

Phaedo I 57a–69e¹

Introduction. Phaedo reports the last hours of Socrates's life and his death. He recounts the final discussions, which revolve around death and the nature of the soul.

Questions.

1. How does Phaedo describe the general mood in prison (58e–59a)?
2. Cebes points out a tension in relation to Socrates's allusion to suicide: why does it seem 'illogical' (*ἀτόπω*, i.e. strange, out of place) to say that philosophers are 'willing to die without qualms' (62d), yet also to say that suicide is not legitimate (61d ff.)?
3. What is the thesis Socrates advances between 63e–64c?
4. How does Socrates define death (64c)?
- 5.★ Why does Socrates begin the argument (64d) with the pleasures (*αἱ ἡδοναί, hai hêdonai*)?
- 6.★ In what sense is the body an impediment (66a)?
- 7.★ Socrates makes the case for the idea that 'true philosophers make dying their profession' (67e). What is his argument? Do you find it plausible?

Background. (a) The passages where Socrates introduces and motivates what can be called *Separation Argument* (64d ff.) are strikingly similar to points made by Descartes, e.g., in the *Meditations* (1641). There, one central point is that certain and indubitable knowledge is achieved by a sort of inner vision, rather than sense experience. The fact that the soul (for Descartes, the 'thinking thing') is embodied means that the body impedes the clear and distinct apprehension of truths by reason; it is as if being in a body limits our rationality, and obscures our reason (cf. esp. *Med.* VI). More about this in class. (b) At 65d, the theoretical notion of a Form makes its first appearance: there is a thing that is 'justice itself'. Socrates's point is that these Forms are not the objects of sensory experience, but of the pure intellect. Briefly, their main philosophical function is to explain qualitative sameness: two white cups are the same with regard to their whiteness; whiteness is what they share, or have in common. The Forms reappear in the discussion of the theory of recollection (72e ff.), and again later at 100b, where Socrates claims the theory of Forms as his invention: but it is almost certainly Plato's. Forms are absent from his earliest dialogues.

¹ *The Last Days of Socrates*, pp. 116–32.

