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FEAR AND DEATH IN PLATO

by

Emily A. Austin

A dissertation presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABBREVIATIONS OF ANCIENT WORKS AND AUTHORS

### PLATO

<u>Ap.</u>	<i>Apology</i>
[ <u>Ax.</u> ]*	<i>Axiochus</i>
<u>Chrm.</u>	<i>Charmides</i>
<u>Cri.</u>	<i>Crito</i>
<u>Epin.</u>	<i>Epinomis</i>
<u>Euthphr.</u>	<i>Euthyphro</i>
<u>Grg.</u>	<i>Gorgias</i>
<u>Hp. Ma.</u>	<i>Hippias Major</i>
<u>La.</u>	<i>Laches</i>
<u>Lg.</u>	<i>Laws</i>
<u>Men.</u>	<i>Meno</i>
<u>Mx.</u>	<i>Menexenus</i>
<u>Phd.</u>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<u>Phdr.</u>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<u>Ptr.</u>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<u>R.</u>	<i>Republic</i>
<u>Smp.</u>	<i>Symposium</i>
<u>Tht.</u>	<i>Theatetus</i>

\*Dialogues in brackets indicate that scholars generally agree that Plato is not the author of the dialogue.

### ARISTOTLE

<u>EN</u>	<i>Nichomachean Ethics</i>
<u>Pol.</u>	<i>Politics</i>

### HOMER

<u>Il.</u>	<i>Iliad</i>
<u>Od.</u>	<i>Odyssey</i>

### EPICURUS

<u>KD</u>	<i>Key Doctrines</i>
<u>Ep. Men.</u>	<i>Letter to Menoeceus</i>

**WELL, YOU JUST WELL TO GET READY, YOU GOT TO DIE.**

**-BLIND WILLIE MCTELL**

## INTRODUCTION

Plato should have something to say about the fear of death. First, Plato intends to offer an account of how to live well, and it does not take much imagination to see that the fear of death can affect the course of one's life. Second, for Plato, courage is a necessary condition for living well, and the courageous person is distinguished by her ability to stand firm in the face of death. Finally, courage is as necessary for a well-ordered polis as for a well-ordered soul. In a political environment marked by frequent war, plagues, and the imminent possibility of violent regime change, death is an ever-present concern. Any polis with a hope of survival must reckon with death in order to preserve itself.

Once one recognizes that Plato should say something about the fear of death, one will discover that he says quite a lot, and what he says is interesting and contentious. At the most general level, Plato consistently argues the following: 1) a virtuous person will not fear her own death;<sup>1</sup> 2) a virtuous person will not fear or grieve the death of her family and friends;<sup>2</sup> and 3) a virtuous political organization will train its citizens not to fear death and will prohibit public manifestations of grief.<sup>3</sup> It is by no means self-evident, however, that ridding oneself of the fear of death, even if possible, is ethically or psychologically beneficial. I organize this dissertation, then, around three questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Ap. 28b-29b, 35a-b, 37b, 40a-42a; Phd. 63e-64a, 67e, 68b, 68a-69a, 84d-85b, 117a; Grg. 522de; R. 3: 386ab, 6:486a

<sup>2</sup> Phd. 116a; 115e-116a; 117d-e; R. 3:387c-388d; 3:397d-e, 10:603e-606c

<sup>3</sup> R. 3: 387c-388d, 9: 578a, 10:603e-606c; Ap. 35ab; Mx. 247c; Lg. 12: 958c-960b, 12:949b, 7: 732c, 7:800c-e,



1. Why does Plato think that the fear of death is ethically inappropriate?
2. What are the impediments to removing the fear of death?
3. Why does he think acquiring and sustaining the appropriate attitudes towards death depends on favorable political circumstances?

I address these questions within the individual context of three dialogues—the Apology, Phaedo, and Republic. In this introduction, I briefly motivate the questions at a more general level, provide a chapter outline, and discuss my methodological approach to Plato's dialogues.

### OVERVIEW OF THE CENTRAL QUESTIONS

The fear of death is an ethical concern for Plato for two reasons. First, Plato, like most ancient ethicists, thinks the aim of a good life is achieving a harmonious soul, which is comprised of a coherent set of beliefs and desires that manifest themselves in action. It depends, in short, on psychological health. Thus, our contemporary thought that one's attitudes towards death are a matter of psychological health makes it *de facto* an ethical question for the ancients.

Second, an inharmonious soul is an unvirtuous soul. The fear of death not only threatens the unity of the soul, then, but it makes agents prone to unvirtuous acts. For Plato, I argue, the fear of death makes unjust activities appear prudent, as injustices both great and small can prove sufficient to save one's own life or the lives of those for whom

one cares. In addition, since the traditional conception of courage involves standing firm in the face of death, an extreme fear of death compromises one's ability to act courageously, whether in battle, in sickness, or on the sea. The fear of death can also foster intemperance, since life's finitude tempts individuals to maximize pleasures, and one might seek to unjustly amass wealth and power with the hopes that they will protect one against violence. Finally, for Plato, the fear of death keeps one from gaining wisdom, not only because wisdom rises and falls with the other virtues, but also because the avid pursuit of goods and security cuts in on time that should be spent in study.

Even if the fear of death compromises virtue, however, one might nevertheless contend that it is hard-wired into our psychology and that many manifestations of the fear of death are not open to alteration. In this dissertation, I argue that Plato believes that the fear of death, though it can be masterfully controlled, can never be eliminated, because it feeds on two desires that are beyond the reach of rational persuasion. First, human beings have a natural desire for protection against the violence of others. Second, we foster and enjoy attachments to people and projects, and death serves as the ultimate threat to those attachments. In an unstable political environment, a host of anxieties accompany efforts to defend oneself and those for whom one cares against violence and to extend the length of one's life for the sake continuing one's relationships. Success often depends on one's willingness to act unjustly.

Thus, I argue that Plato organizes the Republic's ideal city with these two ineliminable desires in mind. First, the ideal city is distinguished by its freedom from faction—it is perfectly safe and secure. Citizens do not fight or seek protection against

one another's violence. Second, individuals are educated from the outset in a way that fosters the appropriate attitudes towards death. The educational program conditions children's emotions and teaches them that they should not fear death or grieve the death of others. I offer a novel interpretation of the material conditions of the upper classes, under which the collective possession of children and the absolute prohibition against possessing any money ensure political stability and diffuse emotional attachments, thereby lessening the fear of death and diminishing the desire to grieve.

### OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The first two chapters take the Apology as their principal text. In Chapter One, I examine Socrates' two attempts to convince his audience that they should not fear death. I argue that Socrates does not intend to convince his audience that they can eliminate their fear. Rather, he intends to lessen the extent to which they fear death and to convince them that risking death is always better than committing injustice. He argues that the greater a person's fear of death, the more willing she is to commit unjust or cowardly acts. My interpretation makes two contributions to the standing literature on the problem. First, some commentators argue that Socrates' two arguments are inconsistent, and I show that they are not inconsistent; second, many commentators argue that the second argument is a dismal failure, and I show that it does not fail.

In Chapter Two, however, I argue that Socrates' chances of convincing his audience that a minor injustice is worse than risking death are seriously challenged by two powerful human desires. First, most people desire security against violence. I show

that Socrates believes that gaining security requires injustice, so according to his argument, making oneself an easy target for violence is better than the injustice required to protect oneself. Second, most people desire to form and sustain intimate relationships with friends and family, to whom they grow emotionally attached. This attachment increases their fear of death, Socrates suggests, because death serves as the ultimate threat to the continuation of personal relationships. In addition, the greater the emotional attachment, the more injustice one is willing to commit to continue enjoying one's relationships. Socrates, I contend, indicates through the course of his defense that he has left these two desires unsatisfied, and that it has led to his unjust prosecution and his inability and unwillingness to protect himself and his family. I conclude that most of Socrates' audience prefers to satisfy these desires, even though it will increase their fear of death and require them to act unjustly.

In Chapter Three, I turn to the Phaedo. In the Phaedo, Socrates addresses a group of philosophically-minded youth, all of whom admire his way of life and grieve his impending death. I challenge the standard interpretation that Socrates is fearless before death, and I contend that the antagonism between the body and the soul makes it impossible for any embodied human to be fearless. For this reason, Socrates employs a set of strategies to control his fear of death rather than eliminate it, and he recommends each strategy to his distressed friends. First, he claims that the philosopher must completely avoid some external goods (money and power) and strongly devalue others (relationships with friends and family). Second, he believes one should regularly rehearse arguments in support of the soul's immortality, preferably until one truly

believes them. Third, one should speculate about the benefits of the afterlife by telling myths and stories. Without all three strategies, Socrates would be unable to minimize and control his fear. If his young interlocutors fail to reduce their worldly attachments or remain unconvinced about the soul's immortality, their fear will intensify. I argue that the text suggests they will fail.

The final two chapters concern the Republic. In the fourth chapter, I address the attitudes towards death of the auxiliary, or second, class in the ideal city, who are required to prepare themselves to die early on the battlefield. I argue that the mechanisms by which auxiliaries control their fear of death are largely social in nature, or features about the political organization that are external to them and mostly beyond their control. First, I point out the elements of the educational program that foster the appropriate attitudes towards the fear of death, especially the religious education, which encourages hope for a desirable afterlife. Second, I argue that the most important mechanism for controlling the auxiliaries' fear of death and desire to grieve, somewhat surprisingly, is the prohibition against possessing private external goods like children and property. Since Plato thinks private property leads to faction and political instability, providing the community with a sense of security from violence significantly lessens the desire to seek protection through unjust means. The community of wives and children keeps any soldier from leaving behind an orphan or widow, and the death of a child is never a private misfortune and does not leave anyone childless. Without these political mechanisms in place, I argue that the childhood education of the auxiliaries would prove insufficient to control their fear of death and their temptation to act cowardly and

unjustly.

In the fifth chapter, I consider whether the philosophers-rulers, unlike the auxiliaries, are able to eliminate rather than simply control their fear of death. I argue that the philosophers, too, cannot eliminate negative emotions like grief and fear. My argument depends on an interpretation of Socrates' two discussions of "lawless desires" in Book IX. I use these two passages to set up my argument that the desire to grieve is a "lawless desire," then I defend my conception of "lawless desires" as natural and ineliminable against two competing conceptions. I then turn to the philosopher's fear of death. I argue that philosophers control their fear by hoping for an afterlife, and they, like the auxiliaries, desire immortal honor from the ideal city. Thus, I offer a somewhat deflationary account of the ability of the philosophers to vanquish negative emotions. However, I concede that the philosophers, with one significant exception, exercise perfect control over their emotions, even if the ideal city crumbles. I close by considering the advantages of thinking of the philosopher's psychology as a scene of struggle.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In each chapter, I focus on a single dialogue. However, since my dissertation is to some extent a thematic enterprise, I cannot fully skirt the methodological issues. My methodology is spartan. I am concerned to draw connections between the key dialogues of my dissertation only by way of what is on the surface of the text. There is no substantive reason, then, to jump into the fray concerning background issues that arise from other ways of connecting Plato's dialogues. To borrow from Chris Bobonich [2002:

483n8], “my claims about the content of particular dialogues are argued for on their own merits, and do not depend on a specific chronological order.” I will also not be concerned with whether Plato may have changed his mind, and if so, when he might have done so. I remain agnostic about the extent to which the protagonist Socrates resembles his historical counterpart and about the relationship between the protagonist Socrates and the beliefs of Plato himself. None of the questions of my dissertation turn on these matters, so I do not plan to seek out complications.

#### TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. I refer throughout to the standard Oxford Classical Texts. For Vol. 1, I use the revised text by Duke, et. al. [1995]. For all other references to the Platonic corpus, I use the Burnet volumes [1900-1907]. I have availed myself of a number of excellent commentaries. For the Apology, I primarily consulted Burnet [1924], Strycker and Slings [1994], Adam [1910], and Dyer [1893]. For the Phaedo, I consulted Burnet [1911], Geddes [1885], and Wagner [1894]. For the Republic, I used Adam [1894]. I supply the Greek in the notes, though short passages are in the body of the text.

## CHAPTER ONE

### APOLOGY: PRUDENCE AND THE FEAR OF DEATH

In Plato's Apology, Socrates argues that the members of the Athenian jury could greatly benefit from fearing death less. He is especially concerned with the effect of an extreme fear of death on an individual's motivation to act virtuously. In particular, a marked fear of death makes cowardice and injustice tempting, as a petty injustice can fend off threats to one's person and may at times prove sufficient to save one's life. Socrates, then, in order to explain his current predicament and justify his refusal to save himself by committing injustice, must convince his audience that risking death is a better choice than committing a minor injustice. He must convince them that they should imperil themselves in similar fashion. This is no small task. Socrates offers two arguments for this effort. The first I call the "Argument from Uncertainty" (29a5-b6) and the second is the infamous "Two Things Argument" (40c5-41c6).\*

At the most general level, commentators have raised two objections to Socrates' arguments regarding the fear of death. First, they seem mutually inconsistent, since the second argument breaches the epistemic modesty upon which the first argument depends. Second, the "Two Things Argument" is a mess, leading scholars to judge it either a very bad argument or no argument at all. Instead of an argument, those donning the banner of

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\* All references in chapters one and two in which the dialogue is unspecified refer to the Apology.



charity argue that Socrates intends only to offer his audience “consolation” or “reasons for hope.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the standard means for resolving the inconsistency is to undermine Socrates’ commitment to the second argument, thereby preserving his emblematic epistemic modesty and protecting him from the charge of arguing poorly. I argue that the arguments are in no way inconsistent, since Socrates is entitled to his breach of the epistemic modesty of the first argument. In addition, I argue that he is fully committed to his final argument, and he has good reason to believe it is sound.<sup>5</sup>

First, though, it is useful to see how Socrates appears to contradict himself. The crucial premise of Socrates’ “Argument from Uncertainty” is that no one knows whether death is a harm rather than a benefit. He offers the argument in response to an imaginary objector, who wonders why Socrates is not “ashamed” [αἰσχύνῃ, 28b3] to continue philosophizing, since doing so endangers his life. Socrates responds:

For to fear death, gentlemen, is nothing other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know. For no one knows whether death might not be the greatest of all goods for a human being, but people fear it as if they knew well that it is the greatest of evils.

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<sup>4</sup> Among those who argue that the “Two Things Argument” is not intended to be read critically as an argument are Brickhouse and Smith [1989: 260-1, 267] and [1989b 156-57], Reeve [1989: 182], Armleder [1966: 46], and Strycker and Slings [1994: 216-7]. Roochnik [1985, 219-20] concludes that Socrates willfully offers his audience a bad argument with the intent of duping the less-philosophical among them in order to comfort them (falsely, it seems).

<sup>5</sup> My allies in principle are McPherran [1996] and Rudebusch [1999]. The details and extent of our differences will become clear in the course of the paper.

And how is this not the most blameworthy ignorance to believe one knows what one does not know? On this point and in this respect, gentlemen, I perhaps differ from most people, and if I were to claim that I am wiser than anyone in anything, it would be in this, that because I do not adequately know about things in the house of Hades, so I do not think I know (29a5-b6).<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Socrates suspects that he is wiser than his fellow death-fearing citizens because he is epistemically responsible.

However, in his parting speech to those who voted to acquit him, it seems he reneges on his claim of ignorance by arguing that death is a benefit. First, he reflects on the silence of his spiritual guide, or daimonion, in the proceedings that have led to his death sentence:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> τὸ γὰρ τοι θάνατον δεδιέναι, ὃ ἄνδρες, οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ δοκεῖν σοφὸν εἶναι μὴ ὄντα· δοκεῖν γὰρ εἰδέναι ἐστὶν ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν. οἶδε μὲν γὰρ οὐδεὶς τὸν θάνατον οὐδ' εἰ τυγχάνει τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ πάντων μέγιστον ὃν τῶν ἀγαθῶν, δεδίασι δ' ὡς εὖ εἰδότες ὅτι μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν ἐστὶ. καίτοι πῶς οὐκ ἀμαθία ἐστὶν αὕτη ἢ ἐπονείδιστος, ἢ τοῦ οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν; ἐγὼ δ', ὃ ἄνδρες, τοῦτω καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἴσως διαφέρω τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰ δὴ τῷ σοφώτερός του φαίην εἶναι, τοῦτω ἄν, ὅτι οὐκ εἰδῶς ἱκανῶς περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου οὔτω καὶ οἶομαι οὐκ εἰδέναι·

<sup>7</sup> There is no easy way to deal with the daimonion, but the fact is that, whatever it is, it plays an essential role in Socratic ethics and piety. I am not wedded to any particular conception of the daimonion, so long as the basic details remain: with respect to morality, it has an evaluative component, and Socrates considers its evaluations to be true and thereby action-guiding. For a sustained treatment of the daimonion and Plato's reliance on other sorts of religious divination, see Vlastos [1999], especially "Socratic Piety," and the special issue of Apeiron, 48/2 [2005].

This thing that has happened to me is likely to be a good thing, and those of us who believe that being dead is an evil cannot be thinking rightly. I have a great proof (μέγα μοι τεκμήριον) of this, for my customary sign necessarily would have opposed me if I had not been about to do something good (40b7-c4).<sup>8</sup>

With this conclusion in hand, Socrates offers his audience the “Two Things Argument,” in which he contends that regardless of what happens when one dies, death will be a benefit, perhaps even the greatest benefit [τί μείζον ἀγαθὸν τούτου εἴη ἄν, 39e6-7]. He is far from claiming ignorance about the value of death, and it would seem that he is contradicting his earlier epistemic modesty.

I argue that the inconsistency disappears upon reexamination of Socrates’ aims and his changing predicament. I contend that both arguments should be read as prudential in nature, meant to explain and justify Socrates’ dedication to choosing justice

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<sup>8</sup> κινδυνεύει γάρ μοι τὸ συμβεβηκὸς τοῦτο ἀγαθὸν γεγόνεσθαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅπως ἡμεῖς ὀρθῶς ὑπολαμβάνομεν, ὅσοι οἰόμεθα κακὸν εἶναι τὸ τεθνάναι. μέγα μοι τεκμήριον τούτου γέγονεν· οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ’ ὅπως οὐκ ἠναντιώθη ἄν μοι τὸ εἰωθὸς σημεῖον, εἰ μὴ τι ἔμελλον ἐγὼ ἀγαθὸν πράξειν.

There are some who would contest my translation of τεκμήριον as proof (cf. Strycker and Slings [1994: 383] and Vlastos [1991: 283-4n2]). I side with Brickhouse and Smith [1989: 237] and McPherran [1996: 255]. For the most part, those who want to downplay the strength of τεκμήριον do so because they prefer that Socrates have a confidence that depends upon a transparent, rational argument, or they seek to lessen his confidence in order to save him from a breach of epistemic modesty. As I argue that the strength of the daimonic warrant gives Socrates the right to breach his earlier epistemic modesty, I am content to render what I take to be appropriate power to his epistemic confidence. Regarding the role of the daimonion, see n.3.

at the risk of death.<sup>9</sup> The first is a prudential argument to the effect that it is best for one to choose justice when doing so puts one at risk of death, even if one does not know whether death is beneficial. Death is the better bet. The second argument follows three marked changes in Socrates' circumstances. First, instead of risking death, he faces it. Second, he directs his statements to a smaller audience that is composed of those who voted to acquit him. Third, he has new evidence from his daimonion. His new circumstances and new evidence enable him to argue that if one faces death as a result of consistently just action, even though one does not know the nature of death (annihilation vs. immortality), one can see death as a benefit. Choosing justice gives one the advantage of facing death confidently, while choosing injustice does not. For Socrates, acquiring and acting in light of reasonable attitudes towards death makes one less anxious about living and, when push comes to shove, dying.

## II. Epistemically Modest Risk Assessment

According to Socrates' first argument (29a5-b6), to fear death justifiably, one must know that death is a harm. Since no one has sufficient knowledge that death is harmful, no one is justifiably afraid. However, knowledge that death is a benefit is also unattainable. If death were a benefit, especially if it were the "greatest of benefits," then one might justifiably look forward to death, as one looks forward to receiving tenure or finishing the day with a tumbler of whisky. According to Socrates' argument, though, we are not entitled to make any claim about what death is or whether it is good for us. To

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<sup>9</sup> This prudential interpretation is dismissed by Rudebusch [1999: 66].

believe that we can make such claims, and that such claims are the justifiable bases for our actions or emotions, is to be epistemically irresponsible.<sup>10</sup>

Though one might think that Socrates aims to convince the jurors that they should not fear death, this cannot be his aim. If it were, his argument would be a dreadful failure for two reasons. First, for Socrates, fear is the anticipation of harm; people fear those things they believe to be future harms.<sup>11</sup> To convince his audience that their fear of death is unjustified, Socrates needs to convince them that death is not a harm. However, Socrates insists that no one knows or can know whether death is a harm or a benefit. The only way he could convince the jurors that they have no reason to fear death is to prove to them something that would undermine his claim of ignorance. Socrates is not, one hopes, employing the garden-variety fallacy of advancing a positive claim from ignorance.

Second, the jurors may heartily admit their uncertainty about whether death is a harm, yet consider this uncertainty further reason to fear and avoid death. Given a choice between certain and uncertain results, if I place high value on the certain results (life is overall pretty good), and have no desire to discover the uncertain results (death is possibly very bad), I may have little desire to venture into the unknown. When the loss of life is at stake, risk aversion generally passes for prudence. If you tell me that an

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<sup>10</sup> Throughout this paper, I treat Socrates as a cognitivist about emotion (in the sense that emotions depend on judgments), who also believes that one's judgments about death are open to revision in light of reasoned argument. This is, I think, in line with the standard view that in the "Socratic dialogues," Socrates denies the existence of an irrational part of the soul that cannot (at least in some instances) be altered via a change in beliefs alone.

<sup>11</sup> I use fear and anxiety interchangeably in this discussion, since the *Apology* does not necessitate any distinction, but it should not be overlooked that the distinction can be usefully employed and, I argue elsewhere, is useful when working with later Platonic works which feature an irrational element of the soul.

elective medical procedure might benefit me or it might kill me, it would be strange for me to experience no trepidation, especially if there are a number of desires that might be satisfied if I stay alive (i.e. raising my children, finishing my book). If I choose the surgery, I cannot very well be expected to do so fearlessly.

Socrates' argument, then, does not aim to convince his audience not to fear death. It does, however, challenge the Athenian jurors' blind assumption that death is harmful, and, more importantly, it undermines the degree to which they fear it. Though Socrates consistently refers to his own death as a risk, he thinks others tend to view death not merely as a risk or a possible harm, but as the "greatest of evils" or the "ultimate risk" (Ap. 29a9-b1, 34c7, 40a9-b1; cp. Grg. 522de). He thinks this is a grievous mistake. For if death really were the worst thing that can happen to one, everything else that is bad pales in comparison. The greater one's fear of death, then, the greater the injustice one is willing to commit in order to avoid it. If an agent believes death is the worst thing, even if she grants that it is indubitably bad to heedlessly kill her enemies, betray her city, or bribe the jury, then she should prefer to kill, betray, or bribe in order to avoid death. Such is the ordinary prudence of opting for the lesser evil (cp. Phd. 68d5-9). On this view, anyone who pursues any number of activities at the risk of death seems perversely imprudent. This, of course, is exactly the way Socrates seems to his imaginary objector.

If one cannot be certain that death is even a harm, however, much less the greatest of harms, then the demands of prudence change. Provided an opportunity to avoid death by betraying her city to the enemy or bribing the jury, it is no longer clear that she should err on the side of injustice. Before, when her options were to suffer the greatest of evils

or do something unjust, injustice was the lesser evil. Now, however, she is certain that injustice is bad but recognizes her uncertainty about death. In this circumstance, Socrates plausibly maintains that it is unreasonable to do something that is clearly bad in order to avoid something that could be good. He chooses an ethical certainty over a metaphysical uncertainty.

I contend that Socrates' argument is compelling if his objective is to change his audience's conception of what counts as prudent action when death is a risk. Socrates' numerous anecdotes in which he is forced to decide between justice and risking death make it clear that he understands the argument's objective in this way. He introduces the first of these anecdotes by saying:

Listen to what has happened to me, so that you may know  
that I will not yield to anyone contrary to what is right, for  
fear of death, even if I should die at once for not yielding  
(32a5-8).<sup>12</sup>

At the close of his first anecdote, in which he resists the demands of the Council to unjustly prosecute the generals from the battle of Arginusae for not retrieving the dead, he reiterates:

...but I thought I should run any risk on the side of the law  
and justice rather than join you, for fear of prison or death,

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<sup>12</sup> ἀκούσατε δὴ μοι τὰ συμβεβηκότα, ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι οὐδ' ἂν ἐνὶ ὑπείκῃθοιμι παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον δεῖσας θάνατον, μὴ ὑπείκων δὲ ἀλλὰ κἂν ἀπολοίμην.

when you were engaged in an unjust course. (32b9-c2).<sup>13</sup>

In the second anecdote, Socrates is ordered to unjustly deliver Leon of Salamis to the Thirty Tyrants, and he again refuses, explaining that:

Then I showed again, not in words, but in deed, that, if it's not fairly crude to say, death is not a concern for me, but my whole concern is to do nothing unjust or impious (32d1-d4).<sup>14</sup>

In later passages, Socrates reiterates the theme. He recognizes that he might save himself if he resorted to begging for his life by crying and parading his family and friends before the court. He thinks doing such things is at odds with the justice of the courts, so he refuses to secure his release from death in that fashion: “but I will do none of these things, even though I may seem to be running the ultimate risk” (34c5-7).<sup>15</sup> And finally, after he is sentenced to death, he justifies his decision not to beg for his life, saying, “I did not think it necessary to do anything unfit for a free man because of the danger” (38e2-3).<sup>16</sup> In none of these passages does Socrates deny that death might be harmful. Instead, he thinks it is worth risking harm when justice demands it.

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<sup>13</sup> μετὰ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τοῦ δικαίου ὤμην μᾶλλον με δεῖν διακινδυνεύειν ἢ μεθ' ὑμῶν γενέσθαι μὴ δίκαια βουλευομένων, φοβηθέντα δεσμὸν ἢ θάνατον.

<sup>14</sup> τότε μέντοι ἐγὼ οὐ λόγῳ ἀλλ' ἔργῳ αὖ ἐνεδειξάμην ὅτι ἐμοὶ θανάτου μὲν μέλει, εἰ μὴ ἀγροικότερον ἦν εἰπεῖν, οὐδ' ὅτιοῦν, τοῦ δὲ μηδὲν ἄδικον μηδ' ἀνόσιον ἐργάζεσθαι, τούτου δὲ τὸ πᾶν μέλει.

<sup>15</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄρα τούτων ποιήσω, καὶ ταῦτα κινδυνεύων, ὡς ἂν δόξαιμι, τὸν ἔσχατον κίνδυνον.

<sup>16</sup> ἀλλ' οὔτε τότε φήθηεν δεῖν ἔνεκα τοῦ κινδύνου πράξαι οὐδὲν ἀνελεύθερον



### III. Beyond Epistemic Modesty?

At the end of the dialogue, however, Socrates is not risking death. The sentence has been handed down, and he is given no choice but to confront death. He now sheds his epistemic modesty. Instead of claiming that death is a known unknown, Socrates argues that it is “something good,” perhaps the greatest benefit. Before, he claimed that one should not let one’s fear of death outweigh one’s dedication to justice. Now, however, he claims he has no reason to fear death.

Still, I maintain that he is not contradicting himself, nor should a reader resolve the conflict by lessening Socrates epistemic confidence. He has new evidence and a new audience. Justice in the face of death is now prudent for another reason. I contend that his new evidence permits the claim that death is a benefit for the just. It does not warrant any claims about what happens when one dies, but Socrates does not make any claims of that sort. Instead, Socrates aims to convince a subset of the jurors that the best way to deal with death is to do as he has done, to choose justice, because only the just face death with the same equanimity with which he faces it. The borders of his epistemic limitations are justifiably expanded, but he stays well within them.

Socrates’ newfound confidence that death is nothing to fear depends on the silence of his daimonion. He acknowledges, as he has numerous times in his defense, that he risks suffering “what one might think, what is commonly thought to be, the worst of evils” (40a9-b1).<sup>17</sup> Yet his daimonic sign has not opposed any of the actions that have

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<sup>17</sup> ταυτὶ ἄ γε δὴ οἰηθεῖη ἂν τις καὶ νομιζέται ἔσχατα κακῶν εἶναι·

led to his death. Since his daimonion reliably prevents Socrates from doing something unwise, he concludes that he has done nothing unwise, even though he has brought on his death sentence. His death must not be a bad thing, so he has no reason to fear it.<sup>18</sup>

There is another marked difference in Socrates' circumstances. Namely, he significantly reduces his audience for his final speech. He directs the earlier argument to the entirety of the Athenian jury, whereas he now addresses only those who voted to acquit him, whom he can "rightly call judges" (40a3) and "friends" (40a1). This is no small point. For instance, when Socrates tells the jurors that "those of us who consider death to be a bad thing are clearly mistaken" (40b8-c1), there is good reason to interpret 'those of us' to refer only to the people Socrates is addressing.<sup>19</sup> Socrates does not say that it is a mistake for anyone to consider death a bad thing. He says that those who have acquitted him, whom he has reason to believe are disposed to choose justly, have no

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<sup>18</sup> There is a sizable literature that seeks to walk a fine line concerning the epistemic warrant of the daimonion. On the one hand, if it always stops Socrates from doing what is wrong, then Socrates must know more than he claims to know. At the least, he would have ready knowledge of what is wrong simply by trying to do it and knowledge of what is right on the basis of its noninterference. Many, if not all, of his claims to ignorance, then, would be false or ironic. However, if the daimonion does not always tell Socrates what is wrong, then it seems he cannot be confident of his conclusions based on daimonic silence in any particular instance. It could simply be taking the day off. In the case at hand, then, Socrates would not be entitled to his claim that death is not bad for him. Brickhouse and Smith [1989: 250-57] argue that the number of unchecked steps required for Socrates to complete the very complex action of offering a defense provides sufficient inductive grounds for concluding that his death will not be a bad thing. For them, the complexity and particularity of Socrates' action also prohibits him from generalizing to other cases; thus, he does not undermine his disavowal of knowledge. Reeve [1989: 181-2] argues that, though the daimonion might overlook small evils, it would certainly intervene if Socrates were about to experience "the greatest of evils."

<sup>19</sup> οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως ἡμεῖς ὀρθῶς ὑπολαμβάνομεν, ὅσοι οἰόμεθα κακὸν εἶναι τὸ τεθνάναι

reason to consider death harmful.

While speaking to this audience, then, Socrates claims that death is a benefit, and he offers two nested arguments. The first is his argument from daimonic silence, and the second is the “Two Things” argument. I contend that both arguments are of a piece because Socrates’ evidence from the daimonion is necessary to explain his confidence in the success of the “two things” argument. So, his increased confidence in the final speech is tied closely to his changed epistemic standpoint and his new audience, and his claims about the benefits of death do not contradict the limited confidence of his earlier discussion.

But I need to do some work to sustain this reading of the later passage. Most scholars distinguish sharply between Socrates’ appeal to his daimonion and his “Two Things” argument, and they do not think that both arguments represent Socrates’ considered views.

There are a number of reasons commentators are eager to separate the arguments. Perhaps the chief argument against generalizing Socrates’ lessons is that the daimonion is private. Privacy poses two difficulties. First, since the audience has no direct access to Socrates’ daimonion, they might require more convincing evidence in order to accept Socrates’ claims about death. Thus, Roochnik contends that “since no one else is privy to its messages,” the “two things” argument is required in order for “his audience to think through the situation logically with him.”<sup>20</sup> Other commentators are not particularly concerned with who has access to the daimonion’s prohibitions; they are concerned to

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<sup>20</sup> Roochnik [1985: 212]; also McPherran [1996: 255].

establish only that its lesson, at least in this instance, is restricted to Socrates alone. Thus, the resounding silence daimonic silence offers Socrates a proof or indication that his own death will be good, but it has no bearing on whether the death of others will be good. According to Reeve, since the conclusion applies to Socrates alone, the second argument is unconnected. It is also less compelling, as Socrates can only offer his audience “good hope” about their own death.<sup>21</sup>

The second reason the arguments are separated is that, while some have defended Socrates’ conclusion in the argument from daimonic silence, the “two things” passage troubles most commentators, and not only because it threatens to cast Socrates into a contradiction that is the focus of this paper. It is so difficult to render the “two things” argument respectable that many readers pursue a charitable route by claiming that it is meant merely as consolation to his sympathetic, distressed audience. In short, they are willing to cede the failure of the “two things” argument, and they hope to isolate it from the argument they take to be successful.

I think separating the arguments is a mistake. First, as a textual point, Socrates evidently believes that the conclusion to be drawn from his daimonion applies to all those listening, at least, as I have argued, to those with a penchant for justice. Remember that the take-home lesson from his daimonion’s silence is that “those of us” who think death is bad are wrong. Though charity may be the reason motivating some commentators to scrap the “two things” argument, they do so at the risk of undermining Socrates’ belief that his first argument applies generally. They swap one brand of charity for another.

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<sup>21</sup> Strycker [1994: 216-7]; Reeve [1989: 182]; Brickhouse and Smith [1989: 258].

Second, the transition from the daimonion argument to the “Two Things Argument” contains no marked textual clues to differentiate Socrates’ degree of commitment to the two arguments. Though commentators appeal to Socrates’ introduction of the phrase “good hope” [πολλὴ ἐλπις, Ap. 40c5] as a mark of differentiation, I contend this phrase does not do as much work as they might intend.<sup>22</sup> Commentators contend that the silence of Socrates’ daimonion provides him with a “proof” [τεκμήριον] that death will not be bad for him, whereas the “good hope” he offers his audience is significantly less weighty. However, those who separate the argument on these grounds need to account for the body of evidence that Socrates himself, even with his proof in hand, never claims to face death with anything more than “good hope.” Throughout the Platonic corpus, regardless of the presumed date of the dialogues, Socrates describes his own attitude towards death as one of “good hope” [πολλὴ ἐλπις, Phd. 67b8, 70b1; εὐελπις, Phd. 63c5; ἡ ἐλπὶς μεγάλη, Phd. 114c9; μετὰ

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<sup>22</sup> ἐλπις is a relatively rare word for Plato. He uses some form of ἐλπις about 30 times, and a majority of the instances refer to some relation a person holds towards death as a future state. It is unclear, however, how much epistemic strength is involved in Plato’s conception of “hope.” It is clearly not an idle wish. However, he offers only one sustained definition of ἐλπις, (L. 1: 644c10-d4), and he uses it to cover *all* beliefs about the future [δόξας μελλόντων]. When one has a belief that something will be bad, one fears it, and when one has a belief that something will be good, one is “confident,” “courageous,” or even “without fear.” [θάρος, 1: 644d1]. It is quite bizarre, though, that both states would be a variety of ἐλπις, and the epistemic strength involved remains unclear.

ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος, Phd. 67c1; μετὰ καλῆς ἐλπίδος, R. 496e2].<sup>23</sup> There is reason to think, then, that in his second argument, he is boarding the same boat as his audience.

Finally, though this may be a bit of a stretch for some readers, there is reason to think that many in the audience would take seriously the lessons of Socrates' daimonion from piety. If we were to follow the wealth of testimony that Socrates was brought up on charges of impiety at least in part because of the daimonion, then the audience to whom he is speaking has acquitted him of the charge.<sup>24</sup> The daimonion, then, does not conflict with their established religious beliefs. They need not be Socrates' followers, they may not even like him, yet they still might think that he could be some sort of mantic, especially at the end of his life, when "men prophesy most" (39c2-4). One should by no means doubt that Athenians believed in prophets, even in the most unlikely form.

Still, those scholars who want to distinguish sharply between Socrates' two arguments and downplay his commitment to the "two things" argument have charity on their side so long as the "two things" argument appears unredeemable. In what follows, then, I will recast the "two things" argument as a successful prudential argument in light of Socrates' new evidence and audience. I cannot, of course, render it unassailably sound, but I can defend it from the major objections raised by detractors.

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<sup>23</sup> Though it is not in the mouth of Socrates, the Athenian in Epinomis (973c) notes that a good person cannot expect much to go well in life, but can, if she has lived well, face death with "good hope" [καλῆ δὲ ἐλπίς, Epin. 973c6].

<sup>24</sup> For evidence that Socrates' impiety involves or is exhausted by his daimonion, see Ap. 31c8-d2, Euthphr. 3b5-7, and Xenophon's Apology. Burnet [1924], on the other hand, believes Socrates is brought up on charges of impiety because of his involvement in the Orphic cults.

The structure of the “two things” argument is simple and formally valid. It begins with a disjunction: “to be dead is one of two things: either the dead person is nothing and has no perception of anything, or [death] happens to be, as it is said, a change and a relocation or the soul from this place here to another place” (40c6-9).<sup>25</sup> Socrates next aims to establish two conditionals, one for each disjunct: (1) if there is no afterlife, then death will be a “wondrous advantage” [θαυμάσιον κέρδος, 40d1-2] and (2) if there is an afterlife, then death will be the greatest benefit (40e6-7). If the disjunctive premise and the two conditionals are true, then Socrates is entitled to conclude that death will be beneficial. Unfortunately, each of the three premises is dubious.

Against the disjunctive premise, Roochnik argues that Socrates’ two options are not exhaustive. When Socrates contends that death is either a dreamless sleep or a departure for somewhere else, he overlooks options. At the most general level, though, it should be clear that the disjunction holds: there is an afterlife, or there is not. As for the possibilities Socrates considers, I cannot imagine what the absence of an afterlife would be except the absence of perception, so I consider him safe on that score. However, there are problems concerning Socrates’ assumptions about the afterlife.

These problems threaten not the disjunctive premise itself so much as the second conditional that assumes the afterlife is a benefit. Roochnik suggests that, far from being good, the afterlife could consist in pushing rocks up hills or having one’s liver eaten daily

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<sup>25</sup> δυοῖν γὰρ θάτερόν ἐστιν τὸ τεθνάναι· ἢ γὰρ οἷον μηδὲν εἶναι μηδὲ αἰσθῆσιν μηδεμίαν μηδενὸς ἔχειν τὸν τεθνεῶτα, ἢ κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα μεταβολὴ τις τυγχάνει οὔσα καὶ μετοίκησις τῆ ψυχῆ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἐνθένδε εἰς ἄλλον τόπον.

by vultures.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the possibilities are endless. Setting aside the details, why should Socrates assume that the afterlife is even good?

Socrates, I argue, assumes the afterlife will be good because to think otherwise would be at odds with his conception of piety. If there are gods, they are good by definition, and that is his guiding constraint. In addition, he believes that he is addressing the limited audience of the ostensibly pious, and thus, he likely believes that they agree.<sup>27</sup> Socrates believes, then, that the gods would not force a good person to have her liver eaten over and over by vultures. It is an unresolved and troubling question whether Socrates believes these might be worries for an unjust person, and I will address that worry below. However, Socrates clearly does not believe the afterlife would be unjust and heedlessly cruel. So, although this conditional premise is not unassailable, Socrates has good reason to accept it, and his limited audience could hardly deny it except by making wholesale changes in their core commitments to the goodness of the gods.

Let us turn to the first conditional, that if death is a lack of perception, or something like “a dreamless sleep,” then death is a benefit. Socrates here draws on a

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<sup>26</sup> Roochnik, 213

<sup>27</sup> There is some concern that jury members who accept a number of traditional myths might be unable to believe the gods are good or just. The myths that are at the center of Greek religion include tales of gods harming humans for spite or fun. Presumably, however, Socrates thinks the acceptance of these stories is at odds with more central beliefs that the gods are good. Think, for instance, of the trouble Euthyphro makes for himself. If I am correct that for Socrates, pious beliefs are integral in facing death fearlessly, then he believes no one will gain the appropriate attitudes toward death without resolving this tension. Those who believe the stories of the gods acting unjustly cannot properly rid themselves of the fear of death.



traditional conception of “the slumber of death,”<sup>28</sup> and he says,

If it is a lack of perception, but like the slumber when one sleeps but does not dream, then death would be a wondrous advantage. For I think that if someone had to pick out that night which he slept this way without dreaming and if, putting the other nights and days of his life next to that night, he had to inquire and say how many nights and days he had lived better and more pleasantly in his life, I think that not only a private citizen but also the Great King would find them easy to count compared to the other days and nights. If death is like this, I say it is an advantage for all time appears in this way to be no more than a single night (40c10-e30).<sup>29</sup>

The problem with this argument concerns the relationship between pleasure and

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<sup>28</sup> Both Homer and Hesiod use the word ‘slumber’ [ὑπνος] to describe death. (See Il. XI and Hesiod fr. 160). In Hesiod’s Theogony, Sleep and Death are twins born of Night. In the Iliad, these twins carry Sarpedon’s body off at the behest of Zeus.

<sup>29</sup> καὶ εἴτε δὴ μηδεμία αἰσθησίς ἐστιν ἀλλ’ οἷον ὕπνος ἐπειδὴν τις καθεύδων μὴδ’ ὄναρ μὴδὲν ὄρα, θαυμάσιον κέρδος ἂν εἴη ὁ θάνατος—ἐγὼ γὰρ ἂν οἶμαι, εἴ τινα ἐκλεξάμενον δέοι ταύτην τὴν νύκτα ἐν ἧ οὕτω κατέδαρθεν ὥστε μὴδὲ ὄναρ ἰδεῖν, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμέρας τὰς τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἀντιπαραθέντα ταύτη τῇ νυκτὶ δέοι σκεψάμενον εἰπεῖν πόσας ἄμεινον καὶ ἥδιον ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας ταύτης τῆς νυκτὸς βεβίωκεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ βίῳ, οἶμαι ἂν μὴ ὅτι ἰδιώτην τινά, ἀλλὰ τὸν μέγαν βασιλέα εὐαριθμητούς ἂν εὐρεῖν αὐτὸν ταύτας πρὸς τὰς ἄλλας ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας—εἰ οὖν τοιοῦτον ὁ θάνατος ἐστίν, κέρδος ἔγωγε λέγω· καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲν πλείων ὁ πᾶς χρόνος φαίνεται οὕτω δὴ εἶναι ἢ μία νύξ.

perception. It is somewhat standard fare that pleasure requires perception, when perception requires some bare minimum of consciousness, human or animal. If sleep is like a dreamless sleep, and a dreamless sleep entails the absence of perception, then it cannot be pleasant.<sup>30</sup> It would seem that if Socrates is to argue that the lack of perception is pleasant, then he must have a notion of pleasure that is independent of an awareness that one is experiencing pleasure.

George Rudebusch steps in to offer Socrates a new variety of pleasure that does not depend upon perception. He imports an Aristotelian distinction between two types of pleasures, “modal” and “sensate” pleasures. The pleasures that would render Socrates’ argument a failure are “sensate” pleasures, which depend on conscious awareness. Rudebusch grants, then, that dreamless sleep cannot be pleasant in this sense. “Modal” pleasures, on the other hand, are pleasures that are not experienced in particular instances; rather, they “happen in a certain way.” Marks of this sort of pleasure include activities that (1) “are done or happen effortlessly or without boredom, or (2) are approached in a certain way, or (3) have a particular value to a person.”<sup>31</sup>

His key example of a “modal” pleasure is borrowed from Gilbert Ryle and involves a golfer who spends the day on the course. Though the golfer may experience a number of “sensate” pleasures during his game (for instance, when he sinks a difficult

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<sup>30</sup> The claim that pleasure and pain require perception is the chief premise in Epicurus’ argument that death is nothing to fear. (KD 2, Ep. Men. 124-5). This premise, however, leads Aristotle to the opposite conclusion, namely that if there is no benefit or harm once a person is dead, then we have every reason to fear death (EN 3:6: 1115a25-27).

<sup>31</sup> Rudebusch [1999: 68].

putt), his experience of the game or activity as a whole is a “modal” pleasure. Likewise, the “modal” pleasure can obtain even if the agent experiences a number of “sensate” pains (for instance, if his partner were responsible for their loss to some professors from a different department). In either case, the golfer can experience “modal” pleasure throughout the course of the game without being aware of the activity as a pleasure, while consciously experiencing a wide spectrum of sensate pleasures and pains. Rudebusch supplements Ryle’s example with one of an avid reader of fiction who becomes so absorbed in her novel that she is “barely aware” of the world around her, perhaps even forgetting that she is reading.<sup>32</sup>

Though I consider this a resourceful solution, we should hesitate to attribute it to Socrates. First, there is scant evidence that Socrates ever recognized such a distinction, and those ancients who did recognize such a distinction would likely object to Rudebusch’s use of it. Rudebusch gets his textual evidence for the modal/sensate pleasure distinction from Aristotle, primarily because neither Socrates nor Plato ever draws such a distinction. Aristotle himself uses the distinction to talk about two different kinds of activity, and those familiar with Aristotle’s conception of a life of virtuous activity must know that Aristotle’s primary example of a life that is not active is a life through which one remains asleep (EN 1:8: 1099a).

One might think, though, that even if Socrates did not intend to speak of “modal pleasure,” and even if Aristotle would object to sleep as a “modal pleasure,” we should be in favor of the distinction in order to make the argument work. However, I argue that

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 69-70

the distinction is unconvincing as a solution to the problem and that we can get Socrates out of this puzzle without talking about the pleasures of sleep at all.

Rudebusch makes a convincing case that there are a number of pleasures of which we are not aware, many of them taking place over a significant expanse of time. It would be difficult post-Freud to deny that a great many pleasures are “subconscious” or “preconscious,” and we might even be willing to grant Rudebusch the idea that some conception of subconscious pleasures fits into a Socratic or Platonic framework. The problem is that awareness-blind or subconscious pleasures will not do enough to bring pleasure to the “sleep of death.” For, in each example of subconscious pleasure offered by Rudebusch, there is at least the possibility that one could become aware of one’s past pleasure. One finishes the novel or someone asks whether one enjoyed one’s golf game. Even in the case of the most subconscious of pleasures, there is the possibility that those pleasures could manifest themselves, if not in conscious awareness then in behavior. In death, however, there is no affirming or denying the status of one’s pleasure. There is not even the *possibility* of becoming aware of the pleasure of one’s golf game or novel reading. In each of Rudebusch’s examples, the agent is conscious, she is just not attending to or aware of the pleasure she experiences.

A more economical reply to Roochnik’s objection does not require importing a new conception of pleasure at all, for I contend that Socrates does not claim that the lack of perception is pleasant at all. He claims that death is an advantage [κέρδος; 40d1-2, 40e2-3] and that most of one’s days and nights are not better and more pleasant than being dead. These claims do not require the thought that a dreamless sleep or a state of

lacking perception is pleasant. Socrates need only think that most days and nights are actually painful and that it is an advantage to be free of such pains.<sup>33</sup>

Though this offers a dismal view on the quality of human life, it is not out of tune with conceptions of the value of life in other Platonic dialogues,<sup>34</sup> and it is certainly a fair representation of the picture painted by the epic poets, tragedians, and historians.<sup>35</sup> As cultural background to this evaluative stance towards life, one can easily go as far back as Hesiod, but the paradigmatic account of the dismal view is in the first book of Herodotus. In his famed discussion with Croesus, Solon claims the second happiest life is exemplified by two brothers, Cleobis and Biton. On the day that they received fame because of their devotion to their mother, she asked the gods to reward them with

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<sup>33</sup> The choice of κέρδος here is a bit puzzling, as one might expect ὄφελος. κέρδος is rarely used by Plato, and almost always in the context of deriding individuals who organize their lives around external goods—lovers of money or profit. In the corpus, the great majority of instances appear in the spurious dialogue Hipparchus, in which Socrates and Hipparchus attempt to define greed. However, in the Gorgias, Socrates and Gorgias agree that being refuted if one holds a false view is κέρδος (461a), which clearly has more of a positive, Socratic ring to it.

<sup>34</sup> In the Platonic corpus, this dark sentiment is most clearly displayed in the Epinomis, in which the Athenian claims that life is full of sorrows from beginning to end. That is, excepting one point in the middle of life in which the pains are “tolerable” [μέτριοι, 974a3] for a few people. This rare period, however, is fleeting and followed by old age, which is the worst of all. No one, he concludes, “would want to come to life again, unless he happens to be full of childish belief” [ὅστις μὴ τυγχάνει παιδικῆς δόξης μεστὸς ὢν, 974a5-7]. Though the Epinomis is thought to be dubious by some and spurious by others (see introduction to the dialogue in Cooper’s Complete Works, 16-17), I follow the arguments for its authenticity offered by A.E. Taylor [1927: 497-8]. One should also not think this view of life is merely ancient. For a very elegant and very dark contemporary defense of this view, see Benatar [2006], Better Never to Have Been.

<sup>35</sup> I share this reading of Socrates’ claims about the relative pleasure of sleep when compared with the sorrows of life with McPherran [1996: 257-8].

“whatever is best for a man to win”. They were rewarded evening feasting, after which they fell asleep and never awoke. With this reward, Solon says, “the god showed thoroughly how much better it is for a man to be dead than alive.”<sup>36</sup> The misfortunes of life make death an advantage. The only life better, according to Solon, is to live a long, unremarkable life, raise a lot of children, and then die courageously in battle.

Socrates might provide a bit more content to this thought by reflecting on the painful effects of desires, especially unsatisfied desires. A desire manifests the lack of some object that is perceived as good, and the lack of the desired object is a sort of pain. Thus, “the pain of desire.” The more desires one has, the more pain one experiences. In addition, the more one worries about one’s ability to satisfy those desires in the future, the greater one’s anxiety. As anxiety, like fear, is another species of pain, one is pained not only by one’s desire, but also by one’s insecurity about consistently procuring even the most basic of one’s desires. In sleep, on the other hand, especially dreamless sleep, one experiences no sense of pain at all, no need for anything. Death, if it were a dreamless sleep, would be perennially free of desire, thus perennially free of pain and anxiety (cp. Grg. 492e-494b; Phd. 66b-67b). This removal of pain, then, would itself be a benefit without being pleasant.

It is true that the amount of pain that desire causes for each individual depends upon, among other things, the degree to which an individual is temperate. The more desires she has, the more unfilled desires she is likely to have at any given time; thus, the more pains she experiences at any given time. On this model of desire, it is advantageous

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<sup>36</sup> I. 31, trans. Greene [1987]

while living to pare down the demands of one's desires in order to decrease one's pain, and there is also reason to limit one's desires to those that are easily attainable in order to minimize anxiety. We should assume that Socrates' new audience is various—some have more unfulfilled desires than others. Those with wildest and most untamed desires, like perhaps the King of Persia, may stand to benefit the most from death, for they will be relieved of the most pain (cp. Phd. 107cd). We can make sense, then, of the idea that death is better than most of the days of one's life, regardless of whether one is a common citizen or a powerful tyrant.

Thus far, I have defended the first conditional by showing how death as a dreamless sleep could be construed as beneficial, and I have defended the expected benefit of the second conditional on grounds of piety. In addition, I contended that once one recognizes the changes in Socrates' circumstances, the "two things" argument agrees with his earlier insistence that no one knows whether death is a harm or a benefit. But it might nevertheless seem that Socrates flouts his earlier epistemic modesty not by insisting that death is a benefit for the just—for this, he has the new evidence provided by his daimonion's silence—but by insisting that death is a harm for the unjust. Socrates surely suggests this in his elaboration on the second conditional. He says,

If, though, death is some sort of change from here to another place, and if the things that are said are true, namely that all who have died are there, what greater blessing could there be, jurymen. If anyone arriving in the house of Hades will have escaped from those who call

themselves judges here, and will find those true judges who are said to sit in judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus and the other demi-gods who have been upright in their own life, would that be a poor kind of change? (40e10-41a6).<sup>37</sup>

It seems that the afterlife brings a desirable change in judges only for those who are just. “Those who call themselves judges here” and embrace their injustice will not be so keen on facing Minos and his fellow true judges. Such is the clear implication of Socrates’ words. But how does he have new evidence for this? He has evidence for benefit, not for harm. Is he not overstepping his epistemic bounds?

First, it is evident that Socrates is committed to the spirit of his sketch of his afterlife, not to the letter. Socrates’ strings together his conception of the afterlife with a series of conditional statements. When he introduces his discussion of the afterlife, he says “If, though, death is some sort of change from here to another place, and if the things that are said are true, namely that all who have died are there, what greater blessing could there be, jurymen?” (40e4-7). His further statements regarding the judgment of just gods are likewise conditional, as is his notion that he will be able to continue his philosophical examination of those who claim to know things which they do not know. Socrates does not insist that this is in fact what happens if there is an afterlife.

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<sup>37</sup> εἰ δ' αὖ οἷον ἀποδημῆσαι ἐστὶν ὁ θάνατος ἐνθένδε εἰς ἄλλον τόπον, καὶ ἀληθῆ ἐστὶν τὰ λεγόμενα, ὡς ἄρα ἐκεῖ εἰσι πάντες οἱ τεθνεῶτες, τί μεῖζον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτου εἴη ἂν, ὃ ἄνδρες δικασταί; εἰ γάρ τις ἀφικόμενος εἰς Ἄϊδου, ἀπαλλαγεῖς τουτωνὶ τῶν φασκόντων δικαστῶν εἶναι, εὐρήσει τοὺς ὡς ἀληθῶς δικαστάς, οἵπερ καὶ λέγονται ἐκεῖ δικάζειν, Μίνως τε καὶ Ῥαδάμανθους καὶ Αἰακὸς καὶ Τριπτόλεμος καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσοι τῶν ἡμιθέων δίκαιοι ἐγένοντο ἐν τῷ ἑαυτῶν βίῳ, ἄρα φαύλη ἂν εἴη ἡ ἀποδημία;



Nevertheless, even if the spirit is all to which we need pay attention, it might be objected that there is plenty for the unjust to worry about in the spirit alone, and if so, Socrates oversteps his bounds. In other words, it might be overstating the conditional nature of Socrates' picture of the afterlife to think he is not committed to the claim that someone who is unjust, should the afterlife be just, is in a worse position than someone who enters the afterlife having lived her life as justly as she could (cp. Phd 107c; Grg. 523a-524b; Tht. 176a-177b). Surely, if the afterlife is ordered and just, there is something to fear for the unjust in the idea that they could be treated as they deserve.

One might think, as Brickhouse and Smith have argued [1989b], that in the same way that the King of Persia could stand to benefit most from the removal of the pain caused by his excessive desires, the unjust who enter the afterlife may stand to benefit the most from the true justice of the afterlife. If we are to take seriously the solidly Socratic commitment that just punishment is beneficial to the one receiving the punishment, then the unjust person stands to benefit quite a lot from the judgment of Minos et. al. (cf. Grg. 525b, 478d-480e).<sup>38</sup> It might seem odd, but this could very well commit Socrates to the idea that the more unjust one is, the more one stands to benefit from just punishment. The King of Persia, or some other paradigmatically wicked tyrant like Archelaus, benefits from the cessation of his excessive desires and from whatever corrective treatment might alter his beliefs and desires in accord with temperance and justice. Thus, Socrates is not committed to the idea that the unjust are harmed in the afterlife, since they benefit at least as much as the just.

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<sup>38</sup> The most systematic treatment of Socrates' claim that punishment benefits the punished is Mackenzie's Plato on Punishment [1985].

Now, however, we might wonder why Socrates singles out those individuals who voted for his acquittal when he claims that it is a mistake to think death is a bad thing. I have argued that Socrates chooses a particular audience and that his choice of audience is crucial for understanding his argument. If everyone stands to benefit from death, and the unjust may stand to benefit the most, why choose justice over injustice while living? If I can live recklessly and nevertheless stand to benefit regardless of whether the soul is immortal, then why choose justice?

I argue that the primary advantage of choosing justice is that regardless of what death offers, the just can face death without fear, in the same way that Socrates faces death without fear. The just not only benefit from death, but they are able to see death as a benefit, at least to some degree. The unjust, on the other hand, even if they too benefit from death, will be unable to face death fearlessly, and this, I contend, has all sorts of ramifications for their ability to live a good human life.

To illustrate the point, let's revisit the first prong of the "two things" argument. Though death removes the pain caused by the King of Persia's excessive desires, as well as his anxiety about continuing to secure the objects of those desires, there is reason to think his unruly desires will leave him with a much greater fear of death than those who are more temperate. Since the principal aim of his life is to continue securing the objects of his many desires, he will fear death as the ultimate threat to his ability to obtain those pleasures. As he takes himself to have more pleasures to lose by dying than others have to lose, he takes himself to be more justified in fearing death. Death, then, as the cessation of his ability to achieve the objects of his many, many desires, is a terrible

prospect.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the tyrant's ability to secure his pleasures likely increases his anxiety about death at the hands of others who desire his resources in order to secure the objects of their own desires. So he fears losing his many pleasures by death, whether that death is natural or violent.

The second prong of the "two things" argument should cause the unjust individual even greater consternation, as it is likely that the prospect of punishment is not something she happily contemplates. If there is an afterlife, despite the Socratic claim that she might be most improved by just punishment, there is little reason to think she would look upon any of the variations of the afterlife Socrates might entertain with anything less than resistance and fear. Simply being rebuked and corrected might cause a wealth of anxiety. Regardless of the outcome of death, then, the average unjust and intemperate individual recognizes little reason to think her death will be beneficial and a host of reasons to fear it.

A significant fear of death, though, causes all sorts of problems. If one assents to Socrates' first argument about the fear of death and prudence, then the fear of death undercuts one's ability to choose justice when doing so requires that one risk one's life. If the unjust and intemperate have a greater fear of death, they will be more likely continue acting unjustly in order to avoid death. Belief that death is a great harm, if not even the "the greatest of harms," makes choosing to act unjustly in order to secure pleasures or

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<sup>39</sup> The argument that death is bad, as it deprives a person of her many pleasures and projects, has been recently defended by Nagel [1979] and Williams [1973], but less recently by Aristotle (EN 3:9: 1117b). Those who do not believe this is a reason to think death is bad include Rosenbaum [1986, 1989], Nussbaum [1994], Epicurus, and now, it seems, Plato.

safety seem the best option. Choosing injustice, in turn, makes death more fearsome by introducing a feedback mechanism. The fear of death motivates one to choose injustice, but choosing injustice increases one's fear of death. Most importantly, since anxiety indubitably compromises one's ability to live a good life, and the unjust and intemperate will be rife with anxiety, they have greatly diminished their chances for living a good life.

Those who choose to act justly, on the other hand, gain two advantages. They are better able to face death confidently, and because of this, they are better able to consistently choose justice at the risk of death. Their ability to choose justice in the face of death institutes a feedback mechanism that helps undercut the fear of death. The just, then, can face death with the same equanimity with which Socrates faces death. Most importantly, insofar as we take the absence of anxiety to be a benefit in itself, then it seems that the just individual is better off in life regardless of whether death is the loss of perception or holds the promise of an afterlife. She acknowledges the relative benefits of death and lives a less painful life.

However, a final objection to Socrates' argument remains: why does Socrates not consider the possibility of an afterlife in which none of the "things that are said" are true, an afterlife in which there is no justice, no gods, or in which the gods torment the just exactly as they are tormented by the unjust in this life?<sup>40</sup> If this were the case, there

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<sup>40</sup> Rudebusch responds to this objection by arguing that Socrates need not be committed to the justice of the afterlife. Even if the afterlife is not just, the good man will still be fine because Socrates believes "no harm can come to a good man." Thus, if the afterlife is filled with pain, the good man will experience "no harm." It is difficult to believe this is what Socrates intends, though, when he contends the afterlife is a *great* benefit. One might doubt that surviving a host of torments, even if the good man may do so with aplomb, would be that great a benefit.

would be reason for everyone, just or unjust, to fear the afterlife. It should be clear now that the answer must be the same as it was to Roochnik's objection to the disjunction. Any sketch of the afterlife would be acceptable insofar as it did not deviate from Socrates' pious commitment to the goodness of the gods, a commitment he believes his audience shares. If there is an afterlife, then justice will reign there, as it does not in Athens, primarily because the gods rule justly, and the gods rule the afterlife.

Socrates' commitment to piety is in fact the chord that runs through both passages concerning the fear of death, as neither argument gets off the ground if the gods are patently unjust. As I have argued, the justice of the gods is a necessary assumption driving Socrates' conception of the afterlife in the "two things" argument. It is clear, though, that the first argument must depend on an implicit commitment about the gods as well. For the fear arising from the uncertainty of death could very well override the call to justice if there were not good reason to think that it is the gods who require one to act justly, and that what the gods require is what is best. Socrates makes this explicit immediately after he insists on his ignorance about death, for he adds, by way of contrast, "I do know that this is unjust and shameful, to do what is unjust and to disobey one's superior, whether god or human" (29b6-7).<sup>41</sup> It may be that the gods require one to act justly without a reward, and that doing so may get one killed. It cannot, however, be that the gods call on one to act in accordance with virtue because they want to torment humans for fun.

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<sup>41</sup> τὸ δὲ ἀδικεῖν καὶ ἀπειθεῖν τῷ βελτίονι καὶ θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅτι κακὸν καὶ αἰσχρὸν ἔστιν οἶδα.

In conclusion, I contend that the upshot of Socrates' arguments is that those who choose injustice cause themselves a wealth of anxiety in the course of their life and in the contemplation of their own death. They choose injustice because of a miscalculation of what is fearful, with the result that they do themselves a great deal of psychological harm. The fact that acting unjustly is self-harm is perhaps the most paradigmatically Socratic of claims, and in this instance, Socrates argues that unjust individuals harm themselves by increasing their fear of death exponentially. On the other hand, those who choose justice live less anxious, less painful lives, and they have reason to see death as a benefit. For Socrates, the choice is obvious.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SECURITY, ATTACHMENT, AND THE FEAR OF DEATH

In the previous chapter, I argued that Socrates aims to convince the jury that they should always risk death rather than commit an unjust act. In this chapter, though, I contend that Socrates recognizes that his arguments run up against two extremely powerful human desires that must remain unsatisfied if one intends to control one's fear of death in the way he recommends. First, one cannot satisfy a desire for physical safety and protection from unjust violence, either for oneself or for those one loves. Second, one must avoid forming strong emotional attachments to people and projects, since nothing human has true value, and attachments increase one's fear of death.

These two desires share a common denominator, since both illustrate a link between external goods and the fear of death. First, security is an external good, and the desire for security against a violent death is arguably the most basic manifestation of the fear of death. Since gaining security often depends on acquiring other external goods (money, allies, walls, and weapons), the desire for security can be readily linked to the desire for many other external goods as well. Second, both desires indicate the human tendency to develop strong emotional attachments to external goods like personal relationships and life projects. The desire to ensure safety for those one loves and the desire to stay alive long enough to enjoy relationships and complete projects increase the fear of death, since death threatens to deprive one of all external goods irreparably.

First, then, I show that the desire for security and protection from unjust violence is indeed a concern for Socrates in the Apology and that he believes certain external goods are conducive to providing security from unjust violence. However, he also thinks that obtaining these goods of security and protection requires injustice, and I offer an account of why he likely believes this is the case. Since Socrates refuses to commit injustice, he admits that he has left himself and his family without sufficient defense against unjust prosecution and death.

However, in the third section, I note that Socrates thinks that some external goods can be obtained without committing injustice. In particular, forming friendships and having a family do not generally necessitate unjust actions. Nevertheless, I argue that Socrates thinks emotional attachment to these relationships increases the fear of death, which then increases the temptation act unjustly in order to avoid losing the relationship at death. During the course of his defense, Socrates expresses disdain for such people, since committing even a minor injustice is, again, worse than acting in a way that permits one to continue one's relationships and protect one's family.

In the final section, I argue that leaving their desires for security and for personal attachments intentionally unsatisfied will be impossible for most, if not all, of Socrates' audience. These desires are too powerful to ignore without extreme difficulty, and, more importantly, it remains unclear that they are best eliminated. If Socrates thinks one must fight them in order to convince oneself that risking death is better than a minor injustice and that death is even a benefit, then some people may quite reasonably prefer to engage in minor injustice at the cost of a moderate fear of death.



## SECURITY AND EXTERNAL GOODS

In this section, I marshal the textual evidence that indicates that Socrates links the fear of death and the desire for security. I highlight passages in which Socrates claims that the pursuit of a certain class of scarce and competitive external goods is conducive to protection against death, and I tease out his three basic commitments:

(C1) Pursuing and maintaining competitive external goods requires injustice.

(C2) People without competitive external goods are defenseless against an unjust death.

(C3) Using external goods to escape an unjust death requires injustice.

Given (C2), those invested in staying alive have a vested interest in procuring some external goods, and fast. The problem for Socrates, who might otherwise prefer to stay alive, is posed by (C1) and (C3); one cannot acquire and use external goods to avoid death without injustice. One must be willing to commit injustice to acquire goods one needs for protection, and one must be willing to use external goods unjustly in order to stay alive. An individual who insists on justice, then, must avoid the pursuit of protective external goods and prepare to be killed. I argue, then, that Socrates believes a certain class of external goods, in particular goods that are scarce and competitive, is off-limits to anyone who wants to be just, and that same class of external goods is desirable to those who fear death.

(C1)

In the course of his defense, Socrates repeatedly justifies his lack of political involvement and his disinterest in pursuing economic and social gain. He claims, in short, that if he had pursued external goods, he would have long been dead. Since he is a “good man” (32e3), and he is “too decent” [τῷ ὄντι ἐπιεικτερον, 36c1], he could not have pursued external goods without being killed. Given that he addresses a body of people who *have* pursued those external goods without as yet meeting a bad end, his self-assessment suggests he does not consider his audience particularly good or honest. Socrates fails to endear himself to the jury in many ways, but one might think this a particularly stellar insult.

Three passages show that Socrates believes attempts to gain external goods justly would eventually result in an unjust death. The first passage is one of the most famous in the dialogue. Having just reminded the jury that he has a “divine sign,” which he claims has prohibited him from taking part in public affairs, he provides a rationale for the daimonion’s prohibition:

For know well, men of Athens, that if I had long ago tried to do political things, I would have died long ago and benefited neither you nor myself. And do not be angry with me for speaking the truth; for there is no human being who will save himself from death if he genuinely opposes

either you or any other crowd and prevents many unjust and illegal things from occurring. But it is necessary for someone really fighting for justice, if he wants to save himself from death for a little time, to live a private life, not a public one. (31d6-32a3).<sup>42</sup>

Socrates does not think his daimonion's prohibition against political action applies to himself alone. First, Socrates does not believe he would survive, but he also does not think any other human being would survive under similar political circumstances. Second, he allows that others might be “really fighting for justice,” and he believes they, too, would meet the same end if they sought political influence. The lesson of the daimonion is that anyone who refuses to commit injustice or to sit idly by while others commit injustice is not safe from the threat of an unjust death.

Socrates follows this claim with a few examples of his dedication to justice despite the risk of death. The first anecdote concerns his refusal to try the generals from the battle of Arginusae, and the second anecdote narrates his refusal to deliver Leon of Salamis to his death at the hands of the Thirty. Both anecdotes featured in the previous chapter, but what matters for the moment is the conclusion he draws as a result of the

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<sup>42</sup> εὖ γὰρ ἴστε, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, εἰ ἐγὼ πάλαι ἐπεχείρησα πράττειν τὰ πολιτικὰ πράγματα, πάλαι ἂν ἀπολώλη καὶ οὐτ' ἂν ὑμᾶς ὠφελήκη οὐδὲν οὐτ' ἂν ἐμαντόν. καὶ μοι μὴ ἄχθεσθε λέγοντι τάληθῆ· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὅστις ἀνθρώπων σωθήσεται οὔτε ὑμῖν οὔτε ἄλλῳ πλήθει οὐδενὶ γνησίως ἐναντιούμενος καὶ διακωλύων πολλὰ ἄδικα καὶ παράνομα ἐν τῇ πόλει γίγνεσθαι, ἀλλ' ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι τὸν τῷ ὄντι μαχούμενον ὑπὲρ τοῦ δικαίου, καὶ εἰ μέλλει ὀλίγον χρόνον σωθήσεσθαι, ἰδιωτεύειν ἀλλὰ μὴ δημοσιεύειν.

anecdotes. Specifically, he reiterates his claim that any person who aims to be just cannot be politically active without risking death.

Do you think, then, that I would have survived so many years if I had been active in city affairs and, acting in a way worthy of a good man, came to the help of justice and, as one ought, considered this the most important thing? Far from it, gentlemen of Athens; nor would any other person (32e2-33a1).<sup>43</sup>

These passages demonstrate that Socrates believes any effort to pursue political power or engage in political affairs justly would result in his death and the death of anyone else like him.

Socrates, though, does not think that the pursuit of political influence is the only external good that would lead to his death. Later in the trial, the list of life-threatening activities increases significantly. After the jury finds Socrates guilty, Meletus requests that they sentence him to die (36b). Socrates is then called upon, as is customary, to propose a counter penalty, after which the jury must decide which of the two punishments is most appropriate. As a prelude to his proposal, Socrates asks:

What am I worthy to suffer or pay because I have

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<sup>43</sup> Ἄρ' οὖν ἂν με οἴεσθε τοσάδε ἔτη διαγενέσθαι εἰ ἔπραττον τὰ δημόσια, καὶ πράττων ἀξίως ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἐβοήθουν τοῖς δικαίοις καὶ ὥσπερ χρὴ τοῦτο περὶ πλείστου ἐποιούμην; πολλοῦ γε δεῖ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλος ἀνθρώπων οὐδεὶς.

deliberately not kept quiet during my life and did not care for the things the many care for: moneymaking, household affairs, generalship, public orator, or the other offices, the political clubs and factions that arise in the city? I thought myself too honest to save myself from death if I had recourse to those things (36b5-c3).<sup>44</sup>

Thus, Socrates believes someone who pursues external goods justly or honestly can have little confidence that he will not die at the hands of others. External goods of this sort include (but are not limited to) political power, military leadership, wealth, maintaining a large household, and gaining political allies.

What, though, makes Socrates believe that such goods cannot be pursued justly without risking death? The clearest reason is that a just person will always meet with, in

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<sup>44</sup> τί ἄξιός εἰμι παθεῖν ἢ ἀποτεῖσαι, ὅτι μαθὼν ἐν τῷ βίῳ οὐχ ἡσυχίαν ἦγον, ἀλλ' ἀμελήσας ὄνπερ οἱ πολλοί, χρηματισμοῦ τε καὶ οἰκονομίας καὶ στρατηγιῶν καὶ δημηγοριῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχῶν καὶ συνωμοσιῶν καὶ στάσεων τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει γιγνομένων, ἡγησάμενος ἐμαυτὸν τῷ ὄντι ἐπιεικέστερον εἶναι ἢ ὥστε εἰς ταῦτ' ἰόντα σῶζεσθαι

I follow Burnet [1924: 154] in the translation of εἰς ταῦτ' ἰόντα σῶζεσθαι as “to have recourse to them” as opposed to Strycker, who suggests “take to” or “engage in.” Strycker [1994: 153] objects to Burnet’s rendering, claiming that “Socrates does not mean that he is too honest to have recourse to either economic or political activities in order to remain safe, as if such pursuits were a means to an end, namely safety; they are ends in themselves.” This, I think, begs the question. That they can be ends in themselves does not mean that they are not often pursued for instrumental purposes, and Burnet is right to point out that some of these items, especially “political clubs and factions,” have an express purpose of helping one escape prosecution and death.

Strycker's words, "unscrupulous adversaries."<sup>45</sup> This is inevitable, I argue, because goods like power and money are scarce and competitive, so one must be willing and prepared to commit injustice to get one's share. When resources are limited, someone who refuses to use deadly force is defenseless against someone willing to shed some blood if necessary. Those who pursue competitive external goods will inevitably be required to commit injustice simply to protect themselves from unjust competitors. Even individuals who succeed in procuring external goods without committing injustice will have trouble maintaining their goods and protecting themselves against "unscrupulous adversaries" who are out to unjustly usurp the goods of others.<sup>46</sup>

(C2)

Not only can the just pursuit of such goods lead to death, but lacking them also leaves one prey to unjust violence. It does not require a reconstruction of the mores and political circumstances of Classical Athens to establish that the possession of external goods increases one's ability to escape threatening jams. People with money and allies can use those external goods to escape death or punishment. Money still pays lawyers'

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<sup>45</sup> Strycker [1994: 368].

<sup>46</sup> Strycker claims that there is no evidence that it would be difficult to avoid death as a just businessman in Athens [1994: 368]. However, I think that the presence of "unscrupulous adversaries" is just as likely in business as in the political arena. And protecting one's money would likely require injustice, since people like rich foreigners had a tendency to end up dead with their fortunes confiscated.

fees, power can get one's son out of combat, and the temptation to bribe judges and intimidate witnesses is timeless.

Socrates lacks these resources, and he makes sure everyone present knows it. He begins his defense by admitting that he lacks the rhetorical ability possessed by his accusers (17b). In fact, on a literal reading of the passage, he claims never to have even visited a law court, a place where oratorical ability is the coin of the realm (17d).<sup>47</sup> Since gaining and exercising oratorical skill is a skill of the political arena, his lack of experience no doubt tracks his belief that political involvement would prove lethal. Socrates grants that proficiency in oratory would offer him an advantage, as orators are much more likely to secure an acquittal for the falsely accused. In fact, guilt and innocence need not concern a true orator, since the distinguishing mark of an excellent orator is his ability to argue convincingly in support of whatever he chooses.<sup>48</sup> Socrates, then, because he lacks the external good of public speaking and cares more for truth than style, is at a much greater

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<sup>47</sup> As Burnet [1924: 73] rightly notes, "this is not to be taken too seriously." Brickhouse and Smith object that Socrates must have visited a law court, if only because he later says he has seen other people parade their children before the court in order to secure their acquittal [1989: 49-59]. I see no reason to insist on anything stronger than that he has never practiced what he is currently doing. One might suppose he has at least been called up for jury duty. Yet those who prefer a Socrates who is never "ironic" must explain this away.

<sup>48</sup> A key theme in Socrates' discussion with Callicles in the *Gorgias* is Socrates' inability to protect himself from unjust violence due to his refusal to, among other things, practice oratory. Callicles repeatedly insists that this is a failure of prudence, while Socrates repeatedly insists that avoiding injustice is far more important than securing one's life (see esp. *Grg.* 508c-509c, 511b-d, 521b-e).

risk of being killed unjustly, and he knows it.<sup>49</sup>

Money is another external good that would be helpful for saving Socrates' life. By the standards of an Athenian citizen, though, Socrates was poor, and he admits this quite openly (31c, 36d). For example, he offers his poverty as evidence against his accusers' claim that he takes money from the young men who study with him (31c). As he concludes his proposal for a counter penalty, Socrates says:

For if I had money, I would have proposed as much money as I could pay, for that would not hurt me. But as it is now, I don't, unless you want me to propose as much as I am able to pay. Perhaps I would be able to pay you one mina of silver. So that is my proposal (38b1-4).<sup>50</sup>

Though one mina is not a ludicrously small amount of money, it is nevertheless woefully

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<sup>49</sup> I was asked at one point whether rhetorical skill qualifies as an external good. There is a sense in which it is not, since it is not an object or person that is external to the possessor of the skill. However, if education is an external good, then an education in rhetoric is an external good. Or, if an external good is something that is only good when used by a virtuous person, then rhetorical skill is an external good. Perhaps my best reply is to borrow the rhetorical response to the question offered by a classicist friend of mine: "Is a gun an external good?"

<sup>50</sup> εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν μοι χρήματα, ἐτιμησάμην ἂν χρημάτων ὅσα ἔμελλον ἐκτεῖσειν, οὐδὲν γὰρ ἂν ἐβλάβην· νῦν δὲ οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν, εἰ μὴ ἄρα ὅσον ἂν ἐγὼ δυναίμην ἐκτεῖσαι, τοσοῦτου βούλεσθέ μοι τιμῆσαι. ἴσως δ' ἂν δυναίμην ἐκτεῖσαι ὑμῖν που μᾶν ἀργυρίου· τοσοῦτου οὖν τιμῶμαι.



insufficient to placate the jurors.<sup>51</sup> Granted, a fine of one mina is less ridiculous than his initial suggestion that he should be celebrated as if he were an Olympic victor and awarded public support at the Prytaneum because he is a “poor benefactor” [πένητι εὐεργέτη, 36d4; cp. R. 5:465d]. However, it is still only a fraction of the amount that might be a reasonable alternative to the death penalty. Both proposals—free meals at the public expense or a paltry fine—highlight Socrates’ belief that the life he leads is incongruous with making and possessing wealth. Without money, though, he again finds himself at a greater risk of being killed unjustly.

Thus, Socrates’ lack of political and military power, allies, money, and oratorical skill leave him prey to unjust violence and with few resources to defend himself.

(C3)

Obviously, Socrates cannot use the goods he does not possess to escape unjust violence. Some goods, though, are not scarce and competitive, and one need not commit injustice in order to attain or maintain them. Though Socrates lacks oratorical flair, power, and money, he does have two external goods that appear on many standard lists of desirable external goods—friends and family (cf. EN 1:8: 1099b; 1:7: 1097b). He has a wife, three sons, two of them young, and he reminds the jurors that he is a family man

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<sup>51</sup> Burnet [1924: 160] cautions against thinking of a mina as the equivalent of £4 in 1924. Instead, one might appeal to Aristotle to establish that it “was recognized as a fair ransom for a prisoner of war” (EN 5: 7: 1134b21).

(34d3-8). His friendship with and influence over numerous young men is a chief reason he has been indicted in the first place. Since one can, under most circumstances, have a family and friends without committing injustice, Socrates lacks principled reason to avoid pursuing them.

It may seem unclear, though, that family and friends (not factious political allies) can play a role in the quest to stay secure and avoid unjust violence. Socrates notes twice, though, that when one is on trial for one's life, friends and family can be handy for winning an acquittal or lessening the penalty. In another of his backhanded castigations of the jurors, he notes his unwillingness to use his friends and family for advantage, even in order to save his life. He says:

Perhaps one of you might be angry as he recalls that when he himself stood trial on a less dangerous charge, he begged and supplicated the jury with many tears, bringing forward his children and many of his family and friends, in order to be pitied as much as possible, but that I will do none of these things, even though I may seem to be risking the ultimate risk (34b7-c7).<sup>52</sup>

The “ultimate risk” is Socrates’ recurring reference to the risk of death (Ap. 29a9-b1,

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<sup>52</sup> τάχα δ’ ἂν τις ὑμῶν ἀγανακτήσειεν ἀναμνησθεὶς ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ ὁ μὲν καὶ ἐλάττω τουτουῦ τοῦ ἀγῶνος ἀγῶνα ἀγωνιζόμενος ἐδεήθη τε καὶ ἰκέτευσε τοὺς δικαστὰς μετὰ πολλῶν δακρυῶν, παιδία τε αὐτοῦ ἀναβιβασάμενος ἵνα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐλεηθῆι, καὶ ἄλλους τῶν οἰκείων καὶ φίλων πολλοὺς, ἐγὼ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄρα τούτων ποιήσω, καὶ ταῦτα κινδυνεύων, ὡς ἂν δόξαιμι, τὸν ἕσχατον κίνδυνον

34c7, 40a9-b1; cp. Grg. 522d-e). Many people who stand trial for their life, Socrates suggests, are willing to use their family to protect themselves from death by arousing pity for the wife they will widow and the children they will orphan. They hope that the jury will also pity the accused, who will be deprived of his close personal relationship and who fears the fate of the people he loves.

Socrates, though, is not a man of pity or a man who wants pity. Defendants who attempt to use their children to avoid a death sentence, for Socrates, behave unjustly because they fear death. He claims that they are a “shame” [αἰσχρὸν, 35a3] and “no better than women” [γυναικῶν οὐδὲν διαφέρουσιν, 35b3]. Their behavior, he claims, is a “disgrace”:

Yet I have often seen some who act just like this when on trial, men who are thought to be somebody, doing amazing things, since they think that they will suffer something terrible if they die, as if they would be immortal if you did not kill them (35a4-7).<sup>53</sup>

Socrates echoes this claim when he addresses those who voted to put him to death. He accuses them of killing him because he refused appeal to their pity, or “to say or do

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<sup>53</sup> οἴουσι περ ἐγὼ πολλάκις ἐώρακά τινας ὅταν κρίνονται, δοκοῦντας μὲν τι εἶναι, θαυμάσια δὲ ἐργαζομένους, ὡς δεινὸν τι οἰομένους πείσεσθαι εἰ ἀποθανοῦνται, ὥσπερ ἀθανάτων ἐσομένων ἂν ὑμεῖς αὐτοὺς μὴ ἀποκτείνητε ·

everything necessary to avoid my sentence” (38d4-5).<sup>54</sup> They wanted him to see him, he says, “lamenting and mourning and my other things that are, as I say, unworthy of me, but that you have been accustomed to hear from others” (38d9-e2).<sup>55</sup>

These passages may at first suggest that Socrates merely thinks that appeals to pity are unseemly or shameful rather than that that he condemns them as unjust or unvirtuous in some other respect. However, first, and most simply, one might think it unreasonable to be ashamed of something that is not deficiently virtuous—embarrassed maybe, but not ashamed. Second, and on textual grounds, Socrates follows his claim that such displays are shameful with the judgment that they are “not fine or just or pious” [καλὰ εἶναι μήτε δίκαια μήτε ὄσια, 35c8-d1]. He thinks the jury should never acquit or lessen the sentence of anyone because of pity, since to judge on the basis of emotional factors is unjust. He refuses to encourage them to behave unjustly, because such encouragement would itself be unjust and impious. Thus, appeals to pity are not only shameful, but unjust.

Death, he contends, is not nearly so harmful as using rhetoric to appeal to emotion or obscure the truth, or as placating the jury by offering money in exchange for justice. He lacks money, and he lacks the requisite oratorical skill, but he does not lack the means with which he could appeal to pity—his children and his wife.

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<sup>54</sup> δεῖν ἅπαντα ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν ὥστε ἀποφυγεῖν τὴν δίκην

<sup>55</sup> θρηνοῦντός τέ μου καὶ ὀδυρομένου καὶ ἄλλα ποιοῦντος καὶ λέγοντος πολλὰ καὶ ἀνάξια ἐμοῦ, ὡς ἐγὼ φημι, οἷα δὴ καὶ εἴθισθε ὑμεῖς τῶν ἄλλων ἀκούειν.

In the course of his defense, then, Socrates makes a set of claims about his refusal to gain the means with which he could protect himself and his refusal use his available goods to fend off an unjust death. This dogged determination to avoid injustice, he thinks, explains to his audience why he appears so willfully imprudent and so unable to secure his own safety. In the course of this explanation, he accuses those who protect themselves by acquiring and using such goods of acting unjustly.

In the final section of this chapter, I consider to what extent he can reasonably expect people to ignore their own physical security and, perhaps more importantly, the security of their friends and family. One might, for instance, wonder why emotional appeals in service of a fair verdict are prohibited, even if one concedes the injustice of emotional appeals in order to secure a false acquittal. A reader should never lose sight of the possibility that Socrates may not always be a character worth emulating. For now, though, I set aside the question of protection from unjust or violent death in order to explore Socrates' connection between the fear of death and emotional attachment to external goods.

#### **ATTACHMENT AND THE FEAR OF DEATH**

As I mentioned in the previous section, some external goods are open to those who refuse to commit injustice. Personal relationships with friends and family, for instance, are not generally pursued solely for the sake of security. This is not to say that

they could not be pursued solely as instrumental to security, like cohorts in a political faction.<sup>56</sup> Children can provide some economic security through their free labor and their protection when one grows old and weak. Socrates clearly thinks children can be helpful when on trial for one's life, at least if one is willing to parade those children through court, wring one's hands, and weep. When used for such purposes, children can be remarkably instrumental to security, and one could theoretically have children for this reason alone.

We tend to think there are some personal relationships that we pursue with an understanding that they are part of living a good life or because they offer opportunities for exercising some variety of virtuous behavior (generosity, for instance). Socrates presumably has children and friends for something like this reason. He does not befriend Crito and Plato for the sake of security, even if they could be used that way. So, perhaps he does not think goods pursued from motives other than security contribute to the fear of death.

I contend, however, that Socrates connects people's attitudes towards their children and family with their fear of death in a different way. Strong attachment to any

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<sup>56</sup> There was a raging Hellenistic debate about friendship. One worry was whether hedonists like the Epicureans could be friends without one of them abandoning the other whenever the other became no longer pleasant. So, opponents claimed, Epicureans were only fair weather friends. On one common reading of the Epicureans, they formed friendships for the sake of mutual security and stayed friends with people who caused them displeasure because to abandon these friends would make them insecure in the future. Many authors, especially Cicero, quite reasonably objected that friendship only for mutual advantage seems a poor sort of friendship. Evans [2004] has defended it as a very reasonable way of thinking about friendship.

external good breeds the fear of death, because death is the greatest threat to the continued enjoyment of those things to which one is attached. The greater one's attachment to the goods of this life, the more one resents and fears death. If one wants to minimize one's fear of death, then, a prescription might be to lessen one's attachment to relationships and other external goods. Socrates, it seems, recommends precisely this strategy, not merely because it is a handy trick for combating the fear of death, but because, I argue, he truly believes these goods lack significant positive value.

Think, first, of the defense I offered in Chapter One of the first prong of Socrates' "Two Things" argument. I argued that the charitable interpretation of Socrates' claim that a "dreamless sleep" would be better than almost all of the days and night of one's life requires the background assumption that life is overall really bad. Life is full of pain, and death serves as a release from that pain. Some of life's pain, presumably, comes from physical suffering and misfortune, but I suggested that the consistent, daily pain of life must arise from unsatisfied desires for pleasure. An unsatisfied desire causes pain and anxiety, and the more unsatisfied desires one has at any given time, the greater the pain. In addition, the desire to continue to satisfy one's desires in the future, as well as the worry that one will be unable to satisfy them, increases the pain. Death, for Socrates, is a release from this pain and worry.

Socrates' reasoning, then, rests on the assumption that death does not deprive one of anything of significant, positive value. Instead death frees one from a lot of pain. We may falsely believe, as the tyrant does, that certain objects of desire have positive value, and so we may resent and fear death as a deprivation of our ability to enjoy them.

Convincing people that their desire for a well-stocked wine cellar and a long life to empty it is a questionable reason to fear death, though, might be significantly less difficult than convincing them that they should rid themselves of a desire to establish and maintain lasting personal relationships that would be cut short by the death of either partner. Socrates could be correct that human desires are trivial and painful and that life is full of suffering—but it is worth noting that desires for and attachments to personal relationships must go into the pile of disposable items.

There are four straightforward ways that attachment to relationships can increase one's fear of death, two of which concern one's own death, while the other two concern the death of those one loves. One can fear one's own death because it deprives one of the future enjoyment of relationships, or one can fear one's own death because of the pain and grief that it will cause others. This latter fear increases if one has young, dependent children. However, one can also fear the death of others, both for the deprivation they will suffer and the pain and grief that one will suffer at their death. Each of these fears increases the more one values the current and future enjoyment of one's relationships. Thus, attachment to others breeds worry, fear, grief, and pity.

Pity and sympathy are what the paraders of children seek most of all. The accused understand that no one in the audience would want to be deprived of their children, and for that reason, they hope to secure acquittal by appeal to the attachments of others. The jury, they hope, will realize that in similar circumstances, they would also seek pity. When this wins the defendant an acquittal, it is a large number of people on the jury think that attachment to one's children and friends serves as sufficient motivation to avoid



death, perhaps even at the cost of unsavory, “womanish,” or less than fully virtuous behavior.

Socrates, however, thinks their behavior is “womanish” because he thinks emotional attachment is not a good reason to fight to stay alive. He does not consider the loss of his friends and family to be sufficient reason to act unjustly, whether that means begging for an acquittal against false charges that will end in his unjust death or arranging to escape prison, both of which were common and relatively minor injustices in Athens at the time. It is not sufficiently important to him that he continue to enjoy the pleasure of his friends’ company, or that they continue to enjoy the pleasure of his company.

Other dialogues about the death of Socrates indicate that his friends and family find this component of Socrates’ refusal to avoid death perplexing and frustrating. In the Crito, for instance, Crito urges Socrates to consider escape because his continued livelihood is important to his friends, but more importantly to his children’s care and support (45c-e). The fact that Socrates will orphan his children especially frustrates Crito, and he claims that Socrates’ refusal to escape for his children’s sake is “unjust” [οὐδὲ δίκαιόν, 45c5] and cowardly. Socrates, he thinks, “betrays” [προδιδόνα, 45c9] his children, since orphans do not fare well. Socrates, however, denies the significance of any of these relationships in his decision-making, telling Crito,

As for those questions you raise about money, reputation,  
the upbringing of children, Crito, those considerations in

truth belong to those people who easily put men to death...

I mean the majority of men (Cri. 48c).<sup>57</sup>

Socrates' friends, Cebes and Simmias, who in the Crito are reported to have come to Athens with the express purpose of springing Socrates from jail, initiate a discussion of death in the Phaedo by objecting that Socrates, in their words, "bears leaving us too lightly" (Phd.63a). I examine this conversation in detail in the next chapter.

So, if the jury does not understand Socrates' detachment, neither do his friends. His ability to care more for justice than his continued relationships with his family, though, is an important factor in his ability to face death fearlessly, and this results in a difficult tension between the desire to get rid of the fear of death and a Socratic conception of the value of life.

## CONCLUSION

In the previous sections, I have explored two background assumptions on which the success of Socrates' arguments that death is better than injustice depends. I have also demonstrated the role that Socrates' acceptance of both of these assumptions plays in his defense. First, his consistent refusal to commit injustice, whether small or large, explains why he lacks the resources necessary to protect himself from an unjust prosecution that

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<sup>57</sup> ὅς δὲ σὺ λέγεις τὰς σκέψεις περὶ τε ἀναλώσεως χρημάτων καὶ δόξης καὶ παιδῶν τροφῆς, μὴ ὡς ἀληθῶς ταῦτα, ὃ Κρίτων, σκέμματα ἢ τῶν ῥαδίως ἀποκτεινόντων καὶ ἀναβιωσκομένων γ' ἄν, εἰ οἴοι τ' ἦσαν, οὐδενὶ ξὺν νῶ, τούτων τῶν πολλῶν.

will lead to his death. It has also left him powerless to protect his friends and family should they find themselves in similar circumstances. His audience, in short, must accept that even a minor injustice is worse than gaining the means to security against unjust violence for oneself and one's family.

Second, his audience must accept that the loss of their personal relationships at death does not count as a significant harm, and that any attachment they form should never override the call to act justly. They should avoid growing attached to external goods like projects and people. In order to rid themselves of their fear of death, and certainly to see death as a benefit, they must believe that death does not deprive them of anything of value, especially anything of value that outweighs the harm of a minor injustice.

One might think that it is impossible for humans to live like Socrates, even if it would make them more just and lessen their fear of death. The desire for protection against violence may be a good candidate for a hard-wired desire that we share with animals because we are animals. One might make a similar case for our emotional attachment to our young. However, unless we are to believe that Socrates is divine, Socrates intends for his audience to believe that ignoring the desire for security and avoiding strong attachment to others is possible for a human being sufficiently committed to justice and to attaining the appropriate attitudes towards death.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> It could be argued that the introductory conditional of this sentence is satisfied. Socrates may in fact be divine, or rather, his ability to act as he does may be a result of

Even if one concedes that such attitudes can stand up to worries about descriptive plausibility (i.e. it is the case that they are possible to attain for humans), there looms a normative question. Is it really better for us to adopt this stance? First, one might think, as Crito does, that protecting oneself for the sake of one's young overrides the prohibition against minor injustice. An even stronger argument can be offered in support of committing injustice in order to protect one's child from violence.<sup>59</sup> Socrates is probably right that one's personal relationships do not matter enough to justify a grave injustice, but what about a request for pity and an attempt to avoid an unfair death that will orphan one's children? Second, developing attachments to personal relationships and life projects may be worth increasing one's fear of death. Socrates may simply be wrong that external goods like relationships lack genuine positive value and that the desire to lessen one's fear of death is a good reason to convince oneself otherwise. A little fear of death may be ethically and psychologically healthier.

So, the debate issues in an open question: security, attachment, minor injustices, and some fear of death vs. insecurity, absence of attachment, a pure commitment to justice, and no fear of death. I presume with some confidence that most non-philosophers in Socrates' audience (as well as myself and many of the people I know),

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divine dispensation that is not granted to almost anyone else. First, Socrates has a special, singular daimonion, which suggests that he is dear to the gods. Second, Plato has Socrates argue in the Republic that only someone with a divine dispensation could be philosophical in a non-ideal city. Socrates then identifies himself (as well as a few others with gifts from the gods) as a philosopher in a non-ideal city (R. 6: 496a-e).

<sup>59</sup> This, of course, is a stock objection to absolutisms of the Kantian variety.

will opt for a little fear of death and a little injustice in exchange for a sense of security and emotional attachment to goods that are external to them and beyond their control.

Things may be different in the Phaedo, however. Socrates' audience is winnowed down to admirers with a philosophical nature, who may be more willing and able to adopt a Socratic lifestyle. In the next chapter, then, I consider whether it might be possible for the young men who want to be like Socrates to eschew security and attachment for the sake of justice and courage, with the added benefit of getting rid of the fear of death. More importantly, I consider how the picture changes once philosophical wisdom and a strong commitment to the immortality of the soul get thrown into the mix.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE AND HOW TO DIE

The Apology and the Phaedo share a mission—convincing the present audience that they should not fear death. In the Phaedo, Socrates intends to persuade his friends and, to some extent, himself, that a philosopher should face death confidently, even eagerly. His young friends, quite naturally, are distressed that he will die before the day is out, and they are confounded by his own apparent lack of distress. He sets out to change their attitudes towards death in three steps. First, he offers a conception of the philosopher such that fearing death is contrary to her nature and desire for wisdom. Second, he and his two principal interlocutors run through a series of arguments for the immortality of the soul. Third, mixed among the arguments, he provides a couple of myths that bolster his belief that death is a benefit for the just and pious. Then he takes the poison.\*

The Phaedo's overabundance of material about death and immortality requires that I set aside many interesting facets of the dialogue. Thus, I will not address the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments for immortality,<sup>60</sup> or the role of the theory of the Forms in Plato's epistemology and metaphysics, whether in the Phaedo or elsewhere.

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\* All citations in this chapter in which the dialogue is unspecified reference the Phaedo.

<sup>60</sup> I find Gallop [1975], Hackforth [1955], and Bostock [1986, 1999] especially helpful regarding the arguments for immortality in the Phaedo. Bostock and Gallop focus almost exclusively on the arguments, devoting very little attention to dramatic elements or the myth.

These matters feature in the discussion only insofar as they are instrumental to determining why Plato thinks people fear death and how he believes they can control it.

In this chapter, I argue for two big-picture theses. First, I contend that in the Phaedo, Plato argues that everyone, philosophers included, fears death. Philosophers fear death far less than non-philosophers, but they are not without some recalcitrant fear of death. This is the case for two reasons: 1) Human beings are embodied creatures, and bodies are full of fears; 2) the philosopher's central desire is for wisdom, which will, Socrates contends, remain forever frustrated unless the soul is immortal. Since immortality is something of which no one can be certain, the soul suffers anxiety about never satisfying its central desire. Nevertheless, the philosopher fears death less than the non-philosopher, since she reduces and controls her body's fears and has a greater confidence in the immortality of the soul. Keeping her fear of death in check has a significant positive impact on her ability to live a good human life, since she lives virtuously and dies with limited confidence and minimal fear.

Second, I argue that the philosopher uses three strategies to keep her fear of death in check. Socrates, I contend, not only offers these strategies to his friends, but he rehearses them through the course of the Phaedo in order to calm himself before he drinks the hemlock. The first strategy, the adoption of a strong brand of asceticism, aims to minimize fear given the possibility that the soul is not immortal. The second strategy depends upon some degree of confidence that the soul is immortal, and the final strategy tames the remaining, exceptionally recalcitrant fears through myths and stories. Socrates distances himself from his friends and family, runs through arguments for the soul's

immortality, and offers two eschatological myths. The first strategy, I argue, targets fears in the body, the second targets a fear in the soul that is specific to philosophers, and the myths target the residual fears of both the body and the soul.

### The Body as Insurmountable Obstacle

For Plato, we fear death because we are regrettably embodied. Every human has a body, and that body ushers in a host of anxieties and attachments, great and small. The body is the soul's prison [φρουρᾶ, 62b4; διαδεδεμένην ἐν τῷ σώματι, 82e], and there is no escape from the body's needs until death (64c, 67e), since death is, by definition, the separation of the soul from the body (64c). The body makes "adequately" knowing the truth impossible (66b5-7), because it constantly deceives us about what is "true" [ἀλήθειάν 65b2; 65b9-11; 66a6] and "real" [τι τῶν ὄντων, 65c2-3, 66a3]. It is always present, so that "seeing true things is not possible because of it" [ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καθορᾶν τὰληθές, 66d6-7]. It is even a nagging impediment to learning, since it requires that we take time to eat (at least occasionally) and buy clothes and shoes. Its diseases can keep us from study altogether (66c1-2). Worse, the body is full of needs and desires, so that "as is said, truly and in reality no thinking at all ever comes to be for us from the body" (66c2-6).<sup>61</sup> The body's needs and desires are the cause of war within the

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<sup>61</sup> ἐρώτων δὲ καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ φόβων καὶ εἰδώλων παντοδαπῶν καὶ φλυαρίας ἐμπλήρησιν ἡμᾶς πολλῆς, ὥστε τὸ λεγόμενον ὡς ἀληθῶς τῷ ὄντι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ οὐδὲ φρονῆσαι ἡμῖν ἐγγίγνεται οὐδέποτε οὐδέν.

Burnet notes that τὸ λεγόμενον, as it often does, indicates that this phrase is proverbial (rendered by Burnet as "we don't even get a chance of thinking for it"). He, however,



city and without (πολέμους καὶ στάσεις καὶ μάχας), since they “require” (ἀναγκαζόμεθα) us to seek wealth for their satisfaction. The desire for wealth causes all wars (66c5-d2).<sup>62</sup> In short, the body is full of fears and needs, and philosophers have a body.

The worst thing about the body, though, is that it keeps the philosopher from gaining wisdom, her greatest desire. Socrates, noting the body’s constancy during life, concludes that human life itself serves as a persistent obstacle to gaining wisdom. He claims:

And then, so it seems, that which we desire and of which we claim to be lovers, wisdom, will be possible for us when we will be dead, as the argument shows, and not while we live. For if it is not possible to know anything purely in the company of the body, then one of two things is the case—either it is never possible to acquire knowledge, or it is possible for us when we will be dead. For then, the soul

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cannot determine to what proverb Socrates might be referring [1911: 36]. Geddes calls this “an iteration of a cardinal principle,” though he leaves it unclear whose “cardinal principle” is under discussion [1885: 33]. The whole phrase is meant to be emphatic, though, especially with the conjunction of ὡς ἀληθῶς and τῷ ὄντι. Even if it is proverbial, then, it seems that this does not lessen Socrates’ apparent commitment to its conclusion.

<sup>62</sup> In the Republic, soldiers, or “guardians,” only become necessary after the first city is abandoned for a city that includes luxury goods. When luxury goods are introduced, Socrates claims that war is inevitable (R. 2: 373e-374a).

itself will be by itself apart from the body, and not before.

[66e2-67a2].<sup>63</sup>

Socrates reiterates that death brings a release from the body and the opportunity to finally achieve wisdom:

If [philosophers] have been altogether at odds with the body, and they desire to have the soul itself by itself, then would it not be a complete irrationality, if, when this happens, they were to be fearful and resentful, if they did not go gladly to that place where there is hope for those arriving to attain that which they were loving throughout their lives—loving wisdom—and where there is hope to be

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<sup>63</sup> καὶ τότε, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡμῖν ἔσται οὐ̄ ἐπιθυμοῦμέν τε καὶ φαμεν ἐρῶσατὶ εἶναι, φρονήσεως, ἐπειδὴν τελευτήσωμεν, ὡς ὁ λόγος σημαίνει, ζῶσιν δὲ οὐ̄. εἰ γὰρ μὴ οἷόν τε μετὰ τοῦ σώματος μηδὲν καθαρῶς γινῶναι, δυοῖν θάτερον, ἢ οὐδαμοῦ ἔστιν κτήσασθαι τὸ εἰδέναι ἢ τελευτήσασιν γὰρ αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν ἢ ψυχὴ ἔσται χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος, πρότερον δ' οὐ̄.

A third option, of course, is that there is an afterlife in which wisdom remains unattainable. One might think that Socrates can ignore this possibility for the same reason that he ignores the possibility of a torturous afterlife at the close of the Apology—piety rules it out. However, just as in the Apology, Socrates would be epistemically unjustified in committing himself to details of the afterlife outside of its basic desirability, and the afterlife could be desirable in a number of ways that do not include gaining wisdom. Nevertheless, if the gods are extremely beneficent, they will award philosophers wisdom, and the afterlife remains the only place philosophers can hope to attain it. This hope may be sufficient to make philosophers content to die and find out what happens.

released from the company of that with which they have  
been at odds? (67e7-68a3).<sup>64</sup>

Socrates concludes that the philosopher should look forward to the afterlife, “for he believes this intensely—that he will discover wisdom purely no other place but there” (68a).<sup>65</sup>

So, Socrates believes full wisdom is unattainable in this life because of the body. Only in the afterlife will the philosopher be able to gain full wisdom, since only then will she be completely free the body’s persistent disruptions, desires, and fears. The philosopher, then, must believe that the soul is immortal if she is to avoid fearing that she can never attain the thing she most desires. That alone is a significant hurdle to getting rid of the fear of death. However, dealing with the fear of death requires more than simply believing in the existence of an afterlife in which the philosopher gets what she has always wanted. The philosopher must arrange her life in order to be “least” troubled by fears (67e5-6), so that she can get as “close as possible” to wisdom while she is alive (65e4, 67a3). She requires, then, strategies to squelch the body’s fears as much as they can be squelched (64e1, 65a1-2, 65c8, 66a3-5 67a3-4). Obviously, the unruly body that

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<sup>64</sup> εἰ γὰρ διαβέβληνται μὲν πανταχῆ τῷ σώματι, αὐτὴν δὲ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐπιθυμοῦσι τὴν ψυχὴν ἔχειν, τούτου δὲ γιγνομένου εἰ φοβοῖντο καὶ ἀγανακτοῖεν, οὐ πολλὴ ἂν ἀλογία εἴη, εἰ μὴ ἄσμενοι ἐκεῖσε ἴοιεν, οἳ ἀφικομένοις ἐλπίς ἐστίν οὗ διὰ βίου ἤρων τυχεῖν—ἤρων δὲ φρονήσεως—ὧς τε διεβέβληντο, τούτου ἀπηλλάχθαι συνόντος αὐτοῖς;

<sup>65</sup> φρονήσεως δὲ ἄρα τις τῷ ὄντι ἐρῶν, καὶ λαβὼν σφόδρα τὴν αὐτὴν ταύτην ἐλπίδα, μηδαμοῦ ἄλλοθι ἐντεύξεσθαι αὐτῇ ἀξίως λόγου ἢ ἐν Ἄιδου, ἀγανακτῆσει τε ἀποθνήσκων καὶ οὐχ ἄσμενος εἴσιν αὐτόσε; οἶεσθαί γε χρὴ, ἐὰν τῷ ὄντι γε ἦ, ὃ ἐταῖρε, φιλόσοφος· σφόδρα γὰρ αὐτῷ ταῦτα δόξει, μηδαμοῦ ἄλλοθι καθαρῶς ἐντεύξεσθαι φρονήσει ἀλλ’ ἢ ἐκεῖ.

Socrates describes caring nothing for theoretical arguments about the immortality of the soul, so the philosopher must do battle with some other weapon.

### Fighting Back the Body

Socrates claims that the philosopher manages her fear better than everyone else, or that she fears death “least” (67e5-6). How, though, does she do it? Socrates’ reply to Simmias’ final objection to his arguments for immortality is a good place to begin, since it not only provides evidence that the philosopher best manages, rather than eliminates, her body’s fears and desires, but it also casts light on the multitude of strategies the philosopher should use to tame her fears.

Simmias objects to Socrates’ conception of the soul as an immaterial thing that does not depend on the material body by offering a competing theory according to which the soul is a sort of “harmony” [ἁρμονία, 85e3] that depends upon the material form of the thing that produces the harmony. For instance, a harmony might depend upon a lyre, both its wood and the proper tuning of the lyre’s strings. When the body weakens as a result of age or sickness, then the strings weaken or break, and the harmony is destroyed. The wood eventually rots. Since the soul is the harmony, the destruction of the lyre is the destruction of the soul.

Socrates offers two replies to Simmias’ conception of the soul as a harmony. The first is an *ad hominem* that relies on Simmias’ firm belief in the process of recollection.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> The Theory of Recollection is introduced in order to show that the soul must have had a pre-natal existence, since we often learn what seem to be new things by being “reminded” of things that we must have known before birth (72e-77a). Simmias assents

Socrates shows Simmias that he cannot believe both that the soul is a harmony and that recollection is possible. Though Simmias proves unwilling to abandon recollection, someone else (i.e. most of us) might be willing to ditch recollection in order to maintain that the soul is a harmony. Thus, Socrates needs an additional argument for those not terribly convinced by the theory. In his second argument, then, Socrates shows Simmias that the “harmony conception” cannot account for a few common beliefs about souls. It cannot account for disagreement within the soul, it cannot account for the idea that some souls are more or less virtuous, and it entails that one soul can be more or less a soul, insofar as it is more or less a harmony (93b-94a).

Most importantly, the “harmony conception” renders it impossible to account for the obvious truth that even the best souls are constantly at war with the body, vigilantly staving off the body’s desires and fears. Absent opposition of this sort, Socrates claims, the soul might reasonably be a harmony, but given that the soul is always fighting the body, it cannot reasonably be a harmony. Instead, as Socrates says, the soul constantly employs an array of strategies to squelch and control desires and fears,

opposing almost all of them throughout the whole of life,  
mastering all their ways, sometimes punishing them rather  
harshly and with pains, by both exercise and medicine,  
sometimes more gently, sometimes promising them and

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to the theory very early, but often does not seem to realize what his assent entails. Thus, he is interested to discover that his earlier assent to Recollection defangs his later objection. The other dialogue in which Recollection plays the largest role is the discussion with the slave boy in the Meno (80d-86c), and it also makes an appearance in the Phaedrus. For discussion of Recollection in the Phaedo, see Gallop [1975] and Bostock [1986].

other times warning them, speaking with them as one to another (94d1-6).<sup>67</sup>

Socrates tells Simmias that denying such tension would not only contradict the poets, but also themselves [ἡμῶν αὐτοῖς, 95a2]. Everyday experience suggests that a philosopher must fight and monitor her body's emotions in order to do what her soul deems best.

Which strategies are particularly good for dealing with the fear of death, though? Speaking of the vast number of the emotions and desires of the body, Socrates recommends situational strategies, sometimes warnings or promises, sometimes exercise and medicine. One, some, or all of these strategies may be useful for combating the fear of death specifically. If the philosopher recognizes she must minimize her fear of death, then she needs to determine which strategies are most useful for controlling a fear that proves especially obstreperous.

Socrates knows well the impediments to controlling the fear of death. As I mentioned at the outset, I argue that Socrates uses three strategies, though two of the strategies depend on confidence that the soul is immortal. Some contemporary readers are uncomfortable with or hostile to Plato's discussion of immortality and myth, and they think Plato should accomplish his philosophical tasks without recourse to stories about the afterlife or promises of eternal reward. Before turning to Socrates' contentious

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<sup>67</sup> ἐναντιομένη ὀλίγου πάντα διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου καὶ δεσπόζουσα πάντας τρόπους, τὰ μὲν χαλεπότερον κολάζουσα καὶ μετ' ἀλγηδόνων, τὰ τε κατὰ τὴν γυμναστικὴν καὶ τὴν ἰατρικὴν, τὰ δὲ πραότερον, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀπειλοῦσα, τὰ δὲ νουθετοῦσα, ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ὀργαῖς καὶ φόβοις ὡς ἄλλη οὕσα ἄλλω πράγματι διαλεγομένη;

eschatology, then, we should examine and evaluate Socrates' strategies for combating the fear of death should the soul turn out to be mortal through and through.

### Death and the Mortal Soul

For all of Socrates' attention to the immortality of the soul in the Phaedo, he has what seems to be a perfectly good explanation for why philosophers fear death least—they are ascetics, and ascetics have less to lose by dying. If an individual becomes attached to her body and the things her body desires, then death threatens to deprive her of everything she values. This is a grave problem for the non-philosopher. As Bobonich [2002: 15] puts it:

The differences between philosophers' and non-philosophers' attitudes towards death are thus explained by more basic differences in their goals and ultimate ends. All non-philosophers are afraid of death because the goods that they value are conditions of the body or at least require embodiment.

Since death, regardless of the eternal state of the soul, is the loss of the body, the non-philosopher has reason to fear the loss of what she loves. The greater her attachment to the body, the more she stands to lose by death and the greater her fear.

Those who disdain the body, though, among them philosophers, have little reason to fear the loss of the body at death (67d-e). If an increase in asceticism leads to decrease in fear, then the philosopher reduces her fear by minimizing her attachment to pleasures.

On this reasoning, ascetics have less fear than the power-hungry, sex-obsessed, gluttonous tyrants. Or, for that matter, than people who want to write a book or go to Europe next year. Thus, the philosopher should have an advantage over everyone else when facing death, regardless of whether the soul is immortal.

So why does Socrates not merely offer his interlocutors an argument for philosophical asceticism and consider it sufficient to make the philosophers fear death less than everyone else? First, we should get clear about what kind of asceticism Socrates recommends. Raphael Woolf [2004], in “The Practice of the Philosopher,” distinguishes two competing conceptions of asceticism. On the first conception, the person completely spurns and deprives herself of as many external goods as possible, including money and fine food, personal relationships, the pursuit of individual security, and any desire for social respect and honor. He calls this the “ascetic stance.” On the second conception, the philosopher does not deprive herself of external goods, but affects the appropriate philosophical attitude towards her external goods. She affords them no value, or in Woolf’s words, she adopts “a scornful or belittling,” “Kiplingesque” attitude that is not at odds with engaging in “the usual range of human activities.”<sup>68</sup> This, he calls the “evaluative stance.” Thus, a philosopher can pursue and enjoy personal relationships, money, and security, so long as she disdains them.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Woolf, 100

<sup>69</sup> It may be worth considering the following: an unjust person can be an ascetic on either conception. She may be attached to none of the great wealth she acquired through injustice, and thereby be an evaluative ascetic. Likewise, she might be an unjust person who does not pursue goods of the body at all. She may lack the resources, ability, or even desire to pursue external goods, while remaining a vile and unhappy individual.



Woolf argues that Socrates must be advocating the “evaluative stance” as the philosopher’s way of life. Woolf appeals to the historical Socrates’ own apparent choice of the “evaluative stance” as supporting evidence. We know, for instance, that Socrates lived an active life in the city, married and had children, fought in wars, and formed many friendships with attractive, young men. Therefore, if Socrates serves as the model ascetic, Plato must recommend the sort of asceticism that allows a person to marry, have children, and, at least to some extent, get involved in the city’s business. Socrates, then, does not mean to tell his friends that they should not pursue goods; rather, they should not develop strong attachments to their goods, such that being deprived of friends, family, or a romantic conquest counts as a significant harm. Otherwise, Socrates would advocate a form of asceticism he has not pursued, and this would undermine his claim to have practiced for death as best he possibly can.<sup>70</sup>

We should, I think, reserve judgment about whether Socrates, either historically or as represented in the Phaedo, is the ideal philosophical ascetic. The ideal human ascetic, just like the fully wise philosopher, may prove non-existent. Or we might have good reason to think Socrates has in fact failed to prepare for death as best he could, and that his involvement in the life of the polis and his family were mistakes.

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Woolf says something brief about this: “if someone never indulged in bodily pleasures but still thought that the material world was reality, one would score no points as a philosopher” (104). He is surely right that they would not be philosophers, but one might nevertheless wonder whether they would be able to control their fear of death just as well as a philosopher. With respect to the fear of death, then, the ascetic stance may not sufficiently differentiate the philosopher from the non-philosopher.

<sup>70</sup> Woolf, 98-100.

Woolf is surely right, however, that the philosophical ascetic must pursue some goods, just as the philosopher must make some use of her deceiving bodily senses. But, the number of acceptable external goods open to a philosopher may be much smaller than Woolf suggests, and the strictures of Socrates' indifference should not be overlooked. With respect to the asceticism that mitigates the fear of death, I think we should ask three questions, and the answers to these questions should make some room for both ascetic stances. First, if asceticism is "preparation for death," what *particular* goods must a philosophical ascetic relinquish in order not to fear death? Perhaps some goods should be rejected wholesale. Second, does her "evaluative" stance towards the goods she can pursue (if any) require that she assign no significant positive value to them, so that, for instance, a philosopher permits herself, but only so long as she remains indifferent to their continued existence? Finally, to what extent can we expect embodied humans, even philosophically minded ones, to adopt this stance?

In response to the first question, the philosopher must surely abandon any and all goods that conflict with the pursuit of wisdom and virtue. Obvious candidates for goods that conflict with virtue include honor and power won by political intrigue, safety that requires injustice, and material goods won from unfair gain. One might suppose, though, that the injustice required to acquire or to maintain many such external goods is contingent on non-ideal political circumstances like those of imperialist Athens. In ideal political circumstances, then, it might be possible to gain safety, win honor, or protect one's children without injustice. If there were, however, a class of goods that require injustice independent of political circumstances, then those goods are absolutely

prohibited to the philosopher. A primary candidate for such a good, one might think, is money.

One might nevertheless think that goods that can be acquired justly could distract one from the intense study necessary to gain wisdom. The fact that one can pursue such goods justly does not entail that they are not at odds with the pursuit of wisdom. For instance, marrying and having children might fall into this class of goods on some interpretations of philosophers like Epicurus and Plato. We should not forget that pursuing wisdom and acting justly might require absolute deprivation and avoidance of some external goods, not simply a detached attitude towards them.

Thus, Woolf's idea that a philosopher adopts the "evaluative stance" seems right, with the caveat that she adopts it only towards *justly* acquired and justly maintained goods that do not distract her from the pursuit of wisdom. Speculation about how many goods remain available will likely depend upon political circumstances and the conception of wisdom at stake. Regardless of whether the historical Socrates pursued all of his external goods justly, though, and regardless of whether he would prefer upon reflection to have deprived himself of his wife and children, he clearly adopts the evaluative stance towards them in the Phaedo—he is not sorry to lose his children, friends, family, or continued life. This, no doubt, makes it a good bit easier to die.

However, moving to the second question above, even if we assign an "evaluative stance" to Socrates in the Phaedo, we should not lose sight of his extreme indifference to those few external goods he possesses. His level of emotional detachment frustrates his friends and family, and could strike readers as surprising, strange, and even unethical.

Getting clear on the nature and extent of Socrates' detachment is important for considering whether his young interlocutors will be able to adopt it, and to what extent they will be able to similarly control their own fear of death.

Socrates' detachment from his human relationships is evident from the outset of the prison scene. When his friends arrive in the morning, Socrates banishes his crying wife and infant son from his presence. Though some, including Hackforth, Burnet, and Taylor have argued that this is a gentle, caring gesture, meant to save Xanthippe from further sorrow, it is more likely that Socrates simply finds her a nuisance.<sup>71</sup> He later expresses his distaste for women who cry about the death of their loved ones, shaming his friends for their own tears, accusing them of engaging in womanly "offensiveness" [πλημμελοῦεν, 117e1]. They should shape up, since such behavior is "the reason [he] sent the women away" [ἔνεκα τὰς γυναῖκας ἀπέπεμψα, 117d8].<sup>72</sup> His friends are shamed into silence.

Socrates, though, also displays an absence of concern about leaving behind his good friends. Remember that his initial "defense" is a response to Cebes' quite natural charge that Socrates "bears leaving [them] lightly" [ῥαδίως φέρεις καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀπολείπων,

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<sup>71</sup> Hackforth, siding with Burnet, casts Socrates' dismissal of Xanthippe as sympathetic (33n1). Taylor [1927, 178] calls charges that Socrates' is uncaring "absurd." I have trouble believing that she will cease grieving simply because she has left the prison, so I am inclined to think Socrates is more concerned to save himself from her grieving.

<sup>72</sup> Grief, for Plato, is the purview of women (cf. Ap. 35b, R. 3:387e; 10:605d-e; Phd. 60a-b), which is for him very much an insult. Women were often hired to grieve publicly for the death of those they did not even know (see Pomeroy [1975]). However, men were also prone to express strong grief, especially in Homeric epic and vicariously when watching tragic theater. I address grief and the philosopher in the final chapter.

63a8-9, cp. Cri. 43b8-10]. In other words, they want him to display a strong enough attachment to them that he will, at least to some degree, “resent” [ἀγανακτεῖν, 62d4, 62e6] dying. This is not to say that Socrates does not care for the welfare of his friends.<sup>73</sup> He wants them to become philosophers, which he considers the best life. He wants them to adopt a philosophical attitude towards his and their own deaths, which he believes will be to their benefit. He does his best to comfort them with stories, physical affection, and arguments. He does not, however, express any regret that he is leaving them, his children, or his wife behind him.

Even at the end of the dialogue, by which point Socrates must have told Crito many, many times about his eagerness to die, Crito again asks Socrates for direction about how to care for his children (114b). As the day ends, Socrates calls for the poison. Crito, however, notes that some daylight remains, so that Socrates has plenty of time to delay his death. Others, Crito says, delay taking the poison in order to “converse with those they happen to love” [συγγενομένους γ’ ἐνίους ὧν ἂν τύχῳσιν ἐπιθυμοῦντες, 116e4-5].<sup>74</sup> Crito still does not understand that Socrates does not prefer to spend any additional time with friends when the gods have granted him permission to die. Socrates declines, claiming that he would not benefit from any more time. He does not consider,

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<sup>73</sup> Woolf, 104

<sup>74</sup> One might be tempted to translate and read this as Crito’s suggestion that Socrates share a more “biblical” sense of intimacy with his wife or some lover, for instance, instead of further conversation with his friends. I think that since Socrates had already sent the women, and since I doubt (but cannot prove, obviously) that he has made a habit of sexual relations with anyone in the prison, I think it must be Crito’s request that Socrates delay taking the poison for the sake of those assembled.

however, whether Crito, his friends, his children, or his wife would benefit from that time. In short, Socrates remains perfectly comfortable leaving his children and his friends feeling like “orphans” (116a8).

Socrates makes clear that his asceticism is a key reason that he is so calm and collected about his impending death, and he intends to encourage his audience to cultivate the same attitudes and detachment. Since his audience wants to be virtuous, and the fear of death serves as an impediment to virtue, Socrates has given them good reason to think that minimizing their fear of death through ascetic deprivation and emotional indifference is a strategy worth considering.

#### The Insufficiency of Asceticism

His hard sell of asceticism, though, has two problems. First, the majority of those listening to his conversation will likely prove unwilling or unable, whether from incapacity or unfavorable circumstances, to choose the way of life that enables Socrates to remain detached. Second, even if they could become philosophical ascetics, they recognize that deprivation and indifference is a flawed strategy for convincing oneself that death should not be feared, avoided, and “resented.” The soul, they rightly insist, must be immortal.

There are three reasons to think that Socrates’ friends will likely fail to adopt Socrates’ asceticism. First, they have strong personal attachments. In particular, they are extremely attached to Socrates. In the Crito, Cebes and Simmias have, Crito says, just arrived in Athens with the funds necessary to spring Socrates from jail, should Socrates

feel bad about accepting Crito's money (45b). No doubt the friends are all still a bit frustrated that Socrates turned down their offer. When Socrates dies, even if they are convinced by his arguments for immortality (and I will argue that most of them are not), their copious weeping suggests that they remain very attached to Socrates. Of course, they must realize their attachment is not equally reciprocated. Socrates, who accepted no offers for assistance, would also make no offers should they themselves be falsely accused. They could also not very well expect Socrates to weep should they be forced by others to die an unjust death. Socrates, again, is not the sort to grow attached.

Second, his friends cannot quite understand Socrates' lack of concern for his children or Xanthippe. This indicates that they would have trouble detaching themselves from their future children in a similar fashion. True, Socrates expresses confidence that his friends will take care of his children, and true, Socrates' commitment to justice may be the only impediment to protecting his own children and raising them with attention and care, but his general failure to express any worries or particular concern for the future welfare of his children consistently baffles his friends. In the Crito, Crito thinks Socrates' responsibility to care for his children and the unsavory prospect of their fate as orphans require Socrates' escape. Socrates disagrees (45d). At the close of the Phaedo, Crito asks Socrates again for any final advice or guidance on the care of his children. We are told that he has inquired on the topic a number of times by the fact that Socrates tells him that he has nothing new to say (115b).

Powerful familial and political influences provide the third reason that Socrates' young friends will likely fail to become Socratic ascetics. They will be urged or even

required to pursue external goods and protection for their families and the city. The young men's desire to protect Socrates from an unjust death indicates a tendency to protect those for whom they care, and their families and children may need protection in the future. Unlike Socrates, though, their friends and families will not only accept assistance, but also expect it. One can reasonably suspect that Simmias would not reject Cebes' offer to bribe the guard and escape prison, and Cebes would just as happily offer to spring Simmias as Socrates. In non-ideal political circumstances, then, their attachments will be at odds with justice and the pursuit of wisdom.<sup>75</sup>

So, most, if not all of Socrates' interlocutors will have trouble living ascetically (or with the appropriate "evaluative stance"). Their various attachments will increase their fear of death and will tempt them to act unjustly. Even *if*, however, they lose their attachment to each other and their families, and even if they prove as competent at ascetic detachment as the Socrates of the Phaedo, the Socratic stance on the value of external goods will prove insufficient for ridding them of their fear and resentment of death. For there is one attachment they seem to share with Socrates, and this attachment has legitimate value that even Socrates cannot not deny. Namely, they all value the life of philosophy and the pursuit of wisdom. This shared attachment, I argue, requires the discussion of the immortality of the soul, and without immortality, everyone involved in the conversation has reason to fear death.

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<sup>75</sup> The perversion of philosophical talent by family and political influence plays a central role in the Republic's treatment of true and false philosophers and proper philosophical education. I address these concerns more fully in the Republic chapters. Another useful point of comparison is Calicles' indictment of Socrates' powerlessness to protect himself, his family, and his friends in the Gorgias.



### The Deprivation of Philosophy objection

Socrates introduces his belief in immortality as part of his reply to Cebes' first objection, and unless he can provide a convincing proof of the soul's immortality, the objection stands. If the objection stands, though, Socrates would be unable to salvage his claim that the philosopher should not resent death, much less his stronger claim that the philosopher should eagerly anticipate death. The objection is simple. Like Socrates, Cebes and Simmias believe that philosophy is the best way of life. Thus, they consider death a deprivation because it deprives them of their ability to continue practicing philosophy. Their attachment to philosophy is a good reason to resent death, and they think Socrates is mistaken to refuse to escape an unjust death in order to, among other important things, continue doing philosophy.

Cebes raises the objection in response to Socrates' early discussion of the permissibility of suicide.<sup>76</sup> Socrates argues that, though the philosopher is in fact better off dead than alive, she must wait until the gods either kill her or place her in a situation in which they clearly condone her killing herself. Socrates believes his own death, which is under one description self-inflicted, satisfies the latter condition. The philosopher, then, looks forward to the gods killing her or granting her permission to die.

Though hesitant to trouble Socrates on his death-day, Cebes objects: if it is true that the philosopher's life is better than the lives of others, since, among other things, the philosopher recognizes that her life is governed by beneficent gods, then why does she

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<sup>76</sup> See especially Brickhouse and Smith [1989b], Cooper [1999: 515-541] and Miles [2001].

not have more reason to resent death than the non-philosophers, since she loses a life of genuine value (62e, cp. EN 3: 9: 1117b). Even if the philosopher is materially poor and socially ridiculed, her life itself is objectively better. Thus, the philosopher alone actually loses by dying, since death deprives her of the best, and perhaps the only genuinely valuable, human activity.

This objection has bite. There is no point at which Plato in any dialogue denies that some *ways* of life are better than others. If the philosopher's life has *positive* value, then she stands to lose something of true value by dying—her ability to continue doing philosophy. One might think that as the value of a person's life increases, so does the amount of value of which death deprives her. Even if *only* one kind of life were to have value, then death deprives *that* life of its value. If, on the other hand, no lives have any positive value, then the philosopher and the non-philosopher both stand to benefit or at least not lose positive value by dying.

While I have argued that this latter option is a viable interpretation of the first disjunct of the “Two Things Argument” in the Apology, the Phaedo does not readily lend itself to this interpretation. I argued that the Socrates of the Apology thinks that death can be a benefit even if there is no afterlife. This is the case because life is overall full of pain. On this picture, the philosopher might live philosophically as the best way of dealing with a bad situation (i.e., life), but she still stands to gain by death because she loses a great deal of pain. She might simply be distinguished by the fact that she is able to recognize that life is all-around bad and that death is a benefit, while non-philosophers falsely believe death is harmful. In the Phaedo, Socrates seems to concede that the

philosophical life does have genuine positive value; thus, he needs a further account of why the philosopher should not resent being deprived of a valuable life.

Socrates grants that Cebes' argument is a good one, and he claims that he would in fact be upset to leave a life of servitude to the gods through philosophy, if he did not expect an afterlife:

For I, he said, O Simmias and Cebes, if I did not believe I would come first to other wise and good gods, then also to men who have died [who are] better than those here, wise and good, I should be wrong not to resent dying...because of these things, I am not so resentful, because I am of good hope that something exists for people who have died and, just and as it has been said long ago, that it is much better for the good than the bad (63b5-c7).<sup>77</sup>

It is only natural that Cebes and Simmias should insist on a proof of the immortality of the soul; Socrates has just admitted that his “good hope” for an afterlife is the reason he does not resent dying. Before they even get around to challenging him on

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<sup>77</sup> ἐγὼ γάρ, ἔφη, ὦ Σιμμία τε καὶ Κέβης, εἰ μὲν μὴ ᾧμην ἤξειν πρῶτον μὲν παρὰ θεοὺς ἄλλους σοφοὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς, ἔπειτα καὶ παρ' ἀνθρώπους τετελευτηκότας ἀμείνους τῶν ἐνθάδε, ἠδίκουν ἂν οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν τῷ θανάτῳ· νῦν δὲ εὖ ἴστε ὅτι παρ' ἀνδρῶν τε ἐλπίζω ἀφίξεσθαι ἀγαθοὺς—καὶ τοῦτο μὲν οὐκ ἂν πάνυ δισχυρισαίμην—ὅτι μέντοι παρὰ θεοὺς δεσπότης πάνυ ἀγαθοὺς ἤξειν, εὖ ἴστε ὅτι εἴπερ τι ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων δισχυρισαίμην ἂν καὶ τοῦτο. ὥστε διὰ ταῦτα οὐχ ὁμοίως ἀγανακτῶ, ἀλλ' εὐελπίς εἰμι εἶναι τι τοῖς τετελευτηκόσι καί, ὥσπερ γε καὶ πάλαι λέγεται, πολὺ ἄμεινον τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ἢ τοῖς κακοῖς.

the point, Socrates has mentioned the afterlife six times.<sup>78</sup> He repeatedly claims that the afterlife is a sufficiently large benefit to outweigh any loss a philosopher suffers by dying.

With each objection, his interlocutors insist that unless the soul is immortal, the philosopher should fear and resent death. Cebes even threatens Socrates with the epithet of fool at the close of his Weaver Objection (85e-86e). Though Cebes grants the possibility that the same soul travels cyclically through life and death, birth and re-birth, he denies that Socrates has offered a proof against the possibility that any given soul might eventually wear itself out and go out of commission. Given the possibility that this life could be one's last life, he says:

... it is not fitting for anyone who is confident about death not to be confidently foolishly, who is not able to demonstrate that the soul is an altogether immortal and indestructible thing. If he cannot, it is necessary for a man who is about to die to fear for his soul, in case it is utterly destroyed in this current separation of the soul from the body (88b3-8).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Phd. 63b5-c7; 63e8-64a3; 67b7-c3; 67e10-68a3; 68a9-b2; 69d.

<sup>79</sup> εἰ δὲ τοῦτο οὕτως ἔχει, οὐδενὶ προσήκει θάνατον θαρροῦντι μὴ οὐκ ἀνοήτως θαρροῦν, ὅς ἂν μὴ ἔχη ἀποδείξαι ὅτι ἔστι ψυχὴ παντάπασιν ἀθάνατόν τε καὶ ἀνώλεθρον· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἀνάγκην εἶναι ἀεὶ τὸν μέλλοντα ἀποθανεῖσθαι δεδιέναι ὑπὲρ τῆς αὐτοῦ ψυχῆς μὴ ἐν τῇ νῦν τοῦ σώματος διαξέυξει παντάπασιν ἀπόληται.

Before addressing Cebes' objection, Socrates restates it. Cebes, he notes, calls the philosopher who cannot prove that the soul is immortal "simple-minded and a fool"

[άνότηόν τε καὶ ἡλίθιον θάρρος θαρρήσει; 95c4].<sup>80</sup>

You say it makes no difference whether it goes into a body once or many times, as far as the fear of each of us is concerned. For it is fitting for someone to be afraid, unless he is simple-minded, who does not know or have an argument to give that it is immortal, (95d5-e1).<sup>81</sup>

Clearly, Socrates' young friends require a proof of immortality if they are to believe that death is not a harm. It is tempting to believe that Socrates, however, does not need the soul to be immortal. Perhaps Socrates only uses immortality for educative, protreptic purposes. In other words, one might believe he uses it to calm novice philosophers, but that nothing about his own attitudes towards death depends on a belief that the soul is immortal. Tempting, but false.

Absent customary worries about Socratic disingenuousness, textual evidence suggests that Socrates agrees with his interlocutors that the soul must be immortal for his attitude towards death not to be foolish. In his initial "defense," he grants that if he did

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<sup>80</sup> ἔστι δὲ δὴ τὸ κεφάλαιον ὧν ζητεῖς· ἀξιοῖς ἐπιδειχθῆναι ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν ἀνώλεθρον τε καὶ ἀθάνατον οὔσαν, εἰ φιλόσοφος ἀνήρ μελλῶν ἀποθανεῖσθαι, θαρρῶν τε καὶ ἡγούμενος ἀποθανῶν ἐκεῖ εὖ πράξειν διαφερόντως ἢ εἰ ἐν ἄλλῳ βίῳ βιοῦς ἐτελεύτα, μὴ ἀνόητόν τε καὶ ἡλίθιον θάρρος θαρρήσει.

<sup>81</sup> διαφέρειν δὲ δὴ φῆς οὐδὲν εἴτε ἅπαξ εἰς σῶμα ἔρχεται εἴτε πολλάκις, πρὸς γε τὸ ἕκαστον ἡμῶν φοβεῖσθαι· προσήκει γὰρ φοβεῖσθαι, εἰ μὴ ἀνόητος εἴη, τῷ μὴ εἰδῶτι μηδὲ ἔχοντι λόγον διδόναι ὡς ἀθάνατόν ἐστι.

not believe in the immortality of the soul, “it would be wrong not to resent death” [ἡδίκουν ἄν οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν τῷ θανάτῳ, 63b9]. Second, in the brief interlude in which everyone involved fears that Socrates’ arguments have been undone, Socrates, who has consistently admonished his friends for their grief, admits that the death of the argument would be a sufficient reason for everyone to grieve. If the argument dies, and his confidence about death proves false and foolish, Socrates vows to cut his own hair as a sign of grief (89b, cp. Od. 4: 208-9). He reiterates his agreement—he is a fool if the soul is not immortal—at 91b, in a passage that I consider in the final section the chapter.

### Is Anyone Convinced that Socrates is not a Fool?

One might wonder, then, whether Cebes and Simmias conclude the dialogue believing that Socrates has died a fool. For they are not, I argue, convinced that the soul is immortal. Simmias and Cebes face some theoretical impediments to accepting Socrates’ conclusion.

Simmias has two worries. The first lies in the nature of the question at hand, and the second is a more general concern about the philosophical enterprise altogether. Simmias expresses an extreme pessimism about the possibility of proving the soul’s immortality and other questions of a metaphysical nature. To have clear, or manifest, knowledge about questions like the nature of the soul is “impossible or most difficult in this present life” [τὸ μὲν σαφὲς εἰδέναι ἐν τῷ νῦν βίῳ ἢ ἀδύνατον εἶναι ἢ παγχάλεπόν, 85c3-4; cp. 88c6-7]. Even though the odds are stacked against finding the answer, though, Simmias thinks the question is sufficiently important that one should nevertheless

endeavor to advance and refute arguments about immortality. The extreme likelihood of failure should not be a deterrent, and one should not give up. He says,

One should, concerning these matters, accomplish one of these things: either one can learn somehow or discover, or if these things are impossible, one can, taking up the best and most irrefutable of human arguments, sail through life supporting oneself upon it as if taking risks on a raft, unless one is able travel more safely, taking fewer risks upon a sturdier vehicle of some divine doctrine (85c7-d4).<sup>82</sup>

Simmiias, then, thinks one should seek out the best arguments, though those arguments will generally fail to prove anything conclusively. It seems that the best of these arguments, the one “safer” [ἀσφαλέστερον] than the others, might manage to prove sufficient for getting one through life’s “risks.”

Socrates’ reply to his objection does not fully assuage these worries, as Simmiias holds to his skepticism and remains troubled. When Cebes offers Simmiias a chance to discuss any final worries or objects, Simmiias replies:

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<sup>82</sup> δεῖν γὰρ περὶ αὐτὰ ἔν γέ τι τούτων διαπράξασθαι, ἢ μαθεῖν ὅπῃ ἔχει ἢ εὐρεῖν ἢ, εἰ ταῦτα ἀδύνατον, τὸν γοῦν βέλτιστον τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λόγων λαβόντα καὶ δυσεξελεγκτότατον, ἐπὶ τούτου ὀχοῦμενον ὥσπερ ἐπὶ σχεδίας κινδυνεύοντα διαπλευσαι τὸν βίον, εἰ μὴ τις δύναιτο ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ ἀκινδυνότερον ἐπὶ βεβαιότερου ὀχήματος, λόγου θείου τινός, διαπορευθῆναι.

There is a manuscript debate that affects whether the divine doctrine is a disjunct or an appositive. Thus, the divine doctrine *is* the sturdier vehicle, or the vehicle could be another argument instead. If it is appositive, and Socrates claims it is the safest thing he can offer, one might argue that Socrates considers the Forms a “divine doctrine.”

But I myself do not have further grounds for doubt after what was just being said. However, because of the importance of the things about which these discourses are, and my contempt for human weakness, I am forced yet to have [ἔχειν παρ' ἑμαυτῷ] doubts within myself about the things which have been said (107a8-b3).<sup>83</sup>

The difficulty, then, lies not only in the epistemic hurdles that arise from the question itself, but also in the tendency of humans to offer and believe weak or even false arguments.

What of Cebes, though? Simmias has already warned Socrates that Cebes resists accepting arguments more than anyone else he knows (77a). During the course of Socrates' final argument, Cebes twice suggests that he remains unconvinced, and perhaps even evidences some frustration. Simmias, remember, abandons his conception of the soul as a harmony because it is inconsistent with his acceptance of the Doctrine of Recollection. Socrates' reply to Cebes' objection also relies on a basic starting premise—the Doctrine of the Forms. Cebes, though, does not express Simmias' eagerness to accept the fundamental premise of the argument. He does not openly deny the existence of the Forms, but when Socrates makes it clear that the argument depends on his acceptance of their existence, Cebes responds: “Take it that I grant you this, and

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<sup>83</sup> Ἀλλὰ μὴν, ἣ δ' ὅς ὁ Σιμμίας, οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἔχω ἔτι ὄπη ἀπιστῶ ἔκ γε τῶν λεγομένων· ὑπὸ μέντοι τοῦ μεγέθους περὶ ὧν οἱ λόγοι εἰσὶν, καὶ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀσθένειαν ἀτιμάζων, ἀναγκάζομαι ἀπιστίαν ἔτι ἔχειν παρ' ἑμαυτῷ περὶ τῶν εἰρημένων.



hasten to your conclusion” (100c1).<sup>84</sup> Granted, the group is under time constraints, and Cebes may simply not want to get Socrates excited.

Later, though, Cebes shows a similar discomfort. When someone interrupts Socrates and Cebes with an objection, Socrates responds briefly, then asks Cebes whether the objection “troubles” him. Cebes replies that the objection has not troubled him, but then adds that “I do not say, though, that many things do not trouble me” (103c5-6).<sup>85</sup> Cebes, especially given his noteworthy stubbornness, likely remains unconvinced.

The whole group’s behavior at the death of Socrates, though, provides the strongest evidence that everyone remains unconvinced. Crito asks Socrates how he wants to be buried, and Socrates recognizes that Crito would not ask such a question if he understood that Socrates’ soul was not part of his body. Socrates responds to Crito and to everyone else: “I do not persuade Crito” [Οὐ πείθω Κριτώνα, 115d]. His various attempts to persuade Crito that death is followed by an afterlife in which philosophers can expect to fare well has failed. “I seem to myself,” he says, “to be saying all these things

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<sup>84</sup> ὡς διδόντος σοι οὐκ ἂν φθάνοις περαινῶν

Following Burnet [1911: 110]. One might think that this is a pro forma response of the sort that Socrates gets all the time. The request for the premise and the response certainly make clear that the argument turns completely on Cebes admitting the premise and that Socrates thinks it must be “given” to him. Since Socrates himself has only faith in the existence and causal power of the Forms, he surely cannot expect Cebes to take it as more than a central posit. A more pro forma exchange would have gone more like this: “Don’t we say that there is a form of the Beautiful and the Equal,” with a response of, “Certainly!”

<sup>85</sup> οὔτι λέγω ὡς οὐ πολλά με ταράττει.

to him in vain, in my attempts to comfort you all and myself at the same time (115d5-6).”<sup>86</sup>

Once Socrates leaves to bathe before taking the poison, the group gives further indication that they remain unconvinced by gathering together and, Phaedo says, “questioning what had been said, and then talking about the great misfortune that had befallen us. We all felt as if we had lost a father and would be orphaned for the rest of our lives” (116a-b).<sup>87</sup> Their copious weeping as Socrates dies, which is checked only by the shame Socrates brings down upon them by calling them women, most clearly indicates that, regardless of whether they are convinced, their emotions do not conform to the conclusion for which Socrates has argued.

Simmiias, then, doubts his current agreement with the conclusion, and Cebes never fully assents to the crucial premise in which Socrates expresses faith and upon which the last argument depends. The rest of the company grieves excessively, even if they claim to be persuaded. Does this mean that they must believe Socrates to be a fool? No, for two reasons. First, though they are not convinced, they also cannot prove he is wrong. At worst, they are at a standstill or an impasse. Simmiias may even suspect that he has just encountered the “most irrefutable of human theories,” or the “safest raft.” He may think that Socrates’ Forms serve as a divine doctrine that is even better than an irrefutable theory (85c-d). Even though Simmiias and Cebes are far short of certain, then, they lack

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<sup>86</sup> ταῦτά μοι δοκῶ αὐτῷ ἄλλως λέγειν, παραμυθούμενος ἅμα μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἅμα δ’ ἐμαυτόν.

<sup>87</sup> διαλεγόμενοι περὶ τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ ἀνασκοποῦντες, τότε δ’ αὖ περὶ τῆς συμφορᾶς διεξιόντες ὄση ἡμῖν γεγονυῖα εἶη, ἀτεχνῶς ἠγοούμενοι ὥσπερ πατρὸς στερηθέντες διάξειν ὄρφανοὶ τὸν ἔπειτα βίον.

grounds for rejecting the starting posits of the arguments. Second, though they are not convinced, they *want* to be convinced. They want to believe the soul is immortal, not simply because they do not want their friend to be a fool, but also because they themselves do not want to fear death. Thus, they agree to continue working through the arguments, presumably with some hope of determining that Socrates is right, or, for those who already think he is right, with the hope of conforming their emotions to their judgment.

At some points in the dialogue, though, Socrates does not seem particularly concerned with whether they are convinced that the soul is immortal. In a somewhat bizarre passage before he begins his final replies, he claims that his true purpose is to hold to his own belief that the soul is immortal. Securing his interlocutors' agreement would be merely a welcome side effect. He says:

I will not be eager that what I say seem to be true to those present, unless incidentally, but I will be eager that it seem very much so to me myself. (91a).<sup>88</sup>

This short passage raises two questions. First, one might wonder quite simply whether Socrates persuades himself. Second, one might also wonder whether would Socrates would be “eager” to believe that the soul is immortal regardless of whether he is able to establish that it is immortal. In other words, does he recognize prudential benefits to believing something that he admits could be false? I set aside this question of the prudential benefits of dubious beliefs until the close of the chapter.

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<sup>88</sup> οὐ γὰρ ὅπως τοῖς παροῦσιν ἃ ἐγὼ λέγω δόξει ἀληθῆ εἶναι προθυμήσομαι, εἰ μὴ εἴη πάρεργον, ἀλλ' ὅπως αὐτῷ ἐμοὶ ὅτι μάλιστα δόξει οὕτως ἔχειν.

To what extent, then, is Socrates himself convinced that the soul is immortal? He may not insist on Cebes and Simmias' whole-hearted affirmation because he has his own limited doubts. In fact, he repeatedly hedges his bets. Apart from the Phaedo's recurrent theme that wisdom is unattainable in this life, there are other clues that Socrates' confidence is tempered.

First, when Simmias admits to having doubts, Socrates encourages him to reexamine the starting premises. If he continues to puzzle them through, Socrates says, he will "follow the argument as far it is possible for a human to follow it, and if the conclusion is clear, [he] will look no further" (107b7-8).<sup>89</sup> A claim that there is only so far a person can follow the argument squares with Socrates' constant claim that there are significant limits on one's ability to gain knowledge while embodied. It also shows that he recognizes that the starting premises upon which his argument depends are premises in which one can only believe, but which one cannot prove.

One of these hypotheses, obviously, is the existence of the Forms, and Socrates recognizes that his belief in the Forms is not amenable to proof. It is, rather, the "safest" answer [ἀσφαλέστατον, 100d8; ἀσφαλὲς 100e1], to which he "simply, naïvely, and perhaps foolishly" holds fast.<sup>90</sup> At the close of the Cyclical Argument, Socrates tells Simmias that if the Forms do not exist, "then this argument is in vain" [ἄλλως ἂν ὁ λόγος οὗτος εἰρημένος εἴη, 76e4-5]. Since both the Cyclical Argument and the final argument

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<sup>89</sup> ἀκολουθήσετε τῷ λόγῳ, καθ' ὅσον δυνατὸν μάλιστα ἄνθρωπῳ ἐπακολουθήσαι

<sup>90</sup> ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀτέχνως καὶ ἴσως εὐήθως ἔχω παρ' ἑμαυτῷ [cp. ἔχειν παρ' ἑμαυτῷ, 107a]

for immortality depend upon his posit that Forms exist and are causes, he admits that his arguments depend upon a firm belief that is no better than “very safe.” He may, he admits, be naïve and foolish.

Second, if Socrates, unlike Simmias, has reached the very limit to which the argument can take him, that distance is not sufficient to give him more than “hope.” His epistemic confidence about the immortality of the soul has not appreciated since he first claimed to have “good hope” that his death will usher in a new afterlife. The discussion, then, has in no way thwarted his hope, but it also has not increased it. He has managed to hold his epistemic confidence steady, but his starting premises are no more established than when he began.

Socrates, then, believes his fundamental starting premises, but he recognizes he cannot offer a proof for them. His confidence allows for the possibility that he is wrong, and he cannot fully convince himself or others that he is not dying a fool.

However, the most complex indication that Socrates has some residual worries is that he twice discusses the importance of charming or incanting away one’s fear of death [ἐπάδειν ἀντῶ, 77e9; 114d7]. These two discussions of charms, I argue, have less to do with Socrates’ arguments for immortality, though, than with Socrates’ third and final strategy for keeping one’s fear of death in check—the telling of myths.

### The Charms and What They Do

In the previous sections, I have argued that Socrates employs two strategies to control the fear that arises at the prospect of death. First, he believes living ascetically

lessens one's fear of death, makes it easier to live virtuously, and enables one to practice philosophy "in the right way" (69d). However, he also grants that a philosopher must have reason to believe that the soul is immortal if she is not to resent losing her valuable philosophical life. Socrates, I contend, clearly believes he has the best arguments he can make for immortality, even if they depend on fundamental premises that cannot be proven. So, if Socrates has reasonable confidence that the soul is immortal, and he lives as ascetically as possible, are these two strategies sufficient to make him die with the least fear possible?

Perhaps. The text leaves the question slightly open, I think, but in what follows, I offer some reason to think that Socrates needs one more strategy—the telling of myths.<sup>91</sup> Though some may resist my argument that Socrates needs the myths to calm his own fear, I insist that Cebes, Simmias, and Socrates' other young friends *must* have the myths. The myths, I argue, are meant to tame the recalcitrant fears that asceticism and the prospect of immortality are unable to control. Since no one can ever be fully ascetic, and no one can be certain that the soul is immortal, there remains a bit of residual fear, both of the soul and of the body. The myths, I argue, contribute a final weapon to the arsenal with which the philosopher wages war against her fear of death. Since I argue that

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<sup>91</sup> The exhaustive text about Plato's myth of late has been Brisson [1998]. The much older canonical text is Stewart [1905]. For a short and excellent summary of Plato's distinction (or lack thereof) between muthos and logos, I recommend Edmonds [2004: 161-171]. Edmonds argues that the final myth in the Phaedo illustrates the journey to discover the Forms in a three-stage process. Also of interest is Betegh [2009], who, like Edmonds, defends an account of the narrative arc of Platonic myth; Betegh, though, focuses on Socrates' comments about Aesop at the beginning of the Phaedo (61a-d). A collection of articles about Plato's myth has just been released, edited by Partenie [2009]. I have no doubt that it contains interesting work that I have not yet examined.

Socrates' audience will likely fail to be ascetics and have greater doubt about immortality than Socrates, the myths will far more integral to their psychology than to Socrates'. I contend, but do not insist, that the myths play a role, though a much less integral role, in taming Socrates' resistant fears.

Much of my argument about the purpose of the myths depends upon an interpretation of the myths as "charms." The content and role of the 'charms,' however, is a bit contentious, and there is actually very little discussion of them in the literature, despite the growing literature on the myths themselves. I structure my discussion around two questions. First, are the 'charms' the myths, the arguments for immortality, or both? Second, do the charms target the body, the soul, or both?

Socrates first mentions charms after he combines the Cyclical Argument (69e-72d) and the Argument from Recollection (72e-77d) in order to conclude that the each soul must have existed before it was born, must exist after it dies, and must never cease to exist. Cebes, however, who Simmias claims is "most difficult of humans with respect to distrusting arguments" [καρτερώτατος ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶν πρὸς τὸ ἀπιστεῖν τοῖς λόγοις; 77a8-9], has further worries about the soul's existence after death. Before Socrates replies by launching into a discussion of the nature of the soul, though, he jokes that they seem to have a "childish fear" [δεδιέναι τὸ τῶν παιδῶν] that the wind would scatter and carry away their soul. If one had a soul of that sort, it would be especially dangerous to die in a high wind. Acknowledging Socrates' joke at his expense, Cebes laughs, and replies:

Socrates, try to persuade us otherwise, as if we were afraid.

Or not as if we were afraid, but perhaps there is even in us

some child who fears such things. Try to persuade him not to fear death, as if it were a bogey (77e4-8).<sup>92</sup>

Cebes offers Socrates two candidate fears in this passage, the adult Cebes' fear, and the fear of the child in Cebes, who fears death as if it were a "bogey". Before returning to the arguments for immortality, which Socrates directs at the adult in Cebes, he offers a bit of advice for dealing with Cebes' inner child: "You should sing a charm over him each day until you have charmed it away [ἐπάδειν αὐτῷ ἐκάστης ἡμέρας ἕως ἂν ἐξεπάσητε, 77e9-10]." Cebes responds that Socrates is the best charmer alive, and he worries that his frightened child will become unruly once Socrates is not around to play charmer. Socrates, however, encourages Cebes to search for a surrogate, perhaps even among his peers.<sup>93</sup> After Cebes promises to seek out a new Socrates, everyone returns to conversation at a level at which the child cannot participate. They resume the "argument where [they] left it."

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<sup>92</sup> Καὶ ὁ Κέβης ἐπιγέλασας, Ὡς δεδιότων, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, πειρῶ ἀναπειθῆναι· μᾶλλον δὲ μὴ ὡς ἡμῶν δεδιότων, ἀλλ' ἴσως ἐνι τις καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν παῖς ὅστις τὰ τοιαῦτα φοβεῖται. τοῦτον οὖν πειρῶ μεταπειθῆναι μὴ δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον ὥσπερ τὰ μορμολύκεια.

For another instance of "persuasion" through myth, see R. 3: 414d. The NeoPlatonists make good use of this passage and the idea of "child in us." However, I need to be convinced that the NeoPlatonists were much more privileged interpreters than the rest of us in order to treat their word with greater than average authority.

<sup>93</sup> White [1989] notes that it is bit strange that Socrates would encourage them to pay to do philosophy, especially since Socrates in other dialogues refuses to take money for his services and suggests that those who do charge money are swindlers. I cannot help but wonder whether this is subtle advertising for the school of one of their philosophical peers who was not present that day.



The second mention of charms follows the closing myth, and it complicates the picture. In particular, Socrates seems to admit that he needs to be charmed as well. He acknowledges that he cannot possibly “insist” [δισχυρίσασθαι, 114d1, δισχυρίζομαι, 100d7; cp. *Men.* 86b-c] that his myth is correct in detail, but he thinks it right in spirit. He embraces his account of the afterlife, then, saying that “the soul appears to be immortal, and one should incant these things to oneself, which is why I am just now prolonging the myth” (114d6-8).<sup>94</sup> Socrates again claims that the “charm” should be repeated over and over, presumably daily, as he recommended to Cebes. In short, it wears off. For Socrates, then, all or part of the discussion has been part of an incantation for himself.

This, at least, is a very straightforward reading, even if it commits the reader to a Socrates who needs to tell himself stories before he dies—twice, even, in one afternoon. Those tempted to resist a myth reliant Socrates, though, have a few options.

First, one might claim that the “charms” are only the arguments for immortality, so that what Socrates encourages is the repetition of arguments without the involvement of myths. Socrates does not need myths; arguments suffice. This seems to be Hackforth’s position in a note on the first charm passage:

Socrates is an ‘expert charmer’ in the eyes of Cebes not merely because he can produce ‘good arguments’ (καλοὶ λόγοι) with which Zalmoxis is said in the *Charmides* (157a) to have identified his ἑπαφθαί, but also because by

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<sup>94</sup> ἐπεὶπερ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὔσα, τοῦτο καὶ πρέπει μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεῦσαι οἰομένῳ οὕτως ἔχειν—καλὸς γὰρ ὁ κίνδυνος—καὶ χρὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὥσπερ ἐπάδειν ἑαυτῷ, διὸ δὴ ἔγωγε καὶ πάλαι μηκύνω τὸν μῦθον.

his courage and serenity he has plainly shown himself  
devoid of the ‘childish’ fear which lurks in his friends  
(79n1).

I have already offered number of reasons to think that Socrates cannot be “devoid” of fear unless he is divine. Given that he has a body, any case for his divinity would encounter at least one hurdle. In addition, since I have argued that he cannot prove that the soul is immortal, he recognizes that he cannot be fully justified in fearlessness. For these reasons, I argue that Socrates needs the charms. However, if the charms are not myths, but arguments, I doubt anyone would seriously object to the idea that Socrates needs arguments to quell his fear of death to whatever extent that it can be quelled.

Hackforth’s claim that the ‘charms’ are arguments, though, encounters difficulties. First, he depends heavily on the Charmides, reading *καλοὶ λόγοι* at 157a as “good arguments” instead of, for instance, “beautiful words.” I do not intend to delve into the role of the “charms” in the *Charmides*. However, it should be noted that Hackforth refers to only this one additional dialogue, and perusing the role of charms in dialogues outside the Phaedo offers a wealth of evidence that charms are often songs and stories that contain truths.<sup>95</sup> I think concluding that the charms are arguments by appeal

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<sup>95</sup> In addition to the Charmides passage, “charms” show up in a few other dialogues. In the Laws, everyone is required to sing daily in choruses, and they sing charms they learned as children to the city’s children (Lg. 2: 664b). Perhaps most interestingly, the Athenian claims that the charms must be constantly varied so that no one gets bored with them (Lg. 2: 665c), which could explain why Socrates tends to tell myths with the same upshot but different details. At 666c6, the Athenian claims that charms make old men young in order to make them less irritable. Later, he notes that the Guardians of the Laws will select only the charms that evoke the right emotions in order to charm the young people (Lg. 7: 812c). In the Republic, in a passage that I discuss in my fifth chapter,

only to the Charmides does not account for the wide variety of other instances of “charms” that suggest they can sometimes be something other than arguments.

Within the Phaedo itself, the conception of charms as arguments has its own problems. First, Socrates recommends giving the charm or incantation to oneself as one would to a child. Charming a child by arguments, though, provides the child with a number of sophisticated reasoning capabilities. Children do not understand the Forms or the Theory of Recollection. In addition, the second discussion of ‘charms’ follows immediately upon the close of the final myth. Socrates explains the prolongation of his myth “just now” [πάλαι, 114d7]. There is no mention of argument. He has been prolonging a “muthos” that he introduced as a “muthos” at 110b4. Finally, the entire discussion about whether death is a harm or benefit is launched after Socrates claims that it is appropriate for someone about to die, like himself, not only to “examine” [διασκοπεῖν, 61e1] what is said about death, but also to “tell stories” [μυθολογεῖν, 61e2] about it.<sup>96</sup>

White’s conception of the charm as *both* the arguments and the myths, then, seems not only less restricting, but makes room for some account of the myth’s presence and squares with the wealth of evidence from dialogues other than the Charmides that the charms are songs and stories that contain accepted truths. However, if myths that contain

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Socrates tells Glaucon that they should “incant” their “argument” against tragedy whenever tempted by its allure (R. 10: 607e-608b). In the Theaetetus, when Socrates compares himself to a midwife, he claims that midwives control the birthing process by using drugs and “singing incantations” (Tht. 149d).

<sup>96</sup> cf. Protagoras’ choice of a tale over an argument in the prelude to the Great Speech. He notes that tales are better for the young and more entertaining, while suggesting that the lesson of both will be the same (Ptr. 320c).

truths are a crucial part of the recommended charms, and those myths are directed at an inner child, then we are left with a Socrates that tells his own inner child a story to abate his final, residual fears.

I have no problem with the notion that Plato thinks everyone, Socrates included, has an inner child that needs to hear stories. Those who prefer a Socrates who does not need myths, though, have another available refuge. Even if one grants that myths are part of the charm, one might deny that Socrates is telling the myth for his own benefit.

Rather, he is “prolonging the myth” for the benefit of Cebes and Simmias, who remain unconvinced by the arguments and need a charm to motivate them to continue working through the arguments. Or, if he does not provide it for Cebes and Simmias, then Socrates might provide the myth for the remaining young men in the audience, for they are clearly less philosophically sophisticated than the chief interlocutors. Thus, when Socrates says that one ought to repeat these charms to oneself, he does not consider himself one of the people who ought to do so. When he claims it is appropriate for him to mythologize, he believes he should tell stories to others. In short, Socrates does not use but makes myths.

There is no principled reason, though, to think that Socrates cannot be both a myth-maker and someone who needs myths. Even the cobbler wears shoes. There remains one persistent, very principled reason to think that Socrates needs myths, though. The constant nuisance of the human body stands in the way of interpretations that isolate Socrates from strategies employed by the soul to keep the body in check. If the myths are designed to tame and control fears in the body, either fears that cannot be tamed by

asceticism at all, or fears that cannot be tamed by asceticism alone, then Socrates must use myths, as he is embodied.

The basic fact that myths are stories rather than theoretical arguments weighs in favor of thinking they are intended to quell the fears of the body. The body, like a child, does not have the capacity to handle theoretical arguments. Textual evidence, specifically Socrates' second reply to Simmias' "Harmony Objection," supports this interpretation. Recall Socrates' argument that the soul cannot be a harmony because it constantly struggles against the body's desires and fears; if the soul were a harmony, such struggle would be unnecessary. Socrates employs a stock example for illustrating this conflict between the soul and the emotions—Odysseus' labor to repress his desire to slaughter Penelope's maids on their way to sleep with the suitors. Odysseus "rebukes" his heart and saves his slaughter for later, using one of the many possible strategies for controlling the body's "desires, passions and fears." Other strategies include "punishing them rather harshly and with pains, by both exercise and medicine, sometimes more gently, sometimes promising them and other times warning them, speaking with them as one to another." The myths, one might reasonably think, fall into the class of "promises and warnings." They are part of the consolation (*παράμυθούμενος*) that Socrates offers his friends and himself (115d).

One might also think, though, that the myths target the residual fears of the soul. I have argued that Socrates and his interlocutors are not and cannot be fully convinced that the soul is immortal. They may have a nagging suspicion that its belief is foolish. In addition, they cannot be confident that, even if the soul proves immortal, that they will

get the wisdom they desire. Perhaps humans are fated never to achieve wisdom, even after they have died. By what means does Socrates recommend that these residual fears be controlled? If the arguments for immortality prove insufficient, then one might speculate that a useful option is to tell it a story in which it gets what it wants.

I have argued that the charms include myths and that the myths target residual fears of the body and soul that asceticism and argument alone cannot assuage. Socrates is as ascetic as possible, believes confidently if not certainly in the soul's immortality, and has created a myth intended to calm himself and his friends. He needs and employs three strategies, and after using them, he dies.

#### Final Point of Interest

We are left, though, with a question I tabled earlier, and I left it until the end because I cannot answer it. Namely, one must wonder whether Socrates thinks it matters whether the soul is actually immortal. If believing that the soul is immortal has prudential benefits, namely that it is instrumental to controlling a pernicious fear and to living what Socrates considers to be philosophical life, is it worth believing something that cannot be proven and telling oneself stories about it? Can these advantages outweigh the prospect of folly? Again, I cannot answer this question, but I conclude with a passage that suggests that Plato entertains the idea that life is better when one believes the soul is immortal, even if the soul is altogether mortal. These advantages are not postmortem advantages, but psychological advantages for a person still alive.

Socrates twice grants that he could very well be a fool. Remember that he acknowledges that his belief in the Forms could be wrong. He more fully entertains the possibility of his folly, though, during the interlude before he addresses the friends' final objections. Here, he considers the positive effects of having lived and died as a fool. Believing in immortality, he suggests, even if falsely, has made it possible for him to face death nobly and without grief. He says,

For I am calculating, O beloved friend, see how greedily,  
see in how contentious a spirit—if what I say happens to be  
true, to be persuaded is a fine thing; if, on the other hand,  
there is nothing for the one who has died, at least for this  
time before death, I will be less distasteful to those present  
as I am lamenting, and that foolishness of mine will not  
continue with me to the end, for that would be a bad thing,  
but in a little time it will cease to exist (91b1-7)<sup>97</sup>

So, if Socrates remains persuaded that the soul is immortal, and it is, he believes something true and beneficial. If he remains convinced that the soul is immortal, and it is not, then he at least manages to die nobly without distress, which he believes benefits everyone involved. Remaining convinced until he dies is a win-win, or, as Burnet puts it, “heads I win, tails you lose” [1911: 92].

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<sup>97</sup> λογίζομαι γάρ, ὦ φίλε ἑταῖρε—θέασαι ὡς πλεονεκτικῶς—εἰ μὲν τυγχάνει ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγω, καλῶς δὴ ἔχει τὸ πεισθῆναι· εἰ δὲ μηδὲν ἐστὶ τελευτήσαντι, ἀλλ’ οὖν τοῦτόν γε τὸν χρόνον αὐτὸν τὸν πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου ἦπτον τοῖς παροῦσιν ἀηδῆς ἔσομαι ὀδυρόμενος, ἢ δὲ ἄνοιά μοι αὕτη οὐ συνδιατελεῖ—κακὸν γὰρ ἂν ἦν—ἀλλ’ ὀλίγον ὕστερον ἀπολείται.

Socrates, then, thinks there are a few advantages to living and dying a fool. These prudential advantages may turn out to be a final tipping point in Socrates' attempts to convince his interlocutors to take the immortality of the soul seriously. In Simmias' words, believing in immortality may be the best way to get through life, born upon it "as if on a raft" (85d), as calm before death as one can expect to be.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### REPUBLIC: AUXILIARIES AND THE PROBLEM OF EARLY DEATH

Kallipolis, the ideal city of Plato's Republic, has three social classes: the philosophers, the auxiliaries, and the multifarious third class. This chapter concerns the auxiliaries, or the second class, whose special task is to serve as warriors and protectors of the city. Of the four civic virtues, the auxiliaries represent the virtue of courage (4:429a-d), and courage requires that they stand firm in the face of death.\* Their craft requires them "to fear death least" [ἧμισα τὸν θάνατον δεδιέναι, 3:386a7], primarily because they are quite likely to die on the job, often violently and young. However, auxiliaries are non-philosophers, so to whatever extent they possess virtue, it will always be volatile, since they lack wisdom and internally regulated, stable characters.<sup>98</sup> Even

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\* All citations in chapters four and five in which the dialogue is unspecified are to the Republic.

<sup>98</sup> I operate in this chapter under the assumption that the auxiliaries do not possess true, or psychic, courage, since non-philosophers cannot possess any true, or complete virtue. True courage requires two things, neither of which non-philosophers possess. First, it requires wisdom achieved through knowledge of the Forms, and only philosophers possess wisdom. Second, it requires what Irwin [1995] calls "counterfactual reliability," or moral consistency across a wide-range of circumstances (see esp. 230-234). Instead, the non-philosophers possess "political courage" (πολιτικὴν, 430c3) because they hold firm to "true belief" about what is fearful. Irwin argues that only wisdom and true virtue ensures "counterfactual reliability," so the auxiliaries will lose their "political courage" if the city crumbles. Kamtekar [1998] makes an interesting case for the possibility that the first generation of soldiers would remain courageous during the first devolution of the ideal city into an oligarchy. Again, though, Kamtekar concedes that auxiliaries never possess true courage. Commentators greatly disagree about whether complete virtue

after they, like all members of the upper two classes, have been trained and educated, their environment continues to make or break them.

In this chapter, then, I argue that the mechanisms by which auxiliaries both acquire and sustain the appropriate attitudes towards death are largely social in nature, or features of the political organization that are external to them and generally beyond their control. I contend that the most important mechanism for controlling their fear of death, somewhat surprisingly, is the prohibition against possessing private external goods like children and property. I devote the greater portion of the chapter to a defense of this claim.

I divide the argument into two sections. In the first section, I address the straightforward role that religious belief and immortality of the soul play in controlling the auxiliaries' fear of death. Piety is not listed as cardinal virtue of the city or the soul in Kallipolis, but Plato thinks that the right beliefs about the gods are a necessary component of controlling the soldier's fear of death.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, I argue that "advantageous" (380c) beliefs about the possibility of an afterlife will prove insufficient to combat many varieties of the fear of death.

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admits of degrees and whether political virtue can make one incompletely happy I do not weigh in on these questions.

<sup>99</sup> McPherran [2006] claims that the "key obstacle to understanding the place of piety in the Republic is Plato's decision in Book IV no longer to count piety as a cardinal virtue" (90). He argues that the absence of piety is not a problem at all, since it is the same thing as justice, but "aspectually differentiated" with relation to the gods, and justice has certainly not disappeared from the Republic (91). That may be true, but I cannot find much textual support for his claim.

In the second section, then, I revisit a theme from the second chapter—the link between security, external goods, and the fear of death. I argue that commentators have overlooked the important role that the strange material circumstances of the auxiliaries play in controlling their fear of death and desire to grieve. In particular, auxiliaries (as well as rulers) are prohibited from having private wives and children and are absolutely prohibited from even touching money (3: 417a). The only private external good auxiliaries receive is immortal honor, and they receive it solely on the basis of their willingness to risk death. I argue that outside of these circumstances and without these incentives, the auxiliaries' fear of death skyrockets, and their desire and capacity to act courageously diminishes accordingly.

### **PIETY, COURAGE AND THE AFTERLIFE**

In the first chapter, I argued that the success of Socrates' arguments about the fear of death in the Apology depend on some background assumptions about piety and the gods. Those same assumptions must also be at work in Socrates' representation of the afterlife in the Phaedo, since Socrates never considers the possibility of an afterlife that would be anything short of highly desirable for a philosopher. The central component of this Socratic (and Platonic)<sup>100</sup> conception of piety is that the gods are perfectly good. Every other feature of the nature of the gods is an entailment.

Absent a Socratic conception of piety, however, the gods become an unpredictable source of anxiety for humans. Consider Euthyphro, who snares himself in

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<sup>100</sup> See, for instance, in Book X of the Laws and the Theatetus (176c); also the Timaeus, in which the world is designed providentially by a divine craftsman, and Phd. 97b-98b.

a contradiction. He thinks, on the one hand, that the gods are supremely good (Eu. 6a). On the other hand, he believes a number of traditional stories about the gods in which they judge arbitrarily or commit what would be unjust and illegal acts if perpetrated by a human being (Eu. 6b-c). Even if the gods do act fairly and justly in some or most instances, their unpredictable behavior renders a person completely uncertain about whether the gods will on this particular occasion choose to act beneficently and fairly.

The prospect of an afterlife ruled by unpredictable, unjust gods does not inspire confidence. The gods might judge the dead arbitrarily or incorrectly (cf. Grg. 523a-524a). They might favor the rich and unjust, or they might simply make everyone miserable indiscriminately. The afterlife could be dark, dank, and no fun, as it seems to be in Homer. Clearly, the prospect of an unfair and miserable afterlife contributes to the fear of death. Worse, fear and worry motivate a person to pursue all available avenues for avoiding death, even if doing so requires acting cowardly and unjustly.

Given that he wants courageous soldiers, then, it should be unsurprising that Plato makes Socratic piety the belief of the realm in Kallipolis and that any undesirable representation of the afterlife is strictly prohibited. Education about the nature of the gods is, in fact, the first priority in the childhood training of the future auxiliaries and guardians. Socrates and Glaucon agree that all representations of the gods must adhere to two key rules that follow from the gods' perfect goodness: gods cannot cause harm (2: 379b), and they cannot make themselves worse by altering their nature and form (2: 380d).

Thus, the gods must not lie, and they must not alter their appearance in order to be deceptive (2: 379a-382a). They do not fight amongst themselves or laugh at one another's expense (3: 389a). In addition, the gods do not accept bribes (3:390d-e), grieve (3: 388b-d), or engage in wild sexual exploits (3: 390b-c).<sup>101</sup> Absolutely no one in the city can tell or hear a story that violates these requirements, since it would be both "impious and disadvantageous" (3: 380c).

Any portrayal of the afterlife in the ideal city that features gods must also represent it as just and fair. After Socrates opens Book III with the claim that no one "becomes courageous if he has the fear of death in him,"<sup>102</sup> the nature of the afterlife is the first matter of record, since soldiers must be told the stories that make them fear death "least" (3: 386a). Socrates asks Glaucon whether anyone "who believes Hades' domain exists and is terrible will be fearless in the face of death and choose death in battles above defeat and slavery" (3:388b4-6).<sup>103</sup> Glaucon quite reasonably agrees that they will not, so the two run through a laundry list of unacceptable portrayals of the afterlife in popular literature.

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<sup>101</sup> Plato thinks that the belief that the gods can be bribed is perhaps the greatest source of impiety. In the Laws, private sacrifices are outlawed for fear that people will use them in an attempt to bribe the gods (Lg. 10: 910a-c). Adeimantus worries that there is little reason to be just if the gods can be appeased with gifts (R. 2: 365e; cp. Lg. 10:888c). There is some debate about whether Socrates' opening discussion with Cephalus in the Republic suggests that Cephalus has been offering a private sacrifice in order to propitiate the gods in recompense for a life of injustice.

<sup>102</sup> γενέσθαι ἀνδρείον ἔχοντα ἐν αὐτῷ τοῦτο τὸ δαίμα

<sup>103</sup> τὰν Ἄιδου ἠγούμενον εἶναι τε καὶ δεινὰ εἶναι οἶει τινὰ θανάτου ἀδεῖν ἔσεσθαι καὶ ἐν ταῖς μάχαις αἰρήσεσθαι πρὸ ἥττης τε καὶ δουλείας θάνατον;

The first and most famous text to be censored is Achilles' exchange with Odysseus in Hades. Before Odysseus can finally return to Ithaca, the gods force him to visit Hades, and with much despair, he carries out the errand. In the course of his visit, he talks with many sorrowful heroes from Troy about their postmortem existence and answers their questions about the current state of the living (particularly the condition of their sons and fathers). Achilles, the greatest hero of Troy, who chose a preordained, glorious death over a long, but inglorious life, offers the darkest rumination on death. Odysseus congratulates Achilles on the fact that everyone in Hades reveres him, treating him as if he ruled the dead. He replies, though, that he would rather "slave on earth for another man—some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive—than rule down here all the breathless dead."<sup>104</sup> Not a ringing endorsement of death from the hero who most represents the courageous death. The subsequent texts censored by Glaucon and Socrates are almost all from Homer, though common terms for features of the afterlife must also be dropped from the language—for instance, "Cocytus" and "Styx" (387b).<sup>105</sup>

At first, it seems that Socrates leaves open the option that the poets could simply write that the afterlife does not exist at all. Perhaps he rules out stories which claim that

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<sup>104</sup> Od. 11: 556-558 (trans. Fagles). Cp. Ecclesiastes 9: 4, "Indeed, for any among the living there is still hope: a live dog is better off than a dead lion." (NAB).

<sup>105</sup> Oddly, Socrates uses both Styx and Cocytus in his description of the afterlife in the myth at the close of the Phaedo (113c). One gets the impression that none of Socrates' eschatological myths (in the Gorgias, Phaedo, or Republic) would be permitted in the ideal city. Perhaps the key to determining why Plato permits Socrates to be inconsistent is to be found in Socrates' throwaway remark at the close of the censorship of stories about the afterlife. He says that scary stories may be good "for other purposes" (R. 3:387c). There are a number of interesting things to say about this comment, but this is not the place.

it both “exists *and* is terrible,” so they writers could simply claim it does not exist. Socrates, though, not only prohibits negative representations, but he requires positive ones. The poets must “praise the things in Hades” (τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἐπαινεῖν, 386b10). Plato clearly thinks that soldiers need the promise of a beneficial afterlife in exchange for their courage and valor.

There are doubtless people for whom the prospect of a good afterlife is sufficient to rid them of any fear of death, and this confidence may make some soldiers rush headlong into danger and certain death. However, this strategy is insufficient to rid most people of their fear of death, either because they find themselves unable to believe there is an afterlife at all, or because they recognize the very basic fact that there are many other reasons to fear death. People fear death not only because they believe they will gain nothing by dying, but more often because they know they will lose things of value.

### **EXTERNAL GOODS AND THE FEAR OF DEATH**

The auxiliaries are ascetics, though not of their own choosing. However, I argue that this enforced asceticism is a key component of their ability to be courageous and control their fear of death. There are three interesting elements of the auxiliaries’ material culture, the second a great deal more bizarre than the others, and I address the role that each plays in controlling the fear of death. First, auxiliaries are prohibited from touching money, setting up private households, or possessing any political power. In short, they are prohibited from pursuing any external goods that are scarce and competitive. Second, they do not have any private familial relationships—their wives

and their children are shared. Third, the only private external good they are promised is honor and immortal fame if they die doing their job correctly.

### Faction and Fear

Given that the auxiliaries receive the best education Socrates and Glaucon can imagine, which is designed especially to motivate them to care for and protect their fellow citizens, it comes as a bit of a surprise when Socrates closes out their education with the claim that the possession of money will cause them to ruin the city. Their education, it seems, is insufficient to stave off the effect of money on an imperfect soul. So strong is the effect of money that soldiers, neither the ones who rule nor their auxiliaries, cannot even touch it (3: 417a2-3).

Socrates claims that if the strong but insufficiently virtuous soldiers possessed wealth and rich estates, they would have the means with which they would inevitably oppress and kill those weaker than them. Money would make them

despots and enemies instead of allies of the other citizens;  
hating and being hated, plotting and being plotted against,  
they will lead their whole lives fearing enemies at home far  
more than those abroad (3: 417b1-5).<sup>106</sup>

Private wealth brings the fear of violence and death too close to home. It makes even the best-educated non-philosophers fight amongst themselves and terrorize the weak.

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<sup>106</sup> δεσπύται δ' ἐχθροὶ ἀντὶ συμμάχων τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν γενήσονται, μισοῦντες δὲ δὴ καὶ μισοῦμενοι καὶ ἐπιβουλεύοντες καὶ ἐπιβουλεύόμενοι διάξουσι πάντα τὸν βίον, πολὺ πλείω καὶ μᾶλλον δεδιότες τοὺς ἔνδον ἢ τοὺς ἔξωθεν πολεμίους



In Book V, Socrates repeats that the possession of private property by would destroy the city. If an auxiliary were to foolishly decide he cannot be happy without private possessions, Socrates claims, “he will hasten by means of his power to make all the things in the city his own” bringing destruction not only to the city, but to himself as well [ὀρμήσει αὐτὸν διὰ δύναμιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἅπαντα τὰ ἐν τῇ πόλει οἰκειοῦσθαι, 5:466b8-c1]. In Book VIII, the first result of the devolution of the ideal city is the reintroduction of private property and households, and the guardians and auxiliaries forthwith “enslave and hold as house servants those who previously were being guarded by them as free friends and food providers” (8:547c1-3).<sup>107</sup>

Freedom from faction and fear of violence at the hands of one’s neighbor depends on those who possess weapons not possessing wealth. Why? I think Plato simply believes that money lets loose the appetitive beast in human nature. For Plato, the appetitive part of the soul wants money above all, and it wants as much money as it can get (580e-581a). Thus, in order to “overreach” what it needs, the appetitive part will drive individuals to compete with others in order to seize what they have. Other people, though, are also out to “overreach.” As I argued in the second chapter, the problem with goods like money and power is that they are always scarce and competitive. Injustice and violence naturally arise from competitions of this sort because one will inevitably cross paths with someone more committed to winning and getting more than to winning fairly. Thus, one must be willing to commit injustice or stay out of the way of the person who is

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<sup>107</sup> τοὺς δὲ πρὶν φυλαττομένους ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ὡς ἐλευθέρους φίλους τε καὶ τροφῆας, δουλωσάμενοι τότε περιοίκους τε καὶ οἰκέτας ἔχοντες

willing to commit it. Once one possesses goods, one must be willing to protect what one has from those who want it, so both parties must be prepared for violence. Anyone who refuses to engage in the competition, and who avoids external goods in order to abstain from injustice, leaves themselves especially defenseless against anyone who finds them a nuisance or obstruction. In short, once the auxiliaries are permitted to give the appetitive part what it most wants, and the objects of desire are scarce and competitive, Plato thinks the natural result is insecurity, faction, and fear of violence. This theory, of course, was also at work in the Phaedo, in which Socrates claimed that the pursuit of money to gratify the body is the cause of all wars and faction (Phd. 66c).

The quest for security against violence is in itself an attempt to control a very basic form of the fear of death. Insofar as the prohibition against touching money ensures everyone's mutual security, the complete absence of money helps control the fear of death of everyone involved. Money and competition breed insecurity, and insecurity breeds the fear of death.

#### Non-Competitive goods of Attachment

Socrates claims that the community of wives and children is the “cause of the greatest good for the city” [Τοῦ μεγίστου ἄρα ἀγαθοῦ τῆ πόλει αἰτία, 5: 464b5-6; cf. 457d]. Though he introduces the collective family early in Book IV (423e-424a), it is not until the opening of Book V that his interlocutors interrupt him and require that he justify such a seemingly absurd claim. They actually challenge two related claims: that

women can be warriors and guardians, and that the guardians' family should be communal.

The auxiliaries famously lack any children of their own. The rulers of Kallipolis devise a systematic program to keep all children communal, so that no child knows the identity of her biological parents, and no parent knows the identity of her biological child. Mates are chosen by a "rigged" lottery, so that the best matches are assured, and everyone who is not assigned a mate or is assigned a less than desirable mate considers their fate a matter of luck (5: 460a). As children are born, the infants are taken immediately from their mothers and mixed together by the nurses (5: 460c). Thus, the child-bearing members of the auxiliary class treat all of the children of a certain age as their children, and all the children, in turn, recognize many parents (5:457d; 5:461d). What, though, makes private children so problematic?

In some sense, children and women are like money, and Socrates tends to refer to women and children as "possessions" (5: 451c; 10: 603e).<sup>108</sup> Mates, under certain circumstances, can be scarce. One might think, then, that Plato makes children and wives communal property in order to rid the city of the cutthroat competition that leads to insecurity. One passage suggests he has this in mind. When Socrates sums up the advantages of the communal possession of women and children, he claims that it makes

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<sup>108</sup> Okin [1977, 349-350] explores this in her excellent article on community of wives and children in the Republic. Okin is a bit more optimistic about Plato's thoughts on equality of women than Annas [1999], and Annas is far more optimistic than others because she thinks Plato takes the passage seriously. Strauss [1964] and Bloom [1968] think the whole idea is an attempt to one-up Aristophanes' Ecclesiazusae. Burnyeat [1999], agrees that it is a reference to the Ecclesiazusae and that it is supposed to be absurd; however, he argues that the absurdity is in the service of making people take the idea seriously.

the guardians “free from faction, insofar as human beings divide into factions over the possession of money, children, and relatives” (5: 464d9-e2).<sup>109</sup>

However, there are three important differences between money and children in the Republic. First, there is the simple point that auxiliaries are permitted to have children, while they are prohibited from touching money or having any power. Second, children are natural products, and most animals are motivated to procreate, while money is artificial and not common in the animal kingdom. People tend not to horde children, as they would money, and they tend not to steal other people’s children (issues with slavery excepted). Third, and perhaps most importantly, children are dependent on their parents, parents feel responsibility for the care of their children, and children can die or be orphaned.

In other dialogues, Plato claims that most people have a natural, animal-like desire to have “their own” children (Smp. 208b5; cp. R. 1: 330c). In the Symposium, for instance, Socrates recounts the speech of Diotima, who tells him that all people desire to be immortal, and most people pursue immortality through children. Unlike immortality of the soul, this “immortality by proxy” is achieved by producing something that persists after one’s death. So, when all goes right, parents have healthy children who survive their parents. Since children represent their immortality, people have a strong personal investment in the care and protection of their children, and they tend to be partial to their

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<sup>109</sup> ὅθεν δὴ ὑπάρχει τούτοις ἀστασιάστοις εἶναι, ὅσα γε διὰ χρημάτων ἢ παιδῶν καὶ συγγενῶν κτήσιν ἄνθρωποι στασιάζουσιν;

own “offspring” [ἀποβλάστημα, 208b5].<sup>110</sup> In the Laws, the first law of Magnesia *requires* that citizens have children, since human beings are “provided by nature” with a desire to not “lie nameless in the grave.” People most readily participate in immortality by having children, and the Athenian lawgiver argues that “no one should deny himself this prize” (Lg. 4:721b7-c8).<sup>111</sup>

In the Republic, though, Plato clearly believes there is some reason auxiliaries should be forced to challenge this natural desire to have “their own” child by collectivizing children. I suggest that Plato does it for two reasons, both of which contribute to each soldier’s ability to fight fearlessly and face an early death.

First, collective children make it easier to provide for the security and protection of one’s children and parents, especially if one should die early. I argued in Chapter Two that worry about the care and upkeep of one’s family is one of the great motivations to commit injustice and avoid an early death. In the Apology, Socrates expresses disdain for people who parade their soon-to-be orphaned children before the court, appealing to the somewhat reasonable pity aroused by the fate of orphans (Ap. 34c-35b). Even though Socrates seems impervious to such concerns, the continued care and protection of one’s children seems a reasonable worry for the average member of an Athenian jury. Crito, in the dialogue bearing his name, argues that Socrates is in fact “wrong” to refuse to escape prison and his death sentence in order to take care of his family (Cri. 45d), and in the Phaedo, Crito continues to inquire about Socrates’ children (Phd. 115b). This

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<sup>110</sup> This is a very rare word; Plato only uses it here, and he is among a very small class of writers who use it at all. It seems positively biological.

<sup>111</sup> trans. Saunders, Cooper [1997] volume.

indifference to the fate of one's children is not possible for most people, and Plato surely thinks it beyond the reach of non-philosophers.

Elderly parents also need care and protection. Soldiers who risk dying early in battle may worry about their parents as well as their children, and this is yet another reason to avoid death. Homer's heroes are full of this sort of anxiety and grief. For instance, in the Odyssey, Achilles laments that his early death has left his father without the respect or protection that a son normally provides (Od. 2: 562-73). Likewise, Odysseus comes home to find his father, Laertes, neglected and grief-stricken (Od. 1:119-125; 24:274-284) and his son, Telemachus, in danger of his life. In the Iliad, Hector knows that he will die, and must come to the grips with leaving his father, wife, and son unprotected. In Plato's Hippias Major, Hippias defines "the fine" as burying one's parents and being buried by one's children (Hp. Ma. 290d-293c).

An important ramification of the communal sharing of children and parents, though, is that the death of a soldier or child renders no child an orphan and no parent childless. Given that both children and parents alike are liable to die in battle or even from sickness, having many children makes it more likely that each surviving parent or child has many remaining parents and children.

Plato shows a great deal of concern about the fate of orphans and childless parents in other dialogues, especially the Menexenus and the Laws. At the close of the Menexenus, in which Socrates offers an imaginary eulogy of Athens and its fallen soldiers, he assuages the grief of both the fathers and the sons of fallen soldiers. He encourages the fathers not to grieve excessively, since their sons have died valiantly (Mx.

247e). He also promises the warriors that the city will care for their orphans and bereft parents as they themselves would have. Those leaving behind orphans should know that “the city itself raises their children, eager that their orphanhood be as unknown to them as possible” (Mx. 249a3-4).<sup>112</sup> With respect to both the bereft fathers and orphans, Socrates claims: “for those having died she stands as son and heir, for their sons as a father, for their parents as a guardian; giving complete assistance to all for all time” (Mx. 249b7-c3).<sup>113</sup>

Likewise, in the ideal city of the Laws, where children are not collective, the highest elders take care that the orphans of fallen soldiers do not fall to a bad lot and, whenever possible, hide the very fact that they are orphans. The elders police the treatment of orphans, “believing orphans to be a great and sacred trust” (Lg. 11:927c2-3).<sup>114</sup> Though the education of orphans does not usually differ from that of other children, the Athenian lawgiver notes that with respect to “public esteem and the amount of attention the children receive, orphanhood is usually much less desirable” (11: 927e-928a).<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the elders must ensure that those who adopt orphans give the “child

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<sup>112</sup> τοὺς δὲ παῖδας συνεκτρέφει αὐτή, προθυμουμένη ὅτι μάλιστ’ ἄδηλον αὐτοῖς τὴν ὀρφανίαν γενέσθαι

<sup>113</sup> ἀτεχνῶς τῶν μὲν τελευτησάντων ἐν κληρονόμου καὶ υἱοῦ μοίρα καθεστηκυῖα, τῶν δὲ υἱῶν ἐν πατρὸς, γονέων δὲ τῶν τούτων ἐν ἐπιτρόπου, πᾶσαν πάντων παρὰ πάντα τὸν χρόνον ἐπιμέλειαν ποιουμένη.

<sup>114</sup> παρακαταθήκην εἶναι μεγίστην ἡγούμενοι καὶ ἱερωτάτην

<sup>115</sup> trans. Saunders.

who has had the misfortune of bereavement no less affection than his own children, and be just as zealously concerned for his ward's property as he is for his own" (11: 928a).<sup>116</sup>

What better way to ensure such affection and protection than to make many people the parents of many children? The philosopher-rulers of Kallipolis need not concern themselves to police the treatment of orphans and bereft parents, since there are, in some sense, no such persons. Thus, the fear that one will leave one's children without the care that can only be offered by parents disappears.

The fear that one's death will impact the continued care of one's family and that they will be pained by grief, though, concerns the way that one's death will harm others. Some people are a bit more worried about harm to themselves. First, they might fear that death will end their ability to enjoy their personal relationships and, second, that the death of others will cause them grief. In the first case, a person fears not continuing the completion of a project or seeing her children reach adulthood; in the second case, she worries that her child will die. The community of wives and children, I argue, helps with the second fear, but not the first.

Again with a standard theme: if one is particularly attached to something, one does not want to lose it. Since people tend to grow very attached to children, the death of a beloved child may be the best candidate for the highest grief. Plato, at least, seems to think this is the case. Though I discuss Plato's treatment of grief in the Republic at length in the next chapter, what matters for the moment is that Plato thinks one should be as self-sufficient as possible, avoid emotional attachment to things and people, and grieve

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<sup>116</sup> μὴ χειρότερον ἀγαπάτω τῶν αὐτοῦ τέκνων τὸν τῆς ὀρφανικῆς μετελιηφότα τύχησ



their loss and death as little as possible (3:387d1-e1; cp. Mx. 247e6-248a7). I contend that Plato also designs the community of wives and children to lessen the auxiliaries' fear of the death of their children and their grief when a child dies.

In the opening discussion of the Republic, Socrates asks Cephalus, the wealthy merchant in whose house the whole of the Republic takes place, whether he made his own money. Socrates explains his untoward curiosity by invoking a distinction between two types, or degrees of value—if one makes “one’s own” money, children or art, one cares about it far more than if one considers it of only instrumental use, not having made it oneself (3: 330b-d). Socrates claims that people who make “their own product” [ἔργον ἑαυτῶν], whether a child, a piece of art, or a fortune, are insufferable conversationalists because they “love it too much” [σφόδρα ἀγαπᾶν]. Children, money, and art, he seems to suggest, should have only instrumental value. This indicates that Plato may think one can lessen people’s emotional attachments by keeping them from having “their own” children.<sup>117</sup>

Amongst the auxiliaries, there are no private children, so no private losses. The grief is shared, and no one parent is singularly attached to any particular child. This communal, generalized sharing of joy and grief is in fact what Socrates claims to be the “greatest good for the city,” and this unity is evidenced when “to the greatest extent

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<sup>117</sup> Cephalus then argues that the best use of the money is to fight the fear of death (3: 330-d-331c). This claim raises all sort of interpretive questions that I would like to answer but cannot in this dissertation. For instance, how close does Socrates mean to draw the connection between art, children, and money? Should we think that Cephalus’ response suggests that all three could or should be used to combat the fear of death? Is this related to Diotima’s discussion of varieties of “immortality by proxy” through art, fame, and children?

possible, all the citizens alike rejoice and grieve at the same births and deaths” (5: 462b).<sup>118</sup> Since many young soldiers will die young, and children in antiquity tend to get sick and die, a collective response may turn out to be less grievous for everyone. In addition, one might think parents would benefit from having a generalized attachment in the first place, since general attachments might occasion less grief.

However, the communal family may do little to tame the fear of death occasioned by the prospect of the end of one’s own conscious enjoyment of life, pleasures, relationships, projects, etc. Plato may seem to have very little to offer on this front, which would be a shame, since this may be the fear most troubling to many people. The auxiliaries value human, external goods, and as such, death will deprive them of the things they value. They value far fewer goods than they would outside the city, but they still have attachments to their children and each other. Though the afterlife might take up the slack here for many people, since it promises the ability to continue conscious awareness in some other place, the “immortality of the soul” remains uncertain, and death still ends current pleasures. In the next section, I argue that one remaining consolation for the auxiliaries is that death compensates them with what they want most—immortal honor. They are “honor-lovers,” and a noble death brings them the highest human honor

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<sup>118</sup> Οὐκοῦν ἢ μὲν ἡδονῆς τε καὶ λύπης κοινωνία συνδεῖ, ὅταν ὅτι μάλιστα πάντες οἱ πολῖται τῶν αὐτῶν γιγνομένων τε καὶ ἀπολλυμένων παραπλησίως χαίρωσι καὶ λυπῶνται

I follow Shorey in what I think is a very straightforward translation of the participals γιγνομένων τε καὶ ἀπολλυμένων. Reeve [2004] renders them as “successes and failures,” Waterfield [1998] as “gains and losses,” and Griffith [2000] as “any particular gain or loss.” Bloom [1968] goes with the very literal ‘coming into being and perishing’ that seems to lean more towards Shorey and myself.

to which they can aspire. I conclude, however, that even immortal honor can only do so much.

### Immortal Honor

Auxiliaries want very much to be honored by the city, since the most powerful part of their soul is the spirited, or honor-loving part. Given that they are educated in the ideal city, they only want to be honored for the right things rather than for anything at all, unlike indiscriminate “honor-lovers” (5: 475a-b, 6: 485b). They want the highest honor from the city to which they can aspire. Thus, they want to be remembered and honored forever. Hero status and immortal honor are persistent themes in Greek epic poetry and myth, and the instances and variations are too numerous to recount.<sup>119</sup> However, it often goes unnoted how important immortal fame is to Plato in the Republic.

Most commentators with interest in the question of fame look to the Symposium. Though Diotima notes that the easiest way to gain immortality is to have children, children live only so long—fame lives much longer. She claims that the desire for fame lies behind all acts of valor, whether Alcestis’ decision to die in place of her husband or Achilles’ revenge of Patroclus. Both Alcestis and Achilles die “believing the memory of their virtue will be immortal” [οιομένους ἀθάνατον μνήμην ἀρετῆς πέρι ἑαυτῶν ἔσεσθαι, 208d4-5]. Immortal status and fame plays a significant in other dialogues, as well. In the Menexenus, Socrates closes his imaginary eulogy to the fallen soldiers with the

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<sup>119</sup> See Vernant [1991, 50-74] for an excellent examination of Homeric conceptions of the glorious death and immortal fame.

reminder that “the dead themselves the city never fails to honor” (249b). In the Laws, in addition to having children, the first law of Magnesia mentions fame as the other way to avoid lying “nameless in the grave” (Lg. 4:721b7-c8)

Immortal honor for soldiers is all over the Republic. With respect to the auxiliaries,<sup>120</sup> Socrates claims that their honor will span the course of their lives and long past their deaths.

The victory they win is the preservation of the whole city,  
and they are crowned with support and everything else  
necessary to life—both they themselves and their children  
as well; and they get prizes from their city while they live,  
and when they die they receive a worthy burial (5:465d7-  
e2).<sup>121</sup>

Socrates claims that brave soldiers who die in battle become members of the “golden class,” [τοῦ χρυσοῦ γένους, 5:468e5-6],<sup>122</sup> and in the manner dictated by the oracle, they

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<sup>120</sup> I address the immortal honor assigned to the philosophers-rulers in the next chapter.

<sup>121</sup> νίκην τε γὰρ νικῶσι συμπάσης τῆς πόλεως σωτηρίαν, τροφή τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν ὄσων βίος δεῖται αὐτοὶ τε καὶ παῖδες ἀναδοῦνται, καὶ γέρα δέχονται παρὰ τῆς αὐτῶν πόλεως ζῶντές τε καὶ τελευτήσαντες ταφῆς ἀξίας μετέχουσιν.

<sup>122</sup> Plato alludes to Hesiod’s history of the Five Ages in Works & Days a few times in the Republic. According to Hesiod, there was once a golden race of men, who were far superior to any subsequent generation. The next generation was Silver, then came the Bronze, and finally the Iron generation. After members of the golden generation died, they began to wander the earth ensuring justice. In addition to this reference to the golden generation, Plato clearly alludes to the division in races when he creates the Myth of Metals to justify the class system of the city. For more on the role of Hesiod in Plato, see O’Connor [2007: 78-87].

are buried “how the daemonic and god-like should be buried.” [πῶς χρῆ τοὺς δαιμονίους τε καὶ θείουσ τιθέναι, 5:469a3-4]. Once buried, Socrates notes, “for the rest of time we will care for and worship at their tombs, as at those of daemons” (5:469a7-b1).<sup>123</sup> This reward falls not only to those who die in battle, but also to those who fight valiantly throughout life but die at an old age (5:469b1-3).

Immortal honor depends on the soldiers giving up a number of things: private possessions and attachments, as well as freedom to travel and do as they please (4: 419-420b). Nevertheless, Socrates thinks that the promise of immortal celebration compensates them, at least in part, for these deprivations. In light of all of these rewards, he asks Adeimantus whether the soldiers could possibly envy the life “of cobblers or any other craftsmen or of farmers,” who possess their own houses and children (5:466b1-2).<sup>124</sup> The auxiliaries, then, are promised one final reward as a prize for their willingness

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<sup>123</sup> Καὶ τὸν λοιπὸν δὴ χρόνον ὡς δαιμόνων, οὕτω θεραπεύσομέν τε καὶ προσκυνήσομεν αὐτῶν τὰς θήκας;

<sup>124</sup> Some writers, Aristotle for instance, have claimed that Plato does not make clear that the craftsmen have different material conditions than the upper classes (Pol. 2.5: 1264aff.]. It is true that Plato tells us very little about the third class, which contains craftsmen and merchants (and possibly servants), though some authors have used various methods to speculate. I find some of these avenues interesting. For instance, Reeve [1988: 176] has argued that the First City, or City of Pigs, represents the craftsmen “made as happy as it is possible for them to be.” Rachel Barney [2001: 217] also considers this possibility. Even without speculating about the First City, though, I think Plato tells us a few important things. For instance, the craftsmen have private property and private houses. When Socrates explains the conditions under which the soldiers will be housed, he explicitly differentiates them from housing “for money-makers” [στρατιωτικὰς γε, ἀλλ’ οὐ χρηματιστικὰς, 415e9]. At the close of Book III, Socrates claims that at the moment soldiers have “private land, houses, and currency, they will be householders and farmers instead of guardians” (3: 417a6-7; also 421c ff). Given that the craftsmen do not

to die—they are celebrated as heroes by their city. Given the auxiliaries' love of honor, such a promise is clearly a consolation. Immortal honor will likely prove insufficient to eliminate the auxiliaries' fear of being deprived of their conscious pleasures, but Socrates never claimed that the soldiers eliminate their fear. These strategies taken together, though, make courage easier and cowardice less tempting.

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the matter of central importance for the auxiliary psychology is controlling the fear of death. Plato recognizes that this is a difficult task, not only because the fear of death is complex and takes many forms and objects, but also because of the particular nature, desires, and limitations of the auxiliary psychology. He offers three strategies: 1) a desirable conception of the afterlife; 2) material conditions that minimize attachment to material goods and personal relationships; 3) the prospect of immortal hero status. All of these strategies, however, depend on cultural luck and political features out of the control of the auxiliaries themselves. Since the ability to act courageously depends on the city, the auxiliaries' fear of death will increase the moment that the city begins to devolve. In the next chapter, I consider whether the internal regulation of emotions that the philosopher-rulers achieve is sufficient to eliminate their fear of death and whether they also rely on features of the political environment to achieve and sustain the appropriate attitudes towards death.

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share houses, land, or money, it is unlikely, though not impossible, that they share wives and children.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REPUBLIC: LAWLESS DESIRES, GRIEF, AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

In this chapter, I argue that the philosopher, even in the ideal city, cannot eliminate her fear of death and her desire to grieve. In the Republic, then, Plato thinks that the most virtuous humans imaginable must control their attitudes towards death by vigilantly employing a set of strategies. I argue that these strategies are almost indistinguishable from those employed by non-philosophers and that the philosophers are superior only in their facility at employing them.

The argument proceeds in three stages. In the first section, I consider the extent to which the philosophers-rulers, like the auxiliaries, depend on “cultural luck.” Outside of the ideal city, their nature would almost certainly be perverted, and they would not attain virtue and the emotions appropriate to virtue. Thus, even though they have a philosophical nature, they cannot avoid fearing death outside of the ideal city.<sup>125</sup>

In the subsequent two sections, I consider the philosopher in the ideal city. First, I argue that philosopher-rulers control rather than eliminate their desire to grieve the death

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<sup>125</sup> Before anyone gets worked up, I concede at this early stage that Socrates and other divinely gifted individuals manage to become philosophers of a sort in a non-ideal city (6: 496a-e). However, I remind the reader, first, that they are rare and divine. Second, the majority of them are only philosophers because they are not physically able to be politically involved, which means they would not be suitable as philosopher-rulers. Third, as I argue below, they must work very hard to fight the unfortunate effects of their poor education, especially with respect to fear and grief. Most importantly, one should not lose sight of the fact that they cannot possess wisdom and knowledge of the Forms, while the philosopher-rulers can. Socrates never receives the right education, as should be clear from the outline of philosophical education in Book VII.

of others. Much of my argument depends on an interpretation of Plato's conception of "lawless desires," which I contend are natural to all humans and must be controlled rather than eliminated.<sup>126</sup> I focus on three passages. The first is Socrates' introduction of "lawless desires" at the opening of Book IX. The second is the illustrative image of the tripartite soul as three beings: a small man, a lion, and a many-headed beast (9: 588b-590c). I use these two passages to set up my discussion of the third passage, in which Plato suggests that desire to grieve the death of people to whom one is emotionally attached is a "lawless desire." Thus, I argue that it is natural and must be controlled.

Some will object to my conception of a natural and lawless desire, though, since there are at least two other ways that a desire might be natural to humans. Natural desires may be present in everyone but eliminable for a select few; or they may be natural to humans but only under non-ideal political and educational circumstances. With significant "cultural luck," they may never arise.<sup>127</sup> While I note that one piece of textual evidence leaves open the possibility that a few of the most "savage" of the lawless desires can be eliminated by a few people, I argue that the images and argument Socrates offers about the desire to grieve make it clear that it always arises and must be constantly controlled.

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<sup>126</sup> These should not be mistaken for natural and necessary desires like the desire for food and drink, which also cannot be eliminated. Since Plato's "lawless desires" include the desire to sleep with one's mother and murder, it would be a difficult case to make that such desires are necessary. I know the argumentative nature of philosophers, so I want to emphasize that that case would be "difficult."

<sup>127</sup> These two additional conceptions of "lawless desires" are borrowed from Deslauriers [2001], further discussed below.



In the final section, I consider whether the philosophers need strategies to control the fear of their own fear death in addition to their desire to grieve the death of others. I argue that they, like the auxiliaries, control their fear of death by hoping to be immortal, and they desire immortal honor from the city in which they rule.

Since my argument significantly narrows the gap between philosophers and non-philosophers, I conclude by considering the important way that philosophers are superior. Though some readers may consider my account of the philosopher's emotions unhappily deflationary, I suggest that a philosopher who cannot eliminate her fear and grief presents a preferable conception of the philosopher's psychology.

#### **PHILOSOPHERS AND CULTURAL LUCK**

All things considered, the philosophers of Kallipolis have a lot in common with the citizens they rule. Before they receive the mathematical, practical, and dialectical education that makes them philosophers and rulers, they do not possess any singular education. They are products of the same religious education, and they are culled from a warrior class that has received the physical education that makes them highly qualified to fight and die on the battlefield. Like everyone in the city, then, they are educated to believe that the gods are good, do not deceive, and do not cause evil;<sup>128</sup> like the soldiers

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<sup>128</sup> This is not the place for a protracted defense of this claim, but I think that all citizens, even the third class, must receive the religious education, though not the physical education suitable for war. Commentators on both sides of the debate have text to support their position. Given that there is so little text on the third class, Plato's apparent vacillation is annoying. I side in spirit, if not in detail with Vlastos [1973, 137-8] and Cornford [1941] over Hourani [1949] and Reeve [1999, 186-91 and n. 7 and 8].

they rule, they are excellent warriors. They do not possess any private property, and they do not know the identity of their children.<sup>129</sup>

Socrates makes it clear that the philosopher-rulers, like the auxiliaries, rely of “cultural luck.”<sup>130</sup> Without the city, their nature would almost certainly be warped. Their virtue, then, depends on a crucial external good—an education in the right political environment.

Socrates expresses this dependence most forcefully in his defense of the claim that the ideal city can only come into existence when philosophers rule (5: 473c-d). Glaucon warns Socrates that most people will think him a fool. One cannot quite fault the citizenry, Adeimantus suggests, for thinking the suggestion ridiculous. Their basic powers of observation make it clear that philosophers would make poor rulers—philosophers are at worst hacks, and at best useless to the city (5: 487b-d). Socrates,

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<sup>129</sup> The sages of some ancient schools intentionally avoid having children. The Epicureans prefer not to have children, though they will raise the children of others if necessary and might even have children themselves in dire circumstances (see Brown [2009]). Democritus, the famous atomist, was exceptionally blunt: “I observe in the acquisition of children many great risks and many griefs, whereas a harvest is rare, and even when it exists, it is thin and poor.” (DK 68 B276, trans. Freeman [1983]). He thought that if one insists on raising a child, one should take one’s pick from the children of a friend in order to make sure one gets a child one likes (B277). The Stoic sage indifferently prefers to have children. The philosopher of Kallipolis, though, must have children, if only for the simple reason that she spends a long time as a soldier and because she is, unsavory though it sounds, an ideal specimen for the city’s eugenic program. Philosophers will also never know the identity of their children, since they are too young during their prime years to be among the philosopher-rulers that fix the lottery.

<sup>130</sup> I borrow this term from Lear [1992]. For a defense of the position that becoming a virtuous philosopher does not depend on political circumstance, see Annas [1999: 72-95]. She is fighting a difficult battle on that front.

then, needs some justification for the sorry state of philosophy such that the philosophers of the ideal city would be neither hacks nor useless.

Socrates responds by shifting the blame for the sorry state of philosophy to the current state of political affairs. The city prohibits the youth with natural philosophical talent from pursuing philosophy as it should be pursued. Thus, almost everyone who pursues philosophy lacks the necessary talent, and for this reason they do it poorly, with results that range from embarrassing to vicious. These guys are the hacks. On the other hand, those few people who practice philosophy “in a way that is worthy” do so only by divine dispensation or because some physical deformity keeps their nature from being perverted by political activity (5: 496a). These guys are people like Socrates, who seem useless to everyone because their philosophizing depends on staying out of politics.

Worse, the non-ideal city not only keeps those with a philosophical nature from becoming philosophers, it corrupts and ruins them. For, though only the philosophical nature has the potential to save the city, only the philosophical nature has the potential for “great injustices and pure wickedness” (5: 492e). The philosophical skill set can be employed either for good or ill, and the non-ideal city ensures that it will be the latter.

The quick story about the perversion of philosophic talent in Classical Athens goes like this: sophists teach talented youths to pander to the needs and desires of the majority in order to gain power. Relatives, recognizing that they can use a youth’s natural talents to their own devices, encourage him to study with the sophists. The relatives and sophists flatter him until he believes himself capable of great acts of statesmanship. However, since he lacks knowledge about the city’s affairs and wisdom

about what is true and good, he fails, often with spectacularly bad results.<sup>131</sup> And, of course, he may be murdered by rivals along the way.

Those with a philosophical nature, then, have little or no hope of a good life outside the ideal city, just as the auxiliaries would be fearful, insecure, and unjust in a dangerous political climate. The fact that both the philosophers and non-philosophers depend on the city to fulfill their nature, though, does not entail that when their nature is fulfilled, the philosophers fear death to the same extent as the auxiliaries or control it by the same means. Though the non-philosophers will never be able to eliminate their fear because they value human goods and require assurances of immortal fame and hope for an afterlife, the philosophers may afford no significant value to human honors or desire an afterlife. I consider the philosopher's desire for honor and immortality in the final section. In the next section, I argue that the philosophers cannot avoid becoming emotionally attached to other people whose death they fear and grieve; the desire to grieve is "lawless" and cannot be eliminated.

### **LAWLESS DESIRES**

Socrates claims at the beginning of Book IX that the tyrant's waking life resembles everyone else's disturbed sleep. He illustrates the psychological state of the tyrant with a general claim about desires. He tells Adeimantus:

Of the unnecessary pleasures and desires, there are, it  
seems to me, some that are hostile to law and that probably

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<sup>131</sup> This narrative arc of the corruption of the youth runs through the Platonic corpus, most notably in the Gorgias, Alcibiades I, and Protagoras.

exist in everyone; but when checked by the laws and the better desires, with the help of argument, in some human beings they are entirely gotten rid of or only a few weak ones remain, while in others stronger and more numerous ones remain (9:571b4-c1).<sup>132</sup>

Socrates claims that we know that we have these desires because at night, while the “calculating, tame, and ruling part” of the soul sleeps [λογιστικὸν καὶ ἡμερὸν καὶ ἄρχον], the “bestial and wild part” runs rampant [θηριῶδες τε καὶ ἄγριον, 9: 571c4-5]. The desires of “bestial part” run the gamut, from the desire to sleep with one’s mother or kill someone to eating whatever one wants. None of these actions would be permitted by a healthy ruling part, and all these desires are successfully suppressed by the temperate person when awake.

The individual “who has a healthy and moderate relationship with himself” [ὕγιεινῶς τις ἔχη αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ σωφρόνως, 9: 571d6] suffers disruption from these desires “least” [ἥκιστα, 572a8], due to a set of nighttime rituals. Before sleeping, she eats just the right amount of food, rehearses a few arguments, and soothes the spirited part’s anger and aggression (571d-572b). Socrates abruptly ends his discussion with a take-home message: “surely some terrible, savage, and lawless form of desires is in every

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<sup>132</sup> τῶν μὴ ἀναγκαίων ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν δοκοῦσιν τινὲς μοι εἶναι παράνομοι, αἱ κινδυνεύουσι μὲν ἐγγίγνεσθαι παντί, κολαζόμεναι δὲ ὑπὸ τε τῶν νόμων καὶ τῶν βελτιόνων ἐπιθυμιῶν μετὰ λόγου ἐνίων μὲν ἀνθρώπων ἢ παντάπασιν ἀπαλλάττεσθαι ἢ ὀλίγαι λείπεσθαι καὶ ἀσθενεῖς, τῶν δὲ ἰσχυρότεραι καὶ πλείους.

person, even in those of us who seem to be ever so measured” (9: 572b4-6).<sup>133</sup>

Adeimantus agrees, and the discussion returns to the tyrant.

These “lawless desires” resurface later in Book IX, when Socrates illustrates the inner life of a virtuous person. He asks Glaucon to fashion, as would a sculptor, three beings that reside within the body of a man. The first being is a “colorful, many-headed beast” [θηρίου ποικίλου καὶ πολυκεφάλου]. Some heads of the beast are “tame” [ἡμέρων], and others are “savage” [θηρίων, 9: 588c7-9]. The second being is a lion, and the third is a small human being. While the unjust person allows the small person to be enslaved by the many-headed beast and the lion, the just person, with the aid of the lion, controls the “many-headed beast—like a gardener, nourishing and cultivating the tame heads, and hindering the growth of the savage ones” (9: 589b2-4).<sup>134</sup>

Rachel Barney [2001], in her essay “Platonism, Moral Nostalgia, and the City of Pigs,” argues that Plato believes the “lawless desires” are natural to all humans and ineliminable.<sup>135</sup> The image of the gardener, she claims, indicates that the many-headed beast is in everyone, and even the just person must constantly tend the garden of the

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<sup>133</sup> δεινόν τι καὶ ἄγριον καὶ ἄνομον ἐπιθυμιῶν εἶδος ἐκάστω ἔνεστι, καὶ πάνυ δοκοῦσιν ἡμῶν ἐνίοις μετρίοις εἶναι·

<sup>134</sup> ὥσπερ γεωργός, τὰ μὲν ἡμερὰ τρέφων καὶ τιθασεύων, τὰ δὲ ἄγρια ἀποκωλύων φύεσθαι

<sup>135</sup> Barney uses this conception of “lawless desires” to support her argument that the First City, or City of Pigs, is impossible, since it rests on a conception of human nature that does not take account of the savage desires. Since its citizens will of necessity have these desires, and since they do not have the philosophical apparatus with which they can control them, the First City could not possibly sustain itself.

appetites and lawless desires. Barney seems to think of the “lawless desires” as hearty and wily weeds that the rational part must vigilantly fight. She grants that hard work and a great education may make it possible to rid oneself of some of these desires, but she rightly notes that the image makes clear that education is insufficient to keep the weeds from growing in the first place. They arise naturally and are suppressed or starved with effort. However, she contends that even starvation and “riddance” can never be “more than a holding action.”<sup>136</sup>

Barney thinks that Plato considers the desire for wealth and gain to be the most powerful “lawless desire.” In what follows, I argue that Plato recognizes another significant lawless desire that must be controlled because it cannot be eliminated—the desire to respond to death as something “terrible” and to grieve the death of others.

#### The Lawless desire to Grieve

The problem with tragedy, Socrates claims, is that it “nurtures and waters” [10: 606d4] the part of the soul that desires “by nature to lament and grieve” [10: 606a4-5],<sup>137</sup> while it weakens the part that is “best by nature” [φύσει βέλτιστον, 606a7], which follows “law and reason” [λόγος καὶ νόμος, 10: 604a10; ὁ νόμος, 10: 604b6-7, 604b9; cf. 9: 587a, 587c].

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<sup>136</sup> Barney, 219

<sup>137</sup> τοῦ δακρῦσαι τε καὶ ἀποδύρασθαι ἰκανῶς καὶ ἀποπλησθῆναι, φύσει ὄν τοιοῦτον οἶον τούτων ἐπιθυμεῖν

Though Socrates earlier divided the soul in Book IV, in Book X he uses the desire to grieve in order to again demonstrate that the soul must have parts. Socrates invokes a “decent man” [ἐπιεικῆς]<sup>138</sup> who suffers a misfortune like the death of a child. He and Glaucon agree that under such circumstances, the “decent man” will find it “impossible” [ἀδύνατον, 10:603e8] to avoid grieving at least a little bit. However, he will also desire not to grieve. Since a soul cannot have two contrary desires about the same thing at the same time in the same part of itself, his competing desires to grieve and to not grieve entail that he has two parts (10: 604b3-4; cp. 4: 436b). One part follows “law and reason,” and the other part is “irrational” [ἀλόγιστόν, 10: 604d9].<sup>139</sup>

As the temperate person does before sleep, the decent man employs a set of strategies in order “to bear up under misfortunes most quietly” [μάλιστα ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν ἐν ταῖς συμφοραῖς, 10: 604b9-10]. He reminds himself that it is difficult to distinguish bad events from good ones, that grieving does not change matters, that human things are not important, and that grieving impedes sound reasoning and recovery (10: 604b-c).

Regardless of whether we think these strategies are helpful, Plato clearly thinks they are

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<sup>138</sup> “Decent” is by no means a term of art in Greek, though it is rare in Plato, and he uses it almost exclusively to describe the proper attitudes towards death and misfortune. [cf. ἐπιεικεῖ 1:331b1, 1: 387d5, 8: 554c12 ἐπιεικεῖς 1: 347c6, 3: 398e4, 3: 409a8, 6:489b5,8: 568a5, 10: 605c7].

<sup>139</sup> There are some puzzles that arise when one compares the division of the soul in Book X with the division of the soul in Book IV. For instance, one might wonder whether Socrates here divides the soul into two rather than three parts, and even whether this division of the soul occasioned by grief is the same as the one offered earlier in Book X with respect to the confusions of perception. See Annas for a statement of the problems [1981, 339-340], and Lorenz [2006, 59-73] for a defense of the claim that all three instances of soul division are consistent.



necessary. The bereaved father must fight back the lawless desire to grieve in order to grieve “least.”

Socrates suggests repressing the desire to grieve requires focus and energy—it is “held down by force,” [τὸ βίαια κατεχόμενον, 10:606a3] and tragic poetry makes those not properly educated “relax the guard over the mourning part” [ἀνίησιν τὴν φυλακὴν τοῦ θρηνώδους τούτου, 606a8-b1]. One must “battle with the pain and hold out against it” [τῇ λύπῃ μαχεῖσθαι τε καὶ ἀντιτείνειν, 10: 604a2].

One preemptive way to fight the desire is to completely avoid situations that encourage and “nourish” it, even if avoiding them requires a struggle. Socrates tells Glaucon that “even the best of us” [βέλτιστοι ἡμῶν, 605c10] enjoys tragic theater, which has the ring of Socrates’ claim in Book IX that lawless desires are found in “even those of us who seem to be ever so measured” (9: 572b). Nevertheless, he and Glaucon, unlike others, understand that attending tragedies weakens one’s resolve to fight grief when one suffers a real misfortune (10: 606b5-7). Thus, Socrates says that they must never attend tragedies, keeping themselves away “by force” [βίαια μὲν, ὅμως δὲ ἀπέχονται, 607e]. They should respond as though they found themselves unable to avoid loving someone they should not love—avoid the person altogether (10: 607e). In a return of the Phaedo’s “incantation,” when they encounter tragic poetry, they should respond by “incanting this argument we’re making to ourselves as a charm, taking care against falling back into this love, which is childish and belongs to the many” (10: 608a3-5).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> ἐπάδοντες ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, ὃν λέγομεν, καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐπωδὴν, εὐλαβούμενοι πάλιν ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς τὸν παιδικὸν τε καὶ τὸν τῶν πολλῶν ἔρωτα.

Thus, Plato, I argue, thinks that the desire to grieve is a standard human desire that is housed in the lower part or parts of the soul that oppose “reason and law,” and he thinks controlling the desire requires a set of strategies, including rational arguments, incantations, and situational avoidance. This evidence suggests, at the very least, that the desire to grieve is common, powerful, and irrational. It does not, however, justify the claim that it is present in everyone or that it is ineliminable.

### OBJECTION

Marguerite Deslauriers [2001] protests that “lawless desires” are not ineliminable. She might allow me the claim that the desire to grieve is natural and lawless, powerful and common. However, she would contest the idea that it arises of necessity in everyone. The desire to grieve may arise naturally in humans, but that only under non-ideal political circumstances. A person might hold, for instance, that people have a natural desire to murder when educated incorrectly, but the ideal citizens of Kallipolis would never have a desire to murder. If the desire to grieve were natural and lawless in this way, then the problem with Socrates, Glaucon, and the “decent man” is that they were educated in the wrong city. In the right city, they would not fight a desire to grieve because they would never suffer from it. However, even if the desire to grieve does arise naturally in

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This is another instance of a “charm” that seems to indicate that charms are sometimes the somewhat rote repetition of arguments. Here, the charm seems to be an argument that staves off desires. Again, though, the Laws passages [Lg. 2: 664b, 2: 665c, 2:666c6, 7:812c] suggest that charms are popular songs, and the fact that they are mostly directed at children indicates that they must be in a number of instances something other than theoretical arguments.

everyone, irrespective of political circumstances, Deslauriers might further object that it could still be eliminable. She would object to the claim that, in Barney's words, any "riddance" of lawless desires is only a "holding action."<sup>141</sup> There may be evidence that a select few people can eliminate some, if not all of their lawless desires. If a few select people can eliminate them, then surely these select people must be philosophers. I think each of these alternate conceptions of lawless desires can garner a little textual support, but I contend that there is more evidence that lawless desires cannot be eliminated, and I argue that Plato has good independent reasons to reject the alternate conceptions, at least with respect to the desire to grieve.

#### That it Might Never Arise

One of the difficulties of the Republic is that Socrates seems to move back and forth between the attitudes and pleasures of people educated in the ideal city and people educated outside of it. He does this, for instance, in the passage about grief in Book X. When Socrates argues that he and Glaucon must struggle with themselves to stay away from tragedy, he blames their intense desire for watching it on their upbringing under non-ideal political circumstances. Since they were exposed to the wrong literature in their youth, their desire came into existence and is ineliminable (10: 607e-608b). Their desire arose because of their childhood education, so it must be controlled by force.

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<sup>141</sup> Deslauriers would contest this claim because she did contest it in her comments on Barney's paper at the Boston Area Colloquium, where Barney's paper was delivered (229).

One would think, then, that this desire to grieve would never arise in the ideal city, since children would never watch tragedies and would be taught to disapprove of such displays. Thus, no one would grapple with the desire to grieve. Contemporary Athenians, Socrates included, must control by avoidance and extreme effort, but philosophers in the ideal city would be immune.

There are reasons to worry about this possibility. First, remember that tragedy does not create the grieving part—it “feeds” it. Socrates employs gardening verbs when he talks about the desire to grieve, as he did when he discussed the proper control of the many-headed beast. He claims that poetry “nurtures and waters” the desires of the grieving part, when they should be “unwatered” [τρέφει γὰρ ταῦτα ἄρδουσα, δέον αὐχμεῖν, 606d4-5]. There is something already there, then, to nourish or starve. Second, the problem with those who have not been adequately educated by their city is that they “relax their guard over the mournful part” when they hear tragedy [ἀνίησιν τὴν φυλακὴν τοῦ θρηνώδους, 606a8-b1]. The point of difference, then, might be that those who have been educated properly will never “relax their guard.” They do not need the charm, but only because their sentry is never tempted to leave the guardhouse.

A third reason to reject the possibility that the desire to grieve never arises in the ideal city is that it suggests that the philosopher has a unified soul from childhood. If the philosopher never has these sorts of desires contrary to reason, she seems no longer to have a human soul with competing impulses and multiple parts that need to be ruled, “persuaded,” and harmonized. Harmonizing a divided soul has been the aim of much of the discussion of the Republic, and, more germane, a central feature of the passage about

grieving in Book X. Since a soul without tension is a soul without parts, the philosopher who has never experienced a desire to grieve is a philosopher without a partite soul or a many-headed beast to conquer. She either no longer has a human soul, or her soul is divine and, more bizarrely, has been for the course of her life. So even the philosopher must at some point possess the desire to grieve the loss of attachments.

The fourth and final reason to reject the claim that the desire may never arise under ideal circumstances turns on the identity of the mysterious “decent man.” For the decent man of Book X, who finds it impossible not to grieve at all, is the same “decent man” of Book III, who grieves “least” (3: 387d-e). The decent man, then, is likely a creature of the ideal city or, at the very least, he is an exceptional person outside the ideal city who serves a model for the education of the guardian class in the ideal city. In both passages he grieves because he has lost a friend, a child, or some other “prized possession” (10: 603e). Since he is less attached to his children than many other people, he grieves less than other people. He does, however, grieve. The desire, then, arises even in those with an ideal city education.

#### That Some People Can Eliminate It

Even if the philosopher must at some point possess the desire to grieve, this does not entail that she cannot eliminate it. She may be better than the “decent man,” who is educated in the ideal city but unable to eliminate his desire, and who must control it using a set of strategies. The fact that Socrates and Glaucon cannot eliminate their existing desire may depend on their early education in a non-ideal city in addition to the fact that

they are not philosophers (or, at least, full philosophers).<sup>142</sup> However, the theoretical education that the philosophers receive in the ideal city may eliminate their existing desire.

Plato at one point leaves open the option that some of the more “savage” of the “lawless” desires may be “gotten rid of” by a select few people. When Socrates introduces the desires to murder others and sleep with one’s mother, he notes that they are “probably present in all of us” [αἱ κινδυνεύουσι μὲν ἐγγίγνεσθαι παντί] but he further hedges his already hedged claim by speculating that “in some human beings they are entirely gotten rid of or only a few weak ones remain” (9: 571b4-c1).<sup>143</sup> The claim that in some people they are “*entirely* gotten rid of” does suggest something stronger than Barney’s notion of a “holding action.” However, Socrates again confesses that he himself suffers from these lawless desires, when he says that lawless desires are “in everyone, even in those of *us* [ἡμῶν ἐνίοις] who seem to be entirely moderate and measured” (9: 572b4-6). Nevertheless, Socrates has often admitted that he is not the ideal philosopher, not only because he loves tragedy. So it might make sense that some ideal philosophers (better even than Socrates) could eliminate the most savage desires and skip the nightly rituals.

What, though, of the more garden-variety lawless desires, like the desire for money and grieving? Again, I argue that the idea that the philosopher’s constant vigilance over the harmony of the parts of her soul indicates that the philosopher rules

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<sup>142</sup> Cp. Lorenz [2006, 64-65]

<sup>143</sup> ἐνίων μὲν ἀνθρώπων ἢ παντάπασιν ἀπαλλάττεσθαι ἢ ὀλίγοι λείπεσθαι

these desires rather than eliminates them. At the end of Book IX, for instance, Socrates indicates that the person who wants to have a balanced soul must be constantly on guard against upsetting the harmony, which means that if she grows inattentive, her lawless desires and the “many-headed beast” will grow unruly (9: 591e). If the desires were fully eliminated, then there would be no reason to be on guard against upsetting the balance. Thus, the philosopher is not so much the person who eliminates these “lawless desires,” but the person whose can always evaluate how to best keep them from getting in her way, weed them and leave them unwatered. With grief, then, she masterfully employs the strategies that Socrates suggests in Book X whenever she encounters tragedy, and avoids external conditions that tempt her to “relax her guard.” The many-headed beast may be tame, but inattention will make it feral.

### **WHAT ABOUT FEAR?**

Most of this chapter has been about grief, though, which concerns reactions to the death of others to whom one is emotionally attached. It may seem that the philosopher’s fear of her own death has dropped out of the picture. Perhaps she requires strategies to control her lawless desire to grieve, but her fear of death is simply eliminated rather than controlled. I argue otherwise.

Recall that the decent man of Book III, in addition to grieving less than everyone, fears death least, since “he doesn’t think that death is a terrible thing for someone decent to suffer” (387d). Again, though, we cannot conclude much on the basis of the “decent man,” since the philosopher may be better than him. In the previous chapter, I argued

that the auxiliaries require a number of mechanisms to control their fear of death, and absent ideal circumstances, their strategies will fail. In the next section, I argue that the philosophers rely on a number of these mechanisms. I argue, then, that they must also control rather than eliminate their fear of death, even though their strategies consistently work inside and outside the city. I contend that like the auxiliaries, the philosophers hope their soul is immortal, and if afforded the opportunity to receive immortal honor from the city, they welcome the prospect. However, I consider a final objection—why does the philosopher’s failsafe control not count as elimination?

#### Immortality of the Soul and by Honor

In the previous chapter, I noted that Plato thinks a key reason that soldiers tend toward cowardice is their fear of the afterlife. Thus, soldiers must believe that they will gain a beneficial afterlife in exchange for their courageous death. One gets the sense that Plato thinks the belief in a beneficial afterlife is merely a useful fiction employed by the lawmaker as an instrument for creating a soldier willing to die for the city and for keeping everyone else in line for fear the gods will smite them. Some people think that Plato has this instrumental view of religion as “opium for the masses,” and they maintain that, at the very least, Plato himself could not have controlled his fear of death with a belief in the afterlife.<sup>144</sup> The philosopher should not need useful fictions. However, I

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<sup>144</sup> This view is most commonly attributed to the writings of Straussians, though I have heard it suggested by many people who do not fancy themselves Straussians. Straussian methodology turns on the idea that Plato communicates at many levels. This, in itself, is not necessarily a problem. Generally, though, they consider Plato to be a highly ironic deceiver. With respect to religion, then, they think that Plato includes religious bits in



think the text shows that the philosopher-ruler does hope for an afterlife and uses this hope to control her fear.

One passage seems to provide some support for the other position, since it suggests that the philosopher's ability to control her fear of death has nothing to do with the afterlife and everything to do with a philosophical understanding of death. When Socrates separates the philosophers from the other guardians and auxiliaries, he identifies a few features of the philosophical nature. Philosophers love learning and their love of learning and wisdom minimize their bodily desires (6: 485d). They are not "lovers of money." In addition, they will not "believe that death is something terrible" (6: 486b). Though this is the same belief ascribed to the "decent man" in Book III (3: 387d), here Socrates offers a new reason that a person with a philosophical nature will not think death terrible. He asks Glaucon:

To an understanding endowed with magnificence and the contemplation of all time and being, do you think it possible that human life seem anything great?

Impossible, he said.

Then will a man of this sort believe that death is something terrible?

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dialogues in order keep philosophy out of trouble with the non-philosophical, ignorant religious masses (Strauss [1952]). Plato actually disdains the beliefs of the masses, and this is hidden, but accessible to the truly philosophical who pay close attention to the argument (for this view in the Phaedo, see Ahrensdorf [1995]). For a response to Ahrensdorf, see Roochnik [1997]. For a critique of Straussian methodology wholesale, see Burnyeat [1985].

Least of all.<sup>145</sup> (6: 486a8-b2)

The philosopher, then, does not fear death because she understands the value of human life in the grand scheme of things. Since this perspective is attributed only to an “understanding endowed with magnificence,” we have reason to think this outlook on human affairs is peculiar to philosophers.

Thus, one might argue that the philosopher does not fear death because she alone is ascetic and assigns no value to goods of this life. The non-philosophers attach their hopes to external goods like children and honor, they fail to affect the right disdain for human affairs, and they fear the loss of the things they value at death. The philosophers, on the other hand, do not care about life, so they lack reason to fear death. This brand of fearlessness makes no use of immortality.

If my argument about grief succeeds, then we already have reason to think that the philosopher affords some value to the life of those for whom she cares, so she must think some human things are valuable. However, independent of my argument, other evidence suggests that the philosopher thinks a number of human activities and honors are valuable.

First, learning and doing philosophy is itself immensely valuable, so at least one human activity has genuine value. Second, I argue that Plato thinks that philosophers

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<sup>145</sup> Ἡ οὖν ὑπάρχει διανοία μεγαλοπρέπεια καὶ θεωρία παντὸς μὲν χρόνου, πάσης δὲ οὐσίας, οἷόν τε οἶει τούτῳ μέγα τι δοκεῖν εἶναι τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον; Ἀδύνατον, ἢ δ' ὅς.  
Οὐκοῦν καὶ θάνατον οὐ δεινὸν τι ἠγγήσεται ὁ τοιοῦτος;  
Ἦκιστά γε.

pursue some human honors and consider them genuinely valuable because such honors are consonant with wise activity.

That the philosophers receive the highest honor is clear; that they desire it may at first seem contentious. Before Socrates introduces the idea that philosophers must rule the ideal city, he grants the greatest share of “immortality by proxy” to the “true guardians.” Having weeded out and turned into auxiliaries the youths who cannot hold fast to their true beliefs when tempted or after suffering misfortune, he claims that those who can preserve their beliefs should be rulers (3: 412b-414a). Socrates claims that the most resilient must become a

ruler of the city and guardian, and he must be given honors,  
both while living and having died, and must be allotted the  
greatest prizes of burials and of other monuments. (3:  
414a1-4).<sup>146</sup>

Socrates refers back to this passage when he begins the discussion of the importance of a wisdom for the city’s rulers and the philosophical education necessary to achieve it. He reminds Glaucon of the standard by which they had earlier sorted the rulers from the ruled and of their agreement that the one chosen to rule “must be given gifts and prizes both while he is alive and after he has died (6: 503a3-7).<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> ἄρχοντα τῆς πόλεως καὶ φύλακα, καὶ τιμὰς δοτέον καὶ ζῶντι καὶ τελευτήσαντι, τάφων τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μνημείων μέγιστα γέρα λαγχάνοντα · τὸν δὲ μὴ τοιοῦτον ἀποκριτέον.

<sup>147</sup> ἐν πόνοις μὴτ’ ἐν φόβοις μὴτ’ ἐν ἄλλῃ μηδεμιᾷ μεταβολῇ φαίνεσθαι ἐκβάλλοντας, ἢ τὸν ἀδυνατοῦντα ἀποκριτέον, τὸν δὲ πανταχοῦ ἀκήρατον ἐκβαίνοντα ὥσπερ χρυσὸν ἐν

Socrates, though, recognizes that the introduction of the philosophers has further narrowed the field of candidates for ruling. Some of those earlier dubbed rulers will need to be rejected because they are not suitable for academic rigor. Now it is the philosopher-rulers who receive the greatest honors at death, both from the city and from the gods in the afterlife.

The philosopher-ruler's political honor twice coincides with her fate in the afterlife. After her lengthy education, both practical and theoretical, she finally becomes a ruler at the age of fifty (7: 540a). During the course of her service to the city, her freedom to contemplate the truth is severely limited by practical necessity. Time spent ruling takes away from time spent studying. However, once the philosopher-rulers have passed on their craft to a new generation, they are finally permitted to engage in philosophy without distraction. After they are

beyond political and military duties, at this time they ought to be let loose to graze and do nothing else, except as a spare-time occupation—those who are going to live happily and, when they have died, crown the life they have lived with a suitable lot in that other place (6: 498b8-c4).<sup>148</sup>

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πυρὶ βασανιζόμενον, στατέον ἄρχοντα καὶ γέρα δοτέον καὶ ζῶντι καὶ τελευτήσαντι καὶ ἄθλα.

<sup>148</sup> πολιτικῶν δὲ καὶ στρατειῶν ἐκτὸς γίγνηται, τότε ἤδη ἀφέτους νέμεσθαι καὶ μηδὲν ἄλλο πράττειν, ὅτι μὴ πάρεργον, τοὺς μέλλοντας εὐδαιμόνως βιώσεσθαι καὶ τελευτήσαντας τῷ βίῳ τῷ βεβιωμένῳ τὴν ἐκεῖ μοῖραν ἐπιστήσειν πρέπουσαν.

Later, Socrates claims that the “city makes public memorials and sacrifices to them as to daemons, if the Pythia is in accord; if not, as to happy and divine men” (7: 540b7-c2),<sup>149</sup> and when they die, they “go away to live on the Isles of the Blessed” (7:540b6-7).<sup>150</sup>

Again, though, the fact that the philosophers receive the greatest honor, both in this world and in the afterlife, does not entail that they actively seek or care about honor, nor does it entail that they desire an afterlife. Set aside the afterlife for the moment, though, and consider the human honors. In some instances, the philosopher’s honor depends on not actively seeking or desiring it. Since the best rulers do not want to rule, and philosophers do not want to rule, they certainly cannot pursue rule for the sake of honor (1: 347a-d; 7: 521a-b).<sup>151</sup> In addition, the philosopher will never pursue any honor that leads to disorder in her soul, so many human honors are ruled out by necessity—honor for great wealth, for instance (9: 592a).

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<sup>149</sup> μνημεῖα δ’ αὐτοῖς καὶ θυσίας τὴν πόλιν δημοσίᾳ ποιεῖν, ἐὰν καὶ ἡ Πυθία συναναίρῃ, ὡς δαιμοσιν, εἰ δὲ μὴ, ὡς εὐδαιμοσί τε καὶ θείοις.

<sup>150</sup> εἰς μακάρων νήσους ἀπιόντας οἰκεῖν

<sup>151</sup> The fact that the philosophers would choose to do something they do not want to do—namely, rule—causes a puzzle that has issued in a sizable literature. The problem is that if the philosopher realizes that the city will benefit from her rule, and that it is the right thing to do, then she should want to do what is right. However, in this instance, she cannot want what is right, since the best rulers are the rulers who do not want to rule. Either the philosopher always has a fully harmonious soul and wants to rule, or she does not always have a harmonious soul and does not want to rule. For various solutions to this puzzle, see especially Kraut [1991], Irwin [1995], and Brown [2000]. Kraut and Irwin both think that the philosopher will desire to express her inner harmony by ruling. Brown thinks that any explanation of this sort does not account for the fact that the philosophers must be compelled to rule. He argues that the philosophers must be following a legal order to rule, and they follow it because their inner harmony makes them the sort of people who follow just laws.

Other honors, though, certainly do not lead to disorder in the soul, so one might reasonably think that an array of honors remains open to the philosopher in the ideal city. In fact, some honors should be pursued. At the most basic level, those engaged in a philosophical education desire the successive honors they receive from the city when they move on to the next stage of their education (7: 537b9, 537d4, 540e1). Socrates closes out Book IX with the claim that in the ideal city, the supreme political honor will not disturb the order and balance of the philosopher's soul. Thus, in the ideal city, the philosopher will "readily share in and taste" the honor of the citizens of the ideal city (τῶν μὲν μεθέξει καὶ γεύσεται ἑκόν, 9: 591e-592a). She should pursue the honors, then, that will win her immortal recognition, but only in the city in which philosophers rule. Socrates clearly does not mean to suggest, then, that philosophers do not fear death because they think nothing in life is valuable, such that death deprives them of nothing at all.

One might object, though, that Socrates does not deny that the person with "magnificent understanding" will afford human life "some value," or even that immortal honors might be worth pursuing when it does not compromise one's virtuous character. Rather, his point is that human life has little value when compared with all time. The value of one individual life is negligible in the great expanse of time. The philosopher, then, fears death less than other people because she recognizes that her life lacks importance in the grand scheme of things. Honors may be nice, and life may be pleasant, but overall, one individual life is a drop in the bucket of the organized cosmos.

It would be interesting to explore this option and interesting to determine whether this stance offers any consolation (rather than despair) to your average person who fears death. That is a matter for another time, though, since that is not what Socrates means when he discusses the philosopher's understanding of time. I argue that Plato thinks the philosopher who has an understanding of being and time does not fear death because she understands that souls are immortal and exist continuously and forever. Just like the non-philosophers, the philosopher does not fear death because she looks forward to an afterlife. She, however, has underlying principles to prove it.

The chief evidence to support this claim is the prelude to the proof of the immortality of the soul. Before Socrates recounts the final myth, or Myth of Er, he returns the the "prizes, and gifts, and wages" (613e), which had been stripped away from the just person in order to prove to Adeimantus and Glaucon that justice is intrinsically good, independent of rewards. The returned human rewards, including the best marriages, a good reputation, and the highest offices, are negligible, however, by comparison to the greatest rewards (614a), which depend on the immortality of the soul. Glaucon gets excited. Socrates asks him:

"What that is great could come to pass in a short time? For surely the whole of time from childhood to old age would be short when compared with all time.

"It's nothing at all," he said.

"What, then? Do you think that an immortal thing ought to be serious about so short a time and not about all time?"

“I don’t think so, “ he said. “But what do you mean by this?”

“Have you not perceived, I said, that our soul is immortal and is never destroyed?” (10: 608c).<sup>152</sup>

The Republic’s argument for the immortality of the soul commences. As in the passage at 486a, the philosopher cannot be “serious” about life when thinking about all time, but only because one individual human life is simply a short time, a small drop in the bucket of that particular soul’s immortality.<sup>153</sup> So, the “magnificent understanding” does not fear death because the soul is immortal, and if the afterlife resembles the Myth of Er, then she believes that she stands to benefit a great deal.

One might, of course, object that the argument for immortality and the myth are offered in a particular context to individuals who are not philosophers, and that they

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<sup>152</sup> Τί δ’ ἄν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἐν γε ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ μέγα γένοιτο; πᾶς γὰρ οὕτως γε ὁ ἐκ παιδὸς μέχρι πρεσβύτου χρόνος πρὸς πάντα ὀλίγος πού τις ἄν εἴη.

Οὐδὲν μὲν οὖν, ἔφη.

Τί οὖν; οἶει ἀθανάτῳ πράγματι ὑπὲρ τοσοῦτου δεῖν χρόνου ἐσπουδακέναι, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὑπὲρ τοῦ παντός;

Οἶμαι ἔγωγ’, ἔφη· ἀλλὰ τί τοῦτο λέγεις;

Οὐκ ἦσθησαι, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὅτι ἀθάνατος ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ οὐδέποτε ἀπόλλυται;

<sup>153</sup> As in the Phaedo chapter, I am not interested in evaluating the strength of the arguments for immortality. The argument in the Republic has been criticized and even ridiculed, though it has been defended by Brown [1997]. He argues that the argument is formally valid, which means, of course, that anyone interested in derailing the argument must demonstrate that one of the premises is false. Brown argues that the premises themselves are not as indefensible as some have argued, and that those who deny any of the premises risk jettisoning commitments that are at the heart of the Platonic ethical project. Since many people who consider the argument a failure are not willing to abandon these tenets of Plato’s ethical project, he argues they have reason to take the argument seriously.



alone need to believe in the myth. Since Glaucon, Adeimantus, and Socrates have not been educated in the ideal city, they benefit from instrumental religious beliefs that are similar to those of the auxiliaries. The fact that Socrates discusses his own attitude towards death with his standard “good hope” (6: 496d-e) indicates that he, too, expects an afterlife just as he did in the Phaedo. Again, though, he is not the ideal philosopher.

My argument, then, requires that I lean heavily on the connection between these two passages, the first concerning a philosopher in the city and the second, possibly though not certainly, concerning a philosopher outside the ideal city. Nevertheless, I think the connection can bear some heavy weight. If Plato were to believe that the afterlife is a useful fiction, he seems to think it is useful for just about everyone, even for those with a more perfect understanding of “time and being” (6: 486a8).

Now, however, I seem to have provided a somewhat deflationary account of the philosopher’s emotions. She controls her attitudes towards death in roughly the same way as the auxiliary: she depends on the city to fulfill her nature; she must fight the desire to grieve, since she grows attached to others; she values immortal honor, and desires an afterlife.

There is one significant difference between the two classes that I am happy to acknowledge—once educated, philosophers become self-regulating and are able to sustain the tenuous stability of their soul, while the auxiliaries will never be self-regulating. So, the philosophers use the same strategies as the auxiliaries, but the philosophers are “counterfactually reliable” across situations. Attaining the right attitudes depends on the city; sustaining them does not.

A final worry might trouble some readers. If adult philosophers in the ideal city become fully virtuous, their virtue persists after regime change, and they exercise masterful control over their desires and emotions, why does this expert control not pass for elimination? After all, philosophers can stave off any pernicious effect that these emotions could have on their souls.

In some sense, I grant that it appears for all intents and purposes as elimination, since her emotions are so disempowered that they cannot alter the course of the ideal philosopher or upset the balance of her soul. Nevertheless, I contend that anything over which one must constantly rule is not eliminated. For instance, if the philosopher lost control over her rational part, perhaps through senility, madness, or some other diminishment of her rational capacities, these desires would pop right back up. A contingency of this sort, I suggest, indicates that the philosopher's perfectly executed control is nevertheless always a "holding action."

### CONCLUSION

The inherently irrational, "lawless" nature of human attitudes towards death is the thread running through both of my chapters on the Republic. These desires and attitudes arise and persist because of the creatures we are, and philosophers are human just like non-philosophers. They fight off the same urges that spring up from the fertile soil of their irrational soul. It should be unsurprising that they are better gardeners, and that wisdom makes their jobs far easier.

Plato, though, never seems to think that attachment and grief are healthy. They are always weeds, and they always threaten virtue, and if the philosopher had her way, Plato thinks she should eliminate them permanently. Whether this is the best conception of the emotional life of an “understanding endowed with magnificence” is an open question, but not, I think, merely a matter of taste. Plato comes down solidly against powerful attachments because they cause psychological pain, increase fear, increase grief, and tempt one to commit injustice. All things considered, those are pretty good reasons to avoid attachments and fight the irrational part of the soul. On the other hand, the benefit of becoming attached to other people and seeking out some protection from injustice may be worth a mildly unbalanced soul and the willingness to commit a few injustices. This dissertation is not the place to settle the matter, however.

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