

# [Explain why simmias and cebes are so afraid of death in the phaedo, whereas socra...](https://assignbuster.com/explain-why-simmias-and-cebes-are-so-afraid-of-death-in-the-phaedo-whereas-socrates-is-not-does-socrates-explanation-convince-you-or-are-you-like-simmias-a/)

The action of the dialogue in Phaedo takes place on the eve of Socrates’ death in Athens in 399 B. C. As to be expected in this scenario, the dialogue centers round the significance and nature of death. Socrates, resolute in his own conviction of the immortality of the soul, faces his impending death with, not just equanimity, but eager anticipation. On the other hand, Simmias and Cebes, lacking Socrates’ conviction, fear death. The crux of the dialogue is Socrates’ argument persuading Simmias and Cebes to accept his point of view.
To the wonder of his disciples, Socrates remains “ noble and fearless in the hour of death” (Plato, 5). Socrates unequivocally asserts that any true philosopher “ will be willing to die” (6). He is convinced that a better life awaits him. Death, as the harbinger of “ the greatest good” (8), is something the true philosopher desires and pursues. Death may be defined as “ the separation of the soul and body” (8). The philosopher is a seeker of truth and lover of wisdom, who pursues the essence of the knowledge of existence. In this pursuit, the body, with its’ lusts, sensual pleasures and physical needs, is “ only a disturbing element, hindering the soul from the acquisition of knowledge” (10). Therefore, the philosopher desires death, which will release “ the soul from the chains of the body” (11) and free the soul to attain the truth. His desire for the truth will be satisfied only by the separation of the soul from the body – that is, by death – which is the purification of the soul. Death is the philosopher’s means to gain wisdom, while the body is his “ enemy” (11). Socrates fearlessly and eagerly anticipates death and is ready “ to depart with joy” (11) from this world.
Cebes and Simmias acknowledge the truth of Socrates’ word, but continue to fear death, as they are afraid that the soul “ may be destroyed and perish” (12) when she leaves the body, “ vanishing into nothingness” after death. Socrates allays their fears by convincing them of the immortality of the soul. The accepted belief that “ the living spring from the dead” (15) presupposes the prior existence of the soul, in another world, before it assumes human form. As recollection is an essential part of knowledge, this recollection is obviously gained by the intelligent souls’ existence in another place. The rebirth of the soul is proof of the souls’ immortality, as “ everything living is born of the dead” (19). Once it is accepted that the soul is invisible, unchangeable and “ in the very likeness of the divine” (21), it follows that, unlike the body, the pure and noble soul remains indissoluble and immortal. Furthermore, as the soul is the bearer of life, she cannot admit of death, which is the opposite of life. Socrates, who, as a true philosopher, has devoted his life to “ the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom” (40) and has spurned bodily pleasure, is eager to be “ released from this earthly prison” (45). Death, for him, is not a misfortune but a cause of rejoicing and the means “ to be freed from human ills” (24).
I must confess that, like Simmias and Cebes, “ there is a child within (me) to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin” (19). Unlike Socrates, who is armed with the conviction that he has resolutely abhorred bodily pleasures and pursued neither power not wealth, but only true wisdom, I am no true philosopher! As such, being “ not devoid of natural feeling” (32), I am justified in fearing death. However, just as Socrates’ argument convinced Simmias and Cebes of the immortality of the soul and of death being but the means to the salvation of that soul, it has convinced me to endeavor to pursue “ temperance, justice, courage, nobility and truth” (45) so that, when my time comes, I too can face death with the fortitude of a philosopher and look forward to “ live in bliss --- and forever dwell --- in company with the gods” (22).
360 BC
PHAEDO
by Plato
translated by Benjamin Jowett
PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE
PHAEDO, who is the narrator of the dialogue to ECHECRATES of Phlius
SOCRATES
APOLLODORUS
SIMMIAS
CEBES
CRITO
ATTENDANT OF THE PRISON
PHAEDO
SCENE: The Prison of Socrates
PLACE OF THE NARRATION: Phlius
Echecrates. Were you yourself, Phaedo, in the prison with Socrates
on the day when he drank the poison?
Phaedo. Yes, Echecrates, I was.
Ech. I wish that you would tell me about his death. What did he
say in his last hours? We were informed that he died by taking poison,
but no one knew anything more; for no Phliasian ever goes to Athens
now, and a long time has elapsed since any Athenian found his way to
Phlius, and therefore we had no clear account.
Phaed. Did you not hear of the proceedings at the trial?
Ech. Yes; someone told us about the trial, and we could not
understand why, having been condemned, he was put to death, as
appeared, not at the time, but long afterwards. What was the reason of
this?
Phaed. An accident, Echecrates. The reason was that the stern of the
ship which the Athenians send to Delos happened to have been crowned
on the day before he was tried.
Ech. What is this ship?
Phaed. This is the ship in which, as the Athenians say, Theseus went
to Crete when he took with him the fourteen youths, and was the
saviour of them and of himself. And they were said to have vowed to
Apollo at the time, that if they were saved they would make an
annual pilgrimage to Delos. Now this custom still continues, and the
whole period of the voyage to and from Delos, beginning when the
priest of Apollo crowns the stern of the ship, is a holy season,
during which the city is not allowed to be polluted by public
executions; and often, when the vessel is detained by adverse winds,
there may be a very considerable delay. As I was saying, the ship
was crowned on the day before the trial, and this was the reason why
Socrates lay in prison and was not put to death until long after he
was condemned.
Ech. What was the manner of his death, Phaedo? What was said or
done? And which of his friends had he with him? Or were they not
allowed by the authorities to be present? And did he die alone?
Phaed. No; there were several of his friends with him.
Ech. If you have nothing to do, I wish that you would tell me what
passed, as exactly as you can.
Phaed. I have nothing to do, and will try to gratify your wish.
For to me, too, there is no greater pleasure than to have Socrates
brought to my recollection, whether I speak myself or hear another
speak of him.
Ech. You will have listeners who are of the same mind with you,
and I hope that you will be as exact as you can.
Phaed. I remember the strange feeling which came over me at being
with him. For I could hardly believe that I was present at the death
of a friend, and therefore I did not pity him, Echecrates; his mien
and his language were so noble and fearless in the hour of death
that to me he appeared blessed. I thought that in going to the other
world he could not be without a divine call, and that he would be
happy, if any man ever was, when he arrived there, and therefore I did
not pity him as might seem natural at such a time. But neither could I
feel the pleasure which I usually felt in philosophical discourse (for
philosophy was the theme of which we spoke). I was pleased, and I
was also pained, because I knew that he was soon to die, and this
strange mixture of feeling was shared by us all; we were laughing
and weeping by turns, especially the excitable Apollodorus-you know
the sort of man?
Ech. Yes.
Phaed. He was quite overcome; and I myself and all of us were
greatly moved.
Ech. Who were present?
Phaed. Of native Athenians there were, besides Apollodorus,
Critobulus and his father Crito, Hermogenes, Epigenes, Aeschines,
and Antisthenes; likewise Ctesippus of the deme of Paeania, Menexenus,
and some others; but Plato, if I am not mistaken, was ill.
Ech. Were there any strangers?
Phaed. Yes, there were; Simmias the Theban, and Cebes, and
Phaedondes; Euclid and Terpison, who came from Megara.
Ech. And was Aristippus there, and Cleombrotus?
Phaed. No, they were said to be in Aegina.
Ech. Anyone else?
Phaed. I think that these were about all.
Ech. And what was the discourse of which you spoke?
Phaed. I will begin at the beginning, and endeavor to repeat the
entire conversation. You must understand that we had been previously
in the habit of assembling early in the morning at the court in
which the trial was held, and which is not far from the prison.
There we remained talking with one another until the opening of the
prison doors (for they were not opened very early), and then went in
and generally passed the day with Socrates. On the last morning the
meeting was earlier than usual; this was owing to our having heard
on the previous evening that the sacred ship had arrived from Delos,
and therefore we agreed to meet very early at the accustomed place. On
our going to the prison, the jailer who answered the door, instead
of admitting us, came out and bade us wait and he would call us.
" For the Eleven," he said, " are now with Socrates; they are taking off
his chains, and giving orders that he is to die to-day." He soon
returned and said that we might come in. On entering we found Socrates
just released from chains, and Xanthippe, whom you know, sitting by
him, and holding his child in her arms. When she saw us she uttered
a cry and said, as women will: " O Socrates, this is the last time that
either you will converse with your friends, or they with you."
Socrates turned to Crito and said: " Crito, let someone take her home."
Some of Critos people accordingly led her away, crying out and
beating herself. And when she was gone, Socrates, sitting up on the
couch, began to bend and rub his leg, saying, as he rubbed: " How
singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to
pain, which might be thought to be the opposite of it; for they
never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is
generally compelled to take the other. They are two, and yet they grow
together out of one head or stem; and I cannot help thinking that if
Aesop had noticed them, he would have made a fable about God trying to
reconcile their strife, and when he could not, he fastened their heads
together; and this is the reason why when one comes the other follows,
as I find in my own case pleasure comes following after the pain in my
leg, which was caused by the chain."
Upon this Cebes said: I am very glad indeed, Socrates, that you
mentioned the name of Aesop. For that reminds me of a question which
has been asked by others, and was asked of me only the day before
yesterday by Evenus the poet, and as he will be sure to ask again, you
may as well tell me what I should say to him, if you would like him to
have an answer. He wanted to know why you who never before wrote a
line of poetry, now that you are in prison are putting Aesop into
verse, and also composing that hymn in honor of Apollo.
Tell him, Cebes, he replied, that I had no idea of rivalling him
or his poems; which is the truth, for I knew that I could not do that.
But I wanted to see whether I could purge away a scruple which I
felt about certain dreams. In the course of my life I have often had
intimations in dreams " that I should make music." The same dream
came to me sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another, but always
saying the same or nearly the same words: Make and cultivate music,
said the dream. And hitherto I had imagined that this was only
intended to exhort and encourage me in the study of philosophy,
which has always been the pursuit of my life, and is the noblest and
best of music. The dream was bidding me to do what I was already
doing, in the same way that the competitor in a race is bidden by
the spectators to run when he is already running. But I was not
certain of this, as the dream might have meant music in the popular
sense of the word, and being under sentence of death, and the festival
giving me a respite, I thought that I should be safer if I satisfied
the scruple, and, in obedience to the dream, composed a few verses
before I departed. And first I made a hymn in honor of the god of
the festival, and then considering that a poet, if he is really to
be a poet or maker, should not only put words together but make
stories, and as I have no invention, I took some fables of esop, which
I had ready at hand and knew, and turned them into verse. Tell
Evenus this, and bid him be of good cheer; that I would have him
come after me if he be a wise man, and not tarry; and that to-day I am
likely to be going, for the Athenians say that I must.
Simmias said: What a message for such a man! having been a
frequent companion of his, I should say that, as far as I know him, he
will never take your advice unless he is obliged.
Why, said Socrates,-is not Evenus a philosopher?
I think that he is, said Simmias.
Then he, or any man who has the spirit of philosophy, will be
willing to die, though he will not take his own life, for that is held
not to be right.
Here he changed his position, and put his legs off the couch on to
the ground, and during the rest of the conversation he remained
sitting.
Why do you say, inquired Cebes, that a man ought not to take his own
life, but that the philosopher will be ready to follow the dying?
Socrates replied: And have you, Cebes and Simmias, who are
acquainted with Philolaus, never heard him speak of this?
I never understood him, Socrates.
My words, too, are only an echo; but I am very willing to say what I
have heard: and indeed, as I am going to another place, I ought to
be thinking and talking of the nature of the pilgrimage which I am
about to make. What can I do better in the interval between this and
the setting of the sun?
Then tell me, Socrates, why is suicide held not to be right? as I
have certainly heard Philolaus affirm when he was staying with us at
Thebes: and there are others who say the same, although none of them
has ever made me understand him.
But do your best, replied Socrates, and the day may come when you
will understand. I suppose that you wonder why, as most things which
are evil may be accidentally good, this is to be the only exception
(for may not death, too, be better than life in some cases?), and why,
when a man is better dead, he is not permitted to be his own
benefactor, but must wait for the hand of another.
By Jupiter! yes, indeed, said Cebes, laughing, and speaking in his
native Doric.
I admit the appearance of inconsistency, replied Socrates, but there
may not be any real inconsistency after all in this. There is a
doctrine uttered in secret that man is a prisoner who has no right
to open the door of his prison and run away; this is a great mystery
which I do not quite understand. Yet I, too, believe that the gods are
our guardians, and that we are a possession of theirs. Do you not
agree?
Yes, I agree to that, said Cebes.
And if one of your own possessions, an ox or an ass, for example
took the liberty of putting himself out of the way when you had
given no intimation of your wish that he should die, would you not
be angry with him, and would you not punish him if you could?
Certainly, replied Cebes.
Then there may be reason in saying that a man should wait, and not
take his own life until God summons him, as he is now summoning me.
Yes, Socrates, said Cebes, there is surely reason in that. And yet
how can you reconcile this seemingly true belief that God is our
guardian and we his possessions, with that willingness to die which we
were attributing to the philosopher? That the wisest of men should
be willing to leave this service in which they are ruled by the gods
who are the best of rulers is not reasonable, for surely no wise man
thinks that when set at liberty he can take better care of himself
than the gods take of him. A fool may perhaps think this-he may
argue that he had better run away from his master, not considering
that his duty is to remain to the end, and not to run away from the
good, and that there is no sense in his running away. But the wise man
will want to be ever with him who is better than himself. Now this,
Socrates, is the reverse of what was just now said; for upon this view
the wise man should sorrow and the fool rejoice at passing out of
life.
The earnestness of Cebes seemed to please Socrates. Here, said he,
turning to us, is a man who is always inquiring, and is not to be
convinced all in a moment, nor by every argument.
And in this case, added Simmias, his objection does appear to me
to have some force. For what can be the meaning of a truly wise man
wanting to fly away and lightly leave a master who is better than
himself? And I rather imagine that Cebes is referring to you; he
thinks that you are too ready to leave us, and too ready to leave
the gods who, as you acknowledge, are our good rulers.
Yes, replied Socrates; there is reason in that. And this
indictment you think that I ought to answer as if I were in court?
That is what we should like, said Simmias.
Then I must try to make a better impression upon you than I did when
defending myself before the judges. For I am quite ready to
acknowledge, Simmias and Cebes, that I ought to be grieved at death,
if I were not persuaded that I am going to other gods who are wise and
good (of this I am as certain as I can be of anything of the sort) and
to men departed (though I am not so certain of this), who are better
than those whom I leave behind; and therefore I do not grieve as I
might have done, for I have good hope that there is yet something
remaining for the dead, and, as has been said of old, some far
better thing for the good than for the evil.
But do you mean to take away your thoughts with you, Socrates?
said Simmias. Will you not communicate them to us?-the benefit is
one in which we too may hope to share. Moreover, if you succeed in
convincing us, that will be an answer to the charge against yourself.
I will do my best, replied Socrates. But you must first let me
hear what Crito wants; he was going to say something to me.
Only this, Socrates, replied Crito: the attendant who is to give you
the poison has been telling me that you are not to talk much, and he
wants me to let you know this; for that by talking heat is
increased, and this interferes with the action of the poison; those
who excite themselves are sometimes obliged to drink the poison two or
three times.
Then, said Socrates, let him mind his business and be prepared to
give the poison two or three times, if necessary; that is all.
I was almost certain that you would say that, replied Crito; but I
was obliged to satisfy him.
Never mind him, he said.
And now I will make answer to you, O my judges, and show that he who
has lived as a true philosopher has reason to be of good cheer when he
is about to die, and that after death he may hope to receive the
greatest good in the other world. And how this may be, Simmias and
Cebes, I will endeavor to explain. For I deem that the true disciple
of philosophy is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do
not perceive that he is ever pursuing death and dying; and if this
is true, why, having had the desire of death all his life long, should
he repine at the arrival of that which he has been always pursuing and
desiring?
Simmias laughed and said: Though not in a laughing humor, I swear
that I cannot help laughing when I think what the wicked world will
say when they hear this. They will say that this is very true, and our
people at home will agree with them in saying that the life which
philosophers desire is truly death, and that they have found them
out to be deserving of the death which they desire.
And they are right, Simmias, in saying this, with the exception of
the words " They have found them out"; for they have not found out what
is the nature of this death which the true philosopher desires, or how
he deserves or desires death. But let us leave them and have a word
with ourselves: Do we believe that there is such a thing as death?
To be sure, replied Simmias.
And is this anything but the separation of soul and body? And
being dead is the attainment of this separation; when the soul
exists in herself, and is parted from the body and the body is
parted from the soul-that is death?
Exactly: that and nothing else, he replied.
And what do you say of another question, my friend, about which I
should like to have your opinion, and the answer to which will
probably throw light on our present inquiry: Do you think that the
philosopher ought to care about the pleasures-if they are to be called
pleasures-of eating and drinking?
Certainly not, answered Simmias.
And what do you say of the pleasures of love-should he care about
them?
By no means.
And will he think much of the other ways of indulging the body-for
example, the acquisition of costly raiment, or sandals, or other
adornments of the body? Instead of caring about them, does he not
rather despise anything more than nature needs? What do you say?
I should say the true philosopher would despise them.
Would you not say that he is entirely concerned with the soul and
not with the body? He would like, as far as he can, to be quit of
the body and turn to the soul.
That is true.
In matters of this sort philosophers, above all other men, may be
observed in every sort of way to dissever the soul from the body.
That is true.
Whereas, Simmias, the rest of the world are of opinion that a life
which has no bodily pleasures and no part in them is not worth having;
but that he who thinks nothing of bodily pleasures is almost as though
he were dead.
That is quite true.
What again shall we say of the actual acquirement of knowledge?-is
the body, if invited to share in the inquiry, a hinderer or a
helper? I mean to say, have sight and hearing any truth in them? Are
they not, as the poets are always telling us, inaccurate witnesses?
and yet, if even they are inaccurate and indistinct, what is to be
said of the other senses?-for you will allow that they are the best of
them?
Certainly, he replied.
Then when does the soul attain truth?-for in attempting to
consider anything in company with the body she is obviously deceived.
Yes, that is true.
Then ust nmot existence be revealed to her in thought, if at all?
Yes.
And thought is best when the mind is gathered into herself and
none of these things trouble her-neither sounds nor sights nor pain
nor any pleasure-when she has as little as possible to do with the
body, and has no bodily sense or feeling, but is aspiring after being?
That is true.
And in this the philosopher dishonors the body; his soul runs away
from the body and desires to be alone and by herself?
That is true.
Well, but there is another thing, Simmias: Is there or is there
not an absolute justice?
Assuredly there is.
And an absolute beauty and absolute good?
Of course.
But did you ever behold any of them with your eyes?
Certainly not.
Or did you ever reach them with any other bodily sense? (and I speak
not of these alone, but of absolute greatness, and health, and
strength, and of the essence or true nature of everything). Has the
reality of them ever been perceived by you through the bodily
organs? or rather, is not the nearest approach to the knowledge of
their several natures made by him who so orders his intellectual
vision as to have the most exact conception of the essence of that
which he considers?
Certainly.
And he attains to the knowledge of them in their highest purity
who goes to each of them with the mind alone, not allowing when in the
act of thought the intrusion or introduction of sight or any other
sense in the company of reason, but with the very light of the mind in
her clearness penetrates into the very fight of truth in each; he
has got rid, as far as he can, of eyes and ears and of the whole body,
which he conceives of only as a disturbing element, hindering the soul
from the acquisition of knowledge when in company with her-is not this
the sort of man who, if ever man did, is likely to attain the
knowledge of existence?
There is admirable truth in that, Socrates, replied Simmias.
And when they consider all this, must not true philosophers make a
reflection, of which they will speak to one another in such words as
these: We have found, they will say, a path of speculation which seems
to bring us and the argument to the conclusion that while we are in
the body, and while the soul is mingled with this mass of evil, our
desire will not be satisfied, and our desire is of the truth. For
the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere
requirement of food; and also is liable to diseases which overtake and
impede us in the search after truth: and by filling us so full of
loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies, and idols, and every sort of
folly, prevents our ever having, as people say, so much as a
thought. For whence come wars, and fightings, and factions? whence but
from the body and the lusts of the body? For wars are occasioned by
the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in
the service of the body; and in consequence of all these things the
time which ought to be given to philosophy is lost. Moreover, if there
is time and an inclination toward philosophy, yet the body
introduces a turmoil and confusion and fear into the course of
speculation, and hinders us from seeing the truth: and all
experience shows that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we
must be quit of the body, and the soul in herself must behold all
things in themselves: then I suppose that we shall attain that which
we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers, and that is wisdom,
not while we live, but after death, as the argument shows; for if
while in company with the body the soul cannot have pure knowledge,
one of two things seems to follow-either knowledge is not to be
attained at all, or, if at all, after death. For then, and not till
then, the soul will be in herself alone and without the body. In
this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to
knowledge when we have the least possible concern or interest in the
body, and are not saturated with the bodily nature, but remain pure
until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And then the
foolishness of the body will be cleared away and we shall be pure
and hold converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the
clear light everywhere; and this is surely the light of truth. For
no impure thing is allowed to approach the pure. These are the sort of
words, Simmias, which the true lovers of wisdom cannot help saying
to one another, and thinking. You will agree with me in that?
Certainly, Socrates.
But if this is true, O my friend, then there is great hope that,
going whither I go, I shall there be satisfied with that which has
been the chief concern of you and me in our past lives. And now that
the hour of departure is appointed to me, this is the hope with
which I depart, and not I only, but every man who believes that he has
his mind purified.
Certainly, replied Simmias.
And what is purification but the separation of the soul from the
body, as I was saying before; the habit of the soul gathering and
collecting herself into herself, out of all the courses of the body;
the dwelling in her own place alone, as in another life, so also in
this, as far as she can; the release of the soul from the chains of
the body?
Very true, he said.
And what is that which is termed death, but this very separation and
release of the soul from the body?
To be sure, he said.
And the true philosophers, and they only, study and are eager to
release the soul. Is not the separation and release of the soul from
the body their especial study?
That is true.
And as I was saying at first, there would be a ridiculous
contradiction in men studying to live as nearly as they can in a state
of death, and yet repining when death comes.
Certainly.
Then, Simmias, as the true philosophers are ever studying death,
to them, of all men, death is the least terrible. Look at the matter
in this way: how inconsistent of them to have been always enemies of
the body, and wanting to have the soul alone, and when this is granted
to them, to be trembling and repining; instead of rejoicing at their
departing to that place where, when they arrive, they hope to gain
that which in life they loved (and this was wisdom), and at the same
time to be rid of the company of their enemy. Many a man has been
willing to go to the world below in the hope of seeing there an
earthly love, or wife, or son, and conversing with them. And will he
who is a true lover of wisdom, and is persuaded in like manner that
only in the world below he can worthily enjoy her, still repine at
death? Will he not depart with joy? Surely he will, my friend, if he
be a true philosopher. For he will have a firm conviction that there
only, and nowhere else, he can find wisdom in her purity. And if
this be true, he would be very absurd, as I was saying, if he were
to fear death.
He would, indeed, replied Simmias.
And when you see a man who is repining at the approach of death,
is not his reluctance a sufficient proof that he is not a lover of
wisdom, but a lover of the body, and probably at the same time a lover
of either money or power, or both?
That is very true, he replied.
There is a virtue, Simmias, which is named courage. Is not that a
special attribute of the philosopher?
Certainly.
Again, there is temperance. Is not the calm, and control, and
disdain of the passions which even the many call temperance, a quality
belonging only to those who despise the body and live in philosophy?
That is not to be denied.
For the courage and temperance of other men, if you will consider
them, are really a contradiction.
How is that, Socrates?
Well, he said, you are aware that death is regarded by men in
general as a great evil.
That is true, he said.
And do not courageous men endure death because they are afraid of
yet greater evils?
That is true.
Then all but the philosophers are courageous only from fear, and
because they are afraid; and yet that a man should be courageous
from fear, and because he is a coward, is surely a strange thing.
Very true.
And are not the temperate exactly in the same case? They are
temperate because they are intemperate-which may seem to be a
contradiction, but is nevertheless the sort of thing which happens
with this foolish temperance. For there are pleasures which they
must have, and are afraid of losing; and therefore they abstain from
one class of pleasures because they are overcome by another: and
whereas intemperance is defined as " being under the dominion of
pleasure," they overcome only because they are overcome by pleasure.
And that is what I mean by saying that they are temperate through
intemperance.
That appears to be true.
Yet the exchange of one fear or pleasure or pain for another fear or
pleasure or pain, which are measured like coins, the greater with
the less, is not the exchange of virtue. O my dear Simmias, is there
not one true coin for which all things ought to exchange?-and that
is wisdom; and only in exchange for this, and in company with this, is
anything truly bought or sold, whether courage or temperance or
justice. And is not all true virtue the companion of wisdom, no matter
what fears or pleasures or other similar goods or evils may or may not
attend her? But the virtue which is made up of these goods, when
they are severed from wisdom and exchanged with one another, is a
shadow of virtue only, nor is there any freedom or health or truth
in her; but in the true exchange there is a purging away of all
these things, and temperance, and justice, and courage, and wisdom
herself are a purgation of them. And I conceive that the founders of
the mysteries had a real meaning and were not mere triflers when
they intimated in a figure long ago that he who passes unsanctified
and uninitiated into the world below will live in a slough, but that
he who arrives there after initiation and purification will dwell with
the gods. For " many," as they say in the mysteries, " are the thyrsus
bearers, but few are the mystics,"-meaning, as I interpret the
words, the true philosophers. In the number of whom I have been
seeking, according to my ability, to find a place during my whole
life; whether I have sought in a right way or not, and whether I
have succeeded or not, I shall truly know in a little while, if God
will, when I myself arrive in the other world: that is my belief.
And now, Simmias and Cebes, I have answered those who charge me with
not grieving or repining at parting from you and my masters in this
world; and I am right in not repining, for I believe that I shall find
other masters and friends who are as good in the world below. But
all men cannot believe this, and I shall be glad if my words have
any more success with you than with the judges of the Athenians.
Cebes answered: I agree, Socrates, in the greater part of what you
say. But in what relates to the soul, men are apt to be incredulous;
they fear that when she leaves the body her place may be nowhere,
and that on the very day of death she may be destroyed and
perish-immediately on her release from the body, issuing forth like
smoke or air and vanishing away into nothingness. For if she could
only hold together and be herself after she was released from the
evils of the body, there would be good reason to hope, Socrates,
that what you say is true. But much persuasion and many arguments
are required in order to prove that when the man is dead the soul
yet exists, and has any force of intelligence.
True, Cebes, said Socrates; and shall I suggest that we talk a
little of the probabilities of these things?
I am sure, said Cebes, that I should gready like to know your
opinion about them.
I reckon, said Socrates, that no one who heard me now, not even if
he were one of my old enemies, the comic poets, could accuse me of
idle talking about matters in which I have no concern. Let us, then,
if you please, proceed with the inquiry.
Whether the souls of men after death are or are not in the world
below, is a question which may be argued in this manner: The ancient
doctrine of which I have been speaking affirms that they go from
this into the other world, and return hither, and are born from the
dead. Now if this be true, and the living come from the dead, then our
souls must be in the other world, for if not, how could they be born
again? And this would be conclusive, if there were any real evidence
that the living are only born from the dead; but if there is no
evidence of this, then other arguments will have to be adduced.
That is very true, replied Cebes.
Then let us consider this question, not in relation to man only, but
in relation to animals generally, and to plants, and to everything
of which there is generation, and the proof will be easier. Are not
all things which have opposites generated out of their opposites? I
mean such things as good and evil, just and unjust-and there are
innumerable other opposites which are generated out of opposites.
And I want to show that this holds universally of all opposites; I
mean to say, for example, that anything which becomes greater must
become greater after being less.
True.
And that which becomes less must have been once greater and then
become less.
Yes.
And the weaker is generated from the stronger, and the swifter
from the slower.
Very true.
And the worse is from the better, and the more just is from the more
unjust.
Of course.
And is this true of all opposites? and are we convinced that all
of them are generated out of opposites?
Yes.
And in this universal opposition of all things, are there not also
two intermediate processes which are ever going on, from one to the
other, and back again; where there is a greater and a less there is
also an intermediate process of increase and diminution, and that
which grows is said to wax, and that which decays to wane?
Yes, he said.
And there are many other processes, such as division and
composition, cooling and heating, which equally involve a passage into
and out of one another. And this holds of all opposites, even though
not always expressed in words-they are generated out of one another,
and there is a passing or process from one to the other of them?
Very true, he replied.
Well, and is there not an opposite of life, as sleep is the opposite
of waking?
True, he said.
And what is that?
Death, he answered.
And these, then, are generated, if they are opposites, the one
from the other, and have there their two intermediate processes also?
Of course.
Now, said Socrates, I will analyze one of the two pairs of opposites
which I have mentioned to you, and also its intermediate processes,
and you shall analyze the other to me. The state of sleep is opposed
to the state of waking, and out of sleeping waking is generated, and
out of waking, sleeping, and the process of generation is in the one
case falling asleep, and in the other waking up. Are you agreed
about that?
Quite agreed.
Then suppose that you analyze life and death to me in the same
manner. Is not death opposed to life?
Yes.
And they are generated one from the other?
Yes.
What is generated from life?
Death.
And what from death?
I can only say in answer-life.
Then the living, whether things or persons, Cebes, are generated
from the dead?
That is clear, he replied.
Then the inference is, that our souls are in the world below?
That is true.
And one of the two processes or generations is visible-for surely
the act of dying is visible?
Surely, he said.
And may not the other be inferred as the complement of nature, who
is not to be supposed to go on one leg only? And if not, a
corresponding process of generation in death must also be assigned
to her?
Certainly, he replied.
And what is that process?
Revival.
And revival, if there be such a thing, is the birth of the dead into
the world of the living?
Quite true.
Then there is a new way in which we arrive at the inference that the
living come from the dead, just as the dead come from the living;
and if this is true, then the souls of the dead must be in some
place out of which they come again. And this, as I think, has been
satisfactorily proved.
Yes, Socrates, he said; all this seems to flow necessarily out of
our previous admissions.
And that these admissions are not unfair, Cebes, he said, may be
shown, as I think, in this way: If generation were in a straight
line only, and there were no compensation or circle in nature, no turn
or return into one another, then you know that all things would at
last have the same form and pass into the same state, and there
would be no more generation of them.
What do you mean? he said.
A simple thing enough, which I will illustrate by the case of sleep,
he replied. You know that if there were no compensation of sleeping
and waking, the story of the sleeping Endymion would in the end have
no meaning, because all other things would be asleep, too, and he
would not be thought of. Or if there were composition only, and no
division of substances, then the chaos of Anaxagoras would come again.
And in like manner, my dear Cebes, if all things which partook of life
were to die, and after they were dead remained in the form of death,
and did not come to life again, all would at last die, and nothing
would be alive-how could this be otherwise? For if the living spring
from any others who are not the dead, and they die, must not all
things at last be swallowed up in death?
There is no escape from that, Socrates, said Cebes; and I think that
what you say is entirely true.
Yes, he said, Cebes, I entirely think so, too; and we are not
walking in a vain imagination; but I am confident in the belief that
there truly is such a thing as living again, and that the living
spring from the dead, and that the souls of the dead are in existence,
and that the good souls have a better portion than the evil.
Cebes added: Your favorite doctrine, Socrates, that knowledge is
simply recollection, if true, also necessarily implies a previous time
in which we learned that which we now recollect. But this would be
impossible unless our soul was in some place before existing in the
human form; here, then, is another argument of the souls immortality.
But tell me, Cebes, said Simmias, interposing, what proofs are given
of this doctrine of recollection? I am not very sure at this moment
that I remember them.
One excellent proof, said Cebes, is afforded by questions. If you
put a question to a person in a right way, he will give a true
answer of himself; but how could he do this unless there were
knowledge and right reason already in him? And this is most clearly
shown when he is taken to a diagram or to anything of that sort.
But if, said Socrates, you are still incredulous, Simmias, I would
ask you whether you may not agree with me when you look at the
matter in another way; I mean, if you are still incredulous as to
whether knowledge is recollection.
Incredulous, I am not, said Simmias; but I want to have this
doctrine of recollection brought to my own recollection, and, from
what Cebes has said, I am beginning to recollect and be convinced; but
I should still like to hear what more you have to say.
This is what I would say, he replied: We should agree, if I am not
mistaken, that what a man recollects he must have known at some
previous time.
Very true.
And what is the nature of this recollection? And, in asking this,
I mean to ask whether, when a person has already seen or heard or in
any way perceived anything, and he knows not only that, but
something else of which he has not the same, but another knowledge, we
may not fairly say that he recollects that which comes into his
mind. Are we agreed about that?
What do you mean?
I mean what I may illustrate by the following instance: The
knowledge of a lyre is not the same as the knowledge of a man?
True.
And yet what is the feeling of lovers when they recognize a lyre, or
a garment, or anything else which the beloved has been in the habit of
using? Do not they, from knowing the lyre, form in the minds eye an
image of the youth to whom the lyre belongs? And this is recollection:
and in the same way anyone who sees Simmias may remember Cebes; and
there are endless other things of the same nature.
Yes, indeed, there are-endless, replied Simmias.
And this sort of thing, he said, is recollection, and is most
commonly a process of recovering that which has been forgotten through
time and inattention.
Very true, he said.
Well; and may you not also from seeing the picture of a horse or a
lyre remember a man? and from the picture of Simmias, you may be led
to remember Cebes?
True.
Or you may also be led to the recollection of Simmias himself?
True, he said.
And in all these cases, the recollection may be derived from
things either like or unlike?
That is true.
And when the recollection is derived from like things, then there is
sure to be another question, which is, whether the likeness of that
which is recollected is in any way defective or not.
Very true, he said.
And shall we proceed a step further, and affirm that there is such a
thing as equality, not of wood with wood, or of stone with stone,
but that, over and above this, there is equality in the abstract?
Shall we affirm this?
Affirm, yes, and swear to it, replied Simmias, with all the
confidence in life.
And do we know the nature of this abstract essence?
To be sure, he said.
And whence did we obtain this knowledge? Did we not see equalities
of material things, such as pieces of wood and stones, and gather from
them the idea of an equality which is different from them?-you will
admit that? Or look at the matter again in this way: Do not the same
pieces of wood or stone appear at one time equal, and at another
time unequal?
That is certain.
But are real equals ever unequal? or is the idea of equality ever
inequality?
That surely was never yet known, Socrates.
Then these (so-called) equals are not the same with the idea of
equality?
I should say, clearly not, Socrates.
And yet from these equals, although differing from the idea of
equality, you conceived and attained that idea?
Very true, he said.
Which might be like, or might be unlike them?
Yes.
But that makes no difference; whenever from seeing one thing you
conceived another, whether like or unlike, there must surely have been
an act of recollection?
Very true.
But what would you say of equal portions of wood and stone, or other
material equals? and what is the impression produced by them? Are they
equals in the same sense as absolute equality? or do they fall short
of this in a measure?
Yes, he said, in a very great measure, too.
And must we not allow that when I or anyone look at any object,
and perceive that the object aims at being some other thing, but falls
short of, and cannot attain to it-he who makes this observation must
have had previous knowledge of that to which, as he says, the other,
although similar, was inferior?
Certainly.
And has not this been our case in the matter of equals and of
absolute equality?
Precisely.
Then we must have known absolute equality previously to the time
when we first saw the material equals, and reflected that all these
apparent equals aim at this absolute equality, but fall short of it?
That is true.
And we recognize also that this absolute equality has only been
known, and can only be known, through the medium of sight or touch, or
of some other sense. And this I would affirm of all such conceptions.
Yes, Socrates, as far as the argument is concerned, one of them is
the same as the other.
And from the senses, then, is derived the knowledge that all
sensible things aim at an idea of equality of which they fall short-is
not that true?
Yes.
Then before we began to see or hear or perceive in any way, we
must have had a knowledge of absolute equality, or we could not have
referred to that the equals which are derived from the senses-for to
that they all aspire, and of that they fall short?
That, Socrates, is certainly to be inferred from the previous
statements.
And did we not see and hear and acquire our other senses as soon
as we were born?
Certainly.
Then we must have acquired the knowledge of the ideal equal at
some time previous to this?
Yes.
That is to say, before we were born, I suppose?
True.
And if we acquired this knowledge before we were born, and were born
having it, then we also knew before we were born and at the instant of
birth not only equal or the greater or the less, but all other
ideas; for we are not speaking only of equality absolute, but of
beauty, goodness, justice, holiness, and all which we stamp with the
name of essence in the dialectical process, when we ask and answer
questions. Of all this we may certainly affirm that we acquired the
knowledge before birth?
That is true.
But if, after having acquired, we have not forgotten that which we
acquired, then we must always have been born with knowledge, and shall
always continue to know as long as life lasts-for knowing is the
acquiring and retaining knowledge and not forgetting. Is not
forgetting, Simmias, just the losing of knowledge?
Quite true, Socrates.
But if the knowledge which we acquired before birth was lost by us
at birth, and afterwards by the use of the senses we recovered that
which we previously knew, will not that which we call learning be a
process of recovering our knowledge, and may not this be rightly
termed recollection by us?
Very true.
For this is clear, that when we perceived something, either by the
help of sight or hearing, or some other sense, there was no difficulty
in receiving from this a conception of some other thing like or unlike
which had been forgotten and which was associated with this; and
therefore, as I was saying, one of two alternatives follows: either we
had this knowledge at birth, and continued to know through life; or,
after birth, those who are said to learn only remember, and learning
is recollection only.
Yes, that is quite true, Socrates.
And which alternative, Simmias, do you prefer? Had we the
knowledge at our birth, or did we remember afterwards the things which
we knew previously to our birth?
I cannot decide at the moment.
At any rate you can decide whether he who has knowledge ought or
ought not to be able to give a reason for what he knows.
Certainly, he ought.
But do you think that every man is able to give a reason about these
very matters of which we are speaking?
I wish that they could, Socrates, but I greatly fear that
to-morrow at this time there will be no one able to give a reason
worth having.
Then you are not of opinion, Simmias, that all men know these
things?
Certainly not.
Then they are in process of recollecting that which they learned
before.
Certainly.
But when did our souls acquire this knowledge?-not since we were
born as men?
Certainly not.
And therefore previously?
Yes.
Then, Simmias, our souls must have existed before they were in the
form of man-without bodies, and must have had intelligence.
Unless indeed you suppose, Socrates, that these notions were given
us at the moment of birth; for this is the only time that remains.
Yes, my friend, but when did we lose them? for they are not in us
when we are born-that is admitted. Did we lose them at the moment of
receiving them, or at some other time?
No, Socrates, I perceive that I was unconsciously talking nonsense.
Then may we not say, Simmias, that if, as we are always repeating,
there is an absolute beauty, and goodness, and essence in general, and
to this, which is now discovered to be a previous condition of our
being, we refer all our sensations, and with this compare
them-assuming this to have a prior existence, then our souls must have
had a prior existence, but if not, there would be no force in the
argument? There can be no doubt that if these absolute ideas existed
before we were born, then our souls must have existed before we were
born, and if not the ideas, then not the souls.
Yes, Socrates; I am convinced that there is precisely the same
necessity for the existence of the soul before birth, and of the
essence of which you are speaking: and the argument arrives at a
result which happily agrees with my own notion. For there is nothing
which to my mind is so evident as that beauty, goodness, and other
notions of which you were just now speaking have a most real and
absolute existence; and I am satisfied with the proof.
Well, but is Cebes equally satisfied? for I must convince him too.
I think, said Simmias, that Cebes is satisfied: although he is the
most incredulous of mortals, yet I believe that he is convinced of the
existence of the soul before birth. But that after death the soul will
continue to exist is not yet proven even to my own satisfaction. I
cannot get rid of the feeling of the many to which Cebes was
referring-the feeling that when the man dies the soul may be
scattered, and that this may be the end of her. For admitting that she
may be generated and created in some other place, and may have existed
before entering the human body, why after having entered in and gone
out again may she not herself be destroyed and come to an end?
Very true, Simmias, said Cebes; that our soul existed before we were
born was the first half of the argument, and this appears to have been
proven; that the soul will exist after death as well as before birth
is the other half of which the proof is still wanting, and has to be
supplied.
But that proof, Simmias and Cebes, has been already given, said
Socrates, if you put the two arguments together-I mean this and the
former one, in which we admitted that everything living is born of the
dead. For if the soul existed before birth, and in coming to life
and being born can be born only from death and dying, must she not
after death continue to exist, since she has to be born again?
surely the proof which you desire has been already furnished. Still
I suspect that you and Simmias would be glad to probe the argument
further; like children, you are haunted with a fear that when the soul
leaves the body, the wind may really blow her away and scatter her;
especially if a man should happen to die in stormy weather and not
when the sky is calm.
Cebes answered with a smile: Then, Socrates, you must argue us out
of our fears-and yet, strictly speaking, they are not our fears, but
there is a child within us to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin; him
too we must persuade not to be afraid when he is alone with him in the
dark.
Socrates said: Let the voice of the charmer be applied daily until
you have charmed him away.
And where shall we find a good charmer of our fears, Socrates,
when you are gone?
Hellas, he replied, is a large place, Cebes, and has many good
men, and there are barbarous races not a few: seek for him among
them all, far and wide, sparing neither pains nor money; for there
is no better way of using your money. And you must not forget to
seek for him among yourselves too; for he is nowhere more likely to be
found.
The search, replied Cebes, shall certainly be made. And now, if
you please, let us return to the point of the argument at which we
digressed.
By all means, replied Socrates; what else should I please?
Very good, he said.
Must we not, said Socrates, ask ourselves some question of this
sort?-What is that which, as we imagine, is liable to be scattered
away, and about which we fear? and what again is that about which we
have no fear? And then we may proceed to inquire whether that which
suffers dispersion is or is not of the nature of soul-our hopes and
fears as to our own souls will turn upon that.
That is true, he said.
Now the compound or composite may be supposed to be naturally
capable of being dissolved in like manner as of being compounded;
but that which is uncompounded, and that only, must be, if anything
is, indissoluble.
Yes; that is what I should imagine, said Cebes.
And the uncompounded may be assumed to be the same and unchanging,
where the compound is always changing and never the same?
That I also think, he said.
Then now let us return to the previous discussion. Is that idea or
essence, which in the dialectical process we define as essence of true
existence-whether essence of equality, beauty, or anything else: are
these essences, I say, liable at times to some degree of change? or
are they each of them always what they are, having the same simple,
self-existent and unchanging forms, and not admitting of variation
at all, or in any way, or at any time?
They must be always the same, Socrates, replied Cebes.
And what would you say of the many beautiful-whether men or horses
or garments or any other things which may be called equal or
beautiful-are they all unchanging and the same always, or quite the
reverse? May they not rather be described as almost always changing
and hardly ever the same either with themselves or with one another?
The latter, replied Cebes; they are always in a state of change.
And these you can touch and see and perceive with the senses, but
the unchanging things you can only perceive with the mind-they are
invisible and are not seen?
That is very true, he said.
Well, then, he added, let us suppose that there are two sorts of
existences, one seen, the other unseen.
Let us suppose them.
The seen is the changing, and the unseen is the unchanging.
That may be also supposed.
And, further, is not one part of us body, and the rest of us soul?
To be sure.
And to which class may we say that the body is more alike and akin?
Clearly to the seen: no one can doubt that.
And is the soul seen or not seen?
Not by man, Socrates.
And by " seen" and " not seen" is meant by us that which is or is
not visible to the eye of man?
Yes, to the eye of man.
And what do we say of the soul? is that seen or not seen?
Not seen.
Unseen then?
Yes.
Then the soul is more like to the unseen, and the body to the seen?
That is most certain, Socrates.
And were we not saying long ago that the soul when using the body as
an instrument of perception, that is to say, when using the sense of
sight or hearing or some other sense (for the meaning of perceiving
through the body is perceiving through the senses)-were we not
saying that the soul too is then dragged by the body into the region
of the changeable, and wanders and is confused; the world spins
round her, and she is like a drunkard when under their influence?
Very true.
But when returning into herself she reflects; then she passes into
the realm of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and
unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives,
when she is by herself and is not let or hindered; then she ceases
from her erring ways, and being in communion with the unchanging is
unchanging. And this state of the soul is called wisdom?
That is well and truly said, Socrates, he replied.
And to which class is the soul more nearly alike and akin, as far as
may be inferred from this argument, as well as from the preceding one?
I think, Socrates, that, in the opinion of everyone who follows
the argument, the soul will be infinitely more like the unchangeable
even the most stupid person will not deny that.
And the body is more like the changing?
Yes.
Yet once more consider the matter in this light: When the soul and
the body are united, then nature orders the soul to rule and govern,
and the body to obey and serve.
Now which of these two functions is akin to the divine? and which to
the mortal? Does not the divine appear to you to be that which
naturally orders and rules, and the mortal that which is subject and
servant?
True.
And which does the soul resemble?
The soul resembles the divine and the body the mortal-there can be
no doubt of that, Socrates.
Then reflect, Cebes: is not the conclusion of the whole matter
this?-that the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and
immortal, and intelligible, and uniform, and indissoluble, and
unchangeable; and the body is in the very likeness of the human, and
mortal, and unintelligible, and multiform, and dissoluble, and
changeable. Can this, my dear Cebes, be denied?
No, indeed.
But if this is true, then is not the body liable to speedy
dissolution?
and is not the soul almost or altogether indissoluble?
Certainly.
And do you further observe, that after a man is dead, the body,
which is the visible part of man, and has a visible framework, which
is called a corpse, and which would naturally be dissolved and
decomposed and dissipated, is not dissolved or decomposed at once, but
may remain for a good while, if the constitution be sound at the
time of death, and the season of the year favorable? For the body when
shrunk and embalmed, as is the custom in Egypt, may remain almost
entire through infinite ages; and even in decay, still there are
some portions, such as the bones and ligaments, which are
practically indestructible. You allow that?
Yes.
And are we to suppose that the soul, which is invisible, in
passing to the true Hades, which like her is invisible, and pure,
and noble, and on her way to the good and wise God, whither, if God
will, my soul is also soon to go-that the soul, I repeat, if this be
her nature and origin, is blown away and perishes immediately on
quitting the body as the many say? That can never be, dear Simmias and
Cebes. The truth rather is that the soul which is pure at departing
draws after her no bodily taint, having never voluntarily had
connection with the body, which she is ever avoiding, herself gathered
into herself (for such abstraction has been the study of her life).
And what does this mean but that she has been a true disciple of
philosophy and has practised how to die easily? And is not
philosophy the practice of death?
Certainly.
That soul, I say, herself invisible, departs to the invisible
worldto the divine and immortal and rational: thither arriving, she
lives in bliss and is released from the error and folly of men,
their fears and wild passions and all other human ills, and forever
dwells, as they say of the initiated, in company with the gods. Is not
this true, Cebes?
Yes, said Cebes, beyond a doubt.
But the soul which has been p