

Phaedo and prolepses

Post by “Godfrey” of October 18, 2020 at 4:43 PM

This is my take on the main points. I'm putting words in Epicurus' mouth by using my own understanding.

1A. Plato: there is knowledge before birth of equality, beauty, goodness, justice, holiness; dialectic “essences.” This is not possible without an immortal soul.

1B. Epicurus: there is no immortal soul, therefore by Plato's logic there can be no "essences."

2A. Plato: knowledge obtained before birth is forgotten at birth but still exists in the memory of the soul, therefore “learning” is properly called “recollection.”

2B. Epicurus: the soul does not exist before birth, but we have an inborn faculty to recognize concepts (for example justice, truth). This is the faculty of prolepsis.

3A. Plato: when we perceive something through the senses, we obtain a notion of some other thing which is associated with it. This notion is in the memory of our immortal soul and thus is "recollection."

3B. Epicurus: through repeated exposure to something through the senses we are able to construct a concept of that thing using the faculty of prolepsis. This conceptualizing occurs after the birth of the perceiver.