Section G: Reflections after the similarity argument concerning the fate of those souls which have and which have not separated themselves from bodily concerns.

'The truth is much more like this: if at its release the soul is pure and does not drag along with it any trace of the body, because it has never willingly associated with it in life; if it has shunned it and isolated itself because that is what it always practises — I mean doing philosophy in the right way and really getting used to facing death calmly: wouldn't you call this "practising death"?'

'Most decidedly.'

'Very well; if this is its condition, then it departs to the place where things are like itself — invisible, divine, immortal and wise; where, on its arrival, happiness awaits it, and release from uncertainty and folly, from fears and gnawing desires, and all other human evils; and where (as they say of the initiates in the Mysteries) it really spends the rest of time with divine beings. Shall we adopt this view, Cebes, or some other?'

'This one, by all means,' said Cebes.

'But, I suppose, if at the time of its release the soul is tainted and impure, because it has always associated with the body and cared for it and loved it, and has been so beguiled by the body and its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment, making it accustomed to hate and fear and avoid what is invisible and obscure to our eyes, but intelligible and comprehensible by philosophy — if the soul is in this state, do you think that it will be released just by itself, uncontaminated?'

'Not in the least,' he said.

'On the contrary, it will, I imagine, be permeated by the corporeal, which fellowship and intercourse with the body will have ingrained in its very nature through constant association and long practice.'

'Certainly.'

'And we must suppose, my dear fellow, that the corporeal is heavy, oppressive, earthly and visible. So the soul which is tainted by its presence is weighed down and dragged back into the visible
world, through fear (as they say) of Hades or the invisible, and hovers about tombs and graveyards. The shadowy apparitions which have actually been seen there are the ghosts of those souls which have not got clear away, but still retain some portion of the visible; which is why they can be seen."^113

'That seems likely enough, Socrates.'

'Yes, it does, Cebes. Of course these are not the souls of the good, but of inferior people, and they are compelled to wander about these places as a punishment for their bad conduct in the past. They continue wandering until at last, through craving for the corporeal, which unceasingly pursues them, they are imprisoned once more in a body. And as you might expect, they are attached to the same sort of character or nature which they have developed during life.'^114

'What sort do you mean, Socrates?'

'Well, those who have cultivated gluttony or assault^115 or drunkenness, instead of taking pains to avoid them, are likely to assume the form of donkeys and other perverse animals; don't you think so?'

'Yes, that is very likely.'

'And those who have deliberately preferred a life of injustice, suppression, and robbery with violence become wolves and hawks and kites; unless we can suggest any other more likely animals.'

'No, the ones which you mention are exactly right.'

'So it is easy to imagine into what sort of animals all the other kinds of soul will go, in accordance with their conduct during life.'

'Yes, certainly.'

'I suppose that the happiest people, and those who reach the best destination, are the ones who have cultivated the goodness of an ordinary citizen, so-called 'temperance' and 'justice', which is acquired by habit and practice, without the help of philosophy and reason.'^116

'How are these the happiest?'

'Because they will probably pass into some other kind of social and disciplined creature like bees, wasps and ants; or even back into the human race again, becoming decent citizens.'

'Very likely,'

'But no soul which has not practised philosophy, and is not absolutely pure when it leaves the body, may attain to the divine
nature; that is only for the lover of learning. This is the reason, my dear Simmias and Cebes, why true philosophers abstain from all bodily desires and withstand them and do not yield to them. It is not because they are afraid of financial loss or poverty, like the average man who thinks of money first; nor because they shrink from dishonour and a bad reputation, like lovers of prestige and authority.'

'No, those would be unworthy motives, Socrates,' said Cebes.

'They would indeed,' he agreed. 'And so, Cebes, those who care about their souls and do not devote themselves to the body dissociate themselves firmly from these others and refuse to accompany them on their haphazard journey; they believe that it is wrong to oppose philosophy with her offer of liberation and purification, so they turn and follow her wherever she leads.'

'What do you mean, Socrates?'

'I will explain,' he said. 'Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance. And philosophy can see the ingenuity of the imprisonment, which is brought about by the prisoner’s own active desire, which makes him first accessory to his own confinement. Well, philosophy takes over the soul in this condition and by gentle persuasion tries to set it free. She points out that observation by means of the eyes and ears and all the other senses abounds with deception, and she urges the soul to refrain from using them unless it is necessary to do so, and encourages it to collect and concentrate itself in isolation, trusting nothing but its own isolated judgement upon realities considered in isolation, and attributing no truth to any other thing which it views through another medium in some other thing; such objects, she knows, are sensible and visible but what she herself sees is intelligible and invisible. Now the soul of the true philosopher feels that it must not reject this opportunity for release, and so it abstains as far as possible from pleasures and desires and grieves, because it reflects that the result of giving way to pleasure, fear, pain, or desire is not as might be supposed the trivial misfortune of becoming ill or wasting money through self-indulgence, but the last and worst calamity of all, which the sufferer does not take into account.'
'What is that, Socrates?' asked Cebes.

'When anyone's soul feels a keen pleasure or pain it cannot help supposing that whatever causes the most violent emotion is the plainest and truest reality; which it is not. It is chiefly visible things that have this effect, isn't it?'

'Quite so.'

'Is it not on this sort of occasion that soul passes most completely into the bondage of body?'

'How is that?'

'Because every pleasure or pain has a sort of rivet with which it fastens the soul to the body and pins it down and makes it corporeal, accepting as true whatever the body certifies. The result of agreeing with the body and finding pleasure in the same things is, I imagine, that it cannot help coming to share its character and its diet, so that it can never get clean away to the unseen world, but is always saturated with the body when it sets out, and so soon falls back again into another body, where it takes root and grows. Consequently it has no share of fellowship with the pure and uniform and divine.'

'Yes, that is perfectly true, Socrates,' said Cebes.

'It is for these reasons, Cebes, that true philosophers exhibit self-control and courage; not for the reasons that most people do.' Or do you think it's for the same reasons?'

'No, certainly not,'

'No, indeed. A philosopher's soul will take the view which I have described. It will not first expect to be set free by philosophy, and then allow pleasure and pain to reduce it once more to bondage, thus condemning itself to an endless task, like Penelope, when she worked to undo her own weaving; no, this soul brings calm to the seas of desire by following Reason and abiding always in her company, and by contemplating the true and divine and unambiguous, and drawing inspiration from it; because such a soul believes that this is the right way to live while life endures, and that after death it reaches a place which is kindred and similar to its own nature, and there is rid for ever of human ills. After such a training, my dear Simmias and Cebes, the soul can have no grounds for fearing that on its separation from the body it will be blown away and scattered by the winds, and so disappear into thin air, and cease to exist altogether.'
Section H: The objections of Simmias and Cebe. Simmias feels that Socrates’ theory of the soul’s immortality is inconsistent with an attractive Pythagorean doctrine which views the soul as an attunement, for an instrument’s harmony – its condition of being ‘tuned’ – is gone as soon as the instrument is broken. Cebe feels that Socrates has proved that the soul is more enduring than the body, but not that it is completely impervious to the forces of destruction. In this section we are expected to ponder a great deal over what the soul really is like, and what sort of relationship it should have with the body – whether, for instance, it ‘harmonizes’ the body, whether it arranges for its perpetual renewal, and whether it can in fact be worn out by such tasks.

c There was silence for some time after Socrates had said this. He himself, to judge from his appearance, was still pondering the account which he had just given, and so were most of us; but Simmias and Cebe went on talking in a low voice. When Socrates noticed them, he said, ‘Why, surely you don’t feel my account inadequate? Of course it is still open to a number of doubts and objections, if you want to examine it in detail. If it is something else that you two are considering, never mind; but if you feel any difficulty about our discussion, don’t hesitate to put forward your own views, and point out any way in which you think that my account could be improved; and by all means make use of my services too, if you think I can help at all to solve the difficulty.’

‘Very well, Socrates,’ said Simmias, ‘I will be quite open with you. We have both been feeling difficulties for some time, and each of us has been urging the other to ask questions. We are anxious to have your answers, but we did not like to trouble you, for fear of upsetting you in your present misfortune.’

When Socrates heard this he laughed gently and said, ‘I am surprised at you, Simmias. I shall certainly find it difficult to convince the outside world that I do not regard my present lot as a misfortune if I cannot even convince you, and you are afraid that I am more irritable now than I used to be. Evidently you think that I have less insight into the future than a swan; because when these birds feel that the time has come for them to die, they sing more loudly and sweetly than they have sung in all their lives before, for joy that they are going away into the presence of the god whose
servants they are. It is quite wrong for human beings to make out
that the swans sing their last song as an expression of grief at their
approaching end;¹²² people who say this are misled by their own
fear of death, and fail to reflect that no bird sings when it is
hungry or cold or distressed in any other way; not even the
nightingale or swallow or hoopoe, whose songs are supposed to be
a lament. In my opinion neither they nor the swans sing because
they are sad. I believe that the swans, belonging as they do to
Apollo, have prophetic powers and sing because they know the
good things that await them in the unseen world; and they are
happier on that day than they have ever been before. Now I
consider that I am in the same service as the swans, and dedicated
to the same god; and that I am no worse endowed with prophetic
powers by my master than they are, and no more disconsolate at
leaving this life. So far as that fear of yours is concerned, you may
say and ask whatever you like, for as long as the eleven officers of
the Athenians permit.'¹²³

'Thank you,' said Simmias. 'I will tell you my problem first and
then Cebes shall tell you where he finds your theory unacceptable.
I think, just as you do, Socrates, that although it is very difficult if
not impossible in this life to achieve certainty about these ques-
tions, at the same time it is utterly feeble not to use every effort in
testing the available theories, or to leave off before we have
considered them in every way, and come to the end of our
resources. It is our duty to do one of two things: either to ascertain
the facts, whether by seeking instruction or by personal discovery;
or, if this is impossible, to select the best and most dependable
theory that human intelligence can supply, and use it as a raft to
ride the seas of life — that is, assuming that we cannot make our
journey with greater confidence and security by the surer means of
a divine revelation. And so now, after what you have said, I shall
not let any diffidence prevent me from asking my question, and so
make me blame myself afterwards for not having spoken my mind
now. The fact is, Socrates, that on thinking it over, and discussing
it with Cebes here, I feel your explanation not altogether ade-
quate.'

'Your feeling is very likely right, my comrade,' said Socrates,
'but tell me where you think the inadequacies are.'
Section H (i): The attunement theory. Given that one accepts that there is something constantly ‘in’ the living body which brings it life, unity and perception, one is confronted with the following choice: either it will be some part of the individual distinct from the parts of the body, something which arrives when the body is in a condition apt for life and departs thereafter (whether intact and intelligent or not); or it will be some relation between the rest of the parts of the individual. Simmias understands the present theory as being of the latter type, and the ‘attunement’ (or ‘harmony’) as the lyre’s state of being ready to play – with all its parts standing in the correct relation to one another and the strings at the correct tension. Thus the soul would be the body’s state of being ready to live, with all its parts adequately ‘attuned’. This type of theory offers an obvious challenge, since it does not allow the soul to be an independent entity of the type which Socrates advocates, thus threatening the moral theory of the Phaedo as well as the theory of the soul’s immortality. The origin of the theory may be complex. That the soul is some kind of appropriate mixture of the physical forces hot, cold, wet and dry (86b) was a natural view for the Greek medical theorists to hold. Yet harmonic theory was particularly dear to the Pythagoreans, and the Pythagorean Echecrates (88d) had long adhered to a soul-harmony theory – in spite of the Pythagorean belief in an after-life. They did not have to understand the ‘harmony’ as Simmias does, and indeed the soul which Plato employs in the Timaeus is very much a harmony without in any sense being an ‘attunement’ of bodily elements. Since for Pythagoreans mathematical entities were the primary reality, it makes sense that the lyre’s harmony should have been an external and independent force attracted almost magically into the material lyre as soon as it was ready to be played. In criticizing the doctrine at De Anima 407b27–28, Aristotle implies that the theory was a popular one, without specifying any particular advocates of it.

‘What I mean is this,’ said Simmias. ‘You might say the same thing about tuning the strings of a musical instrument: that the attunement is something invisible and incorporeal and splendid and divine, and located in the tuned instrument, while the instrument itself and its strings are material and corporeal and composite and earthly and closely related to what is mortal. Now suppose
that the instrument is broken, or its strings cut or snapped. According to your theory the attunement must still exist—it cannot have been destroyed; because it would be inconceivable that when the strings are broken the instrument and the strings themselves, which have a mortal nature, should still exist, and the attunement, which shares the nature and characteristics of the divine and immortal, should exist no longer, having predeceased its mortal counterpart. You would say that the attunement must still exist somewhere just as it was; and that the wood and strings will rot away before anything happens to it. I say this, Socrates, because, as I think you yourself are aware, this is very much the kind of thing that we take the soul to be; the body is held together at a certain tension between the extremes of hot and cold, and dry and wet, and so on, and our soul is a balance or attunement of these same extremes, when they are combined in just the right proportion. Well, if the soul is really an adjustment, obviously as soon as the tension of our body is lowered or increased beyond the proper point, the soul must be destroyed, divine though it is; just like any other attunement, either in music or in any product of the arts and crafts, although in each case the physical remains last considerably longer until they are burnt up or rot away. Find us an answer to this argument, if someone insists that the soul, being a balance of physical constituents, is the first thing to be destroyed by what we call death.'

Section H (ii): Cebes’ problem. Cebes accepts the notion that the soul is an independent part of the individual, and a long-lasting part at that. He rightly points out that something long-lasting does not have to be imperishable. And he raises the crucial issue that the same body may not after all last a man’s lifetime since parts are constantly expended and replaced, so that the more enduring soul could last longer without lasting beyond death.

Socrates opened his eyes very wide—a favourite trick of his—and smiled. ‘Really,’ he said, ‘Simmias’s criticism is quite justified, so if any of you are more resourceful than I am, you had better answer him; it seems to me that he is not handling the argument at all badly. However, before we have the answer, I think we should hear what criticisms Cebes has to make in his turn, so that we may