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The Asceticism of the *Phaedo*: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul's Proper Activity

Abstract: I argue that according to Socrates in the *Phaedo* we should not merely evaluate bodily pleasures and desires as worthless or bad, but actively avoid them. We need to avoid them because they change our values and make us believe falsehoods. This change in values and acceptance of falsehoods undermines the soul's proper activity, making virtue and happiness impossible for us. I situate this account of why we should avoid bodily pleasures within Plato's project in the *Phaedo* of providing Pythagorean and Orphic ideas with clearer meanings and better justifications.

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1 Introduction

In the *Phaedo* Socrates says that those who pursue philosophy practice nothing other than dying and being dead (64a). Scholars frequently take Socrates to be advocating asceticism when he explains this view.¹ He says, for example, that philosophers “oppose the body in every respect” (67e8) and that they “avoid pleasures, desires, pains, and fears to whatever extent is possible” (83b6–7).² Most people find asceticism off-putting, to put it mildly, and perhaps for this reason another group of scholars have been happy to find reasons for thinking that, in fact, Socrates is not defending asceticism.³ Recently, Raphael Woolf and Daniel

¹ For the assertion that Socrates is an ascetic in the *Phaedo*, see Hackforth 1955, 48 f., Bostock 1986, 30, and Pakaluk 2003, *passim*, e. g. 99, 100. For short explanations (no more than a few sentences) for his asceticism, see Gallop 1975, 88, and Long/Sedley 2010, xxiv. For the argument that Socrates subscribes to asceticism after the affinity argument because otherwise the body will cause the soul to become more bodily, see Appolloni 1996, 32, and Woolf 2004, 110–122. For a sustained argument for a broader sort of asceticism, see Butler 2012.

² Translations are my own, drawing from Gallop 1975 and Sedley/Long 2010. Text is Duke *et al.* 1995.

³ Bluck 1955, 2–5 and 46 f.; Tenkku 1956, 111 and 118; Spitzer 1976; Dorter 1982, 26 f.; Weiss 1987, 58 f.; Gallop 2001; Woolf 2004; Russell 2005, ch. 3.; Jansen 2013, 11.

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Russell have provided sustained arguments against an ascetic reading; instead, they argue that Socrates thinks that one must have the correct attitude towards bodily pleasures and pains or towards bodily activities that involve pleasures and pains.⁴ On such accounts, there is nothing wrong with simply feeling a bodily pleasure; the problems come from misevaluating bodily affections or the activities that involve them.

In this article I argue that Socrates in the *Phaedo* (henceforth simply: Socrates) is committed to the type of asceticism that Woolf and Russell argue against: one that requires you to avoid pleasures and pains by actively avoiding the activities that involve them.⁵ One reason scholars have not wanted to attribute asceticism to Socrates is that it is not clear what its philosophical appeal is. The main goal of this paper is to provide an account of why he is committed to asceticism.⁶ I agree with Woolf and Russell that Socrates is not idolizing or fetishizing the avoidance of bodily affections, nor does he think they are intrinsically bad.⁷ However, I argue that Socrates thinks that we cannot innocuously have pleasures, pains, fears, and desires; they change our values and what we take to be true and hence we must avoid them (section 2). The ultimate problem with this change of values and of thoughts is that it undermines our virtue and happiness (section 3). The key to why it undermines our virtue and happiness is Socrates' account of the soul's proper activity and its proper condition. I argue that the

4 Russell focuses on the attitude towards the pleasures and pains themselves, Woolf on the attitude towards bodily activities. Woolf's position is nuanced. He thinks that this evaluative reading "has priority in Plato's thinking" and "tells us how to live" (98), but he thinks that Socrates subscribes to a limited form of asceticism after the affinity argument because this provides us "with reassurance in the face of death" (98, 110–122). I argue for a quite different form of asceticism here.

5 Asceticism is often not thought to involve the avoidance of pain; for a defense of using the term "asceticism" for such a view, see Butler 2012, 104–106. For my purposes, it is not important whether the term "asceticism" is properly applied to Socrates' view; the important thing is that he thinks we should actively avoid bodily pleasures and pains, not merely evaluate them appropriately.

6 While many modern scholars have described Socrates' views as ascetic (see fn. 1), to my knowledge only Butler 2012 provides a detailed account of why he would hold such a view. His account is, for the most part, complementary to the views presented in section 2 of this paper; my sections 3 and 4 are substantively different from his account. Woolf 2004, 98 fn. 2, notes that (at the time) there had been no sustained defense of an ascetic reading. Russell 2005, 80–85, looking for an opponent who provides detailed arguments for asceticism, only finds the 5th–6th century Neoplatonist commentators Damascius and Olympiodorus (see Olympiodorus 3.5 and 4.3; Damascius I.75–77, I.164).

7 Woolf, in explaining why Socrates is not an ascetic, says that Socrates "has more important things to do than make an idol or fetish out of withdrawal of bodily activity" (104).

philosopher's desire to be dead is a desire for them to be in their proper condition. Scholars have not understood the philosopher's desire to be dead because they have not appreciated Socrates' distinction between death and being dead. A precise account of this allows us to explain why bodily pleasures and desires lead to our unhappiness and, indeed, our reincarnation, whereas their avoidance allows us to be wise, happy, and escape the cycle of reincarnation. Rather than trying to make Socrates' view sound ordinary and sensible, I interpret him as providing a philosophically sophisticated argument for a radical position. I situate this within Plato's larger project of providing Pythagorean and Orphic ideas with clearer meanings and better justifications than those that were provided by the Pythagoreans and Orphics (section 4).

2 Bodily Pleasures and Desires

Socrates says that philosophers “do not associate (ὀμιλῶμεν) with the body nor consort (κοινωνῶμεν) with it except when absolutely necessary” (67a3–4), they “avoid (ἀπέχονται) all the bodily desires” (82c3–4) and they “avoid pleasures, desires, pains, and fears to whatever extent is possible” (83b6–7). Socrates distinguishes between pleasures of learning and those of the body and says that the philosopher leaves the pleasures of the body alone (114d–e).⁸ Passages like these provide *prima facie* evidence for the ascetic reading. Russell argues that Socrates cannot literally mean “avoid” since he tells us that what is important is our evaluative attitude: he describes the philosopher as not eager (σπουδάζειν, 64d2–3) for bodily pleasures and as disdaining (ἀτιμάζειν, 64e2, 65d1) the services of the body and the body itself.⁹ However, note that Russell can be right that Socrates ultimately cares about our evaluative attitude and Socrates can literally mean avoid so long as he thinks that merely having bodily desires and pleasures leads to a change in our evaluative attitude.¹⁰ In this section I argue that this is one of the two reasons Socrates thinks that we should literally avoid bodily

8 In the *Phaedo* Socrates sometimes uses the term “bodily pleasure” (e.g. 114e1–2), but typically he just uses the term “pleasure.” Unless he qualifies himself (as he does when discussing the pleasures of learning), he seems to use the term “pleasure” to refer to bodily pleasures.

9 This is a recurring theme in Russell 2005 ch. 3. See esp. 87–92.

10 Weiss 1987's argument against asceticism faces this same problem (see esp. 58 f.). Weiss notes that in the exchange passage (69a6–c3) Socrates says that pleasure and pain have no value and that wisdom has ultimate value. But this does not mean that there is no instrumental harm in experiencing such things; there is such a harm precisely because they lead us to think that they have value when they do not.

desires and pleasures; the other is that they lead us to believe things that are not true.¹¹

Our first step is to see the insidious effects of bodily desires on our beliefs and actions. After the affinity argument (78b–80e), Socrates describes the impure soul of the non-philosopher as one that “always couples with the body, loves and serves it, and is bewitched by it – by its desires and pleasures” (81b2–4). The body bewitches the soul with its desires and pleasures; this bewitching goes along with (and perhaps is the cause of) the soul loving and serving the body. The idea of bewitching (γοητεύειν) suggests that these desires and pleasures make the soul a willing partner, but not for good reasons. There are three other places in Plato’s corpus where he uses forms of the verb “to bewitch” (γοητεύειν) alongside forms of “pleasure” (ἡδονή) (*Republic* 413b–d and 584a and *Philebus* 44c). In these passages, Socrates makes clear that pleasure, in bewitching us, changes our beliefs without good reason.¹² In the *Phaedo*, the effects of the bewitching are clarified by what Socrates says shortly afterwards:

“Lovers of learning,” he said, “recognize that when philosophy takes control of their soul it has been really bound in the body and glued to it, it is forced to examine the things that are through this, as if through a prison, rather than itself through itself, and it wallows in utter ignorance. And philosophy discerns the cunning of the prison, that it imprisons through desire, so that the prisoner himself may most of all be an accomplice in his imprisonment [...]” (82d9–83e7).

γινώσκουσι γάρ, ἣ δ' ὅς, οἱ φιλομαθεῖς ὅτι παραλαβοῦσα αὐτῶν τὴν ψυχὴν ἢ φιλοσοφία ἀτεχνῶς διαδεδεμένη ἐν τῷ σώματι καὶ προσκεκολλημένην, ἀναγκαζομένην δὲ ὡς περ διὰ εἰργμοῦ διὰ τούτου σκοπεῖσθαι τὰ ὄντα ἀλλὰ μὴ αὐτὴν δι' αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐν πάσῃ ἀμαθίᾳ κυλινδουμένην, καὶ τοῦ εἰργμοῦ τὴν δεινότητα κατιδοῦσα ὅτι δι' ἐπιθυμίας ἐστίν, ὡς ἂν μάλιστα αὐτὸς ὁ δεδεμένος συλλήπτωρ εἶη τοῦ δεδέσθαι ...

¹¹ Arguments against asceticism typically focus on bodily pleasures and pains. In this section I broaden my scope to discuss bodily desires as well. Socrates frequently treats bodily pleasures the same way he treats bodily desires (e. g. 81b, 83b) and bodily desires clearly are connected to bodily pleasures, as I discuss below. As we have seen, Socrates says to “avoid pleasures, desires, pains, and fears” (83b6–7). Thus, if he has reason literally to avoid bodily desires, this provides evidence that he thinks we should also literally avoid bodily pleasures, since it would be strange if within a single phrase he literally meant “avoid” when applied to desires but not when applied to pleasures.

¹² It is clearest at *Republic* 413b–d, where he says that pleasure deceives and that “everything that deceives seems to bewitch” (413c4). At 584a he says that when calm is put alongside pleasure it seems to be pain and when put alongside pain it seems to be pleasure, but that this is not correct, only a sort of witchcraft (γοητεία). In the *Philebus* at 44b–c Socrates describes people with a reputation in natural science, who deny that there is such a thing as pleasure; so-called pleasure is in fact only escape from pain. According to these people, the attractiveness of so-called pleasures is a sort of witchcraft.

Philosophy allows the lover of learning¹³ to see something. The prisoner – i. e. the soul bound to the body – is imprisoned in the body by desires. Why would these desires make the soul an accomplice in its own imprisonment? These desires are, supposedly, for things like food and sex; Socrates has suggested earlier that body's ends include its nourishment (τροφή, 66c1), its care (θεραπεία, 66d1), and bodily pleasure (68e–69a). Such desires lead one to want to stay in the prison of the body because they lead one to see the body as something good. This is what is so insidious about the body's effects on us, what makes the prison so cunning: without realizing it, the prisoner, i. e. the soul, is an accomplice to its own imprisonment because it desires something that leads to its imprisonment. The soul does not view bodily desires as foreign to it or not properly its own; instead, it takes these desires as its very own, becoming bewitched by them. Our first reason, then, genuinely to avoid bodily pleasures and desires, not simply to evaluate them as worthless, is that when we have such desires they subvert our soul, changing our values so that we perpetuate our imprisonment. If we only evaluated pleasures and desires as worthless, without trying to avoid or resist them, our values would end up changing so that we would start evaluating them as worthwhile.

Our next step is to consider how bodily pleasures and desires change our beliefs and our values. After the prison passage, Socrates explains that philosophy tries to persuade the soul to release itself from the body by showing it that this is the only route to truth (83a–b). This leads into Socrates' fullest explanation of why philosophers avoid bodily pleasures, desires, pains, and fears:

“Now the soul of the true philosopher thinks that it should not oppose this release and for this reason avoids pleasures, desires, pains, and fears to whatever extent is possible, reckoning that when someone feels intense pleasure, pain, fear, or desire, he in no way suffers so great an evil from the things one might think (for example, falling ill or wasting money because of his desires) but that he suffers the greatest and most extreme of all evils, without even reckoning it.”

“What is that, Socrates?” said Cebes.

“It's that the soul of every human being, at the same time that it experiences intense pleasure or pain at something, is forced to think that this thing, about which it most of all feels pleasure or pain, is most manifest and most true¹⁴, when it isn't. Those are above all visible things, aren't they?”

“Certainly.”

13 Socrates seems to use the term “lover of learning” interchangeably with “philosopher” in the *Phaedo*, perhaps with an emphasis on being a philosopher in progress, not someone with perfect wisdom.

14 I translate “ἀληθέστατον” “most true” rather than “most real” to keep a consistent translation for the goal of the philosopher, as discussed in the next section: to grasp what is true.

“Isn’t it, then, in this feeling that soul is most of all bound tight by body?”

“How so?”

“Because each pleasure and pain nails it to the body, as if with a nail, and pins it and makes it corporeal, since it believes to be true the very things that the body says are true. For, from its having the same beliefs as the body and enjoying the same things, it is forced, I think, to come to have the same way of life and the same nourishment, and to be the sort of soul never to enter Hades purely, but every time to depart infected by the body, and so to fall quickly back again into another body [...]” (83b4–e1).

ταύτη οὖν τῇ λύσει οὐκ οἰομένη δεῖν ἐναντιοῦσθαι ἢ τοῦ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλοσόφου ψυχῆ οὕτως ἀπέχεται τῶν ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ λυπῶν καὶ φόβων καθ’ ὅσον δύναιται, λογιζομένη ὅτι, ἐπειδὴν τις σφόδρα ἡσθη ἢ λυπηθῆ ἢ φοβηθῆ ἢ ἐπιθυμήσῃ, οὐδὲν τοσοῦτον κακὸν ἔπαθεν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἢ ἄν τις οἰηθείη, οἷον ἢ νοσήσας ἢ τι ἀναλώσας διὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας, ἀλλ’ ὁ πάντων μέγιστον τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν ἐστι, τοῦτο πάσχει καὶ οὐ λογίζεται αὐτό.

Τί τοῦτο, ὦ Σώκρατες; ἔφη ὁ Κέβης.

“Ὅτι ψυχὴ παντὸς ἀνθρώπου ἀναγκάζεται ἅμα τε ἡσθῆναι σφόδρα ἢ λυπηθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι περὶ ὃ ἂν μάλιστα τοῦτο πάσχη, τοῦτο ἐναργέστατον τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον· ταῦτα δὲ μάλιστα ὁράτ’ ἢ οὐ;

Πάνυ γε.

Οὐκοῦν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ πάθει μάλιστα καταδεῖται ψυχὴ ὑπὸ σώματος;

Πῶς δῆ;

“Ὅτι ἐκάστη ἡδονὴ καὶ λύπη ὡσπερ ἦλον ἔχουσα προσηλοῖ αὐτὴν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα καὶ προσπερονᾷ καὶ ποιεῖ σωματοειδῆ, δοξάζουσαν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῆ. ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς χαίρειν ἀναγκάζεται οἷμαι ὁμότροπός τε καὶ ὁμότροφος γίνεσθαι καὶ οἷα μηδέποτε εἰς Ἄιδου καθαρῶς ἀφικέσθαι, ἀλλὰ αἰεὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀναπλέα ἐξίεναι ὥστε ταχὺ πάλιν πίπτειν εἰς ἄλλο σῶμα ...

Intense pleasures and pains force (ἀναγκάζειν) us to think certain things are most true that are not without even realizing that we are doing so. It is perhaps surprising to learn that this is, in fact, the greatest and most extreme of all evils. This is because it directly undermines our soul’s proper aim, which is to grasp the truth (as I discuss in the next section). The passage also mentions a second, related, problem that arises from pleasures and pains. They lead the soul to believe and enjoy the same things as the body, which in turn changes the soul’s way of life.¹⁵

¹⁵ The passage also includes the surprising claim that the soul takes on the same nourishment (ὁμότροφος) as the body. In addition to “nourishment,” “τροφή” can mean nurture, rearing, or way of life, so someone might want to translate “ὁμότροφος” as “same way of life.” If this were right, “ὁμότροφος” would mean basically the same thing as “ὁμότροφος” in the passage. However, “ὁμότροφος” picks up on claims made elsewhere in the dialogue, where he is referring to nourishment or nurture, not way of life. Earlier, at 66c1, “τροφή” clearly refers to the body’s nourishment or sustenance, not its way of life. And shortly after the passage quoted above, Socrates says that the soul is nourished (τρέφω) by “following its reasoning and being always engaged in reasoning, viewing what is true, divine, and not an object of opinion” (84a8–9). “τρέφω” does

Before we consider how the soul comes to believe and enjoy the same things as the body, we should consider the scope of Socrates' claims. Woolf says that this passage only makes claims about intense pleasures and pains, leaving us free to have other such pleasures and pains.¹⁶ However, the passage starts with the claim that the philosopher refrains from pleasures, desires, pain, and fears "to whatever extent is possible" (καθ' ὅσον δύναται, 83b7) – Socrates does not restrict his claim here to the intense pleasures and pains. He then reckons that intense pleasure and pain is "the greatest and most extreme of evils" (πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν, 83c7–8). They are the greatest evil because they actually force us to think something "is most manifest and most true" (ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, 83c7–8) that is not. Socrates then tells us that these feelings most of all (μάλιστα, 83d1) bind us tight to the body. When Cebes asks how so, Socrates responds that, in fact, each pleasure and pain nails and pins the soul to the body, making it bodily. Each one goes along with thinking that something is true. Note that here he does not use the superlative – he does not say that each one makes us *think* that something is most true. He also does not say that this belief is forced, leaving open the possibility that we can sometimes resist thinking that something is true. Every bodily pleasure and pain is to be avoided; every one nails us to the body; every one is associated with thinking that these things are to some degree true. The intense ones are, indeed, our greatest evils. They directly undermine our soul's own end, which in turn undermines our wisdom and happiness.

For our purposes, the other important part of this passage (83b4–e1) is Socrates' surprising claim that pleasure and pain lead the soul to believe and enjoy the same things as the body (ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς χαίρειν, 83d7–8), which in turn changes its way of life. We do not need to settle, for our purposes, whether we should think of the body as literally having beliefs and literally enjoying things. The important question for us is how the beliefs caused in

not normally refer to a way of life (such a meaning is not listed in the LSJ); rather, it refers to something's growth, rearing, or nourishment. Socrates also says that apparitions are likely to be the souls of the bad, who pay a penalty for their bad τροφή (81d). Here "τροφή" seems to mean something like nurture. Thus, Socrates seems to contrast the philosopher's nurture and nourishment with ordinary people's. Nurture and nourishment are what lead to something's developing into and being sustained in its proper condition; they lead to its wellbeing. The soul is put into its proper condition by reasoning and ultimately grasping the forms; thus, this is its nourishment. The body distracts it with its need for bodily nourishment (66b–c). Thus, this passage is saying that the soul that experiences bodily pleasures, pains, desires, and fears becomes confused about what truly nourishes it and thereby becomes dependent on the body.

¹⁶ Woolf, 103; Russell also thinks the passage only is about a certain subgroup of pleasures. He says, "Socrates' focus is on pleasures that come to dominate a person" (89).

us by pleasure and pain change our way of life. A simple belief of the form “this piece of cake is most real” would not lead to a change in one’s way of life. It must be, that part of what we are brought to believe, is that the cake is genuinely good or worth enjoying. That is why believing the same things as the body goes along with enjoying the same things as it: you acquire beliefs about what to pursue. Socrates seems to be operating with the idea, typically thought of as Socratic, that if you believe that something is good, then you will desire it.¹⁷ The interesting twist in the *Phaedo* is the thought that we can have certain beliefs forced on us by our experiences and thereby change what we desire and how we act. We can avoid this result, though, if we do our best to avoid having these experiences in the first place.¹⁸ This passage, which comes shortly after the prison passage, at least partially explains how our pleasures and desires make us accomplices to our imprisonment: pleasures change which things we think are good, which goes along with a change in our desires.

Given the way that pleasures and pains get us to believe falsehoods and change our values, we can see why we would simply avoid the activities that bring pleasure and pain. Shortly after the previous passage, Socrates is clear the philosopher avoids pleasure and pain because he¹⁹ realizes that to do otherwise would be counterproductive:

But this is how the soul of a philosophical man would reason: it would not suppose that while philosophy must free it, it should, while being free, surrender itself to pleasure and pain and bind itself again, and undertake Penelope’s endless task by working a sort of web in reverse. Instead such a man’s soul secures a rest from these things, following its reasoning and being always engaged in reasoning, viewing what is true, divine and not an object of opinion, and being nourished by that, supposes that it should live in this way as long as it lives [...]” (84a2–b1)

17 This idea is emphasized in Bobonich 2002, 13–40 (*passim*). See also Gosling and Taylor 1982, 85. Beere 2010, 269f., emphasizes the other direction: that if you desire something, then you think it is good. For a general discussion of how Plato thinks that pleasure deceives us into seeing things as good, see Moss 2006.

18 Why are not only intense pleasures but also intense pains the greatest evil, given that intense pains force us to think that things are bad that, according to Socrates, are in fact bad? Pain forces us to think that things are most true that are not and it leads us to change our way of life. Pains make us think that painful things are worth avoiding for their own sake, when in fact there is nothing intrinsically bad about them. What is bad about pain is not what pain makes us think is bad about it.

19 I refer to the philosopher as “he” throughout this paper, since Socrates consistently assumes in the *Phaedo* that philosophers are male. Forms of ἀνὴρ are used to discuss the actual or aspiring philosopher at 63e9, 67d12, 68b8, 76b5, 78a4, and 85c7. Socrates also refers to the philosophical man (φιλόσοφος ἀνὴρ) at 64d2, 95c1, and the passage quoted below this footnote.

ἀλλ' οὕτω λογίσαίτ' ἂν ψυχὴ ἀνδρὸς φιλοσόφου, καὶ οὐκ ἂν οἰηθεῖν τὴν μὲν φιλοσοφίαν χρῆναι ἑαυτὴν λύειν, λυούσης δὲ ἐκείνης, αὐτὴν παραδιδόναι ταῖς ἡδοναῖς καὶ λύπαις ἑαυτὴν πάλιν αὖ ἔγκαταδεῖν καὶ ἀνήνυτον ἔργον πράττειν Πηνελόπης τινὰ ἐναντίως ἰσθὸν μεταχειριζομένης, ἀλλὰ γαλήνην τούτων παρασκευάζουσα, ἐπομένη τῷ λογισμῷ καὶ αἰεὶ ἐν τούτῳ οὖσα, τὸ ἀληθὲς καὶ τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὸ ἀδόξαστον θεωμένη καὶ ὑπ' ἐκείνου τρεφομένη, ζῆν τε οἶεται οὕτω δεῖν ἕως ἂν ζῆ [...]

Note that Socrates does not suggest that the philosopher might choose to have pleasures and pains but to evaluate them as worthless, nor does he suggest that the philosopher might choose to have them, understanding that he will have to fight against them. Socrates does not suggest these options because of what he said in the previous passage (which comes shortly before this one): experiencing these will change our thoughts and values. That is why the philosopher seeks a rest (γαλήνη) from them. He would not hope for philosophy to free him while allowing himself to experience pleasure and pain, because this would be to unravel the work already done.²⁰

While the philosopher avoids pleasures and pains to whatever extent is possible (καθ' ὅσον δύναται), feeling a single pleasure will not ruin a philosopher's chance at happiness, nor is the philosopher powerless in the face of pleasures and pains. We should avoid the activities that bring about pleasures and pains to the extent possible, but when we do not succeed, we can try actively to resist them.²¹ The resistance does not come in the form of simply reasoning about what is best to do. Instead, there is an active struggle between soul and body repeatedly described in the *Phaedo*, in which each is vying to rule the other. Nature commands that the soul be master and the body slave (79e–80a), but typically it is the body that rules (66c–d). Most people's souls do not struggle against their bodies because their souls have become the accomplices of their bodies, bewitched by them. Philosophers, by contrast, “avoid all the bodily desires, are steadfast (καρτεροῦσι), and do not surrender themselves to these” (82c3–5). Philosophers actively resist. The body uses pleasures and desires to rule the soul, but the wise

²⁰ Note that earlier Socrates says that *philosophy* tries to free us by showing us that inquiry through the senses is full of deceit (83a). In this passage and the previous one, we are told that the *soul of the philosopher* will not undo philosophy's work of freeing us. The philosopher's soul avoids pleasure and pain so that philosophy can release us.

²¹ Note I have not made any claims about *how* to avoid pleasures and pains to the extent possible. Surely it would not involve, e. g., entirely avoiding eating in order to avoid the pleasures of eating. If nothing else, entirely avoiding eating would result in greater pains. Avoiding pleasures and pains to the extent possible will, supposedly, involve purposely choosing some activities that will result in pleasure or pain, knowing that doing so will lead to less pleasure and pain overall. For a developed discussion of this see Jones and Marechal (forthcoming).

person fights against them. We should avoid pleasures, pains, and bodily desires not because we are completely powerless if we experience them, but because they push us away from the truth and change our values unless we work to resist them. We should seek a rest and devote our energies to the truth.

Socrates explains how we resist bodily affections in his response to Simmias' harmony objection (91e–95a). The soul, especially the wise soul, rules. He explicitly says that it does so not by surrendering to bodily affections, but rather by opposing them, for example by pulling against drinking and eating when there is thirst and hunger (94b). When the soul opposes the body, it sometimes is more ruthless, sometimes gentle, sometimes uses threats, other times reprimands, “conversing with desires, rages and fears as one thing to another” (94d5–6). Clearly, it is not enough for the soul simply to use reason to determine what is best, evaluating as worthless affections that are worthless. It must actively oppose bodily affections, treating them as one might an insubordinate soldier or servant. We can see why Socrates thinks we should avoid having these bodily affections in the first place, so one does not have to fight against them. Socrates is advocating a radical view, a strong form of asceticism. But he has good reasons for thinking it is necessary, given how he thinks bodily pleasures and desires affect us.

Let us turn to how these problems caused by pleasure and pain are related to the other problems caused by the body. We will do this by considering one of Woolf's primary arguments for his evaluative reading.²² According to Woolf, when Socrates describes the philosopher's soul as free of the body and separated from it, he does not treat pleasure and pain differently from how he treats percep-

²² He has two other arguments, one of which has to do with the philosopher's practice for being dead, the other with Socrates' actions and character in the dialogue, with an emphasis on his having sex. I address the first in footnote 46, below. As for the second, Woolf and Russell, following Dorter, note that Socrates had young children when he died, which means he must have chosen to have sex fairly close to his death (Dorter 1982, 27; Woolf 2004, 104; Russell 2005, 85–87). Can he really be advocating, then, that we should avoid all activities that involve bodily pleasures? Socrates has not argued that we should never willingly do something that will cause us to experience pleasure or pain. We avoid pleasure and pain, when we can, because such activities ultimately make us believe falsehoods and change our way of life. But there is nothing intrinsically bad about pleasures and pains and hence they need not be avoided for their own sake. Thus, there is nothing inconsistent in Socrates having children and thinking that in general we should avoid bodily pleasures and pains. Moreover, he says that we should avoid bodily pleasures and desires “to whatever extent is possible.” In the *Republic* sex is listed as a necessary desire (559c), so perhaps “to whatever extent is possible” is not complete abstinence. Finally, even if Socrates were guilty of some inconsistency, he never claims to have a completely pure soul; in fact, he claims that it is impossible to have one while still alive. Perhaps this is one place where Socrates has allowed his body to get the better of him.

tion: he thinks we should separate ourselves from both pleasure and perception. But, Woolf says, Socrates does not think that we should literally avoid using our senses; rather, he is telling us to downgrade the value of our senses.²³ And so, since he treats pleasure and perception in a parallel fashion, Socrates should be counseling us to downgrade the value of pleasures. The problem with this argument is that Socrates does not treat pleasures in a parallel fashion to perception. Following the prison passage Socrates says that investigation (σκέψις) through the senses is full of deceit and that the soul should withdraw from the senses to whatever extent it can, only trust itself, and not think (ἠγχιῖσθαι) true what it investigates (σκοπεῖν) through the senses (83a–b). He never tells us to avoid perception, whereas he does say that we should avoid (ἀπέχεσθαι) pleasures, desires, pains, and fears (83b). When discussing these bodily affections, he does not limit his restrictions to some specific activity like investigation. Socrates thinks we can use the senses without thinking that what they deliver is true. Hence, we do not need to avoid entirely using the senses – we simply need to refrain from using them to investigate.²⁴ By contrast, he thinks we should avoid, to whatever extent is possible, bodily pleasures, desires, pain, and fears. We must actively avoid them in all circumstances because they change what we think is true, our way of life, and what we enjoy.

Woolf is driven by the idea that the philosopher's treatment of pleasures and the senses is part of the very same process: separating the soul from the body, which in turn is part of the practice for dying and being dead.²⁵ However, throughout the dialogue Socrates treats the body as posing distinct problems for the philosopher, which require distinct solutions. So far, in this paper I have focused on passages that come after his affinity argument (78b–80e). But the problems caused by the body are introduced much earlier, in what is known as his defense speech (63b–69e). The problems are (1) that the body can make us not succeed in grasping the truth and (2) it can make us not even try to grasp the truth, because we value and desire something else. Both pleasure and the senses can be involved in (1), but the senses are not involved in (2).

²³ Woolf, 101–103.

²⁴ Socrates thinks that recollection is initially triggered by the use of the senses, so he thinks sometimes we should use our senses. However, he is adamant that investigation itself should not involve the senses. The initial use of the senses to trigger recollection seems to not be strictly part of the process of investigation.

²⁵ In the next section I argue that the practice for being dead does not, in fact, focus on further separating the soul from the body, but rather on the soul becoming itself according to itself (αὐτῆ καθ' αὐτήν).

There are three ways that the body can (1) make us not succeed in grasping the truth. Both pleasures and the senses can (1a) distract the soul so it does not reason well (65c). There is also a specific problem with grasping the truth that is only caused by the senses. A person can try to inquire using the senses, whereas one cannot try to inquire using pleasure or pain. And Socrates is quite clear that (1b) inquiry through the senses is deceptive (e. g. 65a–b, 65e–66a, 83a–b). Thus, Socrates thinks it is particularly important not to use the senses when inquiring. Just as the senses cause a specific problem with grasping the truth, so also pleasures and pains cause a distinct problem for grasping the truth. As we saw in the passage about the most intense pleasures and pains (83b4–e1), Socrates thinks that (1c) whether or not we are inquiring or reasoning, pleasures and pains make us think that things are true that are not true.

We have seen that after the affinity argument Socrates argues for (2), i. e. that pleasures and desires change our values and desires. Socrates also highlights this earlier in the dialogue, in his defense speech. For example, he says that the body fills us up with lusts, desires, fears, fantasies,²⁶ and much nonsense, which lead us to go to war, leaving us with no time for philosophy (66c–d).²⁷ Here the body fills us up with things that change our values, so that we pursue the wrong things, things other than philosophy.

Thus, throughout the dialogue Socrates treats the senses and bodily desires as presenting overlapping but distinct problems. In order for the philosopher to achieve his goals he must not allow the senses to distract him (addressing 1a), nor use the senses to investigate (addressing 1b) and he must avoid bodily pleasures or desires, so that he is not distracted by them (addressing 1a), nor led to believe falsehoods (addressing 1c), nor led to value the wrong things (addressing 2). While the senses are sometimes distracting, Socrates never suggests that we must

26 “Fantasies” is a translation of “εἰδωλα” (following Gallop as well as Sedley and Long), which could also be translated as “images.” If we understood Socrates as meaning that every time we use our senses we are filled with images that lead us to go to war, leaving us with no time to do philosophy, then the philosopher should actively avoid using the senses, not merely devalue them. But that seems like an unnecessarily strong reading of the passage and Socrates never tells us to avoid using the senses. It seems more likely that he is referring to a subset of the images that are relevant to war, perhaps vivid images of victory or of acquiring gold. They need not be straightforward deliverance of the senses.

27 For a quite unorthodox interpretation of this passage, in which Socrates is warning us *not* to engage in this sort of reasoning, see Rashed 2009. While I agree that the reading Rashed develops of 66b3–7 is grammatically possible, I do not think it fits the context, nor what Socrates says at the end of the speech. That said, I am in broad agreement with his approach to Pythagoreanism in the *Phaedo*. See footnote 48.

always avoid using the senses; in fact, he explicitly says philosophy permits their use to the extent necessary (83a).

It is worth considering more closely Socrates' terminology for how the body affects the soul. As mentioned above, he says that "the body fills us up (ἐμπίμπλησιν) with lusts, desires, fears, fantasies of every kind, and much nonsense" (66c2–4); he also says that we will be closest to knowledge if "we are not infected (ἀναπιμπλώμεθα) with the body's nature" (67a4–5). But the philosopher's soul stays pure (καθαρός) to whatever extent it can, not allowing such things into it (67a). He frequently says that the philosopher's soul is unalloyed (εἰλικρινές), i. e. it has nothing mixed into it. It is because their souls are pure that they can grasp things that are pure (67b), namely, the forms. To be pure is to not have foreign or inappropriate things mixed in to you. When bodily desires come into the soul, they make it impure. The soul must not let them in if it is to acquire wisdom. In the next section we will gain a more precise understanding of purification; but already we can see that it involves not allowing bodily desires into the soul.

How does the body fill us up with "lusts, desires, fears, fantasies of every kind, and much nonsense" (66c2–4)? The primary means seem to be pleasure and pain. Socrates presents a vicious circle between pleasure and desire. Experiencing pleasure changes our way of life, so that we desire further pleasures – and acquiring these pleasures leads us to desire them even more. We become body-lovers, the sort of people who might describe themselves as temperate, but in fact only delay some pleasures because they desire greater ones (68e–69a). The philosopher, by contrast, is not eager for the pleasures of food, drink or sex (64d) and hence avoids these pleasures and thereby avoids strengthening the desire for them.

It is worth stepping back to consider the broader picture that Socrates presents in the *Phaedo*, in which intense pleasures and pains force us to believe things that are not true and in which all bodily pleasures, pains, and desires have a deep and insidious effect on our thoughts and values unless we actively avoid and resist them. Socrates thinks you should evaluate these bodily affections as bad, but doing so is not sufficient; you need to abstain and purify as best you can so that you can philosophize as best you can. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Socrates has no qualms with the pleasures of learning (114e), as one would expect, since he thinks there is genuine value in learning.

I take it that most people (both now and in fourth century Athens) would not agree with Socrates that there is nothing intrinsically good about bodily pleasures. We will see why Socrates thinks this in the next section. But suppose, for a moment, that he is right about this. Then it is plausible to think that we should actively avoid bodily pleasures and desires on the grounds that we cannot expe-

rience bodily pleasures, pains, and desires without having them affect our values and actions.²⁸ Of course, someone could deny this. The Stoics, for example, famously thought that the philosopher on the rack could still be happy and hence thought that the philosopher's values and beliefs were not affected by the intense pain of torture. The standard concern with this Stoic view is that it is counterintuitive. One reason it seems counterintuitive is that the happy life seems to involve pleasure (or at least the absence of prolonged pain). Socrates provides a different sort of concern with the Stoic position: when we have intense pleasures or pains they force us to believe false things and change our values, which makes wisdom impossible and, in fact, not even desired.

This disagreement about whether we can be happy on the rack ultimately rests on Socrates denying a fairly common idea among ancient, modern, and contemporary ethicists. The idea is that the world simply provides us with, at most, something like a pro-attitude, an unendorsed appearance, or an impression of an action as worth doing, which we are free to affirm or deny (or some other similar action).²⁹ On the Stoic account, for example, we are not moved by impressions that we have not affirmed. But this is not the picture in the *Phaedo*. We do not distinguish between two aspects of desiring, the impression and the acceptance. The body fills us up with full-fledged desires and pleasures – not unendorsed pleasures or proto-desires.³⁰ If we do not actively avoid and resist, we end up taking these pleasures and desires as our own, so that we desire our own imprisonment. Philosophy can see the cunning of the prison and use this knowledge to help us avoid forming bodily desires and resist the desires that we have already formed. But even when we do not associate ourselves with a bodily desire, it is still a desire that we have and having such a desire is precisely to be compelled toward its end. We should avoid being in such a state to whatever extent we can.

28 It also fits a fair amount of psychological literature, as philosophers have explored recently, e. g. Gendler 2008.

29 Kant is standardly interpreted in this way (e. g. Allison 1990, 97 f.) as are the Stoics (e. g. Long and Sedley 1987 section 58, 354–359). For a contemporary version, see Brewer 2009, 111–114.

30 Pace Bobonich 2002, 26 f., who reconstructs the moral psychology of the *Phaedo* around desires that are endorsed or unendorsed. He does not directly argue for this position. Instead, he seems drawn to it because he thinks that the body is the proper subject of bodily desires; all the soul can do is endorse desires that the body has. Such a view has trouble explaining Socrates' claim that the body fills us up with desires, and trouble explaining why avoiding bodily desires amounts to purification of the soul. On Bobonich's view the soul does not have bodily desires in it, so it can hardly need to remove them in order to be pure. For further arguments against making the body the subject of bodily desires, see Tenkku 1956, 105–107; Gallop 1975, 89; Bostock 1986, 26 f. and 31–33; Woolf 2004, 107 f.; and Beere 2010, 261–264.

3 The Soul's Proper Condition and Activity

I have argued that Socrates is speaking literally when he says that we should avoid bodily pleasures and desires. He thinks that having bodily pleasures and desires leads us away from the truth and changes our values. But what, exactly, is wrong with this change to our values and why, exactly, should we pursue truth? An answer to these questions is needed to understand fully his asceticism. Answering them requires a fuller account of Socrates' overall ethical theory in the *Phaedo*.³¹ In this section I argue that Socrates thinks that the type of thing we are determines how we should act and the condition we should be in. Throughout the *Phaedo* Socrates consistently identifies us with our souls (most memorably at 115c when he says that Crito can bury him any way he wants as long as he can catch him). Our soul has proper activities and a proper condition. Thought and inquiry are proper activities of the soul; if inquiry is successful, it leads to the proper condition, wisdom. The main way Socrates picks out the proper condition and activities is not in terms of function, as one might expect from the function argument in *Republic* I (352d–354a), but rather by describing what the soul does itself according to itself (αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν). The soul itself according to itself grasps the truth by thinking about the forms. When the soul grasps the truth and so has wisdom, it is happy. As we will see, philosophers desire to be dead because they desire to have their souls in this condition. Thus, the main problem with pleasure and pains diverting us from the truth is not that this is harmful to achieving some further end, but rather that it directly undermines our proper condition and thereby our happiness.³² This is why intense pleasures and pains, in forcing us to think things are most true that are not, are the greatest evil (as he says in the 83b4–e1 passage discussed in the last section).

This phrase, “αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν” (which I translate “itself according to itself”), is famously also applied to the forms in the *Phaedo* (first at 66a), although our interest is in its application to the soul.³³ While it is often thought to be quite

³¹ There have not been many comprehensive accounts of this, but see Bobonich 2002, 13–40.

³² Gosling and Taylor 1982, 83f., briefly suggest an account similar to the one I argue for in this section, but without connecting it to αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν, reincarnation, or the philosopher's desire to be dead.

³³ According to the TLG, the phrases “αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν,” “αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν,” and “αὐτὰς καθ' αὐτάς” do not occur before Plato. “αὐτό καθ' αὐτό” occurs only in Isocrates *Areopagiticus* 7.4 and Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.14.2. In Aristophanes' *Clouds* one of Socrates' students does use the phrase “αὐτὸς καθ' αὐτόν” (193f.). Strepsides asks “But what is their asshole doing, looking to the heavens?” (τί δὴθ' ὁ πρωκτὸς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν βλέπει) to which the student responds “itself according to itself it is learning to do astronomy” (αὐτὸς καθ' αὐτόν ἀστρονομεῖν διδάσκεται). It

opaque, let me suggest how we can make sense of it. The first “αὐτή” indicates that the subject is correctly and strictly being picked out, as in “I myself went to the store – I did not send someone to the store for me.”³⁴ Thus, when Socrates says that the soul itself views the things that are (66e), investigates (79d), and comes to be with the things that are (79d), he means properly to pick out the soul, not, e.g. the soul-body composite. The second part of the phrase, “καθ’ αὐτήν”, indicates that this is how the soul is according to itself, that is, in virtue of some feature that is proper to the soul.³⁵ Thus, since the soul investigates according to itself (καθ’ αὐτήν), it does so in accordance with the sort of thing it is. The soul itself can also engage in some activity in accordance with (κατά) some other feature of it, not proper to its being a soul. The soul itself might desire sex, but it does so not in accordance with its being a soul, in other words, not in accordance with itself. Socrates refers to bodily desires as “desires according to the body” (αἱ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ἐπιθυμιαί) (82c3) and similarly refers to “affections according to the body” (τὰ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα πάθη) (94b7). When the soul has such desires, it is not itself according to itself (81b–c, discussed below). Understanding “αὐτή καθ’ αὐτήν” in this way helps us see what, precisely, is wrong with the soul not grasping the truth.³⁶ When it does not grasp the truth, it is not acting in the way proper to a soul.

is unclear what exactly Socrates’ student means by this (for a discussion of this passage, and a different but similar way to understand “αὐτή καθ’ αὐτήν,” see Broackes 2009). It may be that the historical Socrates used the phrase, but that Plato refined the sense of “κατά”; I am not taking a stand on what the original meaning of the phrase would have been, if Socrates used it at the time of Aristophanes’ play.

34 “αὐτή” can also mean “alone,” as in “I went to the store alone, without anyone else.” (c. f. LSJ αὐτός I.3.) I think this meaning is less likely, so I translate this first “αὐτή” as “itself,” but nothing in what follows depends on one interpretation or the other. For further reasons to not take it as alone, see footnote 42, below.

35 For this use of “κατά,” see, e.g. κατὰ νόμον and κατὰ φύσιν in the *Gorgias* (such as at 483a3–4). In the *Meno* at 88c and the *Euthydemus* at 281d–e Socrates says that things are not good αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ if their being good is determined by whether they are guided by wisdom or ignorance. Such things are not good according to themselves, but rather are good or not depending on what controls them.

36 Thus, while “itself according to itself” is hardly ordinary English, it removes the (perhaps intentional) ambiguity in translations like “alone by itself” (Sedley and Long), “by itself” (Grube) or “itself by itself” (Gallop). If one reads the “by” in “by itself” as causal, then “by itself” could mean the same thing as “according to itself.” But what makes “by itself” a more readable translation is that “by itself” normally means *all alone*. Textually, the advantage of reading “καθ’ αὐτήν” as *according to itself* is that this fits with Plato’s broader philosophical use of “κατά” and with his contrasting expression “κατὰ τὸ σῶμα,” in which “κατά” clearly means something like *according to*. Philosophically, the advantage of this reading is that it explains why Socrates

In what follows, I argue that the best way to understand the soul's proper activity and proper condition is through Socrates' account of why the philosopher seek dying and being dead. By the end of Socrates' discussion of why philosophers seek these things (61b–69e), it turns out that only philosophers can have genuine virtue. At this point, everyone seems to have a reason to seek dying and being dead, since only those who seek it have genuine virtue.³⁷ But to understand fully why everyone should practice for being dead, we need to appreciate the technical sense in which Socrates means this. To my knowledge, no other scholar has laid this out. Understanding what he means will help us see why only philosophers engage in the soul's proper activity. We need to begin with Socrates' definitions of death and being dead:

And [do we suppose] that it [death (θάνατος)] is anything other than the separation of the soul from the body? And that being dead (τὸ τεθνάναι) is this: separate from the soul and apart, the body has come to be itself according to itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ), and the soul is itself according to itself (αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτήν), separate from the body and apart? Can death be anything other than that? (64c4–8)

Ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγὴν; καὶ εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ τεθνάναι, χωρὶς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγὴν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγείσαν αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν εἶναι; Ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο;

Notice that Socrates provides two different definitions in this passage, one for death – which requires nothing but separation of the body and the soul – and another for being dead, which requires (1) separation of the body and soul and (2) that each is itself according to itself.³⁸ It is the second part of the definition, the “itself according to itself,” that has been overlooked. Being dead requires more

thinks one should do what one does αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν: you should do this because it is according to your nature. If, instead, you read “καθ' αὐτήν” as meaning *all alone* and if you thought that what something does all alone indicates what is natural and appropriate for it, then the two readings would not be very different from one another.

37 See Beere 2010, 259, for a discussion of this shift from an argument that explicitly applies only to philosophers to one that applies to everyone.

38 Note that the perfective aspect of “being dead” (τεθνάναι) strongly suggests an end state rather than a process. In the *Phaedo* Socrates consistently uses “ἀποθνήσκειν” for the process of dying and “τεθνάναι” for the result, being dead. In fact, these different meanings are crucial for the cyclical argument (70c–72d). Thus, according to Socrates' definition, being dead is the state in which the body and soul are not only separate, but each is itself according to itself. “Death” (θάνατος), by contrast, could refer to a final state or to the process that leads up to this state. For an account of the importance of this for interpreting Heraclitus, and an argument that it often refers to the process in Heraclitus, see Hussey 1991. In the *Phaedo*, “θάνατος” seems to retain its ambiguity, able to refer to either the process or the resulting state. But note that when it refers to the resulting

than death does.³⁹ The final sentence of the passage might suggest that he is only offering one definition here, of death, and so he is not distinguishing death from being dead.⁴⁰ While that might be suggested by this passage taken on its own, I will argue that the way that Socrates goes on to argue relies on these being distinct definitions. As we will see, viewing them as distinct also helps us understand why philosophers view it as an accomplishment to be dead. Moreover, if Socrates thought these were the same thing, it is unclear why he would provide these two definitions in a row, using clearly different formulations. Instead, my suggestion is that Socrates carefully gives distinct formulations, which he later relies on, but he realizes that Simmias may not have immediately grasped these nuanced differences, so he only asks Simmias about the simpler definition, that of death.⁴¹

Socrates' account of when the soul is itself according to itself is related to the philosopher's desire for truth (66b) and wisdom (66e). Socrates says that being connected to the body makes it impossible for the soul to acquire truth and wisdom (66c–e). Then he says, in the passage below, that pure knowledge can only be acquired when the soul is itself according to itself. Given that in order to have genuine knowledge the soul must be both separate and itself according to itself, Socrates argues that the only way for the philosopher to have what he desires is for him to be dead:

The time, so it seems, when we will have that which we desire and whose lovers we claim to be, namely wisdom, will be when we are dead, as the argument indicates, and not while we are alive. For if it is impossible to have pure knowledge of anything when we are in the company of the body, then one of two things: either knowledge cannot be acquired anywhere, or it can be acquired when we are dead. For at that time the soul will be itself according to itself, separate from the body, whereas before then it will not (66e1–67a1).

state of separation of soul and body it is still easier to achieve than being dead (τεθνάναι), by this definition, since it does not require the soul or the body to be itself according to itself.

39 Unfortunately, none of the major English translations preserve this distinction in the argument that follows, making it impossible to follow Socrates' reasoning; at various places, they translate “τεθνάναι” using a form of “death” instead of “being dead” or translate a demonstrative referring back to being dead as referring back to death.

40 I would like to thank Rusty Jones for pressing this concern.

41 That said, for my purposes the most important point is that Socrates thinks that being dead involves the soul being itself according to itself, which turns out to be difficult to accomplish. If you think that Socrates only offers one definition here, but you accept that it includes the soul being itself according to itself, that provides what is needed for my main arguments below. Note that my main point in this section does not even require accepting this much, that Socrates offers a definition that requires the soul to be itself according to itself. My main point is that Socrates thinks that the soul's proper activity is inquiring, and its proper condition is wisdom, the state in which it grasps the truth.

καὶ τότε, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡμῖν ἔσται οὐ ἐπιθυμοῦμέν τε καὶ φαμεν ἐρασταὶ εἶναι, φρονήσεως, ἐπειδὴν τελευτήσωμεν, ὡς ὁ λόγος σημαίνει, ζῶσιν δὲ οὐ. εἰ γὰρ μὴ οἶόν τε μετὰ τοῦ σώματος μηδὲν καθαρώς γνῶναι, δυοῖν θάτερον, ἢ οὐδαμοῦ ἔστιν κτήσασθαι τὸ εἶδέναι ἢ τελευτήσασιν· τότε γὰρ αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν ἢ ψυχὴ ἔσται χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος, πρότερον δ' οὐ.

Socrates presents an argument here for why the philosopher desires to be dead, explained with two “for” (γάρ) clauses. The philosopher desires to be dead because he desires truth. But this requires the soul being itself according to itself, which in turn requires separation from the body, and hence the philosopher must be (by definition) dead. Socrates has recently related the one part of the definition of being dead to the other: the soul cannot be itself according to itself until it is separated from the body (66c–e). Socrates does not think that in order for the soul and body to be separate, the soul must be itself according to itself. Hence, death is easier to obtain than being dead: death only requires separation and something can be separate without being itself according itself. In fact, as we will see, the problem that non-philosophers face is precisely that when their souls separate from their bodies, i. e. upon death, they are not themselves according to themselves and hence not dead, strictly speaking.

It is only after the affinity argument that we can fully appreciate what wisdom is, which is why it is only here that Socrates describes the philosopher as happy after death. In the affinity argument Socrates explains what sort of thing the soul is. His discussion of the nature of the soul clarifies the soul’s proper activity, which in turn clarifies why the philosopher is happy when dead and indeed why the philosopher can escape reincarnation and dwell among the gods. In this discussion of what sort of thing the soul is, we are told that its grasp of the forms is the very same thing as wisdom:

[Weren’t we saying that] whenever the soul itself according to itself investigates, it departs into that which is pure, always is, immortal, and is the same; that soul, because it is akin to this, always comes to be with it whenever it, itself according to itself, comes to be and is able to do so; that the soul then ceases from its wandering, and in relation to those entities always is the same according to the same things, because it is grasping things of the same sort; and that this condition of the soul is called “wisdom”? (79d1–d7)

Ὅταν δέ γε αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν σκοπῇ, ἐκέϊσε οἴχεται εἰς τὸ καθαρὸν τε καὶ αἰὶ ὄν καὶ ἀθάνατον καὶ ὠσαύτως ἔχον, καὶ ὡς συγγενῆς οὔσα αὐτοῦ αἰὶ μετ' ἐκείνου τε γίγνεται, ὅταν περ αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν γένηται καὶ ἐξῆ ἀυτῆ, καὶ πέπαυται τε τοῦ πλάνου καὶ περὶ ἐκεῖνα αἰὶ κατὰ ταῦτ' ὠσαύτως ἔχει, ἅτε τοιούτων ἐφαπτομένη· καὶ τοῦτο αὐτῆς τὸ πάθημα φρόνησις κέκληται;

Notice that Socrates says that what the soul is akin to determines what it does itself according to itself: because it is akin to the things that are pure and always

are, the soul, itself according to itself, comes to be with such things.⁴² The soul is akin to the forms and so grasping them is proper to it, what it does itself according to itself (c. f. 84a–b). Moreover, he says that the soul ceases from its wandering and is according to the same things because it is of the same sort as the forms. The type of thing that the soul is determines its proper condition, wisdom. Philosophers can be said both to desire wisdom and to pursue *nothing but* being dead because, in fact, these turn out to be one and the same thing: the soul being itself according to itself, separate from the body.

The relation between the soul's proper activity and its proper condition is different from what one would expect from Plato's function argument in *Republic* I or Aristotle's function argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7. In those arguments, it is exercising one's virtue, which Aristotle identifies as a sort of disposition (ἔξις), that results in the proper activity, happiness. Aristotle especially emphasizes the importance of not merely possessing virtue, but engaging in activity (e. g., *NE* I.5, 1095b31–1096a2). By contrast, in the above passage the soul's activity of inquiry and of coming-to-be ultimately result in wisdom. They result in the soul *ceasing* from its wandering and thereby being in the condition (πάθημα) of wisdom. Socrates' contrasts the activity that leads up to this condition with the ceasing that results; he does not seem to conceive of the resulting condition as a type of activity. The philosopher's activity is what leads to the condition of grasping the things that always are. We should be careful not to think of the soul's proper activity as an activity in the Aristotelian sense of the exercise (ἐνέργεια) of a disposition.⁴³

Soon after clarifying the nature of the soul in the above passage, Socrates says that the wise soul, after death, goes to what is unseen, divine, and immortal, where it can be happy, spending time with the gods (81a); this is the fate

42 “αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν” cannot literally mean or imply “all alone” here because the soul is αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν precisely when it is *with* something else, namely the things that are. In fact, there are a number of places in the corpus where someone describes something αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό and this thing is not all alone. For example, at the beginning of *Republic* II Glaucon wants to know what justice and injustice are and what power each has αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό when in the soul (358b5). Clearly, Glaucon is not asking about what power justice has when it is all alone, with nothing else in the soul. He wants to know what power justice has according to itself, even if it can never be all alone in the soul.

43 In the *Euthydemus* Socrates says that it is not enough to have (κεκτήσθαι) good things, one must also use (χρῆσθαι) them to be happy (280d). Does this suggest that happiness requires an activity in the *Euthydemus*? It is not clear that it does. It is possible to use something without being engaged in an activity, at least in a normal sense of activity. I can possess a pillow without using it or use it to sleep, thereby coming to a rest. Similarly, we use our wisdom when we cease from our wandering and are in the stable condition of grasping the forms.

of the good people's souls (81d). The fate of non-philosophers is, in a parallel fashion, determined by their souls not being themselves according to themselves. Socrates says that bodily pleasures and desires make souls defiled and impure (μεμιασμένη καὶ ἀκάθαρτος, 81b1) and then says that such a soul is not itself according to itself when it is separated from the body (81c1–2). Hence, by Socrates' definition of being dead, this soul is strictly speaking not dead (separated and itself according to itself). It has, however, gone through death, by definition, since it is separate from the body, as he explicitly says (81b1–2 and 81c1–2). As mentioned earlier, Socrates refers to bodily desires as “desires according to the body” (αἱ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ἐπιθυμιαί) (82c3) and similarly refers to “affections according to the body” (τὰ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα πάθη) (94b7), in contrast to those things that are in accordance with the soul. These desires are not proper to the soul, but rather serve the body. The soul with such desires is, at best, itself according to another, namely the body, since it serves the body's ends and undermines its own end, the grasp of truth.

The very thing that causes non-philosophers not to be truly dead ultimately results in their souls reincarnating. Reincarnation results from their desire for the bodily: “what is more, they wander until the time when they are bound again into a body *by their desire for the bodily* (τοῦ σωματοειδοῦς ἐπιθυμίας) that follows them around” (81d9–e2, emphasis mine).⁴⁴ This basic picture is repeated again after the final immortality argument: the souls of those who desire the body are, by necessity, drawn back into bodies (108a–c). Philosophers can break the cycle of reincarnation because when they reach death, they become truly dead. Their souls are as close as possible to being themselves according to themselves and so when they separate from their bodies, they can think of the forms in the company of the divine, being with what they are akin to. Ordinary people, by contrast, when they die, cannot completely leave the body because they are not themselves according to themselves.

We can now fully appreciate why the philosophers pursue nothing but being dead and dying (64a), and why they practice dying (67e). It is difficult to be dead, which is why you have to practice for it.⁴⁵ Most people's souls are never them-

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion of how this account of reincarnation relates to those throughout the corpus, see Kamtekar 2016.

⁴⁵ Warren 2001 provides an appealing account of Socratic suicide, but, by his own account, he is left with one significant obstacle (104 f.). Why does Socrates think that some people would be better off dead and yet the gods have not given them some sign or way to die? My account offers an answer: everyone would be better off if they were dead, but in fact most people cannot be dead, even if they reach death, because they are too attached to their bodies; they are not themselves according to themselves. The *Phaedo* makes clear that Socrates is the purest and best

selves according to themselves and so they get pulled into a new body. Philosophers, by contrast, are as close to dead as possible (67e) because they are as close as they can be to being themselves according to themselves.⁴⁶ So long as they are still connected to their body, they cannot be entirely pure, entirely according to themselves, but they can come close. They cultivate wisdom, the purifying rite (69c), which keeps the bodily desires from their souls so they can engage in their proper activity. This is why the philosopher avoids bodily activities that lead to pleasures and desires, and resists these bodily affections when they arise.

I argued in the previous section that Socrates does not fetishize the avoidance of bodily pleasure and desires, but he does view them as having bad effects on us, because they lead us away from truth and change our way of life. One might wonder whether bodily pleasures and desires are nonetheless intrinsically good for us, even if they are instrumentally bad. If so, their instrumental badness would need to be weighed against their intrinsic goodness. We are now in a position to see why Socrates would not view them as intrinsically good. Bodily pleasures and desires are not proper to the soul. What they promote and perfect, if anything, is the body, not the soul. They are not intrinsically good for us and are, moreover, instrumentally bad.

4 Purification, Prisons, and Pythagoreanism

Socrates' talk of purification and of the body as a prison has not received much attention, perhaps because it is viewed as part of "an impassioned declaration of faith" or a "religious argument [...] with many unsatisfying features" or simply part of the mythical, religious overtones of the dialogue, rather than something that does real philosophical work.⁴⁷ Let me suggest instead, in line with work

person they know of, by some considerable margin. While philosophers all aspire to be dead, most of their souls are not yet ready.

46 Other accounts of practice for being dead have not attended to the distinction between death and being dead, and have thus simply focused on the separation component of being dead (Woolf 2004, 106–111, Pakaluk 2003, 99–102). This has led to the question of whether the philosopher's practice and pursuit leads to literal separation before physical death or not (Pakaluk says yes, Woolf no). On the account I have provided the practice and pursuit is made through the soul becoming itself according to itself, not through separation. Only at death do we have separation but we can practice for being dead by making our soul closer to itself according to itself so that when we reach death (i. e., separation), we can truly become dead.

47 Hackforth 1955, 44, calls the discussion of purification at 67b "an impassioned declaration of faith". White 2006 distinguishes between a philosophical argument in Socrates' defense, which

by David Sedley and others, that these elements of the *Phaedo* are supposed to show how Pythagorean or Orphic ideas are correct, at least in some sense, but need to be given a more precise account and justification than the Pythagoreans give.⁴⁸ Kathryn Morgan lays out Socrates' general strategy in the *Phaedo* for these claims: he takes one of their cryptic comments – much as he took the Oracle's pronouncement in the *Apology* – and provides an interpretation of it that reveals how it captures an important philosophical truth.⁴⁹ The stage is set for this activity early in the dialogue, when Cebes says that Philolaus told them that suicide is prohibited but did not tell them anything clear about this (61d–e).⁵⁰ Philolaus was the best-known Pythagorean of the time. Socrates is here forced to provide his own justification for this Pythagorean view. Plato seems to think that Philolaus and the other Pythagoreans either did not attempt to justify some of their crucial claims or did so poorly, forcing him to provide his own justification.⁵¹

Many features of Socrates' ethical account in the *Phaedo* naturally fit into this interpretative strategy. I want to draw attention, in particular, to four ways in which the account presented in the last two sections provides a clearer meaning or better justification for Pythagorean or Orphic ideas and practices. First, in his discussion of suicide Socrates says that there are secret accounts that claim that the body is a prison, but that this is not easy to understand (62b). Plato thinks of this idea, that the body is a prison, as Orphic (*Cratylus* 400c) and it may have also been associated with Pythagoreanism.⁵² As we have seen, after the affinity argument Socrates provides an account of what this claim really means, explain-

he thinks is good, from a religious argument, which he thinks has “many unsatisfactory features” (457). Frequently scholars mention that these discussions have a mythical, religious, or Pythagorean overtone without providing a detailed account of them (e. g., Gallop 1975, 88, Bostock 1986, ch. 2).

48 Sedley 1995, Rashed 2009 (esp. 124 f.), Morgan 2010, Horky 2013, ch. 5. Note that the *Phaedo* makes references to Bacchic, Orphic, and Pythagorean practices, which are partially overlapping (Burkert 1972, ch. VI, esp. 300; Parker 1983, ch. 10; Betegh 2014). There is also at least one reference to the Eleusinian Mysteries (“lying in the mud,” Parker 1983, 282). Socrates seems to be considering the practices and structure of mystery cults with a strong emphasis on Pythagoreanism, and showing how the philosopher's practice fits their structure.

49 Morgan 2010.

50 *Phaedo* also narrates the dialogue to Echechrates, a Pythagorean. For a discussion of Echechrates, see Horky 2013, 107 f. For a discussion of the role of Echechrates' Pythagoreanism in the dialogue, see Sedley 1995, 10 f.

51 A major theme of Horky 2013 is that the mathematical Pythagoreans, such as Philolaus, were trying to provide explanations for the things taken to be facts by the Pythagoreans, but Plato and Aristotle thought their explanations were insufficient or methodologically unsound.

52 It is unclear whether we should associate the idea that the body is a prison with Pythagoreanism (c. f., Huffman 1993, F14 f., Horky 2013, 173).

ing how it captures something importantly right: the body imprisons the soul by providing the soul with desires that undermine its own ends, making it pursue the body's ends instead.

Second, Pythagoreans thought that one should follow specific injunctions for how to live, many of them restrictive, for example the avoidance of meat and beans.⁵³ Parker and Burkert describe this as a type of asceticism.⁵⁴ Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, replaces these specific injunctions with the idea that general avoidance and resistance will lead to purification, and he gives a precise sense to the soul being purified. He does not embrace the specific Pythagorean injunctions for how to live, which are part of their *acousmata* (literally, the things heard); instead, he abstracts from the details of their often quite specific injunctions and says that what makes one pure is the avoidance of bodily desires, fears, pleasures, and pains. In giving an account of purification, he clarifies a concept that is not only of general importance for Greek religion, but which is also strongly associated with Orphic mysteries.⁵⁵ Instead of discrete Orphic or Eleusinian rituals, Socrates makes wisdom the purifying rite (69c).

Third, Socrates provides a robust account of how two important ideas fit together: engaging in these restrictive activities and having a better afterlife. Those who engaged in Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries or were Pythagoreans thought that their activities brought the promise of a better afterlife; according to Pythagorean and Orphic views, this would help them escape the cycle of reincarnation.⁵⁶ Socrates provides an account of how this works. Avoiding certain activities leads to purification by not allowing bodily pleasures, pains, and desires into the soul. Not having these bodily affections in the soul allows it to be itself according to itself, and hence not pulled back into a body upon death. Instead, the soul, having detached from the body, is in its own proper condition, leading to eternal happiness. Reincarnation and unhappiness result for those who have bodily desires because their souls are not themselves according to themselves.

Fourth and finally, Socrates appropriates the idea of a Pythagorean way of life. The Pythagoreans' requirement of constantly living in accordance with the *acousmata* goes hand in hand with the idea that there is a Pythagorean way of life, not simply discrete rituals. Robert Parker argues that the Pythagoreans made

⁵³ Betegh 2014 argues for quite a bit of diversity within Pythagoreanism and Orphism, and in particular that vegetarianism was probably not accepted by all Pythagoreans (although he agrees that they all followed some set or other of specific injunctions).

⁵⁴ Parker 1983, 305; chapter VI of Burkert 1972 has the title "Mysteries and Asceticism"; Horky 2013, 4 and 8, also refers to the acousmatic Pythagoreans as ascetic.

⁵⁵ See Edmonds 2013, chapter 7.

⁵⁶ See, e. g., Kahn 2001, 4.

an important break from traditional Greek religion by claiming that one should always stay purified, not merely at special occasions, such as before the performance of rituals.⁵⁷ Whether or not Parker is right that the Pythagoreans emphasized purification, Socrates presents philosophers in the *Phaedo* as having their own way of life, which is the only way to be pure and escape reincarnation. This way of life is entirely distinct from, and at odds with, ordinary people's way of life; the philosopher constantly opposes bodily pleasures instead of pursuing them. The Pythagorean way of life provides the right model for philosophy as Socrates envisions it in the *Phaedo*. Philosophy is not something that you engage in occasionally or as an ordinary profession, nor does it make a minor change in your life. Instead, it completely transforms you.

In sum, Socrates embraces some key structural features of Orphic and Pythagorean views and provides them with clearer meanings and better justifications, making the life that one must live that of the philosopher. Plato's use of Orphic and Pythagorean ideas in the *Phaedo* should be seen within a broader context of his appropriating and trying to improve upon ideas from a number of earlier philosophers, including *Phaedo* and Anaxagoras.⁵⁸ It is the only dialogue where Plato notes his own absence, which has suggested to many that he is claiming less accuracy for how it represents Socrates than in his Socratic dialogues.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the views that Socrates expresses in the *Phaedo* are continuous, in a number of ways, with his views in his Socratic dialogues. We can think of the *Phaedo* as showing how Socrates, as represented in the Socratic dialogues, could appropriate and improve upon other philosophers' ideas. Anaxagoras ideas are brought into Socrates' discussion of the sensible things, forms, and causation.

⁵⁷ Parker 1983, ch. 10. He includes Orphism also; however, see Betegh 2014 (esp. 159) for reasons to think that while Pythagoreanism focused on injunctions relevant to daily life, Orphism focused on special transformative rituals of the sort that would happen once in a lifetime or at times of extreme crisis. There are a few places in the *Phaedo* where Socrates seems to be taking a basic tenet of Greek religion, not specific to mystery cults, and providing it with a revised or refined meaning. For example, Parker notes that it is a truism of Greek religion that "it is not permitted for the impure to attain the pure." Socrates draws on this when he says that when we are pure "by our own efforts we shall know all that is pure, which is presumably the truth, for it is not permitted to the impure to attain the pure" (67a–b).

⁵⁸ For *Phaedo*, see footnote 61. For Anaxagoras, see Furley 1976. Other philosophers have also been suggested. For example, Irwin 1977 argues that Plato is drawing on Heraclitus in the *Phaedo*, and Menn 2010 argues that Plato is appropriating one of Epicharmus' arguments.

⁵⁹ It is a matter of considerable disagreement whether there is such a stable character and whether the Socratic dialogues form a coherent group. In what follows I will assume that there is such a stable character and coherent group of dialogues. However, the main claims in this paper do not depend on this.

These are typically seen as Platonic views, rather than Socratic. But they emerge out of Socrates' views. Socrates repeatedly says in the *Phaedo* that in talking about forms, he is talking about the answers to "what is it?" questions (65d–e, 75c–d, 78c–d), which they have discussed frequently in the past (76d, 100b). He also calls these forms in the *Euthyphro* and *Meno*, and represents them there as having several of the same key features as in the *Phaedo*, such as explaining why f-things are f (*Euthyphro* 6d–e, *Meno* 72c). Socrates' views in the *Phaedo* on forms and their relation to sensible things develop out of a Socratic backdrop. Socrates in the *Phaedo* similarly develops Anaxagoras' account of *nous* (reason) as a cause in light of the account of *nous* put forward in the so-called Socratic dialogues, according to which *nous* brings about what is best.⁶⁰ We can also see Plato as engaging in this sort of appropriation with *Phaedo*'s ideas.⁶¹ *Phaedo*, the narrator, was himself a writer of Socratic dialogues who had views on how one's body can incline one's soul in various ways while, at the same time, allowing the soul to overcome these inclinations. Plato has Socrates develop such ideas in the *Phaedo*.

In a similar way, Socrates appropriates Pythagorean and Orphic elements in the *Phaedo* along recognizably Socratic lines. Plato has Socrates provide a Socratic account of the body as a prison, of asceticism, and of the sort of life one must live in order to escape reincarnation. Socrates frequently defends the view that our beliefs, especially about what is good, mirror what we desire.⁶² On the Socratic account of the body as a prison, it imprisons by changing our beliefs about what is good and thereby changes our desires. On the Socratic account of asceticism, we do not have apparently arbitrary restrictions on specific actions, but rather a principled reason to avoid bodily pleasures and desires because of the way they undermine our virtue and happiness. This focus on virtue and happiness is another characteristic of Socratic ethics. And on the Socratic account in the *Phaedo*, the way of life needed to escape reincarnation is philosophy, and this life leads to a permanent state of wisdom. The idea of philosophy as a way of life is, of course, quite important to Socrates, laid out most clearly in the *Apology*.

The *Phaedo* may be doing more than providing a Socratic version of Pythagorean and Orphic ideas. Marwan Rashed has made a compelling case that Socrates is associated with Pythagorean elements in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, using this to suggest that the historical Socrates may have had Pythagorean interests himself.⁶³ While Rashed is careful not to claim that we can read off the historical

⁶⁰ As I argue in Ebrey 2014, 256.

⁶¹ For a discussion of this, see Sedley 1995, 8 f., and Boys-Stones 2004.

⁶² E.g. *Protagoras* 358d, *Meno* 77d–e.

⁶³ Rashed 2009.

Socrates from the *Clouds*, he does open up the distinct possibility that the historical Socrates had Pythagorean interests, in which case the *Phaedo* could be Plato's exploration of the historical Socrates' Pythagoreanism. Either way, we can read the *Phaedo* as providing a Socratic approach to Pythagoreanism.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that Socrates thinks that the proper condition of the soul is one of grasping the forms. By grasping the forms, the soul will be happy and not be pulled back into a body. We should avoid bodily pleasures, pains, desires, and fears because they make us pursue other ends and hinder us from reaching this condition of wisdom, even when we try to, thereby undermining our happiness and leading to our reincarnation. By way of conclusion, I will first briefly explain how Socrates' theory is reflected in the compositional structure of the *Phaedo*, then explain how my interpretation can account for the emotions elicited by reading the *Phaedo*, and finally address whether Socrates is counseling us to abandon our humanity.

David Sedley has noted that Plato composed the *Phaedo* to contrast the ordinary, commonly accepted view of the world with a deeper account.⁶⁴ Let me note an additional important example of this: Plato's contrast between conventional ideas of prisons and pollution and his deeper account. At the beginning of the dialogue *Phaedo* says that Socrates had been in prison for an unusually long time because of Athenian concerns about purity and pollution, which meant that the city could not put him to death. Socrates is in a conventional prison and conventional concerns with purity and pollution lead them to delay his death, thinking that death is tied to pollution. Socrates reveals, over the course of the dialogue, that the real prison he is in is his own body, the real pollution that should concern them is bodily desires and pleasures, and death, in fact, is a chance to escape this prison and forever be free of pollution, but only if one's soul is made as pure as possible by avoiding bodily pleasures and desires. Plato carefully refers to ordinary views at the beginning of the dialogue that Socrates later replaces with his radical new views.

⁶⁴ Sedley 1995, 9. As an example, he points out that Socrates refers to an ordinary, horizontal geography at the beginning of the dialogue (there are a large number of references to where people live around the Greek world) that contrasts with the more significant vertical geography found in the myth (we, in fact, all live in a depression in the earth, with purer beings above us and the impure below).

It is sometimes objected that ascetic readings of the *Phaedo* cannot account for the emotional effects the dialogue itself has on us, the readers.⁶⁵ Note that I have argued that Socrates counsels us to avoid bodily pleasures, pains, desires, and fears – not emotions in general. Nonetheless, if the *Phaedo* is suggesting that death is not a bad thing and that in fact it is a significant advantage for Socrates to be free of the body, why would Plato compose the dialogue in a way likely to elicit sadness about Socrates' death? Plato likely did predict that most readers would find themselves, if not actually crying, at least in sympathy with Socrates' followers at the end of the dialogue, who are moved to tears. Socrates chides his followers for this behavior (117d–e), saying that this is why he sent away the women, that they, by contrast, should be steadfast. He uses this same term, “steadfast” (καρτερέω), earlier when he says that philosophers avoid all bodily desires, are steadfast, and do not surrender to these (82c). Plato has written the dialogue so that we see Socrates as someone who has approached an ideal that we have fallen short of. Being moved by the dialogue is a sign that we are in the position of Socrates' followers, the sort of people who admire Socrates and think his ideal is worth emulating, but who recognize that they are not themselves at that ideal.

Another concern raised about ascetic readings of the *Phaedo* is that they seem to abandon humanity. Russell sees it as a drawback that according to the ascetic reading Socrates is not suggesting that we live a human life, but rather a life that transcends humanity. Woolf, similarly, says that on the ascetic reading we do not engage in the full range of human activities.⁶⁶ In fact, Socrates embraces this conclusion: he denies that we fundamentally are humans and so denies that we should live a specifically human life or engage in human activities. He says that we can take on human form when we are reincarnated (e. g. 73a, 76c, 82b). He says that our souls are akin to the divine, as opposed to our bodies, which are akin to the human (80b).⁶⁷ Socrates is not suggesting that we engage in a life appropriate for some other sort of being, the life of a god as opposed to our own life. He does not think we should reject a part of ourselves. He thinks we fundamentally are our souls and the proper condition of a soul is to think about what is akin to it, the forms.⁶⁸ This is the sort of thing we are and so determines what we should do.

⁶⁵ So Gallop 2001 and Jansen 2013.

⁶⁶ Russell 2005, 83–85; Woolf 2004, 107.

⁶⁷ He also refers to the evils from which the philosopher wishes to escape as human evils (81a, 84b). He never refers to any human goods.

⁶⁸ The idea that the best life is a life of thinking about the forms plays a central role not only in the *Phaedo*, but across many dialogues, including the *Phaedrus*, the central books of the *Republic*, and the digression in the *Theaetetus* – not to mention the similar view in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* X. Interesting work has been done on this contemplative ideal recently (e. g.

The *Phaedo* may well be the earliest example of Plato using our nature to provide a substantive account of the good life.⁶⁹

LSJ Liddell, H./Scott, R./Jones, H. S., 1940. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford
 TLG Thesaurus Linguae Graecae

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Obdrzalek 2012, Sedley 2013), but there is still much to explore, as well as comparative work to be done. One important question is how the sort of intellectualism in the *Phaedo* or *Republic* (which we could call Platonic intellectualism) relates to the so-called Socratic intellectualism of the Socratic dialogues.

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