

Plato's book phaedo: the last hour of socrate's life

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Plato's dramatic dialogue *Phaedo* captures the final hours Socrates spends with his companions, as well as the process of his self-execution. Because Plato was said not to be present in the jail cell that day, the events are explicitly narrated by a man who was present, Phaedo. This final account of Socrates' life is particularly interesting because it illustrates a radically different character than the one seen in the *Apology* and *Crito*. The Socrates who is now hours away from death confidently lectures and argues about topics he previously claimed to know nothing about. One of his arguments surrounds the immortality of the soul; where Socrates intends to prove to his friends that when the body dies, the soul lives on to be re-born into another living creature.

Plato's Pythagorean influences are exposed as Socrates links the doctrine of reincarnation to his "recycling" argument. This doctrine is centered on the belief that the soul is eternal and can be re-born into different bodies. This idea summarizes the first half of the recycling argument: if the doctrine of reincarnation is true, then it must follow that souls are eternal. Socrates strengthens his "recycling" argument by including the importance of opposites in the universe. Socrates, and the other men present in the jail cell, all seem to agree that everything comes to be from its opposite and that things are constantly in flux between two extremes. If a thing is hot it can become cold and vice versa; so if the same follows for being awake and asleep, and countless other occurrences in the universe, it seems logical that living leads to dying and dying leads to living. Following Socrates' line of reasoning, this argument also implies that no "new" souls can be generated. The number of souls in the universe is not unlimited: living souls are simply

re-born from a soul whose body had already died. In their bodiless form, souls exist in the underworld. Free from the restraints imposed by unreliable bodily senses, the soul has the ability to gain absolute knowledge and understanding. As Socrates prepares to face his death, he aims to prove to his friends that his soul will live on and that, for a philosopher, death is something to be welcomed.

From Socrates' argument, I can identify seven major premises, implicit and explicit, in support of the conclusion that souls are not annihilated when the body dies. These premises are as follows:

1. According to the doctrine of reincarnation, souls go into another and world and, when returning, are born again from the dead.
2. Because the living comes from the dead, souls must exist in another world before they are 'born.'
3. Life is the opposite of death, and death is the opposite of life.
4. All things are generated out of their opposites.
5. There is a finite number of souls in the universe.
6. All oppositions include two constant intermediate processes that are waxing and waning from one opposite to the other.
7. Living things are always approaching death and souls are approaching re-birth.
8. The soul is not annihilated when the body dies.

Socrates' argument must be analyzed for both validity and soundness so that it can be determined if it appropriately argues for the support of the conclusion. An argument is to be considered valid if and only if its premises

guarantee its conclusion. With this definition of validity, I do believe that Socrates' argument can be considered valid. The premises logically follow one another: if souls are reincarnated, then all the 'dead' ones exist in another world until they are re-born; because everything is generated out of its opposite, living souls are only generated from 'dead' souls and no new souls can be generated; and finally souls are in a constant, eternal flux between living and dying. Using this logic, it is impossible for souls to be annihilated when the body dies because they always exist in a state of flux outside the physical realm. An argument is to be considered sound if it the argument is structurally valid and each of its premises is true. While I have allowed that the argument is valid, it does not follow to be sound. Since the time of Socrates' execution in 399 BCE, science has developed new theories involving the behavior energy and thermodynamics. These newly developed theories provide other explanations for the different states objects exist in, and show that energy and life are subject to decay. This disproves Socrates' notion that all things are in a constant flux between two states, inevitably waxing and waning. One premise that can be proved false with modern knowledge is that there must be a finite number of souls in the universe. While I cannot say that souls themselves are newly generated, the rapid population growth our planet is experiencing contradicts this premise. If no new souls could be generated then the population would have remained stagnant. Although modern knowledge provides me with the ability to provide counter examples for Socrates' argument, it most likely would have been considered both valid and sound thousands of years ago. Philosophers during that era would never have imagined the size of the human population today, and the scientific principles we base our knowledge on. There are still <https://assignbuster.com/platos-book-phaedo-the-last-hour-of-socrates-life/>

many people around the world today who believe in the doctrine of reincarnation, but this philosophical argument is not sound and cannot be used as definite proof of the immortal soul.

The Socrates depicted in Plato's *Apology* is unsure about what his soul will encounter upon death, but in *Phaedo* Socrates seems sure that death is something to be welcomed since it frees the soul from bodily restriction. At the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates' companions fear that in the few hours both his body and soul will be destroyed. In this setting, Socrates is able to construct arguments that are meant to persuade his companions that his soul will continue to live. The "recycling" argument made by Socrates is only one portion of the various arguments that he uses to argue for the immortality of the soul. While this argument may have been considered both valid and sound during these philosophers' lifetimes, it should no longer be considered so. The argument may be structurally valid, but I do not believe it is sound because not all of its premises are accurate. It may be unclear whether these views actually belonged to Socrates, but the topic was of critical importance in the lives of many ancient philosophers, and the concern held for one's soul is still one of the most important components of modern religious practices.