

Episode Thirty-Nine - The Mind And Spirit Are Not Supernatural But Parts of A Man Just Like The Head and Foot

Post by "Cassius" of October 9, 2020 at 10:57 PM

One more question we will need to address as we deal with Epicurus/Lucretius on the soul:

In *Phaedo*, Socrates' ultimate argument on which immortality of the soul is based comes down to his "recollection" theory, which is hard to summarize but seems to be something similar to "concepts" at least of a certain type are clear to us from birth, and they must have come from somewhere, therefore we must have had them from a prior existence.

That's a woefully inadequate summary and perhaps not even correct at all, but the argument does seem to me to be related to Plato/Socrates reverence for "ideas."

Presumably, therefore, Epicurus' arguments against immortality of the soul must address this argument. Do we think Epicurus/Lucretius has already made this impossible by the "nothing exists eternally except matter and void" argument? Or are there other aspects of Epicurus/Lucretius which attack this argument. No doubt there are huge numbers of commentaries on Plato/Socrates' recollection argument, so maybe we can find something concise that states the issue clearly.

[From Wikipedia,](#)

the four arguments are these, but the common element to me is that they all appear to be word games: which rely on the listener accepting the asserted definitions, rather than questioning them with observations from the senses and pointing out the limitations of the definitions.

The Cyclical Argument

Cebes voices his fear of death to Socrates: "... they fear that when she [the soul] has left the body her place may be nowhere, and that on the very day of death she may perish and come to an end immediately on her release from the body ... dispersing and vanishing away into nothingness in her flight."[\[10\]](#)

In order to alleviate Cebes' worry that the soul might perish at death, Socrates introduces his first argument for the immortality of the soul. This argument is often called the *Cyclical Argument*. It supposes that the soul must be immortal since the living come from the dead. Socrates says: "Now if it be true that the living come from the dead, then our souls must exist

in the other world, for if not, how could they have been born again?". He goes on to show, using examples of relationships, such as asleep-awake and hot-cold, that things that have opposites come to be from their opposite. One falls asleep after having been awake. And after being asleep, he awakens. Things that are hot came from being cold and vice versa. Socrates then gets Cebes to conclude that the dead are generated from the living, through death, and that the living are generated from the dead, through birth. The souls of the dead must exist in some place for them to be able to return to life.[11]

The Theory of Recollection Argument

Cebes realizes the relationship between the *Cyclical Argument* and Socrates' *Theory of Recollection*. He interrupts Socrates to point this out, saying:

Quote

... your favorite doctrine, Socrates, that our learning is simply recollection, if true, also necessarily implies a previous time in which we have learned that which we now recollect. But this would be impossible unless our soul had been somewhere before existing in this form of man; here then is another proof of the soul's immortality.[12]

Socrates' second argument, the *Theory of Recollection*, shows that it is possible to draw information out of a person who seems not to have any knowledge of a subject prior to his being questioned about it ([a priori](#) knowledge). This person must have gained this knowledge in a prior life, and is now merely recalling it from memory. Since the person in Socrates' story is able to provide correct answers to his interrogator, it must be the case that his answers arose from recollections of knowledge gained during a previous life.[13]

The Affinity Argument

Socrates presents his third argument for the immortality of the soul, the so-called *Affinity Argument*, where he shows that the soul most resembles that which is invisible and divine, and the body resembles that which is visible and mortal. From this, it is concluded that while the body may be seen to exist after death in the form of a corpse, as the body is mortal and the soul is divine, the soul must outlast the body.[14]

As to be truly virtuous during life is the quality of a great man who will perpetually dwell as a soul in the underworld. However, regarding those who were not virtuous during life, and so favored the body and pleasures pertaining exclusively to it, Socrates also speaks. He says that such a soul as this is:

Quote

... polluted, is impure at the time of her departure, and is the companion and servant of the body always and is in love with and bewitched by the body and by the desires and pleasures of the body, until she is led to believe that the truth only exists in a bodily

form, which a man may touch and see, and drink and eat, and use for the purposes of his lusts, the soul, I mean, accustomed to hate and fear and avoid that which to the bodily eye is dark and invisible, but is the object of mind and can be attained by philosophy; do you suppose that such a soul will depart pure and unalloyed?[15]

Persons of such a constitution will be dragged back into corporeal life, according to Socrates. These persons will even be punished while in Hades. Their punishment will be of their own doing, as they will be unable to enjoy the singular existence of the soul in death because of their constant craving for the body. These souls are finally "imprisoned in another body". Socrates concludes that the soul of the virtuous man is immortal, and the course of its passing into the underworld is determined by the way he lived his life. The philosopher, and indeed any man similarly virtuous, in neither fearing death, nor cherishing corporeal life as something idyllic, but by loving truth and wisdom, his soul will be eternally unperturbed after the death of the body, and the afterlife will be full of goodness.[16]

Simmiias confesses that he does not wish to disturb Socrates during his final hours by unsettling his belief in the immortality of the soul, and those present are reluctant to voice their [skepticism](#). Socrates grows aware of their doubt and assures his interlocutors that he does indeed believe in the soul's immortality, regardless of whether or not he has succeeded in showing it as yet. For this reason, he is not upset facing death and assures them that they ought to express their concerns regarding the arguments. Simmiias then presents his case that the soul resembles the harmony of the [lyre](#). It may be, then, that as the soul resembles the harmony in its being invisible and divine, once the lyre has been destroyed, the harmony too vanishes, therefore when the body dies, the soul too vanishes. Once the harmony is dissipated, we may infer that so too will the soul dissipate once the body has been broken, through death. [17]

Socrates pauses, and asks Cebes to voice his objection as well. He says, "I am ready to admit that the existence of the soul before entering into the bodily form has been ... proven; but the existence of the soul after death is in my judgment unproven." While admitting that the soul is the better part of a man, and the body the weaker, Cebes is not ready to infer that because the body may be perceived as existing after death, the soul must therefore continue to exist as well. Cebes gives the example of a weaver. When the weaver's cloak wears out, he makes a new one. However, when he dies, his more freshly woven cloaks continue to exist. Cebes continues that though the soul may outlast certain bodies, and so continue to exist after certain deaths, it may eventually grow so weak as to dissolve entirely at some point. He then concludes that the soul's immortality has yet to be shown and that we may still doubt the soul's existence after death. For, it may be that the next death is the one under which the soul ultimately collapses and exists no more. Cebes would then, "... rather not rely on the argument from superior strength to prove the continued existence of the soul after death." [18]

Seeing that the Affinity Argument has possibly failed to show the immortality of the soul, Phaedo pauses his narration. Phaedo remarks to Echecrates that, because of this objection, those present had their "faith shaken," and that there was introduced "a confusion and

uncertainty". Socrates too pauses following this objection and then warns against misology, the hatred of argument.[\[19\]](#)

The Argument from Form of Life

Socrates then proceeds to give his final proof of the immortality of the soul by showing that the soul is immortal as it is the cause of life. He begins by showing that "if there is anything beautiful other than absolute beauty it is beautiful only insofar as it partakes of absolute beauty".

Consequently, as absolute beauty is a *Form*, and so is Life, then anything which has the property of being animated with Life, participates in the Form of Life. As an example he says, "will not the number three endure annihilation or anything sooner than be converted into an even number, while remaining three?". Forms, then, will never become their opposite. As the soul is that which renders the body living, and that the opposite of life is death, it so follows that, "... the soul will never admit the opposite of what she always brings." That which does not admit death is said to be immortal.[\[20\]](#)

Socrates thus concludes, "Then, Cebes, beyond question, the soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls will truly exist in another world. "Once dead, man's soul will go to [Hades](#) and be in the company of," as Socrates says, "... men departed, better than those whom I leave behind." For he will dwell amongst those who were true philosophers, like himself.[\[21\]](#)