Phaedo’s report of what was said that last day in jail, e.g. Echecrates of Phlius, to band together in their adherence to the argument for the soul’s pre-existing because of its capacity to recollect (87a, 91e f.).

#### 4. EIDE

Perhaps the quickest way of conveying where I want to go in the concluding section of this essay is to cite two poems, one by the German poet Hans Christian Morgenstern, the other, of which I select just a part, by the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Once there was a picket fence  
with space between, to gaze from hence to thence  
An architect who saw this sight  
approached it suddenly one night  
removed the spaces from the fence  
and built of them a residence.  
The picket fence stood there dumbfounded  
with pickets wholly unsurrounded,  
a view so naked and obscene,  
the senate had to intervene.  
As for the architect, he flew  
to Afri- or Americoo.

H. C. Morgenstern, *Galgenlieder* (bilingual edition by Max Knight. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). The translation has been slightly corrected.)

How to keep—is there any, is there none such nowhere  
known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace latch or  
catch or key to keep  
Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, . . . from vanishing  
away?  
O is there no frowning of these wrinkles, ranked wrinkles deep,  
Down?

No there's none, there's none, O no there's none,  
 Nor can you long be, what you now are, called fair,  
 Do what you may do, what, do what you may,  
 And wisdom is early to despair:  
 Be beginning; since, no, nothing can be done  
 To keep at bay  
 Age and age's evils.  
 Be beginning to despair, to despair,  
 Despair, despair, despair, despair

Spare!

There is one, yes I have one (Hush there!)  
 Only not within seeing of the sun,  
 Not within the singeing of the strong sun. .  
 Somewhere elsewhere there is ah well where! one,  
 One. Yes, I can tell such a key, I do know such a place,  
 Where whatever's prized and passes of us .  
 . is kept  
 Yonder—What high as that! We follow, now we follow.—  
 Yonder, yes yonder, yonder,  
 Yonder.

From "The Leaden and the Golden Echo"

To say it with absurd brevity: The *Phaedo* seems to me to be about how the world's beauty, in the form of "betweens" that are like the spaces between the pickets, abides "beyond the tall sun's tingeing, or treacherous the tainting of the earth's air" (Hopkins).

Though the density of poetry gratifies the desire for compactness of statement, I want to be intelligible as well as brief. So nothing but plodding expository prose will come your way for the rest of this essay. No. I do still have to tell a story:

A child asked why it must eat and was told "because there is a little stomach-man inside you that gets hungry." So the child fell to, anxious to nurture the little person that lived in its stomach. But it did not take long before it occurred to the child to wonder why the little stomach man should get hungry.

In preceding parts of this essay I wanted to minister to readers of the dialogue (including my former self) who feel as cheated by it as was the child by the grownup's answer.

I tried to show, through a moderately detailed analysis of Socrates' first argument for the soul's immortality and by sketching the counterarguments for the soul's mortality which his partners in conversation propose, that the reasoning which culminates in detaching or attaching the predicate mortal from/to the subject soul (or self or he or Socrates) turns in every instance on claiming that the soul is like some other thing and that it must, therefore, like that other thing about which we suppose ourselves to know whether it is mortal or not, be

mortal or not. This meant, for instance, that Socrates argued against likening soul to air (which gets dispersed when it leaves its container) and for its being like a star, which temporarily disappears from sight, but will reappear after a sufficient interval.

I was at pains to hold on both to the fact that everything said in the dialogue is in fulfillment of the “assignment” that Socrates prove that it is better for him to die than to live (cf. 95c) and to the fact that Socrates is made to interpret this “better” as though it were connected with death’s not really being what to bereaved survivors it appears to be, annihilation of the one they love. So the dialogue looks, to quote a friend, like a “passionate, frighteningly relentless effort to hammer into the reader’s mind a conviction of the soul’s immortality” (cf. 107c).

Yet since the means of establishing this conviction are, with but one exception, the examining of already available images or models for the soul, it seems to me an allowable refocusing of attention to contend that what the dialogue much of the time does is look at answers to the question who or what the soul, or the soul of Socrates, or Socrates himself, is. In saying this I am not trying to be coquettish or cute: Socrates consistently maintains in other dialogues (cf. *Meno* 71, 100) that to establish what predicate belongs to a subject one must first know precisely what the subject is. In the case at hand, this means that to establish whether soul is mortal or immortal one must know what it is.

I call the models for the soul, or for its relation to the body, which are proposed in the *Phaedo* “already available” because the notions that it is a fallen star, that it is a weaver, that it is a special sort of *pneuma* (cf. Aristotle’s *sumphuton pneuma* = quintessence = ether) resembling but not identical with fire have come my way in other books, some of them predating Plato or belonging to traditions distinct from the Hellenic. Many of these images seem to be folk beliefs. Whether they came to the folk through the poets or whether the poets simply preserved and elaborated on them we do not (and perhaps cannot) know.

However, the *Phaedo*’s two middle arguments for the soul’s immortality—the argument “from recollection” (73a–77c) and the argument “from the soul’s kinship to Platonic forms” (78b–84b)—seem to be of a different sort.

If they involve “models,” it is in some murkier way than so far encountered, as is shown by the fact that one cannot draw them as one could draw the others.<sup>5</sup>

And if these middle arguments—the argument from recollection and that from the simplicity and consequent indissolubility of the Forms—owe a debt to poets, as seems to be suggested in the *Meno* (80b) through the reference to Pindar, the Platonic distance from that poetic source seems to be more important than the possible fact that there is such a poetic fund from which Plato drew.

Both of the middle arguments depend, for their meaning as well as their cogency, on the thesis that there is a “fine itself,” a “large itself,” a “healthy

itself,” an “equal itself” apart from such things as a fine-looking baby, a large house, a healthy Pausanias, etc. (76e). Therefore, after outlining the two arguments according to which the soul must pre-exist the partnership with its present body and postexist this partnership, I shall dwell at some, though not sufficient, length on what Socrates-Plato could conceivably have meant by these “themselves,” the Platonic Forms.

There will not, I fear, be a pleasing roundup of the dispersed pieces of the essay entire at the end. The best I can come up with is an appreciative critique of what I believe Plato sincerely meant. The heart of this critique is that, while there is every reason to be grateful to Plato for his discovering *the realm of logic as the realm of rational necessity* and for recognizing that it lies “beyond” sense and beyond passion, there is also reason to try the hypothesis that he may have misrepresented his own insight.<sup>6</sup>

What I call the misrepresentation of his own insight is sometimes diagnosed as consisting in the mistaken notion that “pieces of language,” to do their job of pointing beyond themselves, must one and all be names. I do not think that this is the happiest description, because (for one thing) it slights Plato’s hard-won discovery (see *Sophist*) that true and false talk comes in sentences, at least when you consider how what is said is heard by the listener: The listener “takes” what he is “given” by the speaker as having subject-predicate format, that is, as both referring and describing. A more nearly just description is, to my mind, that in spite of what we hear Socrates say in the *Phaedo* (99d, e ff.) about doing his own investigating by way of speeches/arguments rather than by way of direct inspection of things, Plato seems to be unwilling to let knowing be anything else, ultimately, than a knowing of, acquaintance with, contact (cf. *Meno* 71b, *Cratylus*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Seventh Letter*).

And I take the outrageously risky step of wondering whether it was passion (cf. Hopkins’ “keep / Back beauty”) that made him downgrade skill (*savoir faire*), and knowledge of matters of fact (*savoir*) and led him to suppose that the true goal of inquiry is *direct contact with divine forms* (*connaître* as when we know a person or a landscape) because it seems to me that the textual evidence for the dialogue’s asceticism being sincere is simply too strong. One has to do violence to the text to overlook or discount it.

By its being sincere I mean that the *Phaedo* seems to me to ask of us, as of Socrates’ companions in jail, that we become resigned to his detachment not because we accept that Socrates is attached to the Athenian community, for whom he deems it better if the execution is carried out, nor because he anticipates an old age that might be full of indignity and pain and expects death by hemlock to be an easy death, but because there is something finer than any human thing contact with which waits for Socrates on the nether side of the horizon.

The moral message of the *Phaedo* is, I believe, that we ought to cultivate the superhuman temperance of willingly giving Socrates up to a beloved we

deem worthier than ourselves, namely, the crystalline purities called Platonic Forms that supposedly draw him on. To them, not him, we ought ourselves to become attached (cf. 68a, b).

It is probably fairly obvious that I believe this invitation to asceticism to be misguided. That is, insofar as the hypothesis that there are Forms "above" and "apart from" mortal things (including human speeches) is motivated by the longing for something to know and love that could substitute for mortal things and that an individual could become intimate with when he concentrates himself and is no longer bonded to his fellows, I believe it to be a mistake. Yet I have great sympathy for the feeling and thought that underlie it.

Isn't Einstein speaking of such feelings and thoughts when he writes:

" . . . one of the strongest motives that lead men to art and science is flight from everyday life with its painful harshness and wretched dreariness, and from the fetters of one's own shifting desires. A person with a finer sensibility is driven to escape from personal existence and to the world of objective observing (*Schauen-theorein*) and understanding. This motive can be compared with the longing that irresistibly pulls the town-dweller away from his noisy, cramped quarters and toward the silent, high mountains, where the eye ranges freely through the still, pure air and traces the calm contours that seem made for eternity. With this negative motive there goes a positive one: Man seeks to form for himself . . . a simplified and lucid image of the world (*Bild der Welt*), and so to *overcome* the world of experience by striving to *replace* it to some extent by this image." (*Ideas and Opinions*, [New York: Crown, 1954], pp. 224 f., my italics; cf. *Phaedo* 79d).

Nor is it only giants of the intellect like Einstein or Plato who know such feelings. Picture the first-grade classroom where the teacher is checking the children's arithmetic exercises and she comes to Johnnie's desk and turns to him, ever so pleased, and says, "Very good, Johnnie." And he looks at her with great irritation and says, "What do you mean 'very good'? It's perfect." That child knows that some things are not matters of degree and not true or right because some human authority declares them to be so!

So if Platonic asceticism is a "mistake," it is one of immense importance. This, indeed, is the prime reason for the writing out of this essay on the *Phaedo*.

Well, then, back to the arguments for immortality, in particular, for the pre-existence of the learning soul.

I understand Cebes' quotation from the *Meno* to be to this effect:

1. If studying or learning with the help of a teacher is something that the student or learner himself does, not something that is done to him by his teacher, then studying or learning is in an important respect no different from recollection. Recollection is an active seeking for something that one believes one could lay hold of "by oneself," the reason for one's self-confidence being, in the case of recollection taken literally, that one knows one previously knew

the thing not now at hand and one has had experience of fishing for some submerged thing in the mind and actually catching one's fish. This first interpretation of the famous metaphor of Socrates that learning is nothing but recollection puts all the emphasis on the polarity *active-passive*.

To appreciate that one ought to give a good deal of weight to this first interpretation of Socrates' metaphor for learning, it is probably helpful to call to mind two things:

- a.) that Platonic dialogues as well as Greek tragedy are continually ruminating about active-passive, doing and being done to.
- b.) that Platonic dialogues pay an inordinate amount of attention to matters of grammar, diction, and syntax, and that it so happens that in Greek you don't say "Ptolemy was teaching astronomy to Syrus," with the thing taught the direct object and the person taught the indirect object. Rather, both the thing taught and the person who gets taught are direct objects. This mere accident, if you like, of the Greek language makes it important for someone like Plato (who is always scrutinizing how what people think and do is affected by what people say and vice versa) to pull resolutely the other way, to make a great fuss over the fact that in a learning situation the recipient is active, is not a mere piece of wax that gets imprinted by the teacher.

When you put what was just said together with other passages in the dialogue (98d) you get the result that the teacher is only a "condition" not a "cause" of the student's learning; the "cause" of the student's learning is his love of the activity of investigation and/or of the things investigated (cf. Augustine's *On the Teacher*). This first interpretation of Socrates' metaphor seems to have no bearing on the question whether the learning soul is mortal or immortal. Rather, it bears on learning's being a "natural" rather than a "violent" motion, to use Aristotelian language.

2.) A second interpretation, which one anticipates might become connected with the result wanted, namely the pre-existence of the learner's soul, is this: Any learning is based on prior knowing or prior believing, because to learn means to seek. And you cannot seek unless your search is oriented to something which to some extent you trust yourself to know already, sufficiently, at least, to recognize it as "it," the very thing you were and are looking for, when you come upon it.<sup>7</sup> Nor can you guess at a riddle unless you at least recognize it as a riddle. Moreover, there is no way of ruling against a step taken on the way to a wouldbe solution to a riddle or the wouldbe conclusion of a search unless, again, you trust that there are constraints whether "gentle forces that commonly prevail" or "imperative prohibitions." These too you must rely on as though you knew them.

Now what shall we say about the very beginning of learning, guessing, investigating? And what shall we say about how we came to know these constraints upon interweavings of subjects and predicates, or of one sentence with another?

It seems as though there are just two alternatives: Either we must deny that everything that we know we came to know by learning it, or we must deny that there is an absolute beginning of learning /guessing.

These two hypotheses are not the same. The first will be recognized as Leibniz's (*New Essays* bk i ch. 2, pp 52, 78f., 87). It amounts to the claim that even if it is nearly true that nothing is in the intellect that was not previously in the senses, still, the intellect itself is "in there," and its activity and structure are not the result of but the condition for sense experience's leading anywhere when we investigate.

To someone who, like Socrates in the *Phaedo*, treats the pigeonholes "sensory"- "nonsensory" as exclusive and exhaustive, and who, moreover, identifies these two with the pigeonholes "mortal"- "immortal," the thesis that some knowledge is not learned but innate, being constitutive of the intellect, amounts to the claim that the soul is immortal if by soul we mean the intellect.

Let's look at the second hypothesis. According to it, every premise is itself a conclusion, that is, the outcome of some sort of guessing, reasoning, seeking, and there is no reasoning that doesn't have premises. I am using the word "reasoning" in such a way that deductive reasoning is only one variety of reasoning, so that "reasoning from analogy," seeking and finding and using what I called "models," rank as reasoning.

Now most of us believe that Socrates' and any man's or woman's life "began" and, *pace* right-to-lifers, the going opinion in Athens seems to have been that a human life begins when the child exits from the womb. But if, because every premise is itself conclusion, there is no first in the series of learnings or guessings though one believes that there is a first in the series of drawing life's breath in the body, and if, further, learning can only be done by souls, doesn't that prove that the learning that looks like the first learning which a child does is not really first but relies upon a prior believing or knowing deposited in the child's soul from a prior phase of that soul's life?

As was said in a previous portion of this essay, Platonic arguments for the pre- and postexistence of the individual soul often lend themselves to social interpretations. In Part I I tried to sketch how such a social interpretation of the notion of the soul's postexistence might be understood. I illustrated it by applying what is said in the *Republic's* myth of Er about the man whose decency is solely a matter of habit, unenlightened by reflection, to the grandchildren of Cephalus. At present I am talking about the portion of the *Phaedo* that goes into the soul's pre-existence. A social interpretation of this notion would, for instance, go like this: Any human being's investigating, studying, guessing relies on pre-existent knowledge and opinion in the community within which the person who is doing the investigating was raised and of which he is a member. But I hope you agree with me that it is really extremely puzzling how an individual, in particular a child, gains access to this communal fund. It seems to be in some ways quite strictly true that the child must itself actively

guess at the contents of the communal fund of knowledge (human beings learn to speak, but not by being taught); and it also seems likely that the child's guessing is genuine guessing, has intelligence in it, is not purely chance, therefore has something like premises and/or knows constraints. So although what I called the "social" interpretation of the argument from recollection is tempting, I do not believe it to be strictly true, either to the facts of human learning or to the dialogue. It is not faithful to the dialogue because, for one thing, it fails to pay attention to the prominence given to mathematical inquiry in the passages explaining Socrates' metaphor that learning is nothing but recollection.

Way back I proposed that perhaps recollection is thinking and vice versa. This suggestion was based on analysis of the two rather different speeches about recollection given by Cebes and by Socrates and on the observation that what Socrates says about recollection brings to the foreground how very diverse the linkages between what is "present to the mind" and what is "absent" but vicariously "made present" or "recalled" are. And I remarked on how curious the mix of voluntary and involuntary, active and passive is if you take Socrates' and Cebes's two speeches together.

Yet in urging this very broad interpretation of Socrates' metaphor that learning, studying, investigating is recollection, I slighted the fact that the favored examples of recollection given in the *Phaedo* and *Meno* are examples of mathematical thinking.

Any adequate account of the import of this fact would have to go into both the finding of demonstrations for mathematical truths and the demonstrating of mathematical truths. Nor would this be sufficient; one would also have to go into the finding of mathematical truths that might be understood to be explanatory of phenomena. I reserve an exploration of this topic for another occasion.

In the context of the present essay I merely note that one effect of selecting mathematical thinking from the whole of thought is that the kind of thinking which characteristically encounters logical musts and cannots is, so to say, shoved to the foreground. Thereby what is already identified as nonmortal because it is nonsensory (viz. thinking) is moved still closer to the Divine by giving us experience of inexorability (cf. *Iliad* "—and the will of Zeus was accomplished," Parmenides' poem *On Truth*, Fr. 8, l. 32. *Republic* passages on noncontradiction at iv 436b–40 and x 602d ff., *Sophist* 230b).

Just one more step is needed, which is taken in the argument for the soul's immortality that I dubbed "the argument from the soul's kinship with the Forms" (78d ff. [p.273 Loeb]). This last step is that knowing is a becoming assimilated to becoming like that which is known.

Were this assumption true, and were it shown that all scientific investigation, perhaps all investigation scientific or not, depends on the soul's knowing because foreknowing and recollecting Forms, and were it established that these Forms are immortal (because "simple" and thus indissoluble), then the immortality of the soul insofar as this soul was, is, comes to be "in touch with" Forms

might be said to have been demonstrated. To the Forms we must, therefore, turn, or rather, to passages in the *Phaedo*, and a few other places, about Forms. These are: 65, 74–77, 78b–84, 92a–bff., 100 a f., 103e.

The questions I shall pay a little attention to are: (a)Of what are there Forms? (b)What are Forms?(c)Why suppose that there are Forms?

My answers, to state them baldly in a preliminary way, are these: (a)There are Forms (in the sense of *eide choorista*)<sup>8</sup> of qualities that are inherently relational. (b)The Forms are the relationships, I mean the somethings to which we in English tend to refer by what are called abstract nouns—equality, justice, beauty, magnitude, health. (c)It is irresistibly plausible to suppose that there are Forms if one takes words to be names for their senses (logical depths) and holds that names, to do their job of “calling up” the named, must “refer” and indeed must refer to some one thing if the name is not to be ambiguous. And even if one has a more complicated theory of discourse than this, something like a theory of Forms would still be plausible. What is not plausible, to me at least, is the rank that is given to the Forms, by Plato, but not only by Plato.

Let me now try to explain and furnish textual evidence for these answers.

What is it about “just,” “fine,” “good,” “large,” “healthy,” “strong” that Socrates should single them out from among other qualities and claim that they must be “in and of themselves,” beyond just men or cities, apart from fine horses or young women, healthy men and children, strong carts and boxers?

Since roughly the same set of examples occurs repeatedly, in the *Phaedo* (65d, e), in the *Republic* (479), in the *Meno* (72d), in the *Parmenides* (131a), we must ask why Socrates seems to believe that something is left out, overlooked, were it said that the enumerated words or names (*onomata*) are meaningful in that they name such beings (*onta*) as healthy Pausanias, strong Callias, and so on, or, if you like, the particular health, strength, beauty etc. that are in these men.

In calling attention to the fact that certain adjectives (in neuter singular) recur whenever Socrates touches on the theme of *eide choorista* (Platonic, that is, independent, Forms), I am quarreling with one fairly standard answer to the question what such Forms are: If they were any and all “universals,” as Aristotle sometimes leads us to believe (see e.g. *Metaphysics* xiii 1078b33), nouns as well as adjectives should figure in the list.

Aren't “man” and “animal” and “fire” and “snow” just as “predicable of many” as are “just” and “beautiful”? Why, then, are they not parade instances of independent Forms?

The *Parmenides* puts the question whether for kind-words like “man” or “horse” and mass-words such as “gold” or “fire” or “wood” to be meaningful one must suppose that there is a prototypical “man himself,” “fire itself,” “water itself” (Cf. *Philebus* 15b and *Timaeus* 49, 51b, 30). Most readers of the dialogue believe that the answer is in the affirmative. They base this conclusion largely on the fact that Socrates is in this dialogue portrayed (130c) as rejecting

such an expansion of the domain of Forms only because he is embarrassed at the thought that the same reasoning that generates a “water itself” would also generate a “hair,” “mud,” “dirt” per se. Parmenides diagnoses Socrates’ intellectual condition as one of youthful excessive respect for high-low distinctions. This seems to imply that the young Socrates’ exclamation—*As we see them, so they are*—spoken of “mean and worthless things” like hair and mud, things that are, so to say, too base to be “called after” any totemic ancestor “beyond them,” is mere prejudice.

I am, however, struck by the fact that Socrates’ exclamation is virtually a quotation of the famous passage about fingers in the *Republic* (523). According to these texts, men and fingers and sticks and stones directly “deserve” their names. (See also *Alcibiades* I, st. 111c.) Their *to ti en einai* is “in” them.

The conclusion I draw from the facts just enumerated is that according to the majority of the dialogues, “thing words” do not call for Forms which exist apart from the things that illustrate them. (I leave unsettled whether they ought to be called “early” and “middle” over against the *Parmenides* and *Philebus* and *Timaeus* as “late.”)

If, however, adjectival character alone sufficed for Socrates to believe that there must be a Form as a sort of “patron” after whom all the things bearing the adjective as a patronymic are called, there ought to be a Form “the hot itself” ancestral to all hot things. But “the hot itself” nowhere to my knowledge functions as an “eponym” (see *Parmenides* 131a, where that word and notion are employed) “shared out” among participating hot things.

Is it, then, because the enumerated adjectives name good things, objects of desire, that they are treated as somehow special? Perhaps, but whatever one makes of the telic or luring character of the qualities for which Socrates claims that there are separate Forms, one must tell a story that takes into account that equal is the Platonic Form most elaborately dealt with in the *Phaedo*<sup>9</sup> and that the idea of equality (and inequality) is at least as much “foundational” for the supposedly “value-neutral”, desire-muting mathematical sciences as for politics: Euclid’s Common Notions have just one theme—equality and its contraries, greater than, less than.

I could imagine that Gestalt psychologists and phenomenologists would propose that we think of Platonic Forms as the “limits” to some process of “idealization” (whether postulated or acknowledged) which realizes, recognizes, that the cognitive and moral and aesthetic demand (need, or even lust, that is, *eros*) is for perfection—perfect justice, perfect health, perfect equality, perfect any of the things about which Socrates asks “What is it?”—although, or rather, because what the world supplies never quite comes through by fully meeting the standards of the given desire (cf. *Phaedo* 74d, e).

I would accept their proposal, though I would add the rider that the aspiration toward perfection might be a demand for incompleteness that deserves taming: I’ve always liked Whitehead’s reminder, “seek simplicity, and distrust it.”

I would further add that the Gestalt theorists' perfect geometric shapes ("the circle itself" or "the square itself") do not figure in any of the Socratic lists of independent Forms that I have cited.

So far my claim is that being a normative adjective/attribute (I mean, being an adjective the sense of which involves the thought that there are standards to live up to, as in the case of "healthy," "beautiful," "good." Cf. *Euthyphro* 5e, 7; *Phaedrus* 263; *Laches* 192) may, on Platonic principles, be a necessary condition for implicit reference to a Platonic Form. It is not a sufficient condition.

Just one way of making sense of the examples that Socrates gives and does not give occurs to me: There are Platonic Forms for those qualities that belong to things only insofar as they are ranged under a condition or in so far as they are vis-a-vis some correlative and/or in some context. What Plato discovered is, I believe, *the reality of relations and their primacy in mathematics and politics*. By "reality" I mean, not figments that depend on some individual's having originated them, as one might say Hamlet was originated by Shakespeare or a dream by its dreamer. By their primacy I mean that right reasoning and perception is due to recognizing this relational character and wrong reasoning and perception is chiefly due to failing to recognize it.

But I mean more than this. Plato recognized something about relativity that bears on our entire emotional and intellectual nature. I call it our "gappiness" (*Ungesättigkeit*). Plato is ever talking about this: for instance, in *Republic* ii (369b), Socrates identifies the origin of cities as individual neediness and lack of self-sufficiency. In the *Symposium* (202b), the nondivinity of love is said to be entailed by the very meaning of the words—to be divine is to be self-sufficient. But love's greed proves that it is not and has not what it longs for. This dependency of love on what it is of marks its nature through and through. Not only is love relative rather than absolute, it is multiply relative according to Diotima—*ou tou kalou ho eroos alla tes genneseoos kai tou tokou en tooi kalooi* (206e). Knowledge too is inherently relative, and in several respects, being of the known, of the one who knows, and of or among other knowledges. The *Theaetetus* makes quite a point of this relativity.

Once the notion that Plato is interested in studying relativity and its kinds has entered on the scene, one no longer stumbles over previously weird passages, like the long stretch in *Republic* i where Socrates seems to be pestering Polemarchus with the question how to fill in the gaps in the formulas "justice is the craft of giving—to—"

It would not be difficult to show how each and every Platonic dialogue is about one or another kind of being relative: Speech is "of" or "about" as well as "to" and "from." (cf. *Sophist* 244, 263c). So are knowledge, rule, part, whole, always of something else that is in the possessive or some other oblique case.

The men who do the speaking, teaching, loving, ruling may think that they,

who are in the naming case, active rather than passive, giving rather than receiving, commanding rather than obeying, are “substantial” and “independent,” whereas the crowd which they address, the pupils whom they teach, the slaves whom they command are insubstantial and dependent. Yet for the performance of any of these imposing roles they depend on what they deem beneath them.

I believe that one of the reasons for Plato’s never quite losing his charm is the depth he gave to this insight.

Is there then no one and nothing absolute, self-determined, self-sufficient?

Platonic Forms, like the divine Nous of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* book Lambda, are, I think, meant to be the absolutes to which mortal things are relative but which are not in turn relative to these mortal things. They are, to use T.S. Eliot’s word, the “objective correlatives” for the human longing to stoop before what by its very indifference to adoration shows itself worthy of worship.

To savor the strangeness of this thought that the longing for absolutes is, if I understand the project, to be satisfied by *relationships themselves, not things that are related*, I turn now to the topic of equality and try to show how “just,” “healthy,” “strong,” “excellent.” (I mean the qualities on what I called the recurrent list of Form-demanding names) might, from a certain point of view, be deemed to have a logical structure analogous to that of the seemingly unproblematic because value-free qualities “large,” “equal.”

Clearly, the quality of being equal belongs to a thing only insofar as it is relative to another, of which it is an equal. Observe, though this is not pointed out by the dialogue, that the other thing whose equal this stone is need not be a stone but may be a stick. Notice, too, that although Socrates here, and in many another dialogue, remarks on our getting into intellectual muddles because we speak (and perhaps even think and feel) inarticulately, fail to notice or to say that “this stone is both equal and unequal” *relative to* that stick on the one hand, this other stone on the other, we are, even after becoming explicit to this degree, still speaking elliptically. This stone can obviously be one and the same stick’s equal and unequal—its equal in length but its unequal in weight.

The (in Greek) inherently oblique-case-needing character of being-an-equal-stick-or-stone, and the multiply-relative character of being-an-equal-stick-or-stone may not seem worth belaboring. But you will. I imagine, agree with me that these logical truths become more than a little interesting in moral or political context. (Cf. Aristotle’s treatment of claims to equality and inequality in the *Politics*, also 97c on “best for each and best for all”).

But how do these observations concerning relativity bear on such qualities as health or strength (or justice, excellence, and beauty)?

The *Meno* gives, or at least suggests, an answer. But, since it is an answer supplied by Meno, who has a bad reputation, many readers do not appreciate what he says.

Wouldn’t it, from a Greek physician’s point of view, be true that the health

of an old man is different from that of a man at mid-career in that, say, the androgen level of the one is healthy for him but, should the other have the numerically same androgen level, some sort of imbalance or unhealthiness would exist in him? And do we really want to say that the same degree of muscular strength in a man and a woman is required for us to call either of them strong? Or that we expect a boy of six who is spoken of as tall to be the same height as a tall teenager? And are we entirely confident that Socrates would and should reject Meno's notion that a woman's way of being excellent is different from a man's?

Meno is not simply wrong in speaking of excellence as relative to station in life, and the same holds, according to my argument, for the other qualities mentioned. Throughout, inexplicitness about the condition under which the quality that is spoken of belongs to what it qualifies tends to generate misapprehension and misreasoning. In this respect equal, healthy, tall, strong, splendid, just, and good are alike. For example, it seems abhorrent that for vultures to feed on the corpses of heroes is both right and wrong, until one makes explicit whether the corpses are Persian or Hellenic. Well and good, But Socrates finds fault with Meno's answer. So far I have said nothing about why.

Compare with Meno's litany about virtue (71e f.) this statement of my own invention about what being equal is:

"There are many kinds of equality, as of weight, or of length, or of speed, or of volume. A balance will prove things equal weight. A stopwatch will help show their equal speed. Perfect coverage by each of each will show their equal length. Pouring the liquid that fills one container into another and finding that there is no overflow will establish that the two containers are of equal volume."

Would we not side with Socrates in feeling that although everything that was said is true and relevant and perhaps even indispensable, (cf. the indispensable and nevertheless "rejected" examples of knowhow and science at the opening of the *Theaetetus*), the *tenor* of our question is not being appreciated. We wanted to reach greater clarity about how all these different ways of being equal are ways of being equal.

When Aristotle, in the *Physics*, defines motion as "the actuality of the potential qua potential" he is defining "motion as a whole," because he is saying something about how the different *species* of motion (viz. in respect of place, in respect of size, in respect of quality) are akin. Thus he is giving the *type* of answer Socrates is ever seeking. He is defining the *genus*.

In the *Meno*, Socrates himself illustrates in what spirit he would like Meno to consider excellence by answering the "what-is-it?" question about shape. Being a rectilinear and being a curvilinear figure are, for Socrates, in some manner "opposite." Nevertheless he comes up with an answer to the question how being circular and being triangular both are ways of being figures (cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* ii 414b–415a end; see also *Charmides* and *Theaetetus*).

What motivates this Socratic hunt for the generic? How is it connected with

the postulating of Forms apart from the above the things “called after” the Forms? And what became of my claim that Forms are, or are primarily, patrons of relativity?

The example from the *Meno* just given, which shows how the genus *figure* manages to hold the round’s and the straight’s conflicting ways of being figures together, gives us a clue:

Intellectual ascent to the genus is frequently a way of rising above mutually antagonistic ways of being and seeing their togetherness, their forming a whole, a “community” (*koinonia*) under the generic totem.

A homely way of illustrating what I mean is to meditate on what troubled many of us about Nixon’s “enemy list.” When we heard that this was the label used by the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, many of us felt that Nixon and his camp had thereby become scoundrels (*panourgoi*), because they were denying that American political parties, even if they contend against each other, are parties of the American people, that there is a genus that holds together the different ways of being American citizens. As this example shows, reminding conflicting social or political parties that and how they are also “akin” or of one genus (*sungenos*) can be of great practical importance, that is, make a difference in deliberations steering toward action.

For me the most vivid instance of what I am talking about is the speech whereby the brothers of Joseph, in the concluding chapter of the book of Genesis (50:16–21), seek to move Joseph to mildness towards them. They say: “Your father said before his death, forgive the servants of the God of your father.” It is the indirectness of that speech’s rationale for reconciliation to which I am calling your attention. The indirectness betokens that only insofar as there is something that is regarded as *to theion*, divine, inasmuch as it is of a kind to rule and hold sway whereas the rival mortals all are to be ruled and to serve, can mortal rivalry be stilled (*Phaedo* 80a).

But not every ascent to (recollecting of?) the genus that contains diverse and even rival species has such practical effects for the community. Sometimes all that is gained is peace of mind for an individual. Thus it appears to me that people who skip the earlier sections of the *Phaedo* because they don’t like to be counted among the “vulgar” overlook the fact that the *Phaedo* acknowledges the different and apparently competing ways of being “animated” (*empsychon*) by desire for goods that are of diverse species (cf. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* i.6), yet of one genus in being good.

To recognize that, as Pythagoras put it, life or at least human life is like a festival, where some go to sell, some to win honor by proving through their victory that they outrank their rivals, and some just to watch the game, the sellers, and the watchers, is to be on the way to becoming reconciled to the fact that each way of life claims that it is the true way, and in trying to win adherents to itself will come into conflict with the others. My brief and perhaps slightly unusual way of expressing this recognition is to say one sees the species of human life as species of one genus.

Sometimes, however, and here the so-to-say privileged status of the Form *equality* comes to the fore, ascent to the genus gives immense theoretical satisfaction.

Euclid's *Elements* postdate the Platonic dialogues, but I imagine that the idea of recognizing truths about equality-inequality as "common to" the sciences—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, and whatever predecessor of Archimedes' science of weight probably existed—was already on the scene when Plato wrote his dialogues.

To what are the Common Notions true? How do we come to know their truth?

The Socrates of the *Phaedo* answers: We learned them via mortal and perceptible things that happened to be equal to one another in this or that respect. But the sign of our only being reminded of "the equal itself" instead of being directly informed by these things is that the very things from which we learned about being equal are (a)only approximately equal and (b)only equals as regarded in terms of one rather than another of their attributes, and (c)deserve the name only vis-a-vis a correlative.

The truths that Euclid collects under the heading Common Notions outrank other truths in that they are Common to all the sciences, rendering arithmetic, plane and solid geometry, astronomy, the science of weights, music theory, as well as the subject matters of these several sciences, akin (*sungenos*). Moreover, the demonstrative power of these diverse species of science seems in large measure to hinge on the Common Notions.

Now whereas when I tried to illustrate the idea of genus earlier through political and social examples, the diverse species that belonged to the genus were "contained in" their genus, it is my best guess that according to the *Phaedo* the genus of equal things to which Euclid's Common Notions are strictly applicable are not equal sticks or stones or equal heard musical intervals or equal observed angles made by heavenly bodies. Rather, these common notions hold strictly true of equals that are purely and perfectly and without qualification what their name proclaims them as.

And beyond them, higher yet than "the mathematical," there is the *source* of mutual equals having mutuality. This One is the Form "apart and above" the things called after it, whence mutual equals have their mutuality, their *brotherliness*. It outranks the terms related even when these terms are "perfect" in the way that "mathematicals" are. It is the relationship equality.

To "the equal itself" in this sense of the word Socrates would say that we ultimately "look" when we pronounce such truths as that equality is transitive and symmetrical. To this same Form the things here on earth (and even those over the earth that can be seen with the body's eyes) that are yoked together as each other's equals "look" when they aspire to be true to their name but "fall short" and remain "inferior" (*Phaedo* 74d).

Let what's been said be my tentative answer to the three questions I promised to take up:

1. *Of what* are there forms? Of relational qualities such as figure in the mathematical sciences but also in politics and morals.

2. *What are* the forms? They are the “fathers” or “patrons” of the innumerable couples, triples, quadruples, bonded to each other by the relation they bear toward each other.

3. *Why suppose* that there are forms? Because the relation-words, which are the very words on which much of our reasoning turns, are meaningful, and their meaningfulness cannot be explained by treating them as the names of the things that are “towards” each other by virtue of their relation, not even if one takes these things in groups, small or large. The word, if name it is, is primarily name of what it signifies, secondarily of what it denotes.

Now this entire excursion into the region of the Platonic Forms was for the sake of meeting our obligation to appraise Socrates’ self-defense before his friends. And that self-defense was given the form of attempts to demonstrate the soul’s immortality.

We must, therefore, return to the question whether, when toward the end of the dialogue his friends see Socrates’ corpse stretched out and Crito has closed its mouth and eyes, these friends would rightly hope that Socrates now associates with beings better than themselves, namely, the Platonic Forms.

My own belief is that the answer is “no.” I hope, however, that I have somewhat succeeded in conveying that if one says “no,” if one contends that Socrates has not established that it is better for him to die because at death his true self will become disencumbered of “accretions” and will gain full intimacy with associates long divined, one has to think rather carefully about everything over and under the sun.

One of the things one learns from Platonic dialogues is that one should try to find out what follows from denying an assumption.

If the “middle arguments” have not succeeded,<sup>10</sup> then I can see only three ways in which Socrates’s drinking of the hemlock is “doing what he wishes,” a good for him. Two of these you will probably not like.

1. Socrates is using the verdict of the Athenians as a permissible mode of suicide, anticipating a troubled old age (cf. *Memorabilia* IV.viii, Loeb ed. p.352).

2. Socrates is “making a name for himself,” shaping how future generations will remember him, by dying for Athens and philosophy. Despite the fact that Socrates is made to speak of other heroes in some such way as this in the *Symposium*, and in spite of the fact that the passion for fame plays so immense a role in human life, I have some difficulty ascribing this motive to Socrates because he is so profoundly aware of how the passion for fame makes one dependent on those who bestow fame. And I was under the impression that the Einstein passage, which towards the end speaks of *substituting* the intellectual for the lived world, shows that becoming independent of one’s fellow human beings is one of the prime motives of the man whom Plato portrays in the guise

of Socrates (cf. Epistle ii 314c, *legomena sookratous . . . kalou kai neu gegotos*).

3. Socrates judges that the good of Athens is his good and regards the execution of a procedurally correct judicial verdict as a public good.

If you opt for this last way, that seems to show that what a thing, or at least a human being, or at least certain human beings are is a matter of relations. It may, were there but argument enough and time, show that *relationships derive from facts of being related*.

## NOTES

1. *Apologemai* is the correlative of *kategoroo* (Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], p. 207). At *Phaedo* 63e the latter is the expression Socrates uses when, with a reminding contrast between the city's representative ("him," viz. the jailer) and his own little band of friends, he says, "Never mind about him. To you, who are now my judges, I want to explain . . . (*logon apodounai*) why a man is of good courage when he is to die if he has spent his life genuinely in philosophy." The *Meno's logon didonai* is likewise a political expression—*logon didonai* is what a magistrate does at the conclusion of his term of office.

2. Aristotle, *On Memory and Recollection*, ch. 2, especially 453a7, where these are expressly distinguished, recollection being a kind of searching; cf. also *Nichomachean Ethics* 1112b20.

3. A reader to whom I showed a draft of this essay considered my use of the word "deliberateness" in connection with *nous* grossly misleading. The issue is too important for this essay (which is, after all, primarily intent on gaining some clarity about relations between thought and desire, not to repond to his query. But it is too large really to tackle. So I compromise with a note.

Disregard for the moment passages in the *Republic* which contrast *dianoia* with *noesis*. Disregard also what Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* Lambda. *Nous* is, after all, not an invention of philosophers.

To judge by the entries from Herodotus, Homer, Xenophon, Platonic dialogues and Aristotelian writings more broadly that are recorded by Liddell-Scott, the range of meaning stretches over *houtos ho nous tou rematos* ("this is the sense of the word"), *pros ton auton noun* ("to the same effect"), *en noun echein* plus future infinitive ("to intend"), *poiein ti epi noon tini* ("to put into someone's mind to do"), *agathooi nooi* ("kindly"), *ek pantos noou* ("with all his soul/heart/mind").

A survey of these entries leads me to believe that neither the contrast between heart and head nor that between will and understanding is in or associated with the word *nous*. As far as I can see, the overall sense of the root is something like "paying attention," with the question "What part of yourself is attentive? Eye of the soul or of the body, head, or heart?" left unasked. The questions "Why are you paying attention? Do you mean to do something as a result of what you've noticed? Or do you mean to demonstrate something? Or are you just absorbed in what you are attending to?" have not come on the scene.

Consider now the passage in the *Phaedo* on which I drew when I characterized Socrates (97c ff.), Socrates says that when he heard that it is *nous* which *diakosmoon te kai pantoon aitios* ("nous is what arranges and is responsible for all things"), this seemed somehow right to him. He immediately adds: "If this is so, the mind in arranging things arranges everything (*panta*) and each thing (*hekaston*) in such a way as is best." In a sentence a little later, this emphasis on "best for each and best for all" is reiterated. That is, Socrates never talks about a nonarranging *nous*!

Purely contemplative *nous*, as in *Metaphysics* Lambda, is never given entry. Rather, it looks as though the later passage, where Socrates speaks of what seemed best to the Athenians and what seemed best to him, is already being prepared for. Thus I take Socrates to be talking about reasons for action rather than causes of events and as maintaining that when someone does something, or does everything *nooi* he does what he does out of/from a/because of a regard for what is the best of

each (including himself) and for all (including his family, and the city, and the little band represented by those with him in prison on his last day).

I have a very hard time distinguishing “doing something deliberately” from doing it after and as a result of attending to the good of each and all. Doesn’t deliberation (even about how the various pieces of a lock fit together) consist in trying to figure out what, under the given circumstances, is fit for each and for all?

I certainly agree that people other than Socrates get distracted from the outcome of their deliberations (what they “saw clearly” when they were so lucky as to reach clarity), don’t keep their eye on the ball (viz. the good of each and all). So if I am to make sense of the fact that Socrates is not like other people, I shall have to listen to those who say, “Ah, but there is many a slip between the cup of seeing clearly and the lip of doing in accord with what you saw.” I therefore appreciate what tempts people to postulate “will” as mediating between “insight” and “action.” But I confess that my own tendency is to work rather with the idea of concentration (see 83a and 80e—end on *ath-roizesthai*), substituting it for will, or identifying the two. Consequently I often wonder in the most literal-minded way about Meno’s opening question, because it seems as though human excellence consists so largely in this ability to concentrate, which seems to be helped along by regimen and education, but nevertheless seems very much to be a matter of talent or grace. Examining Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* vii would greatly help to clarify the issue.

4. Allow me to outline what I would want to say under headings (1) and (3). Audible speech reminds. How does it manage to do so? Many readers of Plato answer, by prompting the hearer to turn his or her mind to the *eide* “referred to” or “partaken of” by the individual words he hears spoken. On this interpretation of what speaking is and of what Plato’s Socrates means by *eide*, there ought to be an *eidos* for every significant word, the *eidos* being this “significance.” I hold that such a theory of language, one which refuses to make do with an account of words as substitutes for things and insists, instead, that words have logical depth as well as breadth, *Sinn* as well as *Bedeutung*, intension as well as extension, is more nearly like the truth than most of its rivals. I even believe that it was Plato to whom we, in some complicated way, owe it. But, as will be argued below, the evidence of the dialogues is against this general identification of *eide* with logical depths. For the expression “logical depth,” see C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol.2, ch. 5.

To fasten on writing and urge that reflection on its astounding powers is among the *Phaedo*’s themes might seem merely modish. Yet consider, the *Phaedo*, more even than the rest of the dialogues, is a memorial to Socrates. Obviously the marks on wax or papyrus bear no resemblance to Socrates. They are letters not drawings. The only respects in which they seem to be like Socrates is that they are visible (have shape and perhaps color) and mean something (albeit only to those who have learned to read). So, except for being corporeal they utterly fail to resemble the snub-nosed man whom *Phaedo* and his companions deemed wisest, most just, and altogether best of the men in their acquaintance. Nevertheless, uncannily, they call Socrates to mind, who would otherwise be forgotten, since “for long he has not been seen nor been meditated on.”

Now the entire corpus of Platonic dialogue is overrun with remarks about or references to written marks, *grammata*—*Hippias Major* 285, *Republic* II.368, *Phaedrus* 244, 274, *Statesman* 277e, *Theaetetus* 202, *Protagoras* 312, 326, *Cratylus* 423–34, *Philebus* 17 ff. *Sophist* 253. True, letters and the learning or using of letters are frequently used as examples of something else, looked through rather than at. But it is hard to deny that Plato has writing “on his mind.”

Grammata are not mentioned or spoken of in the *Phaedo*. Diagrams, however, are. And in Socrates’ speech to Simmias at 73c, the sentence about a drawn horse or lyre, in Greek *gegrammenon*, is bound to remind of a written horse or man.

The word “diagram” is in the dialogue’s text—

“When you lead people to diagrams or something of that sort it becomes particularly clear” says Cebes in the speech to Simmias which intends to explain in what way learning or studying is recollection.

The *thing* is not. There are no pictures or diagrams in the divided-line section of the *Republic* or the double-square section of the *Meno* either. Moreover, to judge by *Sophist* 240a, professors of mathematics like Apollonius may have left the supplying of illustrative diagrams to the reader himself.

Now one way of vividly experiencing the potency of writing is to stop and think about the fact that letters, merely conventional and otherwise arbitrary scratches, though they are not diagrams, yield diagrams, if the reader cooperates with the text by executing the required "setting out" (Euclidean *ekthesis*) of the author's enunciation.

The Euclidean pattern of a reader's coming to assent to an author's "I say" declarations—by drawing "cases" which meet the author's general specifications, inspecting and experimenting on them, and finding that the particular cases which the reader was at liberty to conjure up bear out the author's claim—is particularly clear and vivid.

But mustn't we always do something like this when we read? Don't we otherwise merely mouth the words like an actor reading a script? (Cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* xiii 1087a17 and *Nicomachean Ethics* vii 1047a20 f.)

You may well agree, yet wonder why I should do my ruminating about how one goes about realizing what is claimed by a sentence through meditation on written sentences. Isn't it just as true that to grasp the sense and test the truth of what someone says in a spoken sentence the person who listens must conjure up something to which to apply what is heard said, something which is not supplied in full by the speaker? I believe the answer is "yes." Remember, however, that what prompted me to think about the thinking that is stirred up when one is on the receiving end, interpreting someone else's words, was that I was trying to interpret what the *Phaedo* says about recollection, cloaks, and lyres.

The scholarly justification for the hypothesis that one of the things that these passages in the dialogue are about is writing is the resemblance between Aristotle's *On Interpretation* 16a and *Phaedo* 73. But what is important about this hypothesis is the following: The passages in the *Phaedo* about recollection, cloaks, and lyres and the dialogue entire, are about thinking and for thinking, not only Socrates', Simmias', and Cebes', and ours, but also Plato's, the author's. What I mean in saying this is that we ought to try the notion that what the *Sophist* tells us about thought, viz., that it is the dialogue of the soul with itself, so that in thinking the one who does it is both speaker and hearer, I and You, applies to writing too: The author is both writer and reader.

Clearly this is the experience which the likes of ourselves have when we compose a written piece. Why opt for radical discontinuity between Plato and us?

If the supposition of continuity between what motivates major authors to write and what prompts ourselves to write sounds like hubris, think again about the slave in the *Meno*. Yes, it is in some measure more plausible to see continuity between *Meno*, the Thessalian nobleman, and his slave than between Plato and ourselves. Yet reconsider—Isn't the long-run question of the dialogue about the excellence that consists in being oneself both Socrates and slave, teacher and learner, that is, self-ruled investigator? And in respect to certain kinds of investigation, in particular, the finding of the geometry that transforms Hesiodic stellar lore into mathematical astronomy, isn't there, on Plato's part, as much need for someone who played the role of teacher vis-à-vis him as there was a need for Socrates in the slave's case (cf. *Epinomis* 989e)?

Now once one allows oneself the thought that Plato resorts to writing not only to teach but also to learn, the riddling character of the dialogues acquires a different ethos. They are no longer Zen master's koans.

The things I said in connection with Cebes' and Socrates' rather different ways of speaking about recollection will now apply to the process of writing the dialogues as well as to the outcomes of that process. The author himself, looking back on what he has written, will have to study the questions which connections that were written down are strong and which are weak and why. And if he is anything like the Socrates whom he depicts, the author will trust that even erroneous answers to his questions have a rationale (as is certainly the case when the slave thinks that doubling an area calls for doubling the sides which contain it).

Therefore he will not throw mistakes away even when he has convinced himself that they are mistakes. He will, having had previous experiences of finding the true in the interstices of motivated falsehood, which was the slave's experience under Socrates' tutelage, "save" mistakes that look promising.

But as for which mistakes are promising, he will have to guess at that. Being a reader as well as

a writer of his own text, he too will in some measure have to guess at "what is meant," which is, of course, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the subject at hand. (Is it at hand?)

5. Try picturing the weaver sitting at his loom and fabricating the life-cloth by passing horizontal weft threads through the vertical warp threads, over and under, over and under, thus making a surface "emerge" from "lines." Or again, picture the musician who gets the lyre strings' tension just right so that the "potential" for noise becomes the "potential" for music. But isn't it hopeless to try picturing a man "reaching" within his mind or memory for an "absent" item? And, if anything, still more hopeless to try picturing anything which is utterly *mono-eides*, one-aspected, simple, and indissoluble? Say you mean to picture the color yellow, just yellow by itself. You will have to do it without also picturing surface and shape, but can you?

6. I am claiming that in discovering the "noetic universe" and distinguishing it from the visible cosmos, he discovered precisely that the "space of reasons" is different from that of "causes," or that the semiotic is other than the causal "order." Cf. the writings of Wilfrid Sellars.

7. Cf. Felix Cohen. "What is a Question?" in *The Legal Conscience* (Archon Books, 1970). Also notice how Euclidean proofs circle back on their opening enunciations at the end, in the q.e.d. or q.e.f. statement.

8. The word *eidos*, as has frequently been pointed out, is not a Platonic coinage. It seems to be used, by authors other than Plato, roughly as in German the words *Wesen* and *Gestalt* are, e.g. in the sentences "Sie hat ein angenehmes Wesen." "Welch eine entzuckende Gestalt." What gets emphasized by these German words in the given sentences is the global, overall impression left by someone or something. Sometimes, indeed, Plato himself so uses the Greek word *eidos*, for instance, at 79a f., when he speaks of "*duo eidee toon ontoon, to men horaton, to de aeides*." "To this use *eidos* in the *Timaeus* roughly corresponds. As I understand the passage in the *Meno* (72) about "bee" in the *Cratylus* (389) about "shuttle," in the *Republic* (596) about "bed," *eide* in these passages are not "separate" except for the contriving mind. The same holds for the *eidos* or *Gestalt* of the beloved whose toga or lyre reminds of the absent one whose property these are: these are *eide*, but not *eide choorista, para tauta panta heteron ti*.

9. Cf. "similar," "multitude," "rest" and their opposites in the *Parmenides*, and "double," "big," "heavy" and their "contraries" in the list at *Republic* v, 479, all the words in quotation marks being fundamental to what will become our physics.

10. I take for granted that the reader will agree that the final argument (102e ff.) leaves undecided whether, when death comes, the soul "withdraws" or has already "ceased to exist."