

Exposition and
criticism of the final
argument for
immortality of the soul
in pha...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the prior conversations, Cebes proposes that even though the soul is long-lasting, it can be worn out and destroyed (91d). In response to that, Socrates investigates the cause of generation and destruction (96a) and proposes his final argument for the immortality of the soul.

Before coming to his final argument, Socrates recounts his own experience in searching for the cause of things and introduces the theory of Forms, which will later serve as an important hypothesis for his argument. First, Socrates recalls his exploration in natural science when he was young and describes his investigation of how things come and cease to be (96b). However, when Socrates uses the old method of investigation for natural science, he feels himself becoming more ignorant in the process (96c). As it is explained by natural science, a man grows from small to large bulk because food adds proper parts to his body (96d). Natural science also explains “by a head” as the cause of being taller and addition of two as the cause of ten being more than eight (96e). However, Socrates is not satisfied with those explanations. For instance, he does not think two ones being brought together is why one plus one equals to two. He wonders why when ones are separated, each of them is one, but when they are brought together, they suddenly become two (97a). Neither is he convinced that division cause something divided to become two (97b). Socrates rejects those explanations of how things come to be, perish or continue to exist.

Socrates continues to explore the cause of all things, and he encounters the theory proposed by Anaxagoras. According to Anaxagoras, Mind is the cause of everything (97c). At first, Socrates was pleased by this explanation.

However, after closely examining Anaxagoras's work, Socrates finds his

<https://assignbuster.com/exposition-and-criticism-of-the-final-argument-for-immortality-of-the-soul-in-phaedo/>

theory problematic and contradictory. Socrates states that if Mind is cause of all, it should direct things to the best states possible. In this way, directed by the Mind, one should find what it is best for him to be (97d). Therefore, Socrates assumes that Anaxagoras would tell him, for example, whether the earth is flat or round and show him why it is best for the earth to be in a certain condition (97e). He also thinks Anaxagoras would describe a common good as the general cause for all (98b). If so, Socrates would be satisfied. However, after reading Anaxagoras's work, Socrates realizes that Anaxagoras gives no such accounts but focuses on some strange things (98c). Then, Socrates uses an example to clarify the inconsistencies within Anaxagoras's theory. On the one hand, Anaxagoras would say Socrates's actions are caused by his Mind. On the other hand, he would say the cause of Socrates's sitting in the prison is the compositions and positioning of his bones, sinews, and muscles. In the same manner, Anaxagoras would explain the cause of Socrates's talking as sounds, air and hearing (98d). However, the true reason why Socrates is sitting in the prison is his sentence by the Athenians. Moreover, it is actually best for his bones and sinews to escape, but Socrates decides to remain due to his pursuit of honor and justice (98e). Therefore, Anaxagoras's claims about causation seem ridiculous. Socrates points out that things like bones and sinews are necessary conditions for people to act in a certain way, but they cannot be the real causes of these actions (99b). By showing the contradictions and problems in Anaxagoras's work, Socrates disapproves it as an alternative explanation of the cause of things. After rejecting those two propositions, Socrates states that it is better for them to examine the causes of all things by means of words rather than

facts (100a). Therefore, he decides to formulate a hypothesis by himself and this is where the theory of Forms comes forth.

Socrates proposes that Forms can explain the cause of everything. Also, he intends to establish the theory of Forms as an important hypothesis for his final argument for the immortality of the soul. Socrates assumes the existence of Forms, which means something like Beauty itself, Goodness itself and Greatness itself (100b). Then, Socrates indicates that anything, other than Beauty itself, is beautiful only because it shares in the Form of Beauty (100c). Socrates rejects any other cause like shape or color and maintains the only cause that he concerns about is the presence of or sharing in the Forms (100d). For example, big things are big only because they share in the Form of Bigness, and small things are small only because they share in the Form of Smallness (101a). Socrates strengthens this theory of Forms by refuting the alternative explanation. For instance, Socrates points out, when we compare sizes, the statement that one is bigger or smaller by a head is problematic in two ways. First, when we say one is bigger by a head, we can also say the other is smaller by a head. In this way, the same cause, "by a head", shows opposite results. Second, it seems contradictory that we say someone is made big by a head, which is something small (101b). Due to those problems in the alternative explanation, being bigger or smaller can better be explained by its sharing in the Form of Bigness or the Form of Smallness. In this way, this theory of Forms can explain the questions raised by Socrates earlier during his discussion about the causes in natural science. For example, ten is more numerous than eight not "by two" but due to the Form of Numerousness.

One plus one equals two not because of addition of ones but because two shares in the Form of Twoness (101c).

After proposing the hypothesis stating that Forms are the cause of everything, Socrates gives some suggestions for their further investigation of the immortality of the soul. He states that they should stick to this hypothesis and ignore any attack of it until they examine the consistency of consequences derived from it (101d). Socrates encourages the propositions of other hypotheses in the course of coming to a satisfactory decision. He also warns against discussing the hypothesis and its consequences at the same time (101e).

Then, Socrates starts to put forth his final argument for the immortality of the soul in the light of the theory of Forms. The first point he makes is that opposite will never admit opposite. Socrates illustrates this point through an example. He invites his followers to compare heights among Phaedo, Simmias and himself, and he states that Simmias is taller than him but shorter than Phaedo (102b). Under the assumption that Forms are the cause of everything, Simmias is taller than Socrates is because Simmias shares in the Form of Tallness compared to the Shortness of Socrates. Likewise, Simmias is shorter than Phaedo because Simmias shares in the Form of Shortness compared to the Tallness of Phaedo (102c). Although there are both Tallness and Shortness in Simmias, the Tallness in him will never become Shortness (102e). When Tallness is approached by its opposite Form, Shortness, it will not admit it but either retreat or be destroyed.

Therefore, Socrates proposes that any Form will never admit or become its opposite (103a). Then, Socrates clarifies a question saying that this claim <https://assignbuster.com/exposition-and-criticism-of-the-final-argument-for-immortality-of-the-soul-in-phaedo/>

seems to contradict with the earlier statement that opposite comes from opposite. Socrates explains that what they discuss before are things that have opposite qualities, but here they are talking about the opposite Forms (103b). Opposite things do come from each other, which is the cyclical argument. However, opposite Forms will never admit each other.

The second point Socrates makes is that there is always something which shares in the characteristic of some Forms. Just as a Form itself will never admit its opposite Form, the thing sharing in the Form will also never admit the opposite Form. For example, Snow is different from cold, but it has the characteristic of Coldness. Fire is also different from hot, but it has the characteristic of Hotness. According to Socrates, like Coldness, the snow will never admit Hotness. When snow is approached by heat, it will either flee or perish. The same thing will happen with fire approached by cold (103d). Also, the number three, though different from odd, has the characteristic of Oddness and hence will never admit the Form of Evenness. Although two and three are not opposites, three's sharing in the Form of Oddness causes it to never admit two and any other even numbers because those even numbers share in the Form of Evenness. When three is approached by an even, facing the Form of Evenness, it will either retreat or perish. This is why three is uneven (104e). In this way, Socrates concludes that not only opposite Forms do not admit each other but also the things sharing in the Form will not admit the opposite Form (105a). When approached by the opposite Form, the thing either goes away safely or fails to exist.

Then, Socrates uses this conclusion to reach his final argument for the immortality of the soul. First, Socrates gives some examples of things that <https://assignbuster.com/exposition-and-criticism-of-the-final-argument-for-immortality-of-the-soul-in-phaedo/>

share in and bring along the Forms. According to Socrates, fire brings along the Form of Hotness, fever brings along Sickness, and the number one brings along Oddness (105c). In the same manner, Socrates proposes that soul brings along the Form of life (105d). In other words, soul gives life to the body it occupies. The Form of Life has its opposite, which is the Form of Death. Previously, Socrates has concluded that the thing which shares in a Form will not admit the opposite Form. Therefore, the soul, which shares in the Form of Life, will never admit the Form of Death. Just as something that does not admit even is called as uneven, and something does not admit just as unjust, the soul, which does not admit death, is deathless (105e). If the soul is approached by Death, it will either retreat safely or be destroyed. To prove the immortality of the soul, Socrates has to show that the soul will retreat safely rather than cease to exist.

To build his argument, Socrates assumes that if uneven is said to be indestructible, this would imply that three, being uneven, is also indestructible (106a). Likewise, if deathless is agreed to be indestructible, soul, being deathless, can also never be destroyed and therefore immortal (106b). Then, Socrates asserts that deathless is indeed the only thing that can resist destructions, and he points out that all men agree that something deathless, such as the gods and Form of Life itself, are indestructible (106d). Given that something deathless cannot be destroyed, the soul is therefore indestructible and immortal. When death comes to a man, his body, the mortal part, is destroyed, and his soul, the immortal part, goes away safely and dwells in the underworld.

Socrates offers his final argument under an important hypothesis of the existence of Forms and reaches the conclusion that soul is immortal. However, after critically examining Socrates's argument and dialogues, I discovered one inconsistency in his final argument. In 106d, Socrates states that the immortality of the soul can be proved by saying that deathless is indestructible. Here, Socrates seems to associate the state of death with destruction. Soul, which does not admit death, will therefore never admit destruction. However, in the previous dialogues in *Phaedo*, Socrates defines death not as destruction but as a separation of the body and the soul: "Do we believe that death is this, namely, that the body comes to be separated by itself apart from the soul, and the soul comes to be separated by itself apart from the body? Is death anything else than that? No, that is what it is" (64c). Here, Socrates argues that death is nothing but a separation of the soul from the body. Following the theory of Forms, it can be concluded that soul never admit death. Then, according to Socrates's own definition of death, the statement would become that soul never admit its separation from the body. However, in his final argument for the immortality of the soul, Socrates claims that when death approaches the body, soul will separate itself from the mortal body and retreats safely (106e). Therefore, the two statements Socrates proposes in his final argument that soul never admits death and that soul will retreat from the immortal body are inconsistent with each other. This leads Socrates to contradict himself and weakens the validity of his final argument for the immortality of the soul.