

Plato's *Phaedo*

The arguments for the immortality of the soul.

I. Argument from Opposites (70a-72e)

- (1) Opposites come to be from opposites. [That is, if something comes to be *F*, it was previously *not-F*.] (71a)
- (2) There is a process of going from one state to its opposite. (71b)
- (3) Death is the opposite to life. (71cd)
- (4) All things that come to be dead were previously alive. (71d)
- (5) The opposite of dying is the process of coming to life. (72a)
- (6) If something comes to life, it must have existed before birth. (72a)
- (7) If the process were not cyclical, all things would eventually be in the same state. [If everything that partakes of life were to die and remain in that state, everything would eventually be dead.] (72b-d)
- (8) Therefore, souls must exist prior to and after their life as embodied things.

II. The Argument from Recollection (72e-77d)

Step 1: That there are *Forms*.

“Imperfection Argument”

- (1) We perceive sensible objects to be *F*.
- (2) But every sensible object is, at best, **imperfectly** *F*. That is, it is both *F* and not *F*. It **falls short** of being perfectly *F*.
- (3) We are aware of this imperfection in the objects of perception.
- (4) So we perceive objects to be imperfectly *F*.
- (5) To perceive something as imperfectly *F*, one must **have in mind** something that is perfectly *F*, something that the imperfectly *F* things fall short of. (E.g., we have an idea of *equality* that all sticks, stones, etc., only imperfectly exemplify.)
- (6) So we have in mind something that is perfectly *F*.
- (7) Thus, there **is** something that is perfectly *F* (e.g., *Equality*), that we have in mind in such cases.
- (8) Therefore, there is such a thing as **the *F* itself** (e.g., *the Equal itself*), and it is distinct from any sensible object.

Step 2: Our souls existed prior to our birth.

- (1) The Forms exist [but *not* in the sensible world] and “we refer all the things we perceive to [their] reality...”
- (2) If we know the Forms, then we either acquired this knowledge at birth or we recollect the Forms. (76a)
- (3) If we simply acquired this knowledge at birth, then everyone could give an account of the Forms. (76b)
- (4) But this is not the case. (76b)
- (5) Therefore, we recollect the Forms.
- (6) Therefore, just as the Forms exist, so our souls must exist before we were born. (76e)

### III. Affinity Argument (78c-84c)

- (1) The world consists of two sorts of things: (a) things that are simple, changeless, divine, unknown to the senses, and eternal; (b) things that are composite, mutable, dissoluble, known to the senses, and mortal.
- (2) The soul is simple, invisible, and rules the body (hence akin to the divine).
- (3) Therefore, the soul most likely belongs to class (a).
- (4) Therefore, the soul exists eternally (i.e., is immortal).

### IV. The Final Argument

- (1) If something is *F*, then it “participates in” *F-ness*. (100d)
- (2) A thing in itself will never become or be its opposite, while still being that thing; either it goes away or is destroyed when that happens. (103a) [A thing can’t be both *F* and  $\sim F$ .]
- (3) There are things in addition to the Forms themselves that deserve the name of the Forms for themselves, for they have that character whenever they exist. (103e) [E.g., Snow is always Cold, Fire Hot, etc. Another way of putting (1) above.]
- (4) Such things do not admit the opposite of the Form in which they participate; if they do, they perish. (104b) [E.g., if snow admits the Hot, then it ceases to be.]
- (5) Not only does the opposite not admit its opposite, but that which brings along some opposite into that which it occupies, that which brings this along will not admit the opposite to that which it brings along. (105a)
- (6) The soul brings life into the body. (105c)
- (7) Whatever the soul occupies, it always brings life to it. (105d)
- (8) Death is the opposite of life. (105d)
- (9) The soul will not admit death; if death approaches, it will give way or perish. (105d)
- (10) If the soul will not admit death, it is deathless. (105e)
- (11) If the deathless is indestructible, it is impossible for the soul to be destroyed when death comes upon it. (106b)
- (12) The deathless is indestructible. (106c)
- (13) The soul is indestructible. (106d)