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"What Kind of Death?": On the *Phaedo's* double topic

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Abstract: The Socratic instruction (64B) to clarify "what kind of death" a philosopher would deserve suggests two different notions of "death" in the *Phaedo*: physical demise and philosophy. This double meaning makes it possible for the Platonic Socrates to address a dual audience with a dual purpose: His interlocutors will receive consolation, while the perceptive reader will focus on practicing philosophy on the basis of the hypothesis of Forms. Socrates' final words can also be illuminated as a vindication of his adherence to *logos*: the cock to Asclepius has to be offered as a sign of gratitude for healing misology.

Keywords: Plato; *Phaedo*; logos; death; immortality.

According to a widespread conviction, any understanding of a Platonic dialogue must start by identifying the "real subject" or the "primary aim" around which the dialogue unfolds.[1] For the *Phaedo*, this question seems to have a clear answer: the dialogue's subject is death, and its basic aim is to prove the soul's immortality. More specifically, and in view of his own approaching demise, Socrates attempts to show in a series of arguments that the philosopher should not fear death, for it actually constitutes a relief from the sufferings of earthly life, a release from bodily shackles and an event that does not affect or endanger the immortal soul. And if this is the case, then a characteristic pursuit of philosophers would be not only to study death or care for it, but also to desire it. This *communis opinio* arises not only as a result of an interpretative assessment of the dialogue; it is directly

1 I cite here from the beginning of an important paper by G. M.A. Grube (1933), p. 203. Grube criticizes such monistic approaches and mentions *Phaedrus*, *Sophist* and *Politicus* as typical cases of a disputed "real subject". We might assume that the *Phaedo* is not mentioned, because its "real subject" has always been regarded as clear and evident. – The search for a σκοπός has been, of course, a major Neoplatonic preoccupation, predominantly marking the readings of Platonic dialogues by Iamblichus and Proclus.

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presented within the dialogue itself: In 64A–B, a Socratic reference to the relation between philosophers and death incurs the laughter of Simmias:

> Νὴ τὸν Δία, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐ πάνυ γέ με νυνδὴ γελασείοντα ἐποίησας γελάσαι. οἶμαι γὰρ ἂν τοὺς πολλοὺς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἀκούσαντας δοκεῖν εὖ πάνυ εἰρῆσθαι εἰς τοὺς φιλοσοφοῦντας – καὶ συμφάναι ἂν τοὺς μὲν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀνθρώπους καὶ πάνυ – ὅτι τῷ ὄντι οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες θανατῶσι, καὶ σφᾶς γε οὐ λελήθασιν ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν τοῦτο πάσχειν. (64A–B)
> By Zeus, Socrates, he said, you have made me laugh, even though I was in no mood for laughing just now. I think that most people, on hearing that, would think it altogether well said of philosophers – and our own countrymen would quite agree – that philosophers are, indeed, verging on death and that they themselves have realized that this is what philosophers deserve to undergo.[2]

Philosophers "verging on death" and deserving death has often been regarded as the tacit motto of the dialogue and its philosophical content. This motto collapses, though, if we pay attention to the fact that it articulates only and exclusively the view of "the Many", which would also be accepted by many compatriots of Simmias, i. e. inhabitants of Thebes, a city known for the influence exerted by Pythagoreanism. This widespread perception of *hoi polloi*, though, which coincides with the most common interpretative approach to the dialogue, is explicitly *criticized* by Socrates, who finds fault with its lack of conceptual clarity and awareness: The Many fail to understand "*in what sense* real philosophers are verging on death, *in what sense* they are deserving of it, and *what kind* of death they deserve" (64B).

> λέληθεν γὰρ αὐτοὺς ᾗ τε θανατῶσι καὶ ᾗ ἄξιοί εἰσιν θανάτου καὶ οἵου θανάτου οἱ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφοι. (64B)

The double emphatic ᾗ and the additional οἵου jointly indicate here that "death" is a *pollachôs legomenon* in the *Phaedo*: not a unique concept, but a word that calls for further investigation, analysis and conceptual distinction. The lack of interest manifested by the vast majority of commentators for this Socratic statement is therefore surprising.[3] In the present paper, I will investigate various

2 Quotations of the Greek text are taken from the edition offered by J. C.C. Strachan: E. A. Duke et al. (eds.), *Platonis Opera, t. I. Tetralogias I-II continens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995. Translations are my own, but I draw extensively on those by Gallop (1975) and Sedley/Long (2010).

3 The sentence goes completely unnoticed in the commentaries of Gallop (1975), Dorter (1982), Bostock (1986) and Frede (1999), while Rowe only comments: "i. e. not as a punishment but as a reward, and not being killed but being separated from the body" (Rowe 1993, p. 136). Burger speaks in another context of an "ambiguous meaning" of death (Burger 1984, p. 45), without

occurrences of the word "death" and its cognates throughout the dialogue, in order to demonstrate that the arguments and the overall approach of Socrates depend upon a double meaning of "death" as termination of life (D1) or as philosophical vocation (D2). I will lay emphasis on this duality in order to show that, along with the debate on the survival of the soul after physical death (D1), the Platonic Socrates holds a discussion on the conditions of the possibility of doing philosophy *within* life (D2). The parallel discussion of the two topics reveals them as two supplementary tasks; but, although the second one takes up much less of the dialogue, we have enough evidence to assume that it constitutes its focal point and thematic epicenter.

I Two notions of "death"...

The distinction between two different notions of death has already been alluded to earlier in the dialogue. The first relevant passage is the brief but significant conversation brought on by the reference to Evenus, who seems to combine the features of a sophist, an orator, and a poet. In these three functions he claims, in different ways, themes and spheres of philosophy, while at the same time remaining opposed to it. Requested to dispel the expected concerns of Evenus in view of his own recent engagement with poetry and music, Socrates justifies this engagement in a playful way and concludes with an ambiguous message to Evenus:

> ταῦτα οὖν, ὦ Κέβης, Εὐήνῳ φράζε, καὶ ἐρρῶσθαι καί, ἂν σωφρονῇ, ἐμὲ διώκειν ὡς τάχιστα. (61B)
> So give Evenus this message, Cebes: give him my greetings and tell him, if he's sensible, to come after me as quickly as he can.

This reference is perceived by Socrates's interlocutors as an invitation for Evenus to follow Socrates in physical death – and this assessment inspires the ensuing discussion on suicide. This perception, however, does not prevent Socrates from interjecting a highly interesting remark. Commenting on the certainty with which Cebes rules out the possibility of Evenus following him in death, Socrates retorts:

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commenting on the passage. Zehnpfennig (1991), p. 181 mentions briefly that this is a "clear indication that what is meant is not only the physical death". Ebert, finally, sees in the Socratic reference the intention of a "reinterpretation [Umdeutung] of what 'death' means" (Ebert 2004, p. 130).

Τί δέ; ἦ δ' ὅς, οὐ φιλόσοφος Εὔηνος; (61c)
Why? Isn't Evenus a philosopher?

Against the common understanding of death adopted by Cebes, Socrates alludes here to a second, *alternative* meaning of death: to follow him in death means to follow him in the practice of philosophy. This allusion to a different meaning –"death" as philosophy–, offers to the perceptive reader the possibility of distinguishing between two concepts of "death". His interlocutors understand death in the ordinary sense, i. e. only as physical death:

D1 "Death" is the termination of earthly life.

But Socrates undertakes a conceptual shift that actually prefigures a new concept:

D2 "Death" is the in-life emancipation from the bonds of body/sensibility, as intended and practiced by the philosopher.

D1 and D2 are not "definitions" in the strict sense, but rather implicit *notions* of death, employed and exploited in various passages of the dialogue.[4] Both notions play an important role as tacit, divergent starting points of the discussion, which, however, never articulates them explicitly. Neither Socrates nor his interlocutors seem interested in making an explicit distinction between the two notions; in fact, nor have modern interpreters been willing to make this differentiation.[5] The

4 If a definition attempts at unambiguously clarifying a concept, it would be impossible for D1 and D2 to stand – both, synchronously and explicitly – as proper definitions of "death". The only definition of death given in the dialogue is D (see below, II); and it is given in a way that can comprise both notions D1 and D2. – In a recent paper, Ebrey (2017), pp. 17–18 speaks of "two different definitions" and locates them in a distinction implied in 64c between ἀποθνήσκειν and τεθνάναι. Both definitions, however, are proposed by Ebrey as versions of physical demise (i. e. what I call D1); the "ambiguity" he sees in θάνατος is therefore not identical with the distinction made here between D1 and D2. – I had completed this paper when it was pointed out to me that a similar distinction was expressly made in the context of the Neoplatonic reading of the dialogue. I cannot engage here into a detailed discussion of this reading; I will therefore confine myself to quoting one of the "General Conclusions" drawn in a recent relevant book (Gertz 2011, p. 189): "what is the meaning of death for our lives? Here, one must draw a distinction between two kinds of death: the natural death that occurs when the body dies and can no longer receive the soul, and the voluntary death that consists in the soul separating itself from the body as much as possible in this life".

5 My own first reference to the importance of the distinction between two different notions of death was made rather *en passant* in an early paper dealing with the Socratic 'autobiography' (Thanassas 1999, pp. 5–6); see also Thanassas (2003), pp. 1–2: "Socrates is not concerned with the first sense of death, even though this is the death he currently faces himself [...] By contrast, he is only concerned with the matter that has always preoccupied him, namely philosophy".

first indication of the necessity of this distinction is provided already by the fully justified question raised by Cebes, immediately following the Socratic exhortation:

> Πῶς τοῦτο λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ μὴ θεμιτὸν εἶναι ἑαυτὸν βιάζεσθαι, ἐθέλειν δ' ἂν τῷ ἀποθνῄσκοντι τὸν φιλόσοφον ἕπεσθαι; (61D)
> How can you say this, Socrates? How can it be forbidden to do violence to oneself and at the same time be the case that the philosopher is willing to follow the dying?

Cebes notes here an obvious conflict that arises for the philosopher: he cannot but wish for the occurrence of death, but at the same time he is not allowed to cause it himself. The paradox is resolved if we realize that the prohibition of exercising violence on ourselves refers to bringing about physical death (D1) and, as such, is forbidden. The invitation to follow Socrates in his release exhorts us to follow him in "death" as D2, i. e. in philosophy. But Socrates avoids making this clarification; at this point of the dialogue he completely bypasses the newly and implicitly introduced notion of D2 and returns to the first, superficial interpretation of his message to Evenus, trying to explain why that invitation did not involve an incitement to suicide. This move links him back to the unequivocal understanding of death shared by his interlocutors. His reservations against suicide are based on the impiety of such an act,[6] and they are not really justified philosophically. We encounter here for the first time a recurring routine in the dialogue: When Socrates is asked to talk about death as physical demise (D1), he is unable to offer arguments with conclusive philosophical validity. In any case, his first allusion

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Meanwhile the need for "distinguishing two desires for death" or "two kinds of death" has also been expressed by Warren (2001), pp. 95, 101, who sees the distinction as "provided by the *Phaedo*, but in a somewhat roundabout way" (p. 102) and limits its function within the context of the discussion on suicide, in the beginning of the dialogue. Madison also belongs to the few commentators who have questioned the meaning of death in the *Phaedo*; she even distinguishes between "two levels" of operating with the "discussion of philosophy as preparation for death: [...] fear of death and carelessness with one's soul" (Madison 2002, p. 428); she, however, avoids tackling the vital question concerning the status of the "Genuine Philosophers" (see below, III); and she underemphasizes the importance of practicing philosophy as a project of Forms, when she states that the primary concern of the dialogue is to live a philosophical life and to care for one's soul (p. 430). Balla (2010), p. 119 also argues for a distinction between two topics in the dialogue: the "right method of approaching truth" vs. "the immortality of the soul"; yet, she seems reluctant to accept the tension between the two topics and prefers to stress that "the two topics are not without connection to each other", since the first is a prerequisite for discussing the second.

6 For a recent, extensive discussion of the passage, see Warren (2001).

in 61C to a different meaning of death (D2) is a distant hint, which attempts to prepare the perceptive reader for the distinction implied in 64B.

The reasons proclaimed by Socrates to support the absolute prohibition of suicide offer Cebes the opportunity to take recourse to them for his justified consideration that the wise can only be indignant in view of death (62C–E). Socrates responds on two levels. On the one hand, he expresses the hope that after physical death (D1) he will be placed among good gods and humans:

> ἥξειν πρῶτον μὲν παρὰ θεοὺς ἄλλους σοφούς τε καὶ ἀγαθούς, ἔπειτα καὶ παρ' ἀνθρώπους τετελευτηκότας ἀμείνους τῶν ἐνθάδε (63B).
> ... that I shall enter, first, the company of other gods both wise and good, and, secondly, of dead men better than those here.

On the other hand, he identifies philosophy as a death process, making now the first explicit reference to the notion of D2:

> Κινδυνεύουσι γὰρ ὅσοι τυγχάνουσιν ὀρθῶς ἁπτόμενοι φιλοσοφίας λεληθέναι τοὺς ἄλλους ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο αὐτοὶ ἐπιτηδεύουσιν ἢ ἀποθνῄσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι. (64A)
> Other people may well be unaware that what those correctly engaging in philosophy pursue is nothing other than dying and being dead.

But Simmias is not able to grasp this notion; in his intervention he hastens to identify the Socratic ἀποθνῄσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι as a θανατῶσι:

> ... ὅτι τῷ ὄντι οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες θανατῶσι, καὶ σφᾶς γε οὐ λελήθασιν ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν τοῦτο πάσχειν. (64B)
> ... philosophers are, indeed, verging on death and [...] this is what philosophers deserve to undergo.

For Socrates, dying (as D2) is a constant enterprise; the imperfective ἀποθνῄσκειν indicates a continual process, which might even lead to its accomplishment in a perfective τεθνάναι – both, however, to be achieved within life. For Simmias, on the contrary, death (as D1) diminishes to a momentary πάσχειν which terminates life. Simmias proves thus unable to follow the Socratic conceptual openness and is rather eager to cancel it; he revokes death's polysemy and brings the conversation back to his preferred unambiguity, in which he even equates the Socratic understanding with the vulgar perception of the philosophers' relation to death.

Faced with this withdrawal, Socrates contents himself with pointing out (in 64B) that there is more than one notion of death, and he only stresses the need to raise the question which marks the starting point of this paper: "in what sense,

and what kind of death?" This Socratic question is an attempt at defending the distinction against the common understanding, which remains unwilling to accept any notion of death other than D1. A preliminary clarification of the two concepts of death might prove useful at this point. "Death" as D2, i. e. as philosophy, denotes the search for truth through *logoi*, through valid arguments and not through myths and comforting or exhortations; the content of D2 becomes apparent later, when Socrates, in his so-called autobiography, develops the hypothesis of Forms. Dealing with D1, on the contrary, reflects an existential anxiety, which cannot be tackled philosophically; philosophy is not expected to remove existential burdens. To be sure, in the course of the dialogue, the hypothesis of Forms will be employed to confront the question of physical death and the afterlife; but the effectiveness of this exploitation is obviously limited – as shown by the fact that none of the Socratic arguments in support of immortality carries logical validity and argumentative persuasiveness.

II … and a neutral common ground

No doubt, Socrates avoids making an explicit distinction between D1 and D2.[7] It seems that this absence is an essential element of the dramatic evolution of the dialogue. Indeed, Socrates not only does not distinguish between the two notions, but rather introduces a third, more general concept, which can 'accommodate' both D1 and D2. Immediately after the introduction of D2 by Socrates, and after Simmias' falling back to D1, Socrates employs in 64c a new, broader definition (D), which he repeats later:

D Death is (i) "the separation of the soul from the body", or (ii) "a release and parting of soul from body".

(i) ἡγούμεθά [...] τὸν θάνατον εἶναι [...] τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγήν (64c).
(ii) τοῦτό γε θάνατος ὀνομάζεται, λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος (67d).

7 In the context of the discussion following a public presentation of this paper, Prof. Sedley remarked that Plato is altogether reluctant to distinguish between different meanings of the same word (with *Euthydemus* as the only exception). I take this point as a further support of my view that a clear and explicit distinction between D1 and D2 would be almost without precedent in Plato's oeuvre.

This definition[8] derives from a 'soul-body' metaphysical dualism, which functions here as a quasi-self-evident precondition for the dialogue as a whole.[9] We have no reason, and no evidence, to doubt that this definition is delivered by Socrates with a serious intention.[10] But apart from its metaphysical impact, this definition also functions as an essential component of the dialogue's dramaturgy: It is general enough to satisfy not only the expectations of Socrates' interlocutors, who share a common understanding of death (D1), but also his own anticipation of a concept of "death" as philosophy (D2). This recourse to D as a common denominator of D1 and D2 is indicated immediately after (i):

> δῆλός ἐστιν ὁ φιλόσοφος ἀπολύων ὅτι μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας διαφερόντως τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων (64E–65A).
> The philosopher clearly releases his soul from its association with the body as far as possible, and more than other people.

And Socrates reiterates the correlation of death (in the sense of D) and philosophy once again after (ii):

> Λύειν δέ γε αὐτήν, ὥς φαμεν, προθυμοῦνται ἀεὶ μάλιστα καὶ μόνοι οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες ὀρθῶς, καὶ τὸ μελέτημα αὐτὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν τῶν φιλοσόφων, λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος. (67D)
> And it's mostly – or only – those who correctly practice philosophy, who are always eager to release it, as we say, and the occupation of philosophers is just this: a release and parting of soul from body.

It is significant that the broad definition D appears in both instances in the context of a Socratic attempt to redirect the discussion. The first (i) takes place after Simmias perceives the Socratic "dying and being dead" (ἀποθνήσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι) as a "verging on death" (θανατῶσι), thus transferring the discus-

8 Versions (i) and (ii) should be treated as identical; needless to say, there is no correspondence between them and D1-D2 respectively.

9 For a recent analysis of the significance of this metaphysical dualism, see Pakaluk (2003). Mesch challenges the supposition that dualism in the *Phaedo* is conceived as a *substance dualism* in the strict sense; as he persuasively points out (Mesch 2016, pp. 238, 247), it is not the soul but rather the body that cannot count as an independent and self-sufficient substance.

10 As Madison (2002), p. 426 does: She sees in D only "a primarily metaphorical sense" and finds it surprising, that Socrates does not offer an "argument or explanation [...] for this bold statement" (p. 426). She concludes that D "must be interpreted not as Socrates' own view of the nature of death, but as a metaphor for philosophical conversion". To me it seems completely unnecessary and unjustified to question the seriousness of Socrates' belief in D; on the contrary, D will provide the ground for the development of the whole dialogue.

sion from D2 back to D1. In the second case (ii), Socrates himself has presented at length the views of the "Genuine Philosophers", who (as we shall soon see) focus on D1 and expect from physical death not only redemption from earthly life's sufferings but also access to pure and clear knowledge. Definition D thus accomplishes a quasi-defensive task, as a first 'regression line' to which Socrates retreats in order to articulate a version of "death" plausible to those who otherwise would only accept D1 (but not D2) as a definition of "death". This move will allow him later on to transfer again the discussion towards D2. This shift remains an on-going Socratic endeavour within the dialogue. While his interlocutors are troubled by the question "what happens after death?" (D1), Socrates prefers to ask the question: "how to live?"

Definition D emphasizes the separation of soul and body – a separation with direct moral implications. It is not achieved when e. g. one merely tries to keep the body away from the soul, or simply ignores its influence. The role and impact of the body always and inherently affects the soul; what is needed, therefore, is not simply the body's isolation, but its subordination to the soul and its control by the latter. Only this control reaffirms and ensures the duality 'body-soul'; in contrast, a dedication to the body always eliminates the separation and allows it to act upon the soul, which becomes thus "body-like" (σωματοειδής, 83D).[11] This will become clear later in the dialogue, which therefore does not substantially differ on this issue from the tripartite division of the soul in the *Republic*, where the appetitive part denotes merely a sphere of the body's effects on the soul. Passages like 80A and 94B–C, on the other hand, clearly allude to the ways in which the body can be controlled by the soul.

Of course, D remains the only explicit definition formulated in the dialogue,[12] and it appears as a univocal definition of death which applies equally to two different forms of separation from the body: physical demise and philosophy. But D clearly does not fulfil the need for the distinction raised by the questions in 64B: "death in what sense?", and "what kind of death?". It does not even attempt to provide an answer to these questions; intended to function as one and the same definition of two different things (demise and philosophy), D not only permits but also effectively and deliberately reproduces the ambiguity of "death", accommodating within it two different concepts or notions. This ambiguity, however, is

11 Warren remarks that the separation of body and soul implied by D could be endorsed by anyone who is devoted exclusively to the body and neglects the soul; this is why Socrates will then show that, "rather than forcing a separation of body and soul, the pursuit of bodily pleasures forces the two to become more tightly together" (Warren 2001, p. 103).

12 Cf. n. 4 above.

necessary for the drama of the dialogue: it enables a discourse between participants who share different expectations.

III The "Genuine Philosophers"

There is, however, a passage in the dialogue which seems to undermine all claims that have been made up to this point: it is the passage 66B–67B, in which, after having emphasized the importance of the duality introduced by definition D, Socrates delivers a series of views whose adoption is seen as necessary for all "Genuine Philosophers":

> Οὐκοῦν ἀνάγκη, ἔφη, ἐκ πάντων τούτων παρίστασθαι δόξαν τοιάνδε τινὰ τοῖς γνησίως φιλοσόφοις, ὥστε καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τοιαῦτα ἄττα λέγειν, ὅτι "[...]"(66B).
> For all these reasons, then, some such view as this must present itself to the genuine philosophers, so that they say things to one another such as these: "[...]"

There follows an exposition of some considerations and arguments extending over more than one Stephanus page. Socrates employs here direct speech, thus impersonating the Genuine Philosophers; the presentation takes place without any interruption or interference, without Socrates even asking his interlocutors Simmias or Cebes for a formal confirmation of his remarks. The Socratic report ends thus:

> τοιαῦτα οἶμαι, ὦ Σιμμία, ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πρὸς ἀλλήλους λέγειν τε καὶ δοξάζειν πάντας τοὺς ὀρθῶς φιλομαθεῖς. (67B)
> Such are the things, I think, Simmias, that all who are rightly called lovers of knowledge must say to one another, and must believe.

Throughout the whole passage on the Genuine Philosophers, Socrates reproduces foreign words, which he clearly places, as it were, in quotation marks and introduces them as the content of a δόξα; at the end of the long citation, these foreign views are then once more characterized as a version of δοξάζειν.

This observation is, I believe, sufficient to confirm the legitimacy and significance of the question: Does the Platonic Socrates adopt the views of the Genuine Philosophers? This question can be answered only with an assessment of the content of the passage itself and of the role it occupies in the context of the whole debate. Let us see, therefore, what exactly the Genuine Philosophers maintain:

a. As long as the soul remains embodied, it is unable to grasp sufficient knowledge:

> ἕως ἂν τὸ σῶμα ἔχωμεν καὶ συμπεφυρμένη ᾖ ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ μετὰ τοιούτου κακοῦ, οὐ μή ποτε κτησώμεθα ἱκανῶς οὗ ἐπιθυμοῦμεν· φαμὲν δὲ τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ἀληθές. (66B)
> As long as we have the body, and our soul is fused with such an evil, we'll surely never adequately gain what we desire – and that, we say, is truth.

Characteristically, for the Genuine Philosophers, the body is the source of an incessant production of "pursuits" or "distractions" (ἀσχολίας, 66B), i. e. a permanent cause (or excuse) of one's inability to find the necessary σχολή for philosophical activities.

b. Pure knowledge, as the result of the soul's release from the body (i. e. as the result of death in the broad sense of D), is only possible after the end of earthly life (i. e. only as the result of death in the sense of D1). The same applies to wisdom (φρόνησις), of which the Genuine Philosophers declare themselves to be lovers (ἐρασταί), stressing that their erotic desire can be fulfilled only *post mortem*: ἐπειδὰν τελευτήσωμεν [...], ζῶσιν δὲ οὔ (66D–E).

c. In our mundane existence, our ability to approach knowledge depends on the distance we keep towards the body, including sensation, which appears in the passage solely as a source of error; the challenge is to remain free of it – or to get purified of it (καθαρεύωμεν, καθαροί, καθαρῷ καθαροῦ).

There is no other passage in the Platonic Corpus presenting philosophy as a form of *thanatophilia* and urging philosophers to ardently desire their death. At the same time, the Genuine Philosophers substantiate here all those prejudices of the Many, which Socrates indirectly but clearly pointed out when he stressed (64B–C) the Many's naivety and inability to understand in what sense philosophers are linked to death and refer to it. Or, in other words, the opinions of the Genuine Philosophers clearly cancel the distinction proposed by Socrates at 64B (ᾗ; οἷον;). There are, however, serious and clear indications that may allow us to challenge the conviction that Socrates adopts and ratifies the views of the Genuine Philosophers. I will try here to point out some of the gaps, paradoxes and weaknesses of the opinions of Genuine Philosophers and of the attribution of these opinions to Socrates himself:

Ad a.: The very starting point of the Genuine Philosophers adheres in fact to a version of the dualism 'soul-body' which undermines the superiority of the soul; it suggests instead that, throughout our lives, the soul is fully subjugated to the influence of the body.[13] Moreover, if the body constantly produces "thou-

13 See also Ahrensdorf, who aptly remarks that, in the view of the Genuine Philosophers, "the body is the master of the soul. They and, indeed, all human beings would be necessarily evil and ignorant beings" (Ahrensdorf 1995, p. 50). But Ahrensdorf seems reluctant to draw the conclusions

sands" (μυρίας, 66b) of "pursuits" or "distractions", then the Genuine Philosophers should accept that pursuing philosophy is not only hard and problematic, but virtually impossible. But of course, and in contrast to this opinion, the whole dialogue, as an imposing instantiation of the pursuit of philosophy within life, is transmitted on the basis of an essential σχολή (58D: σχολάζω), thanks to which Phaedo can narrate it to Echecrates.[14]

Ad b.: Could the assumption that Socrates adopts the positions of the Genuine Philosophers be consistent with his own way of life? If pure knowledge and wisdom is only possible *post mortem*, and if the only in-life requirement for achieving them is a καθαρεύειν as an attitude addressed only towards the body, then what is the point and the purpose of the philosophical quest in our lives? Why does Socrates, even now, shortly before his own death, continue to ask, to wonder and to seek, if he indeed believes that in a few hours he will have full access to the only true and possible knowledge? Certainly, human knowledge remains inferior to divine knowledge; but this does not make the human quest for knowledge dispensable, redundant or flawed, as the Genuine Philosophers clearly seem to imply.

Ad c.: The often positive role of sensation in the dialogue (see e. g. 75A, 83A) is incompatible with its full depreciation by the Genuine Philosophers. Certainly, sensation does not yield knowledge by itself; but it decisively facilitates it, as the starting point of any recollection.

The fanatical attitude of the Genuine Philosophers represents thus another version of the body's domination over the soul. The passage can only present an ironic caricature sketched by Socrates and addressed to philosophical zealots of his time – probably of a Pythagorean provenance.[15] A further clear hint is given

from this observation: He sees the Genuine Philosophers as presenting altogether "the philosopher's opinion" (p. 47) and criticizes authors who describe their argument as "ironic" (p. 216).

14 I owe this observation to a comment contained in a student paper by Christina Rings, written for a course on the *Phaedo* taught by me at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich during the Summer Semester 2015.

15 The ironic tone of the passage was recognised by Burger already in 1984, but without the due resonance. Burger also noticed, among other things, that the position of the Genuine Philosophers implies a renunciation of all moral and intellectual responsibility, arguing that the body – and not the soul – is to blame for all ills (Burger 1984, p. 43); furthermore, if the body is the only obstacle to knowledge and wisdom, death would automatically imply a complete purification of all people without exception (p. 44); and finally if, in our mundane life, we are doomed to constant errancy, while posthumous life fully partakes of wisdom, then "why should learning be necessary, and how could it be possible at all?" (p. 44). – In 1984 Burger could only hint at a previous laconic statement by Hackforth (1955), p. 16: Socrates "can hardly have held

both at the beginning and the end of the passage, where the beliefs of the Genuine Philosophers include what they "say to one another" (πρὸς ἀλλήλους λέγειν, 66B, 67B); this reminds us much more of a sectarian group than real philosophers in the Socratic version, i. e. of people who are fond of an open, public *elenchus* of their own beliefs but also of the beliefs of others. Taking these Genuine Philosophers as representatives of true philosophy would be a colossal misunderstanding of the Socratic-Platonic intention; on the contrary, they are the exact opposite of the "true philosophers" presented in 64B–C.[16]

Already in the passage immediately following that on the Genuine Philosophers, and after having restored definition D and having exposed the notion of philosophy as a version of "death", Socrates recalls in a self-reference his lifelong efforts to attain wisdom (ἡ πολλὴ πραγματεία ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ παρελθόντι βίῳ, 67B). This wisdom (φρόνησις) is characterized as the "correct currency" (τὸ ὀρθὸν νόμισμα, 69A) and appears as unaffected by pleasures and fears (69B). For the careful reader, this extensive reference to the in-life pursuit of virtue (68C–69E) is opposed to the thanatophilia of the Genuine Philosophers. We seek virtue "for the sake of the whole life to come" (τοῦ ἔπειτα βίου παντὸς ἕνεκα, 90E), and this life is therefore a value in itself and not a burden or obstacle. The need to attend to the soul in our lifetime (107C) provides the starting point and the background for the myth that will be narrated by Socrates at the end of the dialogue. This myth concludes with another appeal to acquire virtue and wisdom within one's lifetime (114C). But even the very fact that this myth describes different paths and destinies of the souls after death (D1) means that this death cannot fulfil (as the Genuine Philosophers seem to believe) the function of a universal purgatory.

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that attitude to life expressed in the *Phaedo*'s account of the 'true [i. e. 'genuine'] philosophers'". Meanwhile, another rare exception is the concise but substantial account of Zehnpfennig (1991), pp. XXII–XXIV, who emphasizes the ironic mood of Socrates ("sublime mockery") and calls the philosophical type presented by the Genuine Philosophers a "caricature of a philosopher". She also identifies this type with Pythagoreanism (pp. 180, 182) and stresses the implication that the soul is actually dominated by the body. Frede (1999), p. 21 has argued against Zehnpfennig that Socrates does not provide us in the dialogue with "a third way of life, between the common one and that of the genuine philosophers". Yet, it is far from certain that 'common understanding' and Genuine Philosophers are opposed; at least in one point, namely in their perception of what philosophy is, they converge.

16 I propose that "genuine philosophers" be used only for the phrase γνησίως φιλόσοφοι (66B), and that οἱ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφοι (64B–C) be translated as "the true philosophers". Gallop (1975) pp. 8, 11) blurs the distinction by translating both as "genuine philosophers"; Burger (1984), p. 38 also identifies both.

It seems, therefore, that in the passage on the Genuine Philosophers, Socrates does nothing more than what he says: he presents a series of *foreign beliefs*, without explicitly or implicitly stating that he adopts them. A typical parallel case is the reference to the Friends of Forms in the *Sophist* (248A–249D).[17] There, of course, the disapproving stance of the Eleatic Stranger is explicit and obvious; without it, it is likely that the outline of their views would also be perceived as a genuine 'Platonic' position. But why does Socrates not deliver in the *Phaedo* an explicit criticism such as that encountered in the *Sophist*? And in general: why does Socrates give an extensive account of the views of the Genuine Philosophers? The answer, I think, can be given only if we consider the whole dramatic framework of the dialogue. Socrates uncritically cites the views of the Genuine Philosophers as a response to implicit but clear and reasonable expectations of his interlocutors. Simmias and Cebes appear in the dialogue as representatives of a common understanding of death, similar to that of the Many in 64B, which they have only partially elaborated philosophically under the shadow of a conceptually crude Pythagoreanism. The detailed Socratic reference to the Genuine Philosophers allows him to present this view in philosophical terms and indirectly examine it. In any case, the passage on the Genuine Philosophers not only fails to invalidate the distinction between D1 and D2, but their absurd and self-defeating position is possible only on the basis of their inability to make this distinction: for them, philosophy (D2) is death (D1). Only the differentiation between the two notions can prevent a misunderstanding of the passage and the attribution of the positions of the Genuine Philosophers to Socrates himself.

17 This parallel is also made by Ebert (2004), p. 139, who even assumes a convergence in the content of the passages on Genuine Philosophers and on the Friends of Forms. But then it is all the more surprising to observe his unwillingness to recognize in the passage on the Genuine Philosophers a Socratic detachment similar to that of the Eleatic Stranger towards the Friends of Forms. Although Ebert accurately remarks in the speech of the Genuine Philosophers a "*confessio Pythagorica*", he finally concludes that in this way Plato presents Socrates as "a Pythagorean φιλόσοφος" or as an "*anima naturaliter Pythagorica*" (2004, pp. 141, 151)! – In an earlier reading, Ebert (1994), p. 16 had remarked that "nowhere else can we find Socrates as representing such an asceticism", and that the passage is not presented as Socrates' personal opinion; yet he believed that Socrates "stays, of course, behind what he says" (p. 15).

IV Misology

As we all know, the dialogue proceeds with a Socratic exposition of three (plus one) arguments for the immortality of the soul. This is an attempt to comfort his interlocutors about his imminent demise. This lengthy focus of the conversation on death as passing away (D1), which continues with the objections raised by Simmias ('soul as harmony') and Cebes ('soul as a weaver'), is interrupted for the first time in the digression on misology. This is not meant to be a stylistically charming or superfluous break. The digression is located exactly in the middle of the dialogue (89B–91C), and makes up its epicentre.

The digression is marked by the fact that Echecrates speaks here for the first time after the initial framing of the dialogue (59C). This shift from the narrated dialogue (taking place in prison) to the frame dialogue also denotes a transition in the content. What in a superficial reading might appear as a break is in fact a Socratic detachment from the expectations and fixations of his interlocutors on D1 and the thematic shift of the debate from D1 to D2: from physical death to philosophy. Socrates here avails himself of the chance to deviate for a moment from the issue of the risks arising from human mortality and to discuss the greatest risk for philosophy itself, which he identifies as a hatred for *logoi*: as misology. The significance of the passage is underlined by the fact that it is the only extensive part of the dialogue where the main interlocutor of Socrates is the person who gave his name to the dialogue: Phaedo.

The shift begins with an affectionate Socratic gesture narrated by Phaedo to Echecrates (89B–C):

> καταψήσας οὖν μου τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ συμπιέσας τὰς ἐπὶ τῷ αὐχένι τρίχας – εἰώθει γάρ, ὁπότε τύχοι, παίζειν μου εἰς τὰς τρίχας – Αὔριον δή, ἔφη, ἴσως, ὦ Φαίδων, τὰς καλὰς ταύτας κόμας ἀποκερῇ.
> – Ἔοικεν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ Σώκρατες.
> – Οὔκ, ἄν γε ἐμοὶ πείθῃ.
> – Ἀλλὰ τί; ἦν δ' ἐγώ.
> – Τήμερον, ἔφη, κἀγὼ τὰς ἐμὰς καὶ σὺ ταύτας, ἐάνπερ γε ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος τελευτήσῃ καὶ μὴ δυνώμεθα αὐτὸν ἀναβιώσασθαι.
> Stroking my head and gathering the hair on my neck – it was his way now and again to make fun of my hair – he said: So tomorrow perhaps, Phaedo, you'll cut off those lovely locks.
> – It seems so, Socrates, I replied.
> – You won't, if you listen to me.
> – What then? I asked.
> – Today, he said, I'll cut my locks and you yours, if *logos* dies on us and we can't revive it.

The passage provides the most explicit contrast of Socrates' interests with those of his interlocutors. The latter worry about death in the sense of D1: They seek

proofs of immortality, or they lament the death of their friend. Socrates, on the contrary, is primarily interested in *logos* and in philosophy (D2), and concerned only about their own endangerment. While his interlocutors are preparing themselves to mourn his death on the following day (D1), he invites them to give priority to another probable mourning: the mourning for a possible death of *logos*; for this would be the "greatest evil".[18]

In 68D Socrates had remarked that death (D1) is something commonly perceived "by the others" as one of the greatest evils (τὸν θάνατον ἡγοῦνται πάντες οἱ ἄλλοι τῶν μεγάλων κακῶν). This is, obviously, a view shared by his interlocutors (certainly by Simmias and Cebes). Now, in the digression, he formulates his own opinion about the greatest evil, which proves once more to be in contrast to the view of the Many. But what is exactly this "greatest evil"?

> Μὴ γενώμεθα, ἦ δ' ὅς, μισόλογοι, ὥσπερ οἱ μισάνθρωποι γιγνόμενοι· ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ἔφη, ὅτι ἄν τις μεῖζον τούτου κακὸν πάθοι ἢ λόγους μισήσας. (89d)
> To become misologists, he said, just as some become misanthropists; for there is no greater evil that could befall anyone than hating *logoi*.

The previous reference of Socrates (in 89B–C) to a possible mourning for the death of *logos* could be misinterpreted as denoting the potential failure of a specific argument or series of arguments. One might assume, for example, that if the immortality of the soul is the highest philosophical question, the failure to prove it would be a version of the death of *logos* and would justify mourning today instead of tomorrow. This version would place anew the digression close to the topic of D1, restoring physical death to the epicentre of the dialogue: The lamentation should begin today, because even more important than the imminent death of Socrates is his current inability to prove the immortality of the soul. The account, however, of the greatest evil, in its implicit but unmistakable contrast to the opinion of the Many, revokes this reading. The failure of *logos* lies not in the inability to compose or to defend a specific argument or answer a specific phil-

18 Cf. μεῖζον κακόν (89D); see also below in the text. – At this point in the text one might indeed speak of a metaphorical use of the word "death", which does not coincide with what has been discerned above in the notions D1 and D2. More specifically: what we have here is a metaphorical employment of the concept of physical death (D1), which is intended to express the cancellation of *logos* or of philosophy already classified as D2. In other words: Although the passage on misology clearly belongs to the topic D2, the word "death" is not used here in this (positive!) sense, but as a metaphorical employment of the common (negative) sense D1, thus denoting a complete and irrevocable loss.

osophical question. Mourning becomes *logos* only when a deep and firm hatred has arisen for it:

> Οὐκοῦν, ὦ Φαίδων, ἔφη, οἰκτρὸν ἂν εἴη τὸ πάθος, εἰ ὄντος δή τινος ἀληθοῦς καὶ βεβαίου λόγου καὶ δυνατοῦ κατανοῆσαι, ἔπειτα διὰ τὸ παραγίγνεσθαι τοιούτοις τισὶ λόγοις, τοῖς αὐτοῖς τοτὲ μὲν δοκοῦσιν ἀληθέσιν εἶναι, τοτὲ δὲ μή, μὴ ἑαυτόν τις αἰτιᾶτο μηδὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀτεχνίαν, ἀλλὰ τελευτῶν διὰ τὸ ἀλγεῖν ἄσμενος ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ τὴν αἰτίαν ἀπώσαιτο καὶ ἤδη τὸν λοιπὸν βίον μισῶν τε καὶ λοιδορῶν τοὺς λόγους διατελοῖ, τῶν δὲ ὄντων τῆς ἀληθείας τε καὶ ἐπιστήμης στερηθείη. (90c–d)
> Then, Phaedo, it would be a pitiful fate, if there were in fact some true and secure *logos*, and one that could be discerned, yet owing to association with *logoi* of another sort – the very same ones seeming now true and now false – one blamed neither oneself nor one's own lack of skill, but finally relieved one's distress by shifting the blame from oneself to *logoi*, and then conducted the rest of one's life hating and belittling *logoi*, deprived of both truth and knowledge of beings.

Hatred is caused here by a repeated disappointment of trust. Hatred denotes a stable, irrevocable attitude which can be described as irreversible loss of any positive attitude to its object, or even as the wish for its annihilation.[19] If *logos* was inherently unable to convey truth, then hatred against it would be justified: its death resulting out of this hatred might be appreciated or even valued as a kind of emancipation from a false expectation. But the present possibility of a 'death' is considered as damage, and this damage deserves our grief, only because the disappointment of trust is unjustified and unnecessary: there is a true, reliable, and trustworthy *logos* accessible to us; our inability to approach it is caused entirely by us, and the responsibility which we subsequently attempt to transfer to *logos* is exclusively ours.

While death is, in the opinion of the Many, a great evil, a possible death of *logos*, i. e. of philosophy, would be the greatest evil (μεῖζον κακόν, 89d). Yet, the same characterization (μέγιστον κακῶν) was attributed earlier (83c) to an excessive adherence of the soul to sensory data:

> ὃ πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν ἐστι [...:] Ὅτι ψυχὴ παντὸς ἀνθρώπου ἀναγκάζεται ἅμα τε ἡσθῆναι σφόδρα ἢ λυπηθῆναι ἐπί τῳ καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι περὶ ὃ ἂν μάλιστα τοῦτο πάσχῃ, τοῦτο ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον· ταῦτα δὲ μάλιστα ὁρατά. (83c)
> the greatest and most extreme of all evils [...:] That everyone's soul, when intensely pleased or pained at something, is forced to believe at that moment that whatever most affects it in this way is most clear and most real, when it is not so; and such objects are especially visible things.

19 Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1382[a]15.

The greatest evil here is the wrong choice of an epistemological criterion, which even leads to erroneous ontological assumptions: because visible beings are able to affect us more, causing pleasure or pain, we consider them as most evident and true. The two versions of the "greatest evil" are not only consistent, but in fact denote two aspects of the same evil; or, to be more specific, the one aspect brings about the other. If we perceive the immediate visible fact as the most true, and if we content ourselves with it, then we no longer have any incentive to resort to *logos*.[20] And conversely, the abandonment of any expectation from *logos* results in a subordination to sensory immediacy.

The full and clear priority given by Socrates to the topic of philosophical inquiry over the consolation for death expected by his interlocutors is explicitly formulated later, when he asks them to "concern themselves less with Socrates and much more with the truth":

> σμικρὸν φροντίσαντες Σωκράτους, τῆς δὲ ἀληθείας πολὺ μᾶλλον (91c).

This same Socratic preference will also force him to completely abandon for a while the expectations of his partners, in order to offer a comprehensive report of the Platonic philosophy of Forms, as it will appear in the Socratic autobiography (95e–102a); this autobiography presents the hypothesis of Forms as the culmination of a historical development and thus undertakes a first attempt at demonstrating the historicity of philosophy.[21] I will not analyse this passage here, but instead turn to the last words of Socrates: his famous utterance in which he invites Crito and the others to settle a common debt and offer Asclepius a rooster owed to him.

20 The "second sailing" as a recourse to *logoi*, after the failure of the preceding enterprise of immediate knowledge, was emphasized as the key element of the Socratic autobiography in Thanassas (2003). The compatibility and convergence of the two versions of the "greatest evil" has been noted by scholars such as Gallop (1975), pp. 153–54 and Zehnpfennig (1991), p. 193.

21 What is here presented in the form of a Socratic autobiography is in fact the reconstruction of the heretofore history of philosophy, as presented by the author Plato in three significant stages, namely Pre-Socratic 'Physiology', Anaxagorean Teleology and the Platonic hypothesis of Forms (see also Thanassas 2003).

V The cock and the cure

> Ὦ Κρίτων, ἔφη, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρυόνα· ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε. (118A)
> Crito, he said, we owe a cock to Asclepius; pay [i. e. you all] the debt and don't be careless.[22]

Just as the autobiography constituted Socrates' philosophical testament, this final sentence expresses the last wish of a man to be executed. This debt to Asclepius can only be the result of a cure or perhaps, more broadly, of successful prophylactic treatment against a possible, severe disease. But which disease was prevented, what kind of healing occurred? The discussion of this question has taken place in the past two decades in the shadow of a seminal article by G. Most (1993). In my view, the most important impact of this article was its contribution to overthrowing the Neoplatonist spectre haunting the dialogue, which led to what Most called "allegorical and mystical" interpretations.[23] According to these interpretations, Socrates' last words are a reference to a cure for the sickness of life itself; but as Most underlines, Socrates "nowhere [...] adopt[s] the view that life is an illness or that death is its cure" (Most 1993, p. 101).[24]

Most proposed to view the Socratic command as the fulfilment of a debt owed to Asclepius for healing Plato, who earlier in the discussion was mentioned as suffering from an illness (Πλάτων δὲ οἶμαι ἠσθένει, 59B). Although this proposal has not convinced the commentators, Most's overall and comprehensive discussion of the various aspects of the issue, accompanied with an exhaustive analysis of ancient and modern literature, gave rise to an interesting debate that is still on-going. One methodological advantage of Most's interpretation, which has not

22 I follow here Madison's emphasis on translating μὴ ἀμελήσητε as "not be careless" (2002, p. 431); see also n. 27 below.

23 The fact that this Neoplatonic approach coincides with that of Nietzsche is a paradox only on the surface; in fact, the whole reading of Plato by Nietzsche, as well as the whole scheme of Platonism he devises, is deeply imbued with Neoplatonic perception. It is therefore not surprising that a scholar as deeply influenced by Nietzsche as Nehamas attempts to criticize Most by insisting on a position which evidently represents a philosophical and interpretive retreat: "the illness is life itself" (1998, p. 162). A further significant deviation from the main intention of the Platonic studies in the last decades, seeking to highlight the dramatic enframement and the polyphony of the Platonic dialogues, lies in the position that "the *Phaedo*'s animosity toward the body is so intense, so passionate, that it is difficult to believe that Plato is thinking of life – the time when the soul is trapped in a body – as anything other than a disease" (1998, p. 161). But Wilamowitz (1920), vol. II, p. 57 had already stressed: "Life is not a disease".

24 Most avoids, however, any reference to the passage on the Genuine Philosophers (see above, III) which might seem to support the view that life is a disease.

been sufficiently assessed, lies in his stressing the role of Plato himself, as author of the dialogue, in the context of the hermeneutic situation that arises out of the last Socratic sentence. But this advantage is revoked again, when Most retreats from this insight and focuses on the pragmatic question as to how Socrates knew, just before he died, that Plato would be cured. Most tried to answer this question by invoking an alleged prophetic gift, which allowed Socrates to assert in advance a debt to Asclepius for a cure that would occur in the future.

Most insisted that "Plato's is the only concrete case of illness mentioned in the dialogue", describing all other allusions to an illness (such as in 66C1, 83C1, 86C4–5, 105C3–4, 110E6) as "general and unspecific" (Most 1993, p. 102). In another important paper, Crooks counters Most by mentioning the numerous references in the misology passage to "health" or related words. Indeed, the adjective ὑγιής and the adverb ὑγιώς appear there six times in a text of just over one Stephanus page (89D–90E). All these references reveal the πάθος (89C) of misology as a state that disrupts health, and thus as a disease; Socrates overcomes this state in the dialogue to follow, which thus functions as a cure for the disease of misology (Crooks 1998, pp. 122–123). Crooks also relates misology to the "Pythagorean eclecticism", represented in the dialogue by Simmias and Cebes, and regards it as a kind of disease, which the Platonic Socrates overcame.[25] Crooks' interpretation met with the objections of D. Frede. In the passage on misology, she argued that Socrates does not appear as a patient but as a doctor, who does not cure anybody but only warns his friends not to fall ill.[26] But Frede's objection is not conclusive: the validity of Crooks' key position can be upheld, if it is reformulated by taking due consideration of the text and its details.

Let us ask anew the question: If Socrates orders the offer of the cock as a sign of his gratitude for a cure, what was the healing? If the references of the text to a disease are (according to Most) "general and unspecific", if its references to health (as identified by Crooks) are considered (according to Frede) to be insufficient, and if, for a full understanding of the Socratic utterance, we need to link it to a real healing, then we should perhaps take into consideration that the text actually *does* include a single (but significant) explicit reference to a cure. It is provided within the misology digression, when Phaedo notes (88E–89A):

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25 See Crooks (1998), p. 121. In this point Crooks integrates and expands a position initially expressed by Mitscherling (1985), who had presented the words of Socrates as a challenge against Pythagoreanism, which is represented in the dialogue by Simmias and Cebes and seems to prohibit the sacrifice of a cock. – The position of Crooks seems to be shared by a growing number of scholars; indicatively, Balla (2014), pp. 122–23 maintains that "Socrates' gratitude to Asclepius concerns the immunity that both he and his interlocutors have exhibited against the disease of misology".

26 Frede (1999), p. 171; she thus preferred to link the debt with a healing of the fear of death.

> Καὶ μήν, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες, πολλάκις θαυμάσας Σωκράτη οὐ πώποτε μᾶλλον ἠγάσθην ἢ τότε παραγενόμενος. τὸ μὲν οὖν ἔχειν ὅτι λέγοι ἐκεῖνος ἴσως οὐδὲν ἄτοπον· ἀλλὰ ἔγωγε μάλιστα ἐθαύμασα αὐτοῦ πρῶτον μὲν τοῦτο, ὡς ἡδέως καὶ εὐμενῶς καὶ ἀγαμένως τῶν νεανίσκων τὸν λόγον ἀπεδέξατο, ἔπειτα ἡμῶν ὡς ὀξέως ᾔσθετο ὃ ᾽πεπόνθεμεν ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων, ἔπειτα ὡς εὖ ἡμᾶς ἰάσατο καὶ ὥσπερ πεφευγότας καὶ ἠττημένους ἀνεκαλέσατο καὶ προύτρεψεν πρὸς τὸ παρέπεσθαί τε καὶ συσκοπεῖν τὸν λόγον. (88E–89A)
>
> Well, Echecrates, often as I've admired Socrates, I never respected him more than when I was with him then. That he should have had something to say isn't perhaps surprising; but what I specially admired was, first, how pleasantly, kindly and respectfully he received the young men's *logos*; then how discerningly he noticed the effect the *logoi* had had on us; and finally how well he cured us and rallied us as if we were fleeing in defeat, and encouraged us to follow him in examining the *logos* together.

It is indeed striking that this explicit reference to a cure has not been noticed by Crooks or by other scholars dealing with the issue.[27] The verb ἰάσατο here repudiates first of all Most's insistence that the only explicit reference to a disease in the *Phaedo* is the one pertaining to Plato. If the cock is owed to Asclepius because of a

27 Meanwhile I have been able to trace some rare exceptions: (a) Santilli (1990), p. 35 links the last words with the passage 89a, where "the reference to Socrates as a healer is unmistakable"; Santilli identifies the healing offered by Socrates as a "dialectical inquiry" (34, 36) against a sophistic or eristic use of *logos*.

(b) In a series of lectures given in 1984 and published for the first time in 2009 (English translation in 2011), Foucault also emphasizes that "there really is a cure in the *Phaedo*, the cure carried out by Socrates for the disease which consists of a false opinion. And we find here, with regard to the immortality of the soul, a schema, a problem, and a cure which are the same as in *Crito*" (Foucault 2011, p. 107). But although Foucault acknowledges the connection between the misology passage and the last words of Socrates (in partial agreement thus with the interpretation offered by Crooks), he does not associate the cure of 89A with the misology passage, but presents the cure as a concrete remedy of the objections previously raised by Simmias. Foucault also attributes importance to the fact that Socrates' last words are addressed to his friend Crito, in order to establish a reference to the dialogue *Crito*; the discussion presented there between Socrates and Crito is seen by Foucault as the key for understanding the last words of Socrates, which constitute an appeal to the necessity of taking care of one's own soul. More persuasive is Foucault's view that the very last Socratic word (ἀμελήσητε) marks a reference to the need for ἐπιμέλεια already stressed in 107B–C and 115B–C. The same point, i. e. the care for one's own soul as the central suggestion of Socrates' last words and of the dialogue in general, is also stressed in the interpretations of Madison (2002) and Kloss (2001). Madison mentions that she had access to a typescript of Foucault's lectures; she relates the debt of Socrates to a cure of his friends from carelessness and to their escaping the threat of misology (Madison 2002, pp. 432–33). Kloss does not mention Foucault, but shows at length (and convincingly) that Crito bears no philosophical gift or importance; his role is confined to assisting Socrates in practical matters (Kloss 2001, pp. 234–39); addressing him has no philosophical significance, and there is no apparent need to involve *Crito* in an interpretation of the *Phaedo*.

cure, then we do not need to give ground to the hypothesis of a Socratic prophecy which foresees a forthcoming healing of Plato; it is certainly preferable to look into the healing which is explicitly and plainly discussed in our text. Indeed, the evidence of the passage, in its association with the passage on misology to which it is obviously related, creates a complete picture of an 'illness cured', which is denoted by the last wish of Socrates.

Phaedo describes here Socrates in the role of a doctor and distinguishes three stages of his activity. The first is an overall positive attitude towards Simmias and Cebes, an acceptance of their statements (τὸν λόγον ἀπεδέξατο), which underlines that Socrates takes any objection seriously. The second is the diagnosis: a perception and deep awareness of the effects of these objections on the other interlocutors and listeners (ἡμῶν ὡς ὀξέως ᾔσθετο ὃ ᾽πεπόνθεμεν ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων); the allusion of this second point is not to Simmias or Cebes, but to the other listeners, who are apparently at risk – but from what? It is obvious that what they experienced with *logoi* is that very πάθος which, in the course of the text (89c, 90c), will be explained as the state of misology. This condition is described in terms of frustration and defeat (ὥσπερ πεφευγότας καὶ ἠττημένους), just as it will be the case later with the description of frustration that leads to misanthropy and misology. In the third stage (healing proper), Socrates finally cures them by helping them to restore their confidence in *logos* (παρέπεσθαί τε καὶ συσκοπεῖν τὸν λόγον).[28]

It is not, therefore, only (or mostly) Simmias and Cebes who are healed here, but also in the first instance the listeners of the discussion. This is made clear through the textual contrasts of the double "we"/"us" (ἡμῶν, ἡμᾶς) to the objections of the two νεανίσκοι. In a more general sense, misology does not arise in someone who articulates an objection (and thus still believes in the power of *logos*, either as raising objections or as responding to them), but in someone who, under the influence of the shaking of a former certainty brought about by this or that objection, loses his faith in *logos* altogether. There is no need, therefore, to see the cure exclusively as a remedy for the objections raised by Simmias and

(c) In an unpublished paper presented at the *XI. Symposium Platonicum* (Brasilia, July 2016), F. J. Gonzalez also sees 89A as the basis for understanding Socrates' final words. But Gonzalez does not recognize Socrates in the role of the doctor and instead seeks to show how he was himself susceptible to the danger of misology – and why he also had to be cured.

28 As regards an objection raised by an anonymous reviewer, I am willing to take into consideration that, in the first place, *logos* denotes here the present, specific discussion on immortality. But the healing mentioned here can only be crucial and significant if it heals what soon thereafter will be portrayed as endangerment caused by the pathos of misology, that is a loss of the faith in *logos* altogether. The commitment to this *logos* is a prerequisite to following any specific argument.

Cebes, let alone to enter into an adventurous interpretation that declares Socrates himself to be cured of an alleged illness. The cure is not a positive doctrine, or even the rejection or correction of a specific erroneous theoretical viewpoint.[29] It is the healing of the doubt caused by the turbulences of *logos* and by a complete loss of confidence in it.

Nor is there any need to include Socrates in the 'cured' or to undertake hypothetical constructions that make him empathize with the other 'patients'. Socrates is not one of those cured; he is the doctor.[30] This insight explains both the use of the plural in his last wish and also the overall meaning of that wish.[31] Both Socrates and his friends owe Asclepius a cock. Socrates himself has a debt as a doctor, his friends as recipients of the healing. The reading proposed here thus supports a complete and coherent interpretation, which explains and expounds the last words of Socrates *together* with his analysis of misology and the depiction of his attitude by Phaedo as a cure. Only the joint examination of these three elements allows us to understand each. This interpretation of the last words of Socrates is not a version of an "allegoric reading",[32] but an attempt to include them in the dramatic frame of the dialogue, which is decisively determined by the allusions to sickness and healing.

But when and how did the cure occur? And who exactly was healed? The content of healing is not explicitly stated in the dialogue, but it is not difficult to reconstruct it. The crucial prerequisite for its adequate understanding is to

29 As Madison (2002), p. 433 seems to believe: "Socrates became aware of this healing, I suggest, when Simmias demonstrated at 107A8–B3 that he had overcome the threat of misology". She follows here again Foucault, who however sees the recipient of healing not only in Simmias or Cebes, but also (and primarily) in Crito (Madison 2011, p. 108).

30 Santilli (1990), p. 35 is probably the only author who has clearly opted for this reading (see n. 27 above). This option has also been conveyed by D. Frede (1999) p. 171, but only in terms of an unreal conditional, i. e. as an option which she does not seem inclined to take seriously. Frede also argues that a connection between the last words and the passage on misology is not possible, because in the latter Socrates merely warns his friends about the risk of succumbing to misology, but never asserts that they really fell ill – and therefore neither could he have healed them. This assumption is refuted by the explicit textual reference to a cure in the text (ἰάσατο, 89A). But regardless of this, one might ask: if someone had just escaped an epidemic, thus avoiding a direct impending risk, would it be unthinkable to feel obliged to Asclepius?

31 As rightly pointed out by Madison (2002), pp. 432–33 – who again expands on some thoughts by Foucault – the plural is here twofold: of the debt, but also of the expected payment.

32 The term occurs in Most (1993) and Kloss (2001), without (in my view) sufficient clarification. Especially Kloss classifies as allegorical not only those interpretations which identify as cure the relief from the life disease, but also the one by Crooks, who connects the debt of the last sentence with a cure from misology.

point out the fact that the reference to healing is made by Phaedo as part of the digression, while he addresses Echecrates; it belongs, therefore, not to the narrated dialogue of Socrates with his friends in prison, but to the frame dialogue between Phaedo and Echecrates. The discussion in prison is thus *subsequently* characterized as a cure, in a way that brings the theme of cure closer to the reader of the dialogue. Announced by a reverting to the frame dialogue (88C–89B), the passage on misology (89B–91C) does not constitute a superfluous parenthesis; we can assume that it marks an ideal field of proximity between Plato as author and the ideal reader of the dialogue.

If this is true, then we might also assume that the content and the intention of the dramatic presentation of healing is diverse and multiple. Simmias and Cebes recover from their insecurity and their fear of death, by means of the (deficient) Socratic arguments in support of immortality, as well as by the concluding myth. The other listeners in prison, and also Phaedo's addressees, are healed by a treatment that we might call homeopathic: The πάθος caused by *logos* is a suspicion against *logos* and can be cured only through *logos*. But through and behind these interactions there also exists Plato's attempt to communicate with the reader of the dialogue. In this communication we meet again the levels mentioned beforehand. Some readers will find in the dialogue a series of proofs of the immortality of the soul which dispel their fear. Others will come close to a liminal experience of total mistrust towards *logos*, but they might be healed from this through the Socratic explications. Others, however, will be able to discern an intent that is no longer that of the persona of Socrates within the dialogue, but that of the author Plato.

The ideal reader addressed by Plato is aware of the problematic character of the four arguments, and she is expected to read anew (and more carefully) the Socratic analogy and comparison between misology and misanthropy. Most people, Socrates states (90A), are neither very good nor very bad, but somewhere 'in-between' (τοὺς μεταξὺ πλείστους). But then he hastens to moderate this analogy:

> ταύτῃ μὲν οὐχ ὅμοιοι οἱ λόγοι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἀλλὰ σοῦ νυνδὴ προάγοντος ἐγὼ ἐφεσπόμην (90B).
> In that respect *logoi* do not resemble men, but I was following the lead you gave just now.

Socrates seems here to reject an aspect of the analogy which would imply that, in the context of *logos*, the very good and very bad *logoi* are few, while most of them are in the middle. The analogy might seem to call for a restriction, since bad *logoi* apparently are not as few as bad people.[33] But then why did Socrates

33 See also Hackforth (1955), p. 107 and Rowe (1993), p. 213.

make an extensive reference to the classification of people, if it does not apply to *logoi*?[34] And why does he charge Phaedo with the responsibility for over-accentuating this analogy, although Phaedo has made no contribution to the debate, apart from his typical willingness to confirm all Socrates' claims?

The limitation of the analogy is addressed to Socrates' interlocutors; it emphasizes their faith in the Socratic arguments addressed to them. It is not relevant for a competent reader of the text, for whom the analogy between misology and misanthropy remains valid: like people, most *logoi* are 'in-between'. This intermediary status, however, does not make them unnecessary or harmful, but often useful and necessary in view of a specific audience. Regarding the expectations of Simmias and Cebes, for example, Socrates is forced to present a series of 'intermediate' *logoi*: the four arguments lacking formal validity, and afterwards the concluding myth. The quantitative analogy between misology and misanthropy points out for the reader the intermediary status of these arguments. It also stresses that the good *logoi* do fall short in quantity; in a sense, they are limited to the "naïve"[35] and monotonous hypothesis of Forms.

Over the last decades, several commentators have attempted to present the last words of Socrates as a gesture of gratitude for the effectiveness of his appeal

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34 This question is also posed in a recent paper by Miller: "In this way, *logoi* do not resemble people. But if this is right, why does Socrates 'follow Phaedo's lead' and explain at length precisely the fact about people that will be misleading in the context of the analogy with *logoi*? It is unlikely that Plato includes this *prima-facie* pointless eddy in the conversation without a reason. I take it that this false start covertly invites us to look for a way in which the rejected aspect of the analogy with people does hold, i. e. a way in which *logoi* are (mostly, at least) in between being 'good' and 'bad'" (Miller 2015, p. 155). Yet, these accurate remarks ultimately lead Miller to support the rather adventurous thesis that Socrates does not attack the misologists, but "shows some covert sympathy for their position" (p. 147) and "shares their pessimism" (p. 169). – In any case, Socrates does not simply want to warn us that that *logoi* (or even, according to Miller: most *logoi*) might not be stable and persuasive; but that our own relation to specific *logoi* – whatever their quality or truthfulness might be – should never turn into a hatred for *logos* in general. Miller probably misses the overall point of the analogy, when he recognizes in misology not a *hatred* for *logoi*, but only a "pessimism about *logos* as a route to establish truth" (p.169). For while mere pessimism still allows for an engagement with *logoi*, hatred causes an irrevocable cessation of dealing with them. We might therefore assume that the next step of a misologist would be to espouse not skepticism, but rather an extreme hedonism. Miller finally tries to expand Socrates' assumed epistemic pessimism even to the knowledge of Forms, and for this he invokes the passage on the Genuine Philosophers, whose position he considers to be Socratic (p. 170).

35 In 100D, Socrates calls the approach exposed in the hypothesis of Forms as "simple-minded" (εὐήθως), and in 105C he labels the answer he is compelled to give according to this hypothesis as "ignorant", "unlearned" (ἀμαθῆ); both characterizations stay in an ironical contrast to the "wise" causation (τὰς ἄλλας αἰτίας τὰς σοφάς) of 100C.

for a "care of the soul", thus connecting it with passages 107B–C and 115B–C. The significance of this care to Socrates is certainly undeniable. But this association remains, in my opinion, quite vague and inadequate for interpreting the whole scope of the connections between misology, healing and the request for paying the debt to Asclepius. Let's look at the second of these passages:

> Ἅπερ ἀεὶ λέγω, ἔφη, ὦ Κρίτων, οὐδὲν καινότερον· ὅτι ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιμελούμενοι ὑμεῖς καὶ ἐμοὶ καὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς καὶ ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς ἐν χάριτι ποιήσετε ἅττ' ἂν ποιῆτε, κἂν μὴ νῦν ὁμολογήσητε (115B).
> 'What I am always telling you, Crito', said he, 'and nothing particularly new: If you take care of yourselves, whatever you do will be a favour to me and mine, and to yourselves too, even if you don't undertake to do so now'.

Socrates refers here to "care" in a vocabulary that shows striking similarity to his reference, sometime earlier, to the Forms:

> ὧδε λέγω, οὐδὲν καινόν, ἀλλ' ἅπερ ἀεί τε ἄλλοτε καὶ ἐν τῷ παρεληλυθότι λόγῳ οὐδὲν πέπαυμαι λέγων. (100B)
> It is nothing new, but what I have never stopped talking about always in the past, but also in our earlier discussion.

In 115B, *prima facie*, Socrates presents himself content with a general reference to the care for one's soul, which might be enough to comfort his friends; yet, the expressions ἀεὶ λέγω and οὐδὲν καινότερον seem to mark a connection to the earlier reference to the Forms. But also in 107B–C, "care" appears to be supplementing a previous reference to the hypothesis of Forms. This is *the real cure* for the reader, for only Forms can provide a solid ground to make him constantly invulnerable towards misology. This hypothesis belongs to the rare class of good *logoi*, while the general and quite imprecise allusion to the 'care for one's soul' belongs rather to the 'intermediate' ones. In other words, the real cure for the philosophically competent reader of the dialogue is the hypothesis of Forms, as described in the Socratic autobiography. This is the connection of two digressions which mark the key passages of the dialogue, and in which Socrates allows himself to focus on D2.

To summarize: Socrates' last words are pronounced in the context of his well-known playfulness – comparable to the reference to Aesop (61B), by which he had attempted to explain his occupation with music, in order then to allude to Evenus and draw attention to the dual meaning of "death". But neither the playful mood of Socrates, which does not fade even at the time of his death, nor the observed "Socratic freedom in the interpretation of the meaning of religious symbols" (Frede 1999, p. 171) deprives the last words of their philosophical impact. Their

significance, however, emerges only in combining the analysis of the debt to Asclepius with both the risk of the illness of misology and Phaedo's indication that healing finally did occur. The 'added value' of the reading presented here might be seen in the joint inquiry of these three issues, as opposed to other interpretations, such as that by Crooks, who only links misology and the last words, or by Foucault, who relates only the cure and the last words.

Moreover, the full meaning of these last words is recognized only if we exploit the methodological advantage of the aforementioned interpretation offered by Most. Socrates' request to settle the debt to Asclepius is directed towards a dual audience and thus acquires a dual significance. For its direct recipients, it is a manifestation of Socratic piety and may possibly be explained as a reference to the smooth influence of the drug, to the cure of the doubts concerning the posthumous fate of the soul, or to the success of his appeal to 'care for one's soul' in view of the expected post-mortem judgment. For the readers of the Platonic dialogue, however, who are the main addressees of the *Phaedo*'s references to misology and cure, the Socratic admission of a debt to Asclepius denotes his last disengagement from the agony before death as D1 and a final allusion to the need of philosophy as D2.[36] Even at the time of his death, Socrates is neither interested in (his) physical death, nor anxious about his posthumous existence. He refers the reader once more to the need to protect or rescue *logoi* from any hatred or suspicion as a prerequisite of philosophical life. The implicit emphasis of the final words of the Platonic Socrates on the need of a philosophy of Forms, as reconstructed through their association by Phaedo with misology and its cure, provides also an answer to a question which, to my knowledge, has never been raised: why does Phaedo give his name to this dialogue? The *Phaedo* is entitled *Phaedo*, not because Phaedo narrates the discussion to Echecrates, but because the emphasis he lays on the prevention of misology restores the central theme of the dialogue: the philosophy of *logoi* as philosophy of Forms.

36 A distinction between the Socratic persona and the author Plato was attempted in this context by Kloss (2001), pp. 231–32, who sees here an operation on a double level: Socrates expresses his gratitude to Asclepius "as the provider of the medical drug" (p. 233), while Plato formulates through Socrates a λόγος προτρεπτικός, "a final urgent appeal to an enduring care for our own souls" (p. 239). Since, however, Kloss believes that "the speaking and acting character of Socrates enjoys methodological priority over the philosophizing author Plato", he does not sufficiently point out the Platonic intention, nor does he attribute to it the significance it deserves.

VI Double topic, for a dual audience

The topic of the dialogue is ultimately death in a twofold way, while the Platonic Socrates addresses a dual audience. The first audience is intratextual and includes the interlocutors of the Socratic persona: Simmias and Cebes, Phaedo and Crito, the silent listeners of the last Socratic discussion, but also the "lamenting Xanthippe" (60A). A key feature of this audience is its thematic (and existential) focus on death as D1: as physical demise. In view of the approaching demise of their beloved friend, death as passing away becomes their sole concern, a source of anxiety, and the origin of every query and request addressed to Socrates: 'convince us that (your) death as termination does not mean a complete annihilation'. The second audience is that of the competent readers of the dialogue,[37] whom Plato addresses by posing the crucial question: 'How are we expected to practice philosophy?' Or, in other words: what does it mean to "verge on death" in the sense of D2? The entire *Phaedo* is first and foremost a dramatically outstanding elaboration of the coupling of these two topics, intentions and audiences, in the intersection of which we can locate the Socratic persona. Socrates thus assumes a dual role: On the one hand, he meets the need of his friends for a blend of consolation and hope vis-à-vis death (D1). On the other hand, however, he fulfils his own desire, which shortly before his own death still remains the same as throughout his entire life: the desire for philosophy (D2).

In consideration of the first audience, Socrates proceeds to a discussion which, in terms of its form and intention, is a conversation for 'young children'. At an early point in the dialogue, addressing Simmias and Cebes, Socrates described their fear of the afterlife of the soul as childish: δεδιέναι τὸ τῶν παίδων, "you fear what children fear" (77D). The fear is childish, not because what is at stake seems negligible or insignificant, but because the expectations of its definitive overcoming are naive and unjustified. This is the background against which the whole of Socrates' conversation with his friends on D1 takes place,[38] leading him to make wide use of a vocabulary which employs as its axis hope, faith, assertion and consolation: Socrates is willing to "affirm" (διισχυρισαίμην, 63C) that

37 What I schematically call here a "competent reader" is mainly determined by an awareness of the distinction between D1 and D2. Whoever neglects this distinction is expected to adopt the expectations of the internal, intratextual audience and to demand from the dialogue proof of the immortality of the soul, or even consolation for death. – The distinction between the two audiences made here (intratextual interlocutors of Socrates vs. readers of the dialogue) does not converge with the distinction between a "primary audience" (Simmias, Cebes) and a "secondary audience" (Echecrates et al.), as made by Madison (2002), p. 425.

38 This observation has also been made by Zehnpfennig (1991), p. 187.

after his death he will meet other, even better gods, and he is "hopeful" (ἐλπίζω, εὔελπις, 63C) about what follows after death; he "feels confident" (θαρρεῖν, 63E), is again "hopeful" (εὔελπις, 64A); while impersonating the Genuine Philosophers, he appeals to "probability" (ὡς τὸ εἰκός, 67A, and again later in 70B) and has "plenty of hope" (πολλὴ ἐλπίς, 67b, and again three occurrences of ἐλπίς in 68A). Cebes also asks for some "hope" and "exhortation" (ἐλπίς, παραμυθία, 70B), and Socrates meets this demand with his willingness to offer more "mythologizing" (διαμυθολογῶμεν, 70B) – as he had already declared in 61B and 61E. He later advises Cebes to "chant spells every day" (ἐπᾴδειν, 77E), in order to expel fear, and finally he points out that he has availed himself of such "chanting" (ἐπᾴδειν, 114D) in the form of the concluding myth and in an extensive way, "which is just why I have so prolonged the tale".

The four arguments cannot be viewed outside this background. I cannot go here into a detailed discussion of these arguments; I will confine myself to the quite evident observation that none of these arguments is distinguished by formal or material validity[39] – otherwise, the history of philosophy would have documented the immortality of the soul as a proven thesis, and not e. g. (like in Kant) as a constituent of the dialectic of reason. I do not wish to deny that Socrates (not only the historical Socrates, but also the homonymous persona of the dialogue) indeed believes in the immortality of the soul, and that he shows his commitment to this thesis by attempting to demonstrate it by means of the four arguments. At the same time, however, he seems to recognize that he cannot offer a high degree of certainty on this issue: *His arguments can provide relief, but no conclusive philosophical evidence*. This is, at least, the perspective of the author Plato, who presents the discussion on immortality in a way that clearly demonstrates the insufficiency or defectiveness of these arguments. This inadequacy, of course, does not apply to philosophy altogether (D2), but only to the topic of this debate, for which only the language of hope is finally appropriate. Philosophy is unable to provide sufficient, valid, and convincing arguments for overcoming death (D1), and this is something Plato seems to know well – this is why he eventually allows Socrates to have recourse to myth.[40] Moreover, some aspects of this myth contradict fundamental points of the previous four arguments. The description of

39 See on this, among many others, the conclusions drawn by Ebert (2004), pp. 417–18.

40 The fact that the interlocutor Socrates is committed to the immortality thesis does not exclude that he is himself aware of the inadequacy of the arguments available; cf. also Madison (2002), p. 430: "Socrates is well aware of the insufficiency of these arguments, as he repeatedly makes clear"; Zuckert (2009), p. 785: "the primary purpose of Socrates' speech is not to prove that the soul is immortal".

the fate of souls after death, for example, makes no reference to a revival, i. e. re-embodiment of the souls, as the argument of the opposites did; this results in a further, significant, mutual limitation of the authority and validity of the arguments and the concluding myth.

In the meantime, after Cebes had accepted with some compliance that they had behaved like children and had expressed his worries that they would hardly find another enchanter (ἐπῳδόν, 78A), the Platonic Socrates found another opportunity to contrast the art of enchantment with his own conception of philosophy, as a dialectical art:

> Πολλὴ μὲν ἡ Ἑλλάς, ἔφη, ὦ Κέβης, ἐν ᾗ ἔνεισί που ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ τὰ τῶν βαρβάρων γένη, οὓς πάντας χρὴ διερευνᾶσθαι ζητοῦντας τοιοῦτον ἐπῳδόν, μήτε χρημάτων φειδομένους μήτε πόνων, ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν εἰς ὅτι ἂν εὐκαιρότερον ἀναλίσκοιτε χρήματα. ζητεῖν δὲ χρὴ καὶ αὐτοὺς μετ' ἀλλήλων· ἴσως γὰρ ἂν οὐδὲ ῥᾳδίως εὕροιτε μᾶλλον ὑμῶν δυναμένους τοῦτο ποιεῖν. (78A)
> Greece is a large place, Cebes, he said, which has good men in it, I suppose; and there are many foreign races too.[41] You must comb all of them in your search for such an enchanter, sparing neither money nor effort, as there's nothing on which you would be better off spending money. But you must also search yourselves and with one another; you may not easily find anyone more capable of doing this than yourselves.

Dialectic appears here as an alternative to the problems and limitations of enchanting, and in its familiar Socratic opposition to sophistic. Cebes, however, confines himself again to a concurrent consent, but refuses to follow the Socratic suggestion; instead, he effectively forces him to return to his own favourite subject:

> Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν δή, ἔφη, ὑπάρξει, ὁ Κέβης· ὅθεν δὲ ἀπελίπομεν ἐπανέλθωμεν, εἴ σοι ἡδομένῳ ἐστίν. (78A–B)
> Yes, that will be done, said Cebes. But let's return to where we left off, if you like.

Socrates seems therefore in his last hours to repetitively yield to the expectations and pressure of his friends and to join a discussion on death in the sense of D1. Amidst the presentation of the inadequate arguments for immortality, which only attempt to assuage the fears of his interlocutors, he exploits, however, every

41 As an anonymous reader rightly remarks, this suggestion marks a certain contrast to the following misanthropy passage, where good men are deemed rare: "extremely good [...] people are few in number, and the majority lie inbetween" (τοὺς μεταξὺ πλείστους, 90A). The inconsistency diminishes if we recognize the irony of this text: Socrates knows in fact very well that good men are rare – both in Greece and among the "foreign races".

opportunity to allude to his own preferred theme (D2) and to present it to the reader as the main topic of his own search and of the dialogue's in general.

We have observed many of these references, the first of which was the very distinction between D1 and D2. It is worth adding that, all along the argumentation for immortality, and against the doubts and uncertainties that overshadow it, it is only the hypothesis of Forms that attains universal acceptance as utterly evident, certain, and undeniable – when, for example, Simmias declares that he doubts everything except this:

> οὐ γὰρ ἔχω ἔγωγε οὐδὲν οὕτω μοι ἐναργὲς ὃν ὡς τοῦτο, τὸ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτ' εἶναι ὡς οἷόν τε μάλιστα, καλόν τε καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τἆλλα πάντα ἃ σὺ νυνδὴ ἔλεγες (77A).
> For I have nothing that is as clear to me as that there exists, as much as anything could exist, everything of this sort: the Beautiful, the Good and all the other things you just mentioned.

As already noted, it is only in two loci of the dialogue where Socrates is able to disengage from the childish expectations of his interlocutors and follow explicitly his own primary need and desire. The first is the passage dedicated to the discussion of misology (89B–91C) and the second is his extensive philosophical autobiography (95E–102A). Especially the latter, although (for dramatic reasons) it appears to serve the needs of the debate on D1, is actually a release from the question on D1 and gives Socrates the opportunity to explain, shortly before his own passing away, in the most distinct and clear way, the hypothesis of Forms as the fundamental and unconditional method of ("death" as D2, i. e. of) philosophy. One might therefore speak of mutual transitions from the topic of D1 to that of D2 and vice versa. But a more accurate description might diagnose an asymmetrical pressure of the topic D1, leading Socrates to seek possibilities for escape in order to discuss D2, or sometimes to present it as serving the discussion of D1.

The value and significance of the dialogue is not diminished by this tension – which can even be alleviated if we recognize the importance of the dramatic framework of the dialogue as an eminent field of Platonic *irony*, which, according to the famous characterization by L. Strauss, "consists in speaking differently to different kinds of people" (Strauss 1978, p. 51). Or, in the words of another scholar of completely different origin, if we recognize that Platonic philosophy unfolds in the dialogues as an enterprise addressed at different audiences and operating on different levels, then "each partner receives what he is entitled to" (Szlezák 1985, p. 280). The whole scope of this dramatic framework can be identified only if we read a Platonic dialogue both as an exchange between (in our case) Socrates and Simmias/Cebes and as a dynamic generation of meaning, unfolding in an area

marked by a *quartet of moments*; this quartet includes not only the main interlocutor and his dialogue partners, but also the author Plato and the prospective reader. Or, in other words, in view of a Platonic dialogue, the question 'what does Socrates maintain here?' is never sufficient without a second, broader, and more fundamental question: 'what does Plato expect his reader to understand, when he displays Socrates as maintaining what he maintains?'

The tension we have identified in the dialogue, between what we denoted by the topics D1 and D2, can then obtain a closer description and elucidation (or even a certain alleviation), if we perceive the two expectations depicted therein not as contradictory but rather as *supplementary* prospects. The ambiguity of "death" displays the thematic diversity of a dialogue that balances two contrasting, but not contradictory or mutually exclusive, expectations; one of these concerns the fate of the soul after physical death (D1), while the second aspires in the in-life emancipation of the soul from bodily ties, by means of practicing philosophy (D2).

Placing the distinction in its dramatic context endorses the assumption that D1 constitutes for Socrates a topic which, in view of his own death, he is ready and willing to discuss – but without ceasing to express his doubts about the possibility of providing a philosophically acceptable degree of certainty to the immortality of the soul. This reservation is greater for the author Plato, who is not exposed (like Socrates) to the intratextual existential anxiety and can therefore address the reader in a way that suggests the priority of D2. By this, I do not claim that Plato does not take seriously the question of the immortality of the soul; but, although he most likely believes in it, he clearly shows that it cannot be philosophically proven. The only outcome of the discussion in which his philosophical hero is involved amounts to the consolation of those who want to make themselves content with it.

However, if the dialogue proceeds on these two distinct levels, if it has two different concepts of death as its topics, and if it is addressed to two different audiences, why, then, does Socrates not explicitly distinguish between the two concepts? The answer can only be found in the dramaturgy of the dialogue: If Socrates were to make the distinction, he would no longer have retained a contact ground with his interlocutors concerned only about D1; and the *Phaedo* would not have been possible – or it would be a completely different dialogue. This duality marks at the same time a continuous hermeneutic challenge for the reader, inviting her to examine the appropriateness and validity of the Socratic μυθολογεῖν in its mythological and argumentative form, and to undertake the hermeneutic task of diagnosing the presence, extent and significance of a different concept of death (D2). In other words, the philosophically experienced reader will focus on the "refuge to the *logoi*" and the establishment of Forms, while the anxious and

scared "child within us" will take refuge in the "proofs" of immortality and the consolation they offer.[42]

The interpretive accomplishment of the described transition from D1 to D2 presupposes, of course, our emancipation from versions of philosophy such as those professed by the Genuine Philosophers. By presenting their views through Socrates, Plato opens up the sphere of tensions dominating the dialogue and explicitly addresses the reader with the question: Is D1 indeed the central topic of the dialogue? Is philosophy a version of *thanatophilia*? The emancipation from this attitude coincides largely with overcoming all Pythagoreanism.[43] The Pythagorean context is certainly present in the dialogue, as shown by both the origin of Simmias and Cebes and the narration in Phleious. This, however, indicates not a Platonic accession to Pythagoreanism, but rather a clear delineation. The implicit reference of passage 82E–83A to the famous Pythagorean saying σῶμα-σῆμα is telling: The soul is enslaved in the body only if it decides to give into its desires. "The prison is self-created".[44]

On the grounds of the broad definition D, therefore, Platonic Socrates enters into a dialogue pertaining to a double topic, in a dual intention. In a certain way, the theme of the dialogue is indeed the "study of death" (μελέτη θανάτου, 81A). But this study takes two different forms and is accomplished in two distinct ways: For those interlocutors subjected to the childish fear of dying (D1), study means consolation; for the addressees of the Platonic inquiry, however, this study urges a wise attitude towards bodily restraints, which (against the arguments of Genuine Philosophers) allows for knowledge within life, in the form of the dialectical philosophy of Forms (D2).

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42 The interpretation presented here might incidentally be seen as an antipode to the reading of Derrida, (1981), p. 122, who bluntly states that "philosophy consists of offering reassurance to children".

43 I cannot follow, therefore, the position of Sedley, when he states (Sedley 1995, p. 11) that in the *Phaedo* Socrates persuades the Pythagoreans of the correctness of their own teaching. Sedley perceives the immortality of the soul as the key issue of the dialogue and argues that its proof needs the Platonic theory of Forms. Burnyeat has gone even further, by calling the *Phaedo* "Plato's first Pythagorean dialogue" (Burnyeat 1997, p. 315). Crooks (1998), p. 121, instead, correctly regards "Socrates as an alternative to what we might call Pythagorean eclecticism". One of the few commentators who have tried to challenge the view that Simmias and Cebes are Pythagoreans was Rowe (1993), pp. 7, 194–95.

44 As aptly remarked by Zehnpfennig (1991), p. 188.

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