

2017-3

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Recommended Citation

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A Psychological and Philosophical Understanding of Death: An Analysis of Platonic and Epicurean Philosophy in Modern America

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CLAS 399

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INTRODUCTION

Death is a universal and inescapable phenomenon that cannot be avoided nor delayed in the human experience. Death is one of few conceptions that crosses cultural lines, is gender and racially unbiased, and thus far is out of our control to stop. Death is certain given that it will happen to each person, but uncertain in the time at which or manner by which it will occur. Biologically, death is understood as the cessation of functioning organs and can be determined by physiological signs including heart rate, blood pressure, endocrine hormone levels, or brain functioning. In the field of psychology, the physical signs of death and its occurrence are studied in terms of human behavior and thought leading up to and following one's own death or the death of another. Philosophically, death and mortality are debated and explained in various ways. For example, Plato explains that the soul is immortal and will remain (in a spiritual sense) after the physical destruction of the body. He explains that the fear of death is only natural to humans, but death should be viewed as the achievement of life.¹ Contrary to this, Epicurus explains that the soul is mortal and suffers destruction when the body does because the two exist in unity.² He claims that it is irrational for humans to fear death because once death occurs the experience is over and the person cannot recognize the pain of the experience.

The idea that death causes fear is certainly true. This natural human fear of death is the basis of psychological research regarding death. Psychology does not study the actual event of death, but rather the human reactions to death. To better understand this induced anxiety and fear, psychologists study death through theories that attempt to explain our behaviors leading up to our own deaths and following the deaths of others. This includes mortality salience, which

¹ Plato, *Apology*

² Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*

describes a person's awareness that death is inevitable.³ This awareness of being unable to escape death creates a cognitive dissonance, since people naturally have a desire to live; known as the terror management theory.⁴ These concepts allow psychologists to understand the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that occur when individuals think about death. There are several aspects of death that can affect the perception and response to it people have. This includes age, just world views, the value of human life, belief in an afterlife, preparedness, and perceived tragedy of the death.

Society avoids the discussing death because it requires people to accept their vulnerability of being mortal. It also requires a difficult conversation and realization about one day no longer existing on this earth with family members and friends, and contemplating whether there is a part of the body that will live on to experience eternity. Regardless of culture, religious or spiritual affiliation, or education, people do not choose when they are faced with the reality of death. Rather they are forced by the natural world to confront the issues and difficulties of death.

It is therefore important to know *how* to discuss death. The following research intends to discuss various issues surrounding death, first, by examining the study of death through the history of psychology, then through two separate philosophical accounts from Plato and Epicurus. Plato and Epicurus offer a conversation about the universality of death and how death ought to be considered and conceived by a society. This conversation between differing views suggests two varying ideas about how to cope with death; one offers a spiritual approach, wherein the soul is immortal and the other offers a scientific approach that death represents the end of all life, with absolutely no hope of immortality. As a society, America tends to subscribe

³ Harmon-Jones et al. 1997

⁴ Solomon et al. 1991

to the former rather than the latter because of our inability to come to terms with the human condition. However, certain people are able to rise above the human condition and ascribe to the latter rather than the former. This paper will conclude by discussing case examples of the necessity for, and the complications arising from religion as a way to cope with death and the seeming inability of some to overcome the human condition and accept death.

Chapter One: Psychology of Death

Chapter one summarizes two important psychological principles regarding death that are important to our modern understanding of approaching both our own death and grieving the death of others. First, the foundations of developmental and cognitive psychology regarding fear and anxiety will be explained. Along with this, the conceptual ideas of death in terms of the field of psychology will be presented and explained in brief. Next, the Terror Management Theory and related principles of anxiety and fear will be presented and explained. Finally, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' five-step theory of approaching death will be presented and further discussed.

There is uncertainty concerning what happens after death and who or what we will become, if anything, after death. The realization that death is certain has the potential to cause great anxiety in humans because of their focus on self-preservation.⁵ The idea that the specifics of death are uncertain induces fear of the unknown. Fear often is associated with something 'bad,' even if the thing is not commonly viewed as bad. Any number of phobias are based on a fear rooted in an experience remembered as inducing negative emotions or a negative response.⁶ Whether a fear of death is reasonable and appropriate is debated, but the fact that death causes fear, even if in only some people, is true and known. To better understand this induced anxiety and fear, psychologists study death through theories that attempt to explain our behaviors leading up to our own deaths and following the deaths of others. Psychology as a field of study does not study the actual occurrence of death, but rather the human reactions to death.

⁵ Becker 1973

⁶ Becker 1973

Although the average adult is able to understand the basic concepts of both life and death, there is great variability in individual death-related attitudes and behaviors.⁷ Clinical psychologist Jean Piaget worked extensively on patterns of human cognitive development especially from infancy through adolescence. After researching formal thought operations he developed a four-stage theory in accord with which humans universally develop from birth through adolescence. In brief, the theory is composed of the following four stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operations.⁸ Piaget's theory is important in beginning to understand abstract thought and how individuals conceptualize the world. The sensorimotor stage begins with the development of mental representation and symbolic thought and the final stage ends with the development of abstract thought. Important to the concept of death is abstraction which allows for the imagination of alternative futures. The basic development of the understanding of death starts with the concept 'you are dead,' in which children struggle to understand the permanent and temporary spatial absence of other people.⁹ The young child is unable to imagine his own death, but starts to process the death of others. Piaget suggested that the "adult" conception of death is acquired by children when they realize that mortality is universal, personal, inevitable, and final or irreversible.¹⁰ As the child develops into adolescence, the understanding of death progresses further with self-awareness. The adolescent understands the probability, necessity, and causation of death, and also realizes finality and separation of humanity.

⁷ Adults, including those with intellectual disabilities and those diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia, often do not develop a mature concept of death or lose a once-developed concept because of their cognitive inability or decline.

⁸ Piaget 1976

⁹ Kastenbaum 1972:32-33

¹⁰ Kastenbaum 1972:66

It is normal for the mature view of death to occur developmentally during adolescence, but there are still adults who do not hold a mature view of death. Psychologists, including developmental psychologist K. Warner Schaie, who explain this difference as personality, life experiences, and task demands influencing thoughts of individuals to diverge, explains cognitive development beginning in adolescence, where Piaget ended his theory.¹¹ Schaie suggests a five-stage theory of cognitive development that begins in late childhood or early adolescence and ends in late adulthood.

The first stage of Schaie's theory, which begins in the transition between late childhood and adolescence, is the acquisitive stage. In this stage, the focus is to gather information about the world in order to prepare for future cognitive tasks. Following this, in young adulthood, people begin the achieving stage. In this stage, the knowledge acquired in the first stage is used in situations regarding long-term goals focused on careers, family, and society. Next, from early adulthood to middle adulthood, people transition into the responsible stage. This stage focuses on the protection and nourishment of careers and families. Also in middle adulthood, some people experience the fourth stage, the executive stage. People who experience this stage not only focus on their careers and families, but also focus on nourishing societal institutions. Finally, the fifth stage of Schaie's theory, the reintegrative stage, is experienced during late adulthood. In this stage, people focus on tasks which have personal meaning. Instead of being focused on solving problems of others and society, they focus on what brings them pleasure in life.

In childhood, a concept of death usually begins its development around the age of five years old.¹² Often times children at this age until adolescence view death as a temporary state analogous to sleeping. Further, many children believe death can be cured by medicine and

¹¹ Schaie 1995:513

¹² Kastenbaum 1985:629

magic, just as in the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*.¹³ In the time frame of middle childhood, children begin to understand the finality and irreversibility of death as they experience traditions of funerals, cremation, and burials at cemeteries.¹⁴ For children who themselves are experiencing a terminal illness, the concept of death is more real and in such cases children are able to articulate the finality of their death that they will soon experience.¹⁵

Following this, as children enter into adolescence, cognitive development becomes much more sophisticated, and along with this, the concept of death. The greatest fallacy regarding death in adolescence is often the idea that death will not happen to them.¹⁶ Adolescents often develop a personal fable, a set of beliefs that causes them to feel unique and special, and because of this fable they do not think death can happen to them. When adolescents have to confront the possibility of death and allow themselves to be vulnerable, for example in the case of a terminal illness, they often feel extremely angry or react with total denial. Death itself is a different threat for adolescents, who have not yet become the person they hope to be, and mature adults, who have experienced and settled into much more of life and more or less become the person they had hoped to become. Adolescents have not been given an opportunity to reach their full potential, and thus feel that death is unfair at their age.

This feeling of not being able to reach full potential because of death continues into young adulthood. At this time in their lives, young adults believe they are truly beginning to live their lives as they become independent, begin and finish college, enter long-term relationships, begin their professional careers, and even start families. Not only does the occurrence of terminal illness threaten the possibility of death, but the death of peers affects the vulnerability of young

¹³ Lonetto 1980

¹⁴ Hunter & Smith 2008

¹⁵ Bluebond-Langner 1980;2000

¹⁶ Elkind 1985

adults in confronting death. Young adults are often expected to be in prime physical shape, thus making death even more unthinkable due to physical or biological illnesses. Further, death in young adulthood frustrates thoughts about the future: marrying, starting a family, and beginning a long-term career resulting from widowhood, single parenthood, and necessary termination of employment due to sickness.

As a person enters into middle adulthood, the possibility of death is thought to be less shocking than earlier in life as adults realize they are going to die eventually. Due to this realization, adults in this stage of life are able to consider death in a more realistic manner than before. Despite this more mature realization, the fear of death is greater in this period of life.¹⁷ This is partially due to the fact that cognitive development has eliminated personal fables and the idea of being impervious to death. Even more, the intelligence of an adult can influence an individual's understanding of death. Often times, adults found to have a higher intelligence are able to conceptualize death in more ways, compared to an adult with lower intelligence.¹⁸ In part this may be due to the fact that an adult with higher intelligence has more life experiences which may influence the individual's understanding of death. An individual's understanding of death often times continues to develop and becomes more sophisticated as he or she progresses through middle and late adulthood.¹⁹ As a person develops through middle and late adulthood, their wisdom from life experience deepens and their experiences with death grow as their parents, siblings, and friends begin to die.

From middle to late adulthood, the certainty of death increases and consequently the anxiety of death decreases. In late adulthood, people often begin to prepare for death in such

¹⁷ Levinson 1992

¹⁸ Kastenbaum 1972:71

¹⁹ Kastenbaum 1972:72-73

ways as planning their funerals, writing wills and advanced directives, and focusing on closure in relationships with friends and family members.

An individual's concept of death must accord with the individual's total life situation, if it is to be applicable. This explains why individuals deactivate or re-conceptualize their understanding of death when they are putting their life at risk (i.e., soldiers). This also explains why individuals will re-evaluate their understanding of death when a close friend or family member has died. Often times, individuals will choose to believe that the deceased person in some way is still present and/or will be seen again in the next life. The dead are not dead if we can retain and revive them through words, and we will not die if we are speaking, listening, writing, or reading.²⁰ Often individuals can have multiple concepts of death which allow them to understand deaths on a case-by-case basis (i.e., the death of a child is more tragic).

In psychology, death is understood through various concepts related to our mental state including terror management theory, mortality salience, and uncertainty-identity theory. One of the concepts by which death is understood in psychology is the Terror Management Theory.²¹ This theory is used on the basis that humans have the cognitive capacity to realize their own mortality, which allows for the realization of inevitable death, potentially creating anxiety. TMT theorizes that the fear of death is at the root of all of our other fears and much of what we call civilization consists of a desperate attempt to keep our death anxiety under control.²² As a society, people identify with groups to reduce fear induced by thinking about their own inevitable death. When people think in terms of being in a society, they are able to construct and further preserve a worldview that gives a sense of coherence and stability which gives what is called *symbolic immortality*. This is the idea that if I am successful in being the kind of person

²⁰ Foucault 1984:55

²¹ Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski 1997

²² Kastenbaum 1972:137; Becker 1962

who is approved by my society, then I am protected from mortal anxieties both by my personal self-esteem and the sense of belonging to a powerful entity that is greater than myself. Within the society, humans behave in a way that subdues the anxiety and fear of death including status-seeking, altruism versus selfishness, and defending spiritual and cultural beliefs.

TMT was introduced into the psychological literature by Tomer in 1994 through his research study which found a negative correlation between self-esteem and death anxiety. Generally, when a person has high self-esteem their death anxiety is low, but when a person has low self-esteem their death anxiety is higher. Harmon-Jones et al. further investigated the relationship between self-esteem and death anxiety. In three experiments the researchers attempted to manipulate the participants' sense of self-esteem and determine the effect on their world views.²³

Along with the concept of Terror Management Theory, is Sigmund Freud's account of death anxiety and fear. Freud explained that humans have two primary instincts and through that developed the Death-Instinct Theory.²⁴ The first is *Eros* which is oriented toward life, love, and activity, and the second is *Thanatos*, which is drawn to termination and death. Freud suggested that just because an anxious person spoke of death, death was not necessarily at the root of his or her problem: the apparent anxiety about death could be concealing the real problem.²⁵

Following Freud, much of the work in psychology related to death anxiety and fear developed out of the aftermath of World War I. After the war ceased, death, grief, and despair became central facts of life in Austria, Germany, and the United States. Contrary to Freud's belief that death concealed other problems, psychologists suggested death could no longer be thought of as a secondary neurotic symptom because of its prominence in society.

²³ Harmon-Jones et al. 1997

²⁴ Kastenbaum 1972:163; Freud 1920

²⁵ Freud 1913/1953: 304-305

At the basis of death anxiety and fear is the question: *how can we fear death if we have not experienced death it?* In response, psychologists have suggested that the terror or fear of death arises from instinctual conflicts that are well within our experience, and which are then cloaked in death imagery.²⁶ According to psychology, it is neither wrong nor bad to fear death because as an instinctual conflict, it is only natural to have a fear of death. In fact, according to Einstein and Freud, “the wise person will indeed contemplate death in the midst of life – and live in a more enlightened and responsible manner for doing so.”²⁷ Through psychological development, it is expected and normal that individuals not only contemplate and conceptualize death, but also that individuals have a fear of death.

It is important to understand the cognitive operations underlying the process of thinking about and understanding death. There are four important operations to consider: awareness versus habituation or denial, activation versus inactivation of a death construct, reframing the signal, and interpreting death signals as special but compartmentalized phenomena.²⁸ First, awareness versus habituation or denial refers to the choice between accepting or dismissing a signal probing the thought of death. Activation versus inactivation of a death construct allows a person either to call upon or ignore the concepts they have developed in the past related to the thought of death. Reframing the signal is important because humans live in a symbolic world in which signals often are reframed to mean something more than was originally presented. In terms of thinking about death, people are likely to reframe the signal to be less threatening. Finally, interpreting death signals as special but compartmentalized phenomena refers to the idea that humans develop an ability to cope with death signals in a highly focused and effective way.

²⁶ Kastenbaum 1972:101

²⁷ Kastenbaum 1972:103

²⁸ Kastenbaum 1972:72-73

However, events of death may be excluded from an individual's overall view of self and world (i.e., paramedics).

According to Becker, as humans we cannot help but fear death, for all anxiety is rooted in the awareness of our mortality. Becker believes that as average adults we buffer ourselves in many ways from the acute realization of helplessness, hopelessness, and death.²⁹ We create this buffer between death and ourselves by establishing security through a system that will meet our dependency needs and helps us deny our intrinsic vulnerability (i.e., society). Individuals and society enter into a collusion that is constant due to the dynamics of death anxiety and its denial. In this collusion, there is both a group focus and an individual focus that should concern society.³⁰ According to the individual focus, individuals should acknowledge their anxieties and contemplate death in order to live as enlightened and self-actualized people. An adult cannot be complete or mature unless he realizes his own mortality. On the contrary, the group focus explains that if too many people become preoccupied with the idea of death and therefore dysfunctional, the viability of the society itself is endangered. Therefore, as people create this agreement with society to protect themselves against death anxiety, they must be conscious of becoming so engrossed with death that the society crumbles.

This collusion of individual and society can either be enhanced or disrupted based on personal experience. For example, traumatic experiences disrupt the collusion and demand a person to either restore the tenuous system of mutual and illusionary support or confront death.³¹ Dr. William McDougall was diagnosed with terminal cancer and passed away in 1938, at a time when the field of psychology rejected studying death and dying. McDougall, however, left a journal documenting his own observations of his terminal illness and his personal process of

²⁹ Becker 1973:219

³⁰ Kastenbaum 1972:105

³¹ Kastenbaum 1972:105

dying. In his commentary, Kastenbaum notes that McDougall excludes evaluation of his intrapersonal relationships and early years, but focuses on his career achievements. Kastenbaum notes that this is interesting because according to society, a dying person should review all life experiences and resolve relationships. Even more noteworthy, McDougall does not reference religion or the possibility of life after death, which is often a focus when a person is coping with and accepting his or her own death.

McDougall struggled greatly with severe and never-ending pain from cancer and reflected on an individual's will power to withstand pain and death. He developed an implicit theory of death when he concluded that as individuals and a collective society, "we must attain and maintain the highest possible 'structural integrity.'"³² In this theory, McDougall explains that an individual can exert will power as long as possible, but eventually, due to science, the body will fail. Further, McDougall notes that even with strong and lasting will power, individuals have much less determination of their own life than what they like to think because so much of what happens in life is due to chance. The future is undetermined concerning when exactly events will occur, and an individual's desire cannot guarantee success. McDougall's self-reflection is important because it was originally written before the topics of death and dying were discussed in psychological literature. His reflection is also important because it is a personal reflection which now is uncharacteristic of current psychology theory regarding death and dying.

In current psychology studies regarding thought about death, psychologists investigate the fear and anxiety of death related to gender, age, ethnicity and culture, personality characteristics, and religious affiliations. The concept of mortality salience was developed out of TMT, and describes a person's awareness that death is inevitable.³³ These concepts allow

³² Kastenbaum 245 (Find original source)

³³ Harmon-Jones et al., 1997

psychologists to understand the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that occur because of death. There are several aspects of death that can affect the perception and response people have. Research in psychology has shown factors affecting perception and response include age, just world views, value of human life, belief in an afterlife and tragic nature.³⁴ Due to the fact that each death, whether someone's own or another's, is an individual experience, psychology cannot predict the exact behavior of response, but rather can suggest theories to explain the behaviors that may occur.

A third psychological explanation for the anxiety experienced from thoughts centered on death is the uncertainty-identity theory.³⁵ This theory reasons that people identify with groups to reduce uncertainty about who they are and how they should behave. Hogg claims that the uncertainty surrounding death – how it will happen, when it will happen, and what will happen afterwards – produces a stronger group identification in order to reduce the anxiety experienced. The principle of this theory – that uncertainty provokes anxiety – is further supported by experimental research.³⁶ As concluded by Hohman and Hogg, participants identified more strongly with America under mortality salience only when they were uncertain about the afterlife.³⁷ There was no significant difference between those who had no uncertainty and either believed or did not believe firmly in an afterlife. Further, mortality salience had no effect on those who were primed either to believe with certainty that there was or was not an afterlife.

Kubler-Ross is considered to be a pioneer of our modern views on death and dying because she was the first professional to systematically study how people approach their own deaths. Kubler-Ross developed a five-step theory on death and dying based on her interviews

³⁴ Chasteen & Madey 2003; Goodwin & Landy 2014; Evans, Walters, & Hatch-Woodruff 1999; Rose & O'Sullivan 2002

³⁵ Hogg 2007

³⁶ McGregor 2006; van den Bos 2009

³⁷ Hohman & Hogg 2011: 755-757

with people who were dying and with their loved ones. It is important to note that the interviewees were patients who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Thus, these patients were quite aware of their coming death due to a medical condition. Kubler-Ross' theory on death and dying does not accurately apply to all people because it was specifically based on the terminally ill. Their experience of death is quite different from those not having a reason to expect death, besides mortality itself. However, it is important to discuss and understand Kubler-Ross' theory because she set the foundation for studying and understanding how people approach death. The steps of Kubler-Ross' theory on approaching death are as follows: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The first step in Kubler-Ross' theory on approaching death, denial, is one in which people find any and all reasons to explain that they are not dying. This denial often occurs because people are shocked to discover that their time is becoming limited. Although it is an established fact that all humans eventually die people often expect to live for 80 or more years before having to confront death. Generally, no person plans to die at a young age, but expects to have a life of numerous years – to live to become a grandparent, maybe even a great-grandparent and pass away in old age. Further, psychologists have found that college students expect to experience death due to natural causes in old age. While people are aware of the everyday dangers – car accidents, shootings, natural disasters – and medical conditions – heart attacks, strokes, brain aneurisms – that could cause unexpected death, no person plans to die from any of these situations. For Kubler-Ross' patients, being diagnosed with a terminal illness was unexpected and shocking, which led them to denial. Specifically, for terminally ill patients, their reasons for denial revolve around their belief that medical tests were executed incorrectly, that

their results were confused with those of another patient, or simply that the medical professional was ignorant or incorrect in his diagnosis.

After denial, people enter the second stage, anger. This anger can occur due to feelings of loneliness, guilt, or meaninglessness. This anger often surrounds the question of why *they* are dying. The anger may be directed at spouses, children, other family members, strangers, medical professionals, God, or religious clergy. Kubler-Ross found that many patients explained that they were good people so they did not deserve to die.

This idea leads into the third stage, bargaining. This stage is based on the idea that good people will be rewarded, an idea that is introduced at an early age in our culture. In the bargaining stage, people often have private moments with God, promising that they will be a better person and overcome their flaws and weaknesses if God saves them from death. If, in this stage, a patient asks God to prevent death until a grandchild has been born, for example, more requests will be made based on the granting of the first. If this idea of bargaining worked, few people would experience death since they would continuously find reasons to ask for more life. Death is inevitable and therefore no negotiation with God is enough to prevent it.

Upon this realization that death is inescapable, people enter into the fourth stage, depression. This depression is based on the realization that soon they will no longer be living and the world will continue on without them. Although after death, it is scientifically impossible to realize the loss of loved ones still living, the idea that one will leave behind loved ones – a spouse, children, grandchildren, siblings, friends – is troubling. In this stage of depression, one might experience either reactive or preparatory depression. Reactive depression transpires based on the events that have already occurred. This depression may happen in response to losing a job due to inability to continue working, losing dignity due to medical problems, or not being able to

stay active as a parent or grandparent. Preparatory depression transpires based on expected future losses. This depression may happen in response to the expectation that a marriage is over and a spouse will remarry in the future, no relationship will be built with grandchildren born in the future, or all relationships with family members and friends will perish. Overall, the fourth stage of depression arises when the inevitable and unchangeable future of death is realized.

Finally, the fifth stage of the model is acceptance. According to Kubler-Ross, patients who reach the stage of acceptance have neither positive nor negative feelings about the present or future. They become unemotional as they are fully aware and accepting that death will happen to them in time.

The most significant criticism of Kubler-Ross' theory on approaching death aims at the systemic five-step process. Research as well as natural observation and experience has shown that dying persons do not go through the five stages step-by-step, and even more, that dying persons do not all go through each of the five steps. Numerous factors can influence how a person approaches dying, including religion or spiritual belief, age, sex, personality, diagnosed medical condition, belief in an afterlife, and availability of a support system. These factors have all become important operationalized variables within psychology experiments to investigate more our human approach to death.

This criticism of Kubler-Ross is important to the modern healthcare system because it emphasizes that the approach to dying is unique to each person. Considering all the various factors that may influence one's approach to death, it is difficult to imagine any two persons would have the same approach to death in which they experience the same emotions for the exact same duration. This is important to understand in our healthcare system because many nursing and long-term care facilities have made an effort to emphasize person-centered care. In line with

the theory of person-centered care is the understanding that approaching death is unique to each person, and thus, each individual must have his or her own guidance in approaching death according to his or her own needs.

It is obvious, then, that each person having an individual approach to death makes it difficult for psychologists, doctors, and other professional caregivers to follow a standard procedure of care because there is not one established that fits every individual. Despite this criticism, Kubler-Ross laid a foundation of important knowledge about the psychological experience of approaching death. Kubler-Ross brought to light five feelings and experiences that many people experience in some way as they approach their death.

The fear and anxiety of death and the behaviors that occur because of experiences of death can be explained by numerous psychological principles and theories, which seek to explain the fear itself; however, these explanations do not provide comfort or sympathy concerning how to confront and understand death. Furthermore, the theories, principles, and explanations offered by the field of psychology do not answer the question *what happens to us after death?* In order to cope with the uncertainty of life after death, various institutions including religion, culture, and education, of society seek to provide answers.

In order to deal with the inevitable experience of death, cultures all over the world, beginning in ancient civilizations and continuing into modern day societies, have established certain traditions, rituals, expectations, and practices that serve as coping mechanisms in order to deal appropriately with and attempt to understand death. Each culture practices certain traditions for the deceased and their family before and after death. In the next chapter, I will analyze on such attempt, in the Platonic dialogue *Phaedo*.

Chapter Two: Death in Plato's *Phaedo*

Introduction

Plato composed the *Phaedo* as a retelling of the conversation between Socrates and his friends, Crito and Simmias, before his death. Prior to this conversation, Socrates was imprisoned on a charge of impiety.³⁸ Due to his imprisonment, Socrates was given poison to drink in order to be responsible for his own death. *Phaedo* tells Echechates that he was in the presence of Socrates during this conversation, which turns into a lesson about the importance of philosophy for preparing for death as well as Socrates explaining the immortality of the soul and possible afterlives based on how the soul lives within a mortal body.

³⁸ Plato, *Apology*

In the beginning of the dialogue, Phaedo offers his reflection on the conversation he witnessed, saying: οὔτε γὰρ ὡς θανάτῳ παρόντα με ἀνδρὸς ἐπιτηδείου ἔλεος εἰσῆει: εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου καὶ τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα (Plato. *Phaedo*. 58e).³⁹ This reflection alludes to Socrates' suggestion later in the conversation that men should not fear death if they are properly prepared for it. This allusion also suggests that Socrates has prepared properly, and thus he does not fear his death and consequently his friends do not feel pity.

First, Socrates makes clear that men are the possessions of the gods, οὐ μέντοι ἀλλὰ τόδε γέ μοι δοκεῖ, ὃ Κέβης, εὖ λέγεσθαι, τὸ θεοὺς εἶναι ἡμῶν τοὺς ἐπιμελουμένους καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν τῶν κτημάτων τοῖς θεοῖς εἶναι (*Phaedo*. 62b).⁴⁰ Accordingly, if men are possessions of the gods, men are not to kill themselves because their lives are in the hands of their masters, οὐκοῦν, ἢ δ' ὅς, καὶ σὺ ἂν τῶν σαυτοῦ κτημάτων εἴ τι αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἀποκτείνουσι, μὴ σημήναντός σου ὅτι βούλει αὐτὸ τεθνάναι, χαλεπαίνεις ἂν αὐτῷ καί, εἴ τινα ἔχῃς τιμωρίαν, τιμωροῖο ἄν; (*Phaedo*. 62c).⁴¹ This is comparable to some religious and spiritual views, which put their faith in a god or other “greater being” making decisions about their death. Further, these traditions also believe that a god or other “greater being” created people and consequently the people are a possession of god.

Socrates further states, ἴσως μέντοι θαυμαστόν σοι φανεῖται εἰ τοῦτο μόνον τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἀπλοῦν ἐστίν, καὶ οὐδέποτε τυγχάνει τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὥσπερ καὶ τᾶλλα, ἐστίν ὅτε καὶ οἷς βέλτιον ὂν τεθνάναι ἢ ζῆν, οἷς δὲ βέλτιον τεθνάναι, θαυμαστόν ἴσως σοι φαίνεται εἰ τούτοις τοῖς

³⁹ Although I was witnessing the death of one who was my friend, I had no feeling of pity, for the man appeared happy in both manner and words as he died nobly and without fear

⁴⁰ However, Cebes, this seems to me well expressed, that the gods are our guardians and that men are one of their possessions.

⁴¹ And would you not be angry if one of your possessions killed itself when you had not given any sign that you wished it to die, and if you had any punishment you could inflict, you would inflict it?

ἀνθρώποις μὴ ὅσιον αὐτοὺς ἑαυτοὺς εὖ ποιεῖν, ἀλλὰ ἄλλον δεῖ περιμένειν εὐεργέτην (*Phaedo*. 62).⁴² Here, Socrates acknowledges that there are certain situations in which it would be better for a man to die than to continue to live. However, even in a situation in which it would be better for a man to die, according to Socrates, it would be considered impious for him to kill himself, and thus must wait for death to come to him.

In his first reference to the afterlife, Socrates states, εἰ μὲν μὴ ὦμην ἥξειν πρῶτον μὲν παρὰ θεοὺς ἄλλους σοφοὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς, ἔπειτα καὶ παρ' ἀνθρώπους τετελευτηκότας ἀμείνους τῶν ἐνθάδε, ἡδίκουν ἂν οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν τῷ θανάτῳ: (*Phaedo*. 63b).⁴³ In this statement, Socrates shares that he is not resentful of dying because he believes that he will go and be in the presence of wise and good gods. This statement is important because it is the first suggestion of Plato's that a person should not resent dying because if they have lived life appropriately and well they will be among wise and good gods after death. He then explicitly states that after death occurs, there is a 'future' for men, ὥστε διὰ ταῦτα οὐχ ὁμοίως ἀγανακτῶ, ἀλλ' εὐελπίς εἰμι εἶναί τι τοῖς τετελευτηκόσι καί, ὥσπερ γε καὶ πάλαι λέγεται, πολὺ ἄμεινον τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ἢ τοῖς κακοῖς (*Phaedo*. 63c).⁴⁴ Most importantly in this statement is the distinction between the future of the good man and the wicked man.

This statement is the first declaration by Socrates that there is something after death for men, which he will go on to explain further in his conversation with Cebes and Simmias. He also states here that good men have a hope for a better fate after death than do wicked men. Plato's teaching here is comparable to the beliefs of various religious institutions and society in general.

⁴² But perhaps it will seem strange to you that this alone of all laws is without exception, and it never happens to mankind, as in other matters, that only at some times and for some persons it is better to die than to live; and it will perhaps seem strange to you that these human beings for whom it is better to die cannot without impiety do good to themselves, but must wait for some other benefactor.

⁴³ For if I did not believe, said he, that I was going to other wise and good gods, and, moreover, to men who have died, better than those here, I should be wrong in not grieving at death.

⁴⁴ That is why I am not so resentful because I have good hope that some future awaits men after death, as we have been told for years, a much better future for the good than for the wicked.

For example, in Christian traditions, men who have lived their lives well and according to doctrine will find themselves in Heaven after death, whereas men who have lived their life against doctrine, and with world evils, will find themselves in Hell. Socrates has hope for himself that he will have a good future after death, showing that he feels he has done something correct in his life to deserve it. It is interesting to note that Socrates was sentenced for impiety, yet continues to preach this idea.

To further explain the distinction between the good man and the wicked man, Socrates begins by saying: ἀλλ' ὑμῖν δὴ τοῖς δικασταῖς βούλομαι ἤδη τὸν λόγον ἀποδοῦναι, ὥς μοι φαίνεται εἰκότως ἀνὴρ τῷ ὄντι ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίψας τὸν βίον θαρρεῖν μέλλων ἀποθανεῖσθαι καὶ εὐελπίς εἶναι ἐκεῖ μέγιστα οἴσεσθαι ἀγαθὰ ἐπειδὴν τελευτήσῃ...κινδυνεύουσι γὰρ ὅσοι τυγχάνουσιν ὀρθῶς ἀπτόμενοι φιλοσοφίας λεληθέναι τοὺς ἄλλους ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο αὐτοὶ ἐπιτηδεύουσιν ἢ ἀποθνήσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι (*Phaedo*. 63e-64).⁴⁵ This declaration makes it clear to the audience that Socrates feels men who study philosophy do so in order to properly prepare for death. This suggests that part of being a good man and receiving the benefits of that after death must be to participate in philosophical study. In fact, Socrates later states: τῷ ὄντι ἄρα, ἔφη, ὦ Σιμμία, οἱ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντες ἀποθνήσκειν μελετῶσι, καὶ τὸ τεθνάναι ἥκιστα αὐτοῖς ἀνθρώπων φοβερὸν (*Phaedo*. 67e).⁴⁶ Here, Socrates not only reemphasizes the importance of studying philosophy to prepare for death, but also the idea that those who train properly for death will have the least amount of fear for death. Further, Socrates later states, ὥστε ἢ γε ἀποδημία ἢ νῦν μοι προστεταγμένη μετὰ ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος γίγνεται καὶ ἄλλῳ ἀνδρὶ ὅς

⁴⁵ I want to make my argument before you, my judges, as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder...I am afraid that other people do not realize that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death.

⁴⁶ In fact, Simmias, he said, those who practice philosophy in the right way are in training for dying and they fear death least of all men.

ἡγεῖται οἱ παρεσκευάσθαι τὴν διάνοιαν ὥσπερ κεκαθαρμένην (*Phaedo*. 67c).⁴⁷ According to this statement, any man who has prepared his mind and, even more, has a pure mind, will have a good future after death. This supports the idea that philosophy is preparation for death.

This point is important for Plato since later in the conversation, Socrates once again mentions the importance of studying philosophy, saying: οὐκοῦν ἱκανόν σοι τεκμήριον, ἔφη, τοῦτο ἀνδρός, ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς ἀγανακτοῦντα μέλλοντα ἀποθανεῖσθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἄρ' ἦν φιλόσοφος ἀλλὰ τις φιλοσώματος; ὁ αὐτὸς δέ που οὗτος τυγχάνει ὢν καὶ φιλοχρήματος καὶ φιλότιμος, ἦτοι τὰ ἕτερα τούτων ἢ ἀμφοτέρω (*Phaedo*. 68b-c).⁴⁸ His theory suggests that a man who resents death is a lover of the body. This suggests that the man is interested more in the bodily sensations and pleasures than in finding the truth through his separated soul. A man interested in the body is not capable of finding the truth because he is distracted by the inaccurate and unreliable senses. As if Socrates does not mention it enough, he mentions again more adamantly how important studying philosophy is in order to prepare for death, εἰς δέ γε θεῶν γένος μὴ φιλοσοφήσαντι καὶ παντελῶς καθαροῦ ἀπιόντι οὐ θέμις ἀφικνεῖσθαι ἀλλ' ἢ τῷ φιλομαθεῖ. (*Phaedo*. 82b-c).⁴⁹ He specifically states that a man who is not a lover of learning, or in other words, does not study philosophy, will not dwell among the gods after death.

Not only does Socrates emphasize that men must study philosophy in order to prepare for death properly, he later explains how philosophy works in order to prepare the soul: ὅπερ οὖν λέγω, γινώσκουσιν οἱ φιλομαθεῖς ὅτι οὕτω παραλαβοῦσα ἡ φιλοσοφία ἔχουσιν αὐτῶν τὴν ψυχὴν ἡρέμα παραμυθεῖται καὶ λύειν ἐπιχειρεῖ, ἐνδεικνυμένη ὅτι ἀπάτης μὲν μεστή ἢ διὰ τῶν

⁴⁷ So that the journey that is now ordered for me is full of good hope, as it is also for any other man who believes that his mind has been prepared and, as it were, purified.

⁴⁸ Then you have sufficient indication that any man whom you see resenting death was not a lover of wisdom but a lover of the body, and also a lover of wealth or of honors, either or both.

⁴⁹ No one may join the company of the gods who have not practiced philosophy and is not completely pure when he departs from life, no one but the lover of learning.

ὁμμάτων σκέψεις, ἀπάτης δὲ ἡ διὰ τῶν ὥτων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθήσεων, πείθουσα δὲ ἐκ τούτων μὲν ἀναχωρεῖν, ὅσον μὴ ἀνάγκη αὐτοῖς χρῆσθαι, αὐτὴν δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν συλλέγεσθαι καὶ ἀθροίζεσθαι παρακελευομένη, πιστεύειν δὲ μηδενὶ ἄλλῳ ἢ αὐτὴν αὐτῇ, ὅτι ἂν νοήσῃ αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τῶν ὄντων: ὅτι δ' ἂν δι' ἄλλων σκοπῇ ἐν ἄλλοις ὄν ἄλλο, μηδὲν ἡγεῖσθαι ἀληθές: εἶναι δὲ τὸ μὲν τοιοῦτον αἰσθητὸν τε καὶ ὁρατόν, ὃ δὲ αὐτὴ ὁρᾷ νοητόν τε καὶ ἀιδές (*Phaedo*. 83a-b).⁵⁰ To support the claim that philosophy is preparation for death, Plato explains through Socrates how philosophy works to do this. First, philosophy shows that the senses deceive the mind through misperceptions. This is the first step in breaking the attachment between the soul and the body – prove the senses, or functions, of the body are distrustful. Then, after showing the deception of the senses, philosophy pulls the soul away from using the senses and instead relying on itself to discover truth.

The final statement about the importance of philosophy preparing a man properly for death comes at the very end of the dialogue when Socrates is ready to drink the poison and kill himself. Crito observes: καὶ ἅμα ἐγὼ οἶδα καὶ ἄλλους πάνυ ὁπὲ πίνοντας, ἐπειδὴν παραγγελοῖ αὐτοῖς, δειπνήσαντάς τε καὶ πίνοντας εὖ μάλα, καὶ συγγενομένους γ' ἐνίοις ὧν ἂν τύχωσιν ἐπιθυμοῦντες, to which Socrates replies, καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης, εἰκότως γε, ἔφη, ὦ Κρίτων, ἐκεῖνοί τε ταῦτα ποιοῦσιν, οὓς σὺ λέγεις—οἷονται γὰρ κερδαίνειν ταῦτα ποιήσαντες—καὶ ἔγωγε ταῦτα εἰκότως οὐ ποιήσω: (*Phaedo*. 116e).⁵¹ Crito's statement reflects on the difference between Socrates who has prepared himself for death through purifying his soul in philosophy and

⁵⁰ As I say, the lovers of learning know that philosophy gets hold of their soul when it is in that state, then gently encourages it and tries to free it by showing them that investigation through the eyes is full of deceit, as is that through the ears and other senses. Philosophy then persuades the soul to withdraw from the senses insofar as it is not compelled to use them and bids the soul to gather itself together by itself, to trust only itself and whatever reality, existing by itself, the soul by itself understands, and not to consider as true whatever it examines by other means, for this is different in different circumstances and is sensible and visible, whereas what the soul itself sees is intelligible and invisible.

⁵¹ I know that others drink the poison quite a long time after they have received the order, eating and drinking quite a bit, and some of them enjoy intimacy with their loved ones/It is natural, Crito, for them to do so, for they think they derive some benefit from doing this, but it is not fitting for me.

detaching it from the body and the men who have bodily attachment and are concerned with bodily pleasures, including eating, drinking, and sex. These latter men are those who have impure souls because they have been unable to prepare their souls for death and goodness after death. It is natural for these men to spend their last minutes before death eating, drinking, and have sex because they are mistakenly believing that these are the greatest pleasures. The men who are like Socrates have prepared themselves for death and understand that to engage in bodily pleasures moments before death undermines the truth they have discovered for themselves through their lives of philosophy.

Socrates has a specific idea of how to define death. First, he questions Simmias, asking: ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγὴν; καὶ εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ τεθνάναι, χωρὶς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγὴν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσαν αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν εἶναι; ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο; (*Phaedo*. 64c).⁵² Here, Plato through Socrates declares, death to be simply the separation of the soul from the body. According to Plato, death is not based on biological functioning, including heart rate, pulse, and respirations, as it is medically diagnosed today, but for Plato, death is the time when the soul and body are no longer together. According to Plato, the soul is the life of the body and it includes these functions, therefore, it is not equivalent to the modern conception of the Christian soul.

After defining death as the separation of the body from the soul, Socrates discusses the importance of the separation, ἄρα ἔχει ἀλήθειάν τινα ὅψις τε καὶ ἀκοή τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἢ τά γε τοιαῦτα καὶ οἱ ποιεῖται ἡμῖν ἀεὶ θρυλοῦσιν, ὅτι οὐτ' ἀκούομεν ἀκριβὲς οὐδὲν οὔτε ὀρώμεν; καίτοι εἰ αὐταὶ τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα αἰσθήσεων μὴ ἀκριβεῖς εἰσιν μηδὲ σαφεῖς, σχολῇ αἱ γε ἄλλαι:

⁵² We believe, do we not, that death is the separation of the soul from the body, and that the state of being dead is the state in which the body is separated from the soul and exists alone by itself and the soul is separated from the body and exists alone by itself? Is death anything other than this?

παῖσαι γάρ που τούτων φαυλότεραί εἰσιν (*Phaedo*. 65b).⁵³ Here, Socrates explains that the senses, which come from the body, cannot be true. He explains that truth cannot be found either in sight or hearing, and since these two senses are the most complex and superior, the other senses including touch, smell, and taste must also be inaccurate and unreliable. This is important because, as he continues to explain, the soul is best without the senses, λογίζεται δέ γέ που τότε κάλλιστα, ὅταν αὐτὴν τούτων μηδὲν παραλυπῇ, μήτε ἀκοή μήτε ὄψις μήτε ἀλγηδὼν μηδέ τις ἡδονή, ἀλλ' ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν γίγνηται ἐῷσα χαίρειν τὸ σῶμα, καὶ καθ' ὅσον δύναται μὴ κοινωνοῦσα αὐτῷ μηδ' ἀπτομένη ὀρέγεται τοῦ ὄντος (*Phaedo*. 65c).⁵⁴ The soul reasons better without troubling itself with the senses. Since the soul reasons better without the senses, and the senses derive from the body, Socrates concludes that the soul is best without the body and bodily things. If then the soul is better without the senses and bodily perceptions, death is good for the soul because it separates the soul from the body.

After separation from the body, the soul is then able to reach truth and wisdom, ἄρ' οὖν ἐκεῖνος ἂν τοῦτο ποιήσειεν καθαρῶτατα ὅστις ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ ἴοι ἐφ' ἕκαστον, μήτε τιν' ὅπιν παρατιθέμενος ἐν τῷ διανοεῖσθαι μήτε τινὰ ἄλλην αἴσθησιν ἐφέλκων μηδεμίαν μετὰ τοῦ λογισμοῦ, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ καθ' αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ διανοίᾳ χρώμενος αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ εἰλικρινὲς ἕκαστον ἐπιχειροῖ θηρεύειν τῶν ὄντων, ἀπαλλαγείς ὅτι μάλιστα ὀφθαλμῶν τε καὶ ὠτῶν καὶ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν σύμπαντος τοῦ σώματος, ὡς ταράττοντος καὶ οὐκ ἐῷντος τὴν ψυχὴν κτήσασθαι ἀλήθειάν τε καὶ φρόνησιν ὅταν κοινωνῇ (*Phaedo*. 65e-66a).⁵⁵ Upon death, without the bodily

⁵³ Do men find any truth in sight or hearing, or are not even the poets forever telling us that we do not see or hear anything accurately, and surely if those two physical senses are not clear or precise, our other senses can hardly be accurate, as they are all inferior to these.

⁵⁴ And indeed the soul reasons best when none of these senses troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor pleasure, but when it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality.

⁵⁵ Then he will do this most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears and, in a word, from

senses to interfere, the soul is then able to reach truth and wisdom. This statement continues the idea that the soul is best without the body or bodily things. Without the senses, the soul is better able to find true and pure reality, for using the senses leads to impure reality. Here Socrates explains that the body only confuses the soul and prevents it from acquiring truth and wisdom when the senses interfere. Through this statement, Plato insists that the soul is better without the body and that to reach the truth, the soul must be separated from the body. As was previously established, death is defined by Plato as the separation of the soul from the body. This is important to his ideas of death and what happens thereafter.

Socrates continues saying, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι ἡμῖν δέδεικται ὅτι, εἰ μέλλομέν ποτε καθαρῶς τι εἶσεσθαι, ἀπαλλακτέον αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ θεατέον αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα· καὶ τότε, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἡμῖν ἔσται οὗ ἐπιθυμοῦμέν τε καὶ φαμεν ἐρασταὶ εἶναι, φρονήσεως, ἐπειδὴν τελευτήσωμεν, ὥς ὁ λόγος σημαίνει, ζῶσιν δὲ οὐ. εἰ γὰρ μὴ οἷόν τε μετὰ τοῦ σώματος μηδὲν καθαρῶς γνῶναι, δυοῖν θάτερον, ἢ οὐδαμοῦ ἔστιν κτήσασθαι τὸ εἰδέναι ἢ τελευτήσασιν (*Phaedo*. 66d-e).⁵⁶ Socrates once again emphasizes the point that the soul must be without the bodily senses in order to acquire truth. This truth comes once the separation between soul and body occurs at death. Socrates presents the option then that either a man can never reach true knowledge or that death allows him to reach true knowledge. As Socrates makes this statement, it is clear that Plato sees death as the end and death as the only way to the truth. [Note that if he really means this, leading a philosophical life would be irrelevant and Socrates' has been wasting his time]. This truth is

the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it.

⁵⁶ It really has been shown to us that, if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself. It seems likely that we shall, only then, when we are dead, attain that which we desire and of which we claim to be lovers, namely, wisdom, as our argument shows, not while we live; for if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death.

concluded to be wisdom, which is desired all of one's life, but cannot be discovered nor attained until after death occurs.

If one accepts the idea that the soul is better separated from the body because it is not able to discover the truth when there is interference from the senses which are inaccurate and unreliable and also accepts the idea that philosophy, in other words being a lover of wisdom, is preparation for death, Socrates explains that the accurate conclusion is men resenting death are not lovers of wisdom, and instead are lovers of the body. These men who do not love wisdom fall for the deceptions of the senses and are thus attached to the body, therefore having no proper preparation for death.

In the exchange between Socrates and Simmias, the idea of fearing death is brought to question. Socrates begins by posing the question: οἶσθα, ἢ δ' ὅς, ὅτι τὸν θάνατον ἡγοῦνται πάντες οἱ ἄλλοι τῶν μεγάλων κακῶν; After agreement from Simmias, he poses the second question, οὐκοῦν φόβῳ μειζόνων κακῶν ὑπομένουσιν αὐτῶν οἱ ἀνδρεῖοι τὸν θάνατον, ὅταν ὑπομένωσιν; After agreement once again from Simmias, Socrates reaches the conclusion, τῷ δεδιέναι ἄρα καὶ δέει ἀνδρεῖοί εἰσι πάντες πλὴν οἱ φιλόσοφοι: καίτοι ἄλογόν γε δέει τινὰ καὶ δειλία ἀνδρεῖον εἶναι (*Phaedo*. 68d).⁵⁷ Socrates explains that being brave in the face of death is characteristic of men who fear greater evils. Accordingly, fear of something worse than death makes these men brave in facing death; however, fear does not make the philosopher brave. Here it seems that the issue here is not immortality of the soul but fear of dishonor. It is here that Plato first suggests that death should not be feared, especially by philosophers who spend their time preparing for death.

⁵⁷ You know, do you not, that all other men count death among the great evils? And do not brave men face death – when they do face it – through fear of greater evils? Then all except philosophers are brave through fear. And yet it is absurd to be brave through fear and cowardice.

Emphasizing the importance of studying philosophy, Socrates offers an account of reason for not fearing death, ἀλλὰ γαλήνην τούτων παρασκευάζουσα, ἐπομένη τῷ λογισμῷ καὶ αἰεὶ ἐν τούτῳ οὔσα, τὸ ἀληθὲς καὶ τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὸ ἀδόξαστον θεωμένη καὶ ὑπ' ἐκείνου τρεφομένη, ζῆν τε οἶεται οὕτω δεῖν ἕως ἂν ζῇ, καὶ ἐπειδὴν τελευτήσῃ, εἰς τὸ συγγενὲς καὶ εἰς τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀφικομένη ἀπηλλάχθαι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων κακῶν. ἐκ δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης τροφῆς οὐδὲν δεινὸν μὴ φοβηθῇ, ταῦτα δ' ἐπιτηδεύουσα, ὧς Σιμμία τε καὶ Κέβης, ὅπως μὴ διασπασθεῖσα ἐν τῇ ἀπαλλαγῇ τοῦ σώματος ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνέμων διαφυσθεῖσα καὶ διαπτομένη οἴχηται καὶ οὐδὲν ἔτι οὐδαμοῦ ᾗ (Phaedo. 84a-b).⁵⁸ The basis of his argument is that if the soul is properly prepared by philosophy, there should be no fear about the soul being scattered about by the winds. The soul remains intact with itself if it has gone through the proper training: νῦν δὲ ἔοικε σχίσσεις τε καὶ τριόδους πολλὰς ἔχειν: ἀπὸ τῶν θυσιῶν τε καὶ νομίμων τῶν ἐνθάδε τεκμαιρόμενος λέγω. ἡ μὲν οὖν κοσμία τε καὶ φρόνιμος ψυχὴ ἔπεται τε καὶ οὐκ ἀγνοεῖ τὰ παρόντα: ἡ δ' ἐπιθυμητικῶς τοῦ σώματος ἔχουσα, ὅπερ ἐν τῷ ἔμπροσθεν εἶπον, περὶ ἐκεῖνο πολὺν χρόνον ἐπτοημένη καὶ περὶ τὸν ὁρατὸν τόπον, πολλὰ ἀντιτείνουσα καὶ πολλὰ παθοῦσα, βία καὶ μόγις ὑπὸ τοῦ προστεταγμένου δαίμονος οἴχεται ἀγομένη. ἀφικομένην δὲ ὅτιπερ αἱ ἄλλαι, τὴν μὲν ἀκάθαρτον καὶ τι πεποιηκυῖαν τοιοῦτον, ἢ φόνων ἀδίκων ἡμμένην ἢ ἄλλ' ἅττα τοιαῦτα εἰργασμένην, ἃ τούτων ἀδελφά τε καὶ ἀδελφῶν ψυχῶν ἔργα τυγχάνει ὄντα, ταύτην μὲν ἅπας φεύγει τε καὶ ὑπεκτρέπεται καὶ οὔτε συνέμπορος οὔτε ἡγεμὼν ἐθέλει γίνεσθαι, αὐτὴ δὲ πλανᾶται ἐν πάσῃ ἐχομένη ἀπορία ἕως ἂν δὴ τινες χρόνοι γένωνται, ὧν ἐλθόντων ὑπ' ἀνάγκης φέρεται εἰς τὴν αὐτῇ πρέπουσαν

⁵⁸ The soul of the philosopher achieves a calm from such emotions; it follows reason and ever stays with it contemplating the true, the divine, which is not the object of opinion. Nurtured by this, it believes that one should live in this manner as long as one is alive and, after death, arrive at what is akin and of the same kind, and escape from human evils. After such nurture there is no danger, Simmias and Cebes, that one should fear that, on parting from the body, the soul would be scattered and dissipated by the winds and no longer be anything anywhere

οἴκησιν: ἡ δὲ καθαρῶς τε καὶ μετρίως τὸν βίον διεξελθοῦσα, καὶ συνεμπόρων καὶ ἡγεμόνων θεῶν τυχοῦσα, ὥκησεν τὸν αὐτῇ ἐκάστη τόπον προσήκοντα.⁵⁹

To speak further about the distinction between those who are good men and those who are wicked men, Socrates makes reference to an earlier point: καὶ κινδυνεύουσι καὶ οἱ οἱ τὰς τελετὰς ἡμῖν οὗτοι καταστήσαντες οὐ φαῦλοί τινες εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι πάλαι αἰνίττεσθαι ὅτι ὃς ἂν ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος εἰς Ἄιδου ἀφίκηται ἐν βορβόρῳ κείσεται, ὁ δὲ κεκαθαρμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενος μετὰ θεῶν οἴκησει (*Phaedo*. 69c).⁶⁰ By referring to those who established the mystic rites, Socrates is emphasizing a long-standing tradition that wicked men will suffer after death while good men will dwell with the gods. It is important that Plato writes Socrates' dialogue to make this reference so that his philosophy will be well-supported by pre-established traditions. Here, Socrates once again emphasizes that he has lived his life in a way that he will be rewarded after death by being among the gods. He paraphrases the mystic rites which explained that an uninitiated and unsanctified person will “wallow in the mire” while a purified and initiated person will dwell among the gods. This is in line with Plato's teaching that a soul which is pure and prepared for the truth will find itself among the gods after death, whereas a soul which is impure and unprepared for the truth will find itself wondering around until it finds another body upon which to attach itself.

⁵⁹ The well-ordered and wise soul follows the guide and is not without familiarity with its surroundings, but the soul that is passionately attached to the body, as I said before, hovers around it and the visible world for a long time, struggling and suffering much until it is led away by force and with difficulty by its appointed spirit. When the impure soul which has performed some impure deed joins the others after being involved in unjust killings, or committed other crimes which are akin to these and are actions of souls of this kind, everybody shuns it and turns away, unwilling to be its fellow traveler or its guide; such a soul wanders alone completely at a loss until a certain time arrives and it is forcibly led to its proper dwelling place. On the other hand, the soul that has led a pure and moderate life finds fellow travelers and gods to guide it, and each of them dwells in a place suited to it.”

⁶⁰ It is likely that those who established the mystic rites for us were not inferior persons but were speaking in riddles long ago when they said that whoever arrives in the underworld uninitiated and unsanctified will wallow in the mire, whereas he who arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with the gods.

Later in the dialogue, Socrates makes a final statement about the separation of the body and soul which offers a full summary of separation and distinction of well souls and unwell souls, ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ ἄρα, τὸ αἰδέες, τὸ εἰς τοιοῦτον τρόπον ἕτερον οἰχόμενον γενναῖον καὶ καθαρὸν καὶ αἰδῆ, εἰς Ἄιδου ὡς ἀληθῶς, παρὰ τὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ φρόνιμον θεόν, οἷ, ἂν θεὸς θέλη, αὐτίκα καὶ τῇ ἐμῇ ψυχῇ ἰτέον, αὕτη δὲ δὴ ἡμῖν ἡ τοιαύτη καὶ οὕτω πεφυκυῖα ἀπαλλαττομένη τοῦ σώματος εὐθὺς διαπεφύσεται καὶ ἀπόλωλεν, ὥς φασιν οἱ πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι; πολλοῦ γε δεῖ, ὦ φίλε Κέβης τε καὶ Σιμμία, ἀλλὰ πολλῷ μᾶλλον ὧδ' ἔχει: ἐὰν μὲν καθαρὰ ἀπαλλάττηται, μηδὲν τοῦ σώματος συνεφέλκουσα, ἅτε οὐδὲν κοινωνοῦσα αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βίῳ ἐκοῦσα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ φεύγουσα αὐτὸ καὶ συνηθροισμένη αὐτὴ εἰς ἑαυτήν, ἅτε μελετῶσα ἀεὶ τοῦτο— τὸ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦσα καὶ τῷ ὄντι τεθνάναι μελετῶσα ῥαδίως: ἢ οὐ τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη μελέτη θανάτου; (*Phaedo*. 80d-81a).⁶¹ He first clarifies that the soul is not scattered about upon separation, but that it remains intact with itself. Even more, he emphasizes that the souls which have practiced philosophy and separated themselves from the body and therefore have absolutely no bodily attachment at death, are considered to be pure. He rhetorically poses the question as to whether the practice of philosophy is indeed the practice of death, to which the assumed answer is 'yes, philosophy is the practice of death.'

After assuming the correct answer to the rhetorical question of philosophy as practice for death, Socrates finishes the statement, saying: οὐκοῦν οὕτω μὲν ἔχουσα εἰς τὸ ὅμοιον αὐτῇ τὸ αἰδέες ἀπέρχεται, τὸ θεῖον τε καὶ ἀθάνατον καὶ φρόνιμον, οἷ ἀφικομένη ὑπάρχει αὐτῇ εὐδαίμονι εἶναι, πλάνης καὶ ἀνοίας καὶ φόβου καὶ ἀγρίων ἐρώτων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων κακῶν τῶν ἀνθρωπείων

⁶¹ Will the soul, the invisible part which makes its way to a region of the same kind, noble and pure and invisible, to Hades in fact, to the good and wise god whither, god willing, my soul must soon be going – will the soul, being of this kind and nature, be scattered and destroyed on leaving the body, as the majority of men say? Far from it, my dear Cebes and Simmias, but what happens is much more like this: If it is pure when it leaves the body and drags nothing bodily with it, as it had no willing association with the body in life, but avoided it and gathered itself together by itself and always practiced this, which is no other than practicing philosophy in the right way, in fact, training to die easily: or is this not the practice of death?

ἀπηλλαγμένη, ὥσπερ δὲ λέγεται κατὰ τῶν μεμνημένων, ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον μετὰ θεῶν διάγουσα (*Phaedo*. 81a).⁶² Here, Socrates draws his conclusion as to what happens to the invisible soul when the visible body becomes a corpse and begins to break down. It is here that Plato explains his philosophy on separation of the soul and body. If the soul leaves the body at death and it has become pure and free from bodily pleasures and association, it lives in the invisible state with the divine and immortal and wise. Without bodily associations, the soul has rid itself of fear, confusion, and other human evils, so that it may spend the rest of its time with the gods.

After explaining where the pure soul prepared for death goes upon separation from the body, Socrates considers what happens to the impure soul. He believes, ἐμβριθὲς δέ γε, ὦ φίλε, τοῦτο οἶεσθαι χρὴ εἶναι καὶ βαρὺ καὶ γεῶδες καὶ ὁρατόν: ὃ δὴ καὶ ἔχουσα ἢ τοιαύτη ψυχὴ βαρύνεται τε καὶ ἔλκεται πάλιν εἰς τὸν ὁρατὸν τόπον φόβῳ τοῦ αἰδοῦς τε καὶ Ἄιδου, ὥσπερ λέγεται, περὶ τὰ μνήματά τε καὶ τοὺς τάφους κυλινδουμένη, περὶ ἃ δὴ καὶ ὥφθη ἅττα ψυχῶν σκιοειδῆ φαντάσματα, οἷα παρέχονται αἱ τοιαῦται ψυχαὶ εἰδῶλα, αἱ μὴ καθαρῶς ἀπολυθεῖσαι ἀλλὰ τοῦ ὁρατοῦ μετέχουσαι, διὸ καὶ ὀρῶνται. (*Phaedo*. 81d).⁶³ If a soul is unable to disconnect itself from the bodily associations and pleasures, it is burdened by these eternally. The impure soul will not be able to spend its time among the gods, but will be dragged back to the visible, or the body, because of its fear and unpreparedness for death. Once dragged back, it wanders around graves and monuments until they find a body in which to imprison themselves. These

⁶² A soul in this state makes its way to the invisible, which is like itself, the divine and immortal and wise, and arriving there it can be happy, having rid itself of confusion, ignorance, fear, violent desires, and the other human ills and, as is said of the initiates, truly spend the rest of time with the gods

⁶³ We must believe, my friend, that this bodily element is heavy, ponderous, earthy, and visible. Through it, such a soul has become heavy and is dragged back to the visible region in fear of the unseen and of Hades. It wanders, as we are told, around graves and monuments, where shadowy phantoms, images that such souls produce, have been seen, souls that have not been freed and purified but share in the visible, and are therefore seen...they wander until their longing for that which accompanies them, the physical, again imprisons them in a body, and they are then, as is likely, bound to such characters as they have practiced in their life

souls have not been prepared and therefore are unable to exist without an attachment to a physical body. Through Socrates, Plato asserts that the character these souls have practiced in their life, will remain the character to which they are attached.

In a way, this statement is relevant to Christian religions and their teachings of living an eternal life in heaven. Christian doctrines teach that living a good life on earth by following the teachings of the church, liberating oneself from bodily pleasures, and practicing reverence to God, leads to one achieving eternal rest in Heaven on judgment day. However, for those who on judgment day have not followed the teachings of the church nor liberated themselves from bodily pleasures nor shown reverence to God, find themselves doomed to Hell where the evil souls of the world rest or to purgatory where the soul lives in an eternal state of unrest.

This is not the only reference Socrates makes during his conversation to ancient theories. When discussing the idea that the living soul is born from the dead, Socrates begins by saying, σκεψώμεθα δὲ αὐτὸ τῆδε πη, εἴτ' ἄρα ἐν Ἅιδου εἰσὶν αἱ ψυχαὶ τελευτησάντων τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἴτε καὶ οὐ. παλαιὸς μὲν οὖν ἔστι τις λόγος οὗ μεμνήμεθα, ὥς εἰσὶν ἐνθένδε ἀφικόμεναι ἐκεῖ, καὶ πάλιν γε δεῦρο ἀφικνοῦνται καὶ γίνονται ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων: καὶ εἰ τοῦθ' οὕτως ἔχει, πάλιν γίγνεσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἀποθανόντων τοὺς ζῶντας, ἄλλο τι ἢ εἶεν ἂν αἱ ψυχαὶ ἡμῶν ἐκεῖ; οὐ γὰρ ἂν πάλιν ἐγίγνοντο μὴ οὔσαι, καὶ τοῦτο ἰκανὸν τεκμήριον τοῦ ταῦτ' εἶναι, εἰ τῷ ὄντι φανερόν γίγνοιτο ὅτι οὐδαμῶθεν ἄλλοθεν γίνονται οἱ ζῶντες ἢ ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων (*Phaedo*. 70c-d).⁶⁴ In this statement, Socrates suggests that the dead come from the living, as was stated in the ancient theory that souls arriving in the underworld come from the living world, and further that the living come from the dead. If this statement is taken as true, Socrates suggests further that our

⁶⁴ We recall an ancient theory that souls arriving there come from here, and then again that they arrive here and are born here from the dead. If that is true, that the living come back from the death, then surely our souls must exist there, for they could not come back if they did not exist, and this is a sufficient proof that these things are so if it truly appears that the living never come from any other source than from the dead.

souls exist in the underworld after death for the fact that if they did not exist, they would not be able to come back into the living world if they did not exist in the underworld. ὁμολογεῖται ἄρα ἡμῖν καὶ ταύτῃ τοὺς ζῶντας ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων γεγονέναι οὐδὲν ἥττον ἢ τοὺς τεθνεώτας ἐκ τῶν ζώντων, τούτου δὲ ὄντος ἱκανόν που ἐδόκει τεκμήριον εἶναι ὅτι ἀναγκαῖον τὰς τῶν τεθνεώτων ψυχὰς εἶναι που, ὅθεν δὴ πάλιν γίνεσθαι (*Phaedo*. 72a).⁶⁵ Following this statement, Socrates offers a rhetorical question about where the soul comes from at the beginning of life, εἰ γὰρ ἔστιν μὲν ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ πρότερον, ἀνάγκη δὲ αὐτῇ εἰς τὸ ζῆν ἰούσῃ τε καὶ γιγνομένη μηδαμόθεν ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἐκ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ τεθνάναι γίνεσθαι, πῶς οὐκ ἀνάγκη αὐτὴν καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἀποθάνῃ εἶναι, ἐπειδὴ γε δεῖ αὖθις αὐτὴν γίνεσθαι; (*Phaedo*. 77d).⁶⁶ Here, Socrates makes the point that since it is already agreed upon that the soul exists before it is born into a man, it is only rational that the soul also exists after a man has experienced death.

While the idea that the soul is immortal is presented throughout the dialogue, Socrates offers a full proof of its immortality based on the idea of life not admitting to its opposite, death. In a simple explanation, since the soul gives life to men, it is not able itself to admit to death.

After going through the proof of the immortality of the soul, Socrates further defines what it means for the soul to be deathless, εἰ μὲν τὸ ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀνώλεθρόν ἐστιν, ἀδύνατον ψυχῇ, ὅταν θάνατος ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἴῃ, ἀπόλλυσθαι: θάνατον μὲν γὰρ δὴ ἐκ τῶν προειρημένων οὐ δέξεται οὐδ' ἔσται τεθνηκυῖα (*Phaedo*. 106b).⁶⁷ Being deathless also means being indestructible, especially since the soul does not admit death. Death causes destruction, but the soul does not

⁶⁵ It is agreed between us then that the living come from the dead in this way no less than the dead from the living, and, if that is so, it seems to be a sufficient proof that the souls of the dead must be somewhere whence they can come back again.

⁶⁶ If the soul exists before, it must, as it comes to life and birth, come from nowhere else than death and being dead, so how could it avoid existing after death since it must be born again?

⁶⁷ If the deathless is also indestructible, it is impossible for the soul to be destroyed when death comes upon it. For it follows from what has been said that it will not admit death or be dead.

admit death because it creates life, so therefore, it cannot be destroyed as the body is. If the soul is not and cannot be destroyed, it will exist forever as immortal and dwell in the underworld.

In conclusion, Socrates explains that death is not ‘an escape from everything’ and that since it is not, the soul must be taken care of accordingly, rather than living wickedly without care until death. He explains, ἀλλὰ τόδε γ’, ἔφη, ὧ ἄνδρες, δίκαιον διανοηθῆναι, ὅτι, εἴπερ ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατος, ἐπιμελείας δὴ δεῖται οὐχ ὑπὲρ τοῦ χρόνου τούτου μόνον ἐν ᾧ καλοῦμεν τὸ ζῆν, ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ τοῦ παντός, καὶ ὁ κίνδυνος νῦν δὴ καὶ δόξειεν ἂν δεινὸς εἶναι, εἴ τις αὐτῆς ἀμελήσει. εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν ὁ θάνατος τοῦ παντός ἀπαλλαγὴ, ἔρμαιον ἂν ἦν τοῖς κακοῖς ἀποθανοῦσι τοῦ τε σώματος ἅμ’ ἀπηλλάχθαι καὶ τῆς αὐτῶν κακίας μετὰ τῆς ψυχῆς: νῦν δ’ ἐπειδὴ ἀθάνατος φαίνεται οὔσα, οὐδεμία ἂν [εἴη αὐτῇ ἄλλη ἀποφυγὴ κακῶν οὐδὲ σωτηρία πλὴν τοῦ ὡς βελτίστην τε καὶ φρονιμωτάτην γενέσθαι (*Phaedo*. 107c-d).⁶⁸ Taking into consideration that the soul is immortal, it requires men to take care of their souls not only for the time it is in their body and exists, but for all time or eternity. If death destroyed everything, including the soul, it would be great for evil men because it would not require that they admit to the correct way of life or face consequences in death. However, according to Plato, the soul is immortal and therefore, even if the body of an evil man is destroyed, his soul will remain and will not be able to escape. The only way for the soul to overcome and free itself from evil is to become as good and wise as possible, which happens through philosophy.

Cebes, in his discussion with Socrates about the existence of the soul after death, suggests further proof that the soul exists in the underworld by mentioning Socrates’ theory of learning,

⁶⁸ It is right to think then, gentlemen, that if the soul is immortal, it requires our care not only for the time we call our life, but for the sake of all time, and that one is in terrible danger if one does not give it that care. If death were escape from everything, it would be great boon to the wicked to get rid of the body and of their wickedness together with their soul. But now that the soul appears to be immortal, there is no escape from evil or salvation for it except by becoming as good and wise as possible, for the soul goes to the underworld possessing nothing but its education and upbringing, which are said to bring the greatest benefit or harm to the dead right at the beginning of the journey yonder.

καὶ μὴν, ἔφη ὁ Κέβης ὑπολαβὼν, καὶ κατ' ἐκεῖνόν γε τὸν λόγον, ὃ Σώκρατες, εἰ ἀληθὴς ἐστίν, ὄν
σὺ εἴωθας θαμὰ λέγειν, ὅτι ἡμῖν ἡ μάθησις οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀνάμνησις τυγχάνει οὕσα, καὶ κατὰ
τοῦτον ἀνάγκη που ἡμᾶς ἐν προτέρῳ τινὶ χρόνῳ μεμαθηκέναι ἃ νῦν ἀναμνησκόμεθα. τοῦτο δὲ
ἀδύνατον, εἰ μὴ ἦν που ἡμῖν ἡ ψυχὴ πρὶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ εἶδει γενέσθαι: ὥστε καὶ ταύτη
ἀθάνατον ἡ ψυχὴ τι ἔοικεν εἶναι (*Phaedo*. 72d-73a).⁶⁹ Socrates theory on learning is that learning
is simply recollection. If one takes this theory of learning, that it is no more than recollection, to
be true, Cebes argues that the only way for recollection to occur is for the soul to have existed
before the body. This further supports the idea that the soul lives on after death before entering
into another body.

One final proof of the soul's immortality concerns knowledge of the Beautiful by which
Socrates begins with a question: ἴωμεν δὴ, ἔφη, ἐπὶ ταῦτα ἐφ' ἅπερ ἐν τῷ ἔμπροσθεν λόγῳ. αὐτὴ
ἡ οὐσία ἧς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἀποκρινόμενοι, πότερον ὡσαύτως αἰεὶ ἔχει
κατὰ ταῦτα ἢ ἄλλοτ' ἄλλως; αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον, αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν, τὸ ὄν, μὴ ποτε
μεταβολὴν καὶ ἡντινοῦν ἐνδέχεται; ἢ αἰεὶ αὐτῶν ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστι, μονοειδὲς ὄν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό,
ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχει καὶ οὐδέποτε οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἀλλοίωσιν οὐδεμίαν ἐνδέχεται;
(*Phaedo*. 78d).⁷⁰ Here, Socrates works with Cebes through a proof of the visible versus the
invisible. The visible are those things which can be perceived with the senses and are subject to
change, whereas the invisible is what remains the same and can only be understood by the mind.
Socrates suggests that the body belongs to the visible class of things because it can be perceived
by all the senses and it can experience change. If the body belongs to the visible, naturally the

⁶⁹ Furthermore, Socrates, such is also the case if that theory is true that you are accustomed to mention frequently, that for us learning is no other than recollection. According to this, we must at some previous time have learned what we now recollect. This is possible only if our soul existed somewhere before it took on this human shape. So according to this theory too, the soul is likely to be something immortal.

⁷⁰ Let us then return to those same things with which we were dealing earlier, to that reality of whose existence we are giving an account in our questions and answers; are they ever the same and in the same state, or do they vary from one time to another; can the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing in itself, the real, ever be affected by any change whatever?"

soul belongs to the invisible because it cannot be perceived by the senses and only understood by the mind.

Here, Socrates works on proving further the existence of an immortal soul, as Cebes brings into question if the soul wears out many bodies, but is eventually destroyed after leaving its last body. By this account, Cebes concludes that death is the destruction of the soul, since the body is always being destroyed, which is different from the earlier conclusion that death is the separation of the soul from the body. In order to prove that death is indeed the separation of the soul from the body, and not the destruction of the soul after existing in many and its last body, Socrates discusses the Form and its characteristics. First, Socrates states his belief in the Beautiful, and his further belief that if anything else besides the Beautiful is beautiful it is because it shares in the Beautiful itself. This idea is that the Form itself is named and even more there is something that shares the character of the Form when it exists. In conclusion, Socrates defines this idea as: ὁ τοίνυν, ἔφη, βούλομαι δηλῶσαι, ἄθρει. ἔστιν δὲ τόδε, ὅτι φαίνεται οὐ μόνον ἐκεῖνα τὰ ἐναντία ἄλληλα οὐ δεχόμενα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσα οὐκ ὄντ' ἀλλήλοις ἐναντία ἔχει ἀεὶ τάναντία, οὐδὲ ταῦτα ἔοικε δεχομένοις ἐκείνην τὴν ιδέαν ἢ ἂν τῇ ἐν αὐτοῖς οὔσῃ ἐναντία ἢ, ἀλλ' ἐπιούσης αὐτῆς ἦτοι ἀπολλύμενα ἢ ὑπεκχωροῦντα.⁷¹

Following this proof and understanding of the Form and that which takes on its character and does not admit its opposite, Socrates discusses with Cebes to prove further the immortality of the soul. First, the body is living because in it a soul is present. The soul will bring to life anything it occupies. Next, the opposite of life is death, which was established and accepted earlier in the conversation. Accepting Socrates' proof of the Form and that which takes on its

⁷¹ What I want to make clear is this: Not only do those opposites not admit each other, but this is also true of those things which, while not being opposite to each other yet always contain the opposites, and it seems that these do not admit that Form which is opposite to that which is in them; when it approaches them, they either perish or give away.

character not admitting its opposite, the soul takes the character of life, and therefore will not admit its opposite, which is death. If the soul does not admit death, it is considered to be deathless, or in other words, immortal.

Summary

Chapter two worked through the dialogue of the *Phaedo* in order to explain and analyze Plato's ideas regarding the soul, immortality, and fearing death. According to the text, Plato believes that the soul is attached to the body and death is defined by the separation of soul and body. Further, Plato believes that the soul is immortal because it is present at the creation of life; since the soul causes life, it must not admit death. Finally, Plato argues through Socrates that philosophy is the proper preparation for death. According to Plato, the study of philosophy prepares the soul to live without the body and its misperceptions, thus allowing for a good separation at the end of life. Plato also encourages the study of philosophy in order to not fear death while living. However, it is interesting that Plato encourages this because through the dialogue Socrates demonstrates that death is the only way to reach true knowledge. It seems that Plato then is arguing for a study of philosophy that is irrelevant to its purpose. Rather than finding the truth through philosophy, philosophy offers a comfort before death.

Chapter Three: Death in Epicurus' Letters and Fragments

Epicurus, an ancient atomist, offers a theory of soul that rivals Plato's. In general, Epicurus is opposed to the fundamentals of Platonism. Epicurus accepted atomism as the explanation for the matter of the universe. This idea suggests that the universe is eminently material, which also includes the souls of men. Epicurus also taught that what we know is what we can perceive through our senses, whereas Plato emphasized the inaccuracy and error of the senses. Unlike Plato, Epicurus rejected the gods of myths in that he did not believe the gods interfered with the lives of mortal men. According to Epicurus, the gods live in a state of perfect happiness and giving attention to mortal men would take away from their divine lives.

In Epicurus' Letter to Menoeceus, he shares his opinions of contemplating and understanding death as both a young and old man. In this letter, Epicurus makes it clear that he believes philosophy is the only proper preparation for death. In fact, he begins the letter by writing,

Μήτε νέος τις ὦν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν, μήτε γέρον ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν: οὔτε γὰρ ἄωρος οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν οὔτε πάρωρος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον. ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν ὁμοίός ἐστι τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μήπω παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτι εἶναι τὴν ὥραν. ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέῳ καὶ γέροντι, τῷ μὲν ὅπως

γηράσκων νεάζει τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων, τῷ δ' ὅπως νέος ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ᾗ διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων (Epicurus. *Letter to Menoeceus*. 122).⁷²

In this opening statement of Epicurus' letter to Menoeceus, there is a great amount of information regarding his opinions of the necessity of philosophy for preparing for death. The basic opinions Epicurus asserts regarding studying philosophy is that it should not be avoided when young nor old; no one is too young or too old, in other words wise, to study philosophy in order to better his soul. Epicurus believes that studying philosophy is as essential and basic as having happiness. No one would deny that they are too young or too old to have happiness, and the same should be true of studying philosophy. Both the young and the old should study philosophy. The young should study philosophy so that they do not fear the future. Not having this looming fear, ensures that the young person is ready to die whenever the time may come. The old should study philosophy because it allows for reflection on pleasant times of the past.

Epicurus speaks more to the idea of studying philosophy in his Vatican sayings, writing οὐ προσποιεῖσθαι δεῖ φιλοσοφεῖν, ἀλλ' ὄντως φιλοσοφεῖν· οὐ γὰρ προσδεόμεθα τοῦ δοκεῖν ὑγιαίνειν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ κατ' ἀλήθειαν ὑγιαίνειν (Epicurus. *Vatican Sayings*. 54).⁷³ Here, Epicurus emphasizes the importance of truly studying philosophy, preaching that men should not pretend to be philosophers, but should truly be philosophers. This is a suggestion that there is a deeper process involved that must truly engage the person in order to learn from philosophy, rather than simply reading and pretending to be a philosopher through mediocre study. Epicurus even emphasizes the true role of philosophy saying, κενὸς ἐκείνου φιλοσόφου λόγος, ὅφ' οὗ μηδὲν

⁷² When someone is young, do not let him be slow to understanding philosophy, nor someone having grown old weary of the search. For there is no age too young nor too late to achieve the health of the soul. The man having said that either he is not yet ready to understand philosophy or the time has passed him over is like the man who says he is either too young or too old for happiness. Therefore, one ought to understand philosophy in youth and in old age, in order that he, having grown old, may be young in blessing through the pleasant memory of what has been; and when young he may also be old because he does not fear the things which are to come.

⁷³ We must not pretend to be philosophers, but be philosophers in truth. For we do not stand in need of the appearance of health but of true health

πάθος ἀνθρώπου θεραπεύεται· ὥσπερ γὰρ ἰατρικῆς οὐδὲν ὄφελος μὴ τὰς νόσους τῶν σωμάτων ἐκβαλλούσης, οὕτως οὐδὲ φιλοσοφίας, εἰ μὴ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκβάλλει πάθος (Epicurus.

Fragments. 54).⁷⁴ This statement adds to the necessity of philosophy to provide for death in a comparison to medicine. Medicine is only useful if it takes away bodily disease, and likewise, philosophy is useful only if it takes away the suffering of the mind. This further adds to his point that men should be true philosophers, for pretending to be a philosopher will not bring true health, which is necessary for healing.

Regarding Epicurus' idea about the gods, he follows in the traditional Pagan belief that the gods do exist, but he emphasizes to his followers that the gods are completely unconcerned about humanity. He directly states this to Menoeceus,

“πρῶτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη, μηθὲν μῆτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μῆτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε: πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετ’ ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτοῦ δόξαζε.” (Epicurus. *Letter to Menoeceus*. 123)⁷⁵

This statement begins a series of suggestions by which men should live. In this first statement, Epicurus emphasizes the point of regarding god as only an immortal and blessed being, and nothing that goes against these characteristics. This demonstrates clearly Epicurus' belief that the gods are not interactive in the lives of men, for by associating themselves with imperfect and mortal men, would take away from their perfect and divine lives as gods. Following this, Epicurus rejects that the gods play a role in a popular belief in our modern society that evil happens to bad people and good comes to good people, “οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν, ἀλλ’ ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις: ἔνθεν αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν

⁷⁴ Vain is the word of a philosopher, by which no mortal suffering is healed. Just as medicine confers no benefit if it does not drive away bodily disease, so is philosophy useless if it does not drive away the suffering of the mind

⁷⁵ First, believe that god is living being, both immortal and blessed, just as the idea of a god is commonly presented; and thusly, do not give to him anything foreign to his immortality nor anything not agreeing with his blessedness, but regarding him, believe everything that might keep both his blessedness and immortality.

ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλεια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς. (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 124)”⁷⁶ Here, Epicurus continues to emphasize his point that the gods are not concerned with the lives of imperfect and mortal men and that those who believe gods interfere with benefits and misfortunes of men are wrong and confused. Although many people would like to believe that there is a higher power to control good and evil in the world according to each person, Epicurus encourages his audience to not follow this false belief. Epicurus once more makes clear his opinion of the lack of interaction the gods have with mortal men declaring μάταιόν ἐστι παρὰ θεῶν αἰτεῖσθαι ἅ τις ἑαυτῷ χορηγῆσθαι ἱκανός ἐστι (*Vatican Sayings*. 65).⁷⁷ This further supports Epicurus’ opinion that the gods do not provide assistance nor interference to mortal and imperfect men.

After emphasizing that the gods do not play a role in the good and evil happenings of the world, Epicurus continues on to explain that good and evil are not even an issue when it comes to death. He directly instructs Menoeceus, “Συνέθιξε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον: ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει: στέρησις δὲ ἐστὶν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος.” (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 124).⁷⁸ Epicurus directly states that death is nothing to us based on the idea that all good and evil are present due to sensation and death takes away sensation. Epicurus often associates good with pleasure and bad with pain, pleasure and pain both occurring because of the senses’ capability to feel. Further, Epicurus adds that death is the deprivation of sensation. He proved this idea in his letter to Herodotus through the discussion of the body enclosing the soul and the soul being responsible and capable of sensation due to the enclosure, which is lost when the body is destroyed in death. Since death takes away sensation, good and evil, or pleasure and pain, is completely lost. Following this, if good and evil, or pleasure and pain, are

⁷⁶ For the assertions of the many regarding the gods are not true preconceptions but false assumptions: that the greatest misfortunes are brought from the gods upon evil men and (greatest) benefits upon the good men.

⁷⁷ It is useless to ask the gods for what one is capable of obtaining for oneself

⁷⁸ Become accustomed to think that death is nothing to us: since every good and evil are in sensation: however, death is the deprivation of sensation.

entirely removed, there is no rational reason for a man to fear death and think of it as anything more than nothing.

After proving why death should be nothing to men, Epicurus adds that by allowing for death to be nothing, men are able to enjoy life, “ὅθεν γνῶσις ὀρθὴ τοῦ μηθὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸν θάνατον ἀπολαυστὸν ποιεῖ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς θνητόν, οὐκ ἄπειρον¹⁹⁴ προστιθεῖσα χρόνον ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀφελομένη πόθον” (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 124).⁷⁹ According to Epicurus, enjoyment of life comes from the understanding of death, which takes away the yearning for immortality. A man who understands death and even more that death is nothing is able to accept his mortality and no longer desire immortality. This point is essential to Epicurus’ rational argument of not fearing death. He invites his followers and audience to think of death as nothing in order that they may enjoy the time they do have to live. Even more, he writes, “οὐθὲν γάρ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατειληφότει γνησίως τὸ μηθὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν” (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 125).⁸⁰ Epicurus states that a man who truly understands that there is nothing terrible in death, more importantly knows that there is nothing to fear in life. This point emphasizes that since death, whenever it may come, ends life and afterwards leaves nothing left of man, men should not fear anything in life because when death comes any evil present in life will be gone. Death ends everything.

Epicurus continues his rational argument as to why no man should fear death, he writes to Menoeceus, “ὥστε μάταιος ὁ λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών, ἀλλ’ ὅτι λυπεῖ μέλλον” (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 125).⁸¹ This is an important point to consider because it confronts natural human tendencies of anxiety and fear for the unknown of the future, especially if the

⁷⁹ Therefore, a true understanding that to us death is nothing makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding endless time to life, but by taking away the desire for immortality.

⁸⁰ For there is nothing terrible in life for one who has truly understood that there is nothing terrible in nothing living.

⁸¹ Just as foolish is the one saying that he fears death, not that happening it will cause distress, but that waiting it distresses.

future is expected to cause pain or evil. In fact, Epicurus later explains, τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀσχηστίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν. τούτου γὰρ πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν. (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 127-128).⁸²

Epicurus believes that a man who fears death is foolish because the act of anticipating death is painful, not death itself. Instead of being able to enjoy life, the man who fears death spends many years in pain while he becomes anxious anticipating his own death and unfocused on living the life he has at the time. Finally, at the conclusion, Epicurus writes, “τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθέν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἐπειδὴ περὶ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν: ὅταν δ' ὁ θάνατος παρῇ, τότε ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμέν. οὔτε οὖν πρὸς τοὺς ζῶντάς ἐστιν οὔτε πρὸς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας, ἐπειδὴ περὶ οὓς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, οἱ δ' οὐκέτι εἰσὶν (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 125).⁸³ Epicurus uses rational argument to point out that death should be nothing to men. First, death is not present when men exist, or in other words when they are living. Additionally, when death occurs, men no longer exist, or in other words are no longer living. Men should not fear death because as long as they are living, death is not happening to them, and when death does occur, men are no longer living and therefore cannot remember the feeling of death.

In Principle Doctrine 11, Epicurus states, Εἰ μὴθὲν ἡμᾶς αἱ τῶν μετεώρων ὑποψίαι ἠνώχλουν καὶ αἱ περὶ θανάτου, μή ποτε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ᾗ τι, ἔτι τε τὸ μὴ κατανοεῖν τοὺς ὅρους τῶν ἀλγηδόνων καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, οὐκ ἂν προσεδεόμεθα φυσιολογίας (*Epicurus. Principle*

⁸² Of the necessary desires, there are those that are necessary for happiness, those that are necessary for the body's freedom from disturbance, and those that are necessary for life itself. Everything we do is for the sake of this, namely, to avoid pain and fear.

⁸³ Death, therefore – the most dreadful of evils – is nothing to us, since while we exist, death is not present, and whenever death is present, we do not exist. It is nothing either to the living or the dead, since it does not exist for the living, and the dead no longer are.

Doctrines. 11).⁸⁴ Here, Epicurus speaks to the idea that it is completely natural to fear death. This clarifies that he does not suggest that men naturally should not fear death, but that men should learn to not fear death. For, if men did not fear death, then there would be no need for the studies which allow them to prepare for death. According to Epicurus, the study that prepares men properly for death. Thus, if he suggested that men should naturally not fear death, he would be discounting his own philosophy as a proper approach to understanding death.

Epicurus further offers a suggestion that death can be thought of as the greatest evil by men or as a relief from the evils in the world as he writes, ἀλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν θάνατον ὅτε μὲν ὡς μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν φεύγουσιν, ὅτε δὲ ὡς ἀνάπαυσιν τῶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν <κακῷ αἰροῦνται. ὁ δὲ σοφὸς οὔτε παραιτεῖται τὸ ζῆν> οὔτε φοβεῖται τὸ μὴ ζῆν (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 125-126).⁸⁵ Epicurus believes that most men do run from death because they believe it to be the greatest evil. However, there are some men who run towards death or choose it for themselves because they believe it allows for escape from the evils of the world. This statement is relevant to Plato's suggestion that men who are viewed as being brave in the face of death are so because they fear some greater evil of continuing to live. Epicurus adds to this idea that men might choose death in order to avoid other evils in life. However, in agreement with Plato, Epicurus believes that the wise man should neither choose to die nor fear dying.

Epicurus further suggests how philosophy is important for not only the young men, but also the old men, ὁ δὲ παραγγέλλων τὸν μὲν νέον καλῶς ζῆν, τὸν δὲ γέροντα καλῶς καταστρέφειν εὐθήθης ἐστὶν οὐ μόνον διὰ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς ἀσπαστόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὸ τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι

⁸⁴ If apprehensions about the heavens and our fear lest death concern us, as well as our failure to realize the limits of pains and desires, did not bother us, we would have no need of natural science

⁸⁵ The majority, however, sometimes flee from death as the greatest of evils, and other times choose it for themselves as a respite from the evils in life. The wise man neither rejects life nor fears not living.

μελέτην τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν καὶ τοῦ καλῶς ἀποθνήσκειν (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 126).⁸⁶ Epicurus states here that, “the training for living well and dying well is the same,” to further emphasize his point that it is necessary to understand and not have fear regarding death in order to live an enjoyable life. This principle is true for both young and old men because it is natural for all men to want life. Even more, to live well and die well is the same principle, thus those living and those dying should be practicing the same training of living well.

Epicurus also discusses the cause of death by saying, Μνημονευτέον δὲ ὡς τὸ μέλλον οὔτε ἡμέτερον οὔτε πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον, ἵνα μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὡς ἐσόμενον μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὡς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 127).⁸⁷ Epicurus has already made clear to his audience that the gods are not involved with the lives or deaths of mortals because they live in a perfect world without death. Here, however, Epicurus writes that our deaths are not completely in our control, yet they are not completely in the control of another. While it is not a god who decides a man’s death, there are other forces outside of a man’s control that has power over his death. Such forces may include the natural progression of biological aging, the fatal actions of one man against another man, and natural forces that cause great disaster.

Epicurus explains to Menoeceus that if a man is able to achieve happiness, all of the trouble and confusion in his soul will be released. This is because happiness allows a man to not want anything more or feel that his is missing something. He summarizes this idea in his letter to Menoeceus stating, τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρῆναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν: ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν: ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ

⁸⁶ He who advises the youth to live well but the old man to die well is foolish, not only because of the desirability of life but also because the training for living well and dying well is the same

⁸⁷ We must keep in mind that the future is neither completely ours nor not ours, so that we should not fully expect it to come, nor lose hope, as if it were not coming at all

ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες. καὶ ἐπεὶ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο καὶ σύμφυτον, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οὐ πᾶσαν ἡδονὴν αἰρούμεθα (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 128-129).⁸⁸ In this statement, Epicurus simplifies the relationship between pain and pleasure. Pleasure and pain cannot occur simultaneously, so when a man is feeling pain, he is need of pleasure in order to get rid of the pain. Pleasure is the goal of a happy life, according to Epicurus.

Following this, Epicurus clarifies that men do not always choose pleasure because a pleasure might offer the pleasurable feeling for a moment, but then later cause greater difficulty that outweighs the initial pleasurable feeling. He states to Menoeceus, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅτε πολλὰς ἡδονὰς ὑπερβαίνομεν, ὅταν πλεῖον ἡμῖν τὸ δυσχερὲς ἐκ τούτων ἔπεται (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 129).⁸⁹ Even though men should choose pleasure, there are pleasures in the universe that have greater difficulties which follow them that causes men to avoid the pleasure. Epicurus speaks to this idea in his eighth principle doctrine, Οὐδεμία ἡδονὴ καθ' ἑαυτὸ κακόν: ἀλλὰ τὰ τινῶν ἡδονῶν ποιητικὰ πολλαπλασίους ἐπιφέρει τὰς ὀχλήσεις τῶν ἡδονῶν (*Epicurus. Principle Doctrines*. 8).⁹⁰ Epicurus clarifies in this doctrine that the pleasures are not inherently evil, but the process of obtaining certain pleasures creates troubles that in the end are not worth the final pleasure. Opposing this, is the idea of choosing a pain because although the initial engagement causes pain, the pleasure that follows outweighs the initial pain. He states this to Menoeceus as, καὶ πολλὰς ἀλγηδόνας ἡδονῶν κρείττους νομίζομεν, ἐπειδὴν μείζων ἡμῖν ἡδονὴ παρακολουθεῖ

⁸⁸ For we have need of pleasure at that time when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure. When we do not feel pain, it is because we no longer have need of pleasure. Therefore, we declare that pleasure is the beginning and the goal of a happy life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good and as inborn; it is from this that we begin every choice and every avoidance

⁸⁹ There are times when we pass over many pleasures, whenever greater difficulty follows from them

⁹⁰ No pleasure is evil in itself; but the means of obtaining some pleasures bring in their wake troubles many times greater than the pleasures.

πολὸν χρόνον ὑπομείνασι τὰς ἀλγηδόνας (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 129).⁹¹ Here, Epicurus makes a case that in certain circumstances pains can be greater than pleasures, if greater pleasure comes after enduring the pain.

Epicurus continues on to clarify the type of pleasures in which men should engage, stating that, “ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν, ὥς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μῆτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μῆτε ταραττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν” (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 131-132).⁹² This statement is important because it clarifies what Epicurus believes is an appropriate pleasure. Epicurus clarifies that when he speaks of pleasures he is not suggesting those related to sex. He makes it clear that the pleasures men should choose are those that free them from bodily pain and mental distress. It is important to understand this because Epicurus is sometimes understood as promoting whatever activities may promote pleasure, including promiscuity. However, it is clear that in his letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus refutes the idea of pleasure from promiscuity.

He goes on further to explain what pleasures should be refuted and what pleasures should be enjoyed stating, “οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ’ ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ’ ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα φέρει πολυτελὴς τράπεζα, τὸν ἡδὴν γεννᾷ βίον, ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἐξερευνῶν πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ τὰς δόξας ἐξελαύνων ἐξ ὧν πλεῖστος τὰς ψυχὰς καταλαμβάνει θόρυβος” (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 132).⁹³ Here, Epicurus continues to refute the idea of being involved in pleasures of promiscuity and extreme revelry.

⁹¹ Also, we regard many pains as better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure will attend us after we have endured pain for a long time

⁹² When we say that pleasure is the goal, we are not talking about the pleasure of profligates or that which lies in sensuality, as some ignorant persons think, or else those who do not agree with us or have followed our argument badly; rather, it is freedom from bodily pain and mental anguish

⁹³ For it is not continuous drinking and revels, nor the enjoyment of women and young boys, nor of fish and other viands that a luxurious table holds, which make for a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, which examines the motives for every choice and avoidance, and which drives away those opinions results in the greatest disturbance of the soul

Further, he explains to Menoeceus that sober reasoning is what should be used to find pleasures in the world. Following this, Epicurus uses the idea of sober reasoning to discuss prudence and how prudence influences a man and how he lives his life. Epicurus writes, διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφίας τιμιώτερον ὑπάρχει φρόνησις, ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πᾶσαι πεφύκασιν ἀρεταί, διδάσκουσα ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 132).⁹⁴ This idea of prudence is used to find the ‘happy medium’ between living a life full of pleasure and living a wise life. Epicurus is speaking to his earlier idea that some pains are endured because greater pleasures follow, while some pleasures are ignored because greater pains follow. Epicurus preaches to live a life with pleasure, but to do so with wisdom, virtue, and justice. Epicurus then inverts the idea and claims that a man cannot live wisely, virtuously, and justly without living pleasantly. This idea is interesting because it clarifies that pleasure is just as important in life as wisdom, virtue, and justice.

Epicurus summarizes his idea of the best man according to his philosophy by proposing the following question to Menoeceus: Ἐπεὶ τίνα νομίζεις εἶναι κρείττονα τοῦ καὶ περὶ θεῶν ὅσια δοξάζοντος καὶ περὶ θανάτου διὰ παντὸς ἀφόβως ἔχοντος καὶ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιλελογισμένου τέλος, καὶ τὸ μὲν τῶν ἀγαθῶν πέρας ὡς ἔστιν εὐσυνπλήρωτόν τε καὶ εὐπόριστον διαλαμβάνοντος, τὸ δὲ τῶν κακῶν ὡς ἢ χρόνους ἢ πόνους ἔχει βραχεῖς; (*Letter to Menoeceus*. 133).⁹⁵ This idea of the best man involves three aspects of character. First, the best man reveres the gods. Second, the best man does not fear death. Third, the best man uses reason to understand ‘the end of nature.’ These three aspects of a man combined offers the best man according to Epicurus’ philosophies. The first aspect concerning reverence for the gods is clear in how to

⁹⁴ Prudence teaches us how impossible it is to live pleasantly without living wisely, virtuously, and justly, just as we cannot live wisely, virtuously, and justly without living pleasantly

⁹⁵ Who, do you think, is better than the man who keeps a reverent opinion about the gods, and is altogether fearless of death and has reasoned out the end of nature?

approach proper practice – simply offer reverence to the gods. The second aspect to not fear death is clear in that a man should learn to not fear death. However, the third aspect is not clear as to how to use reason to understand the end of nature.

While Epicurus does not speak more to this idea in his letter to Menoeceus, one of his principle doctrines speaks clearly and further explains the idea of this understanding, Ἡ μὲν σὰρξ ἀπέλαβε τὰ πέρατα τῆς ἡδονῆς ἄπειρα, καὶ ἄπειρος αὐτὴν χρόνος παρεσκεύασεν. ἡ δὲ διάνοια τοῦ τῆς σαρκὸς τέλους καὶ πέρατος λαβοῦσα τὸν ἐπιλογισμὸν καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ τοῦ αἰῶνος φόβους ἐκλύσασα τὸν παντελῆ βίον παρεσκεύασεν, καὶ οὐθὲν ἔτι τοῦ ἀπείρου χρόνου προσεδεήθη: οὐ μὴν ἀλλ’ οὔτε ἔφυγε τὴν ἡδονήν, οὐθ’ ἡνίκα τὴν ἐξαγωγήν ἐκ τοῦ ζῆν τὰ πράγματα παρεσκεύαζεν, ὥς ἐλλείπουσά τι τοῦ ἀρίστου βίου κατέστρεφεν (Epicurus. *Principle Doctrines*. 20).⁹⁶ Here, Epicurus makes a clear statement that it is only rational to not fear death once the mind realizes that there is a limit to the flesh.

Summary

Chapter three worked through the letters of Epicurus written to Menoeceus as well as his principle doctrines and Vatican sayings in order to explain and analyze Epicurus’ ideas about the soul, immortality, and death. Epicurus, as an atomist, explains the deep-rooted connection between body and soul. Based on this connection, Epicurus explains that the soul perishes when the body dies because it cannot remain on its own without the protection of the body. This idea leads to his proof that the soul is mortal. Following, since the soul is mortal and death ends all life, Epicurus uses this reasoning to argue that men should not fear death.

⁹⁶ The flesh considers the limits of pleasure to be boundless, and only infinite time make it possible. But the mind, having gained a reasonable understanding of the end and limit of the flesh, and having expelled fears about eternity, furnishes the complete life, and we no longer have any need for time without end. But the mind does not flee from pleasure nor, when circumstances bring about the departure from life, does it take its leave as through falling short somehow of the best life

CONCLUSION

In modern American society, the growing threat of foreign and domestic violence, in addition to normal aging and medical conditions and illnesses, has increased the overall perceived threat of death. Further, the ubiquitousness of social media and accessibility of continuous news in our society makes death more prominent, increasing mortality salience when such events as tragic young deaths, terrorist attacks, and police violence are shared across social media, emphasizing the realization that such incidents of death could happen to anyone at any time. Given the cultural pervasiveness of death, do philosophy and psychology have anything to teach us that could either explain this pervasiveness or help assuage fear of death?

First, it is important to understand the comparison of the Platonic and Epicurean philosophies. Plato in the *Phaedo* and Epicurus in his letter to Menoeceus and fragmentary writings both discuss the material connectedness of the soul and body, the possibility of immortality, and preparing properly for death. Plato proposes the idea that although the body is mortal, the soul is immortal and therefore lives on through other men. Plato explains that death is defined as the separation of the soul from the body. This separation allows for the truth to be discovered because there is no longer interference from the bodily senses, which are inaccurate and unreliable. Plato emphasizes that men must learn to separate their souls from their bodies and its misperceptions in order to reach the truth. Once the body and soul are separated at death, the body becomes a corpse and naturally decomposes, and the soul is either attached to the body or freed.

A soul that relies too heavily on the bodily senses is unable to detach itself from bodily pleasures and thus remains in the world seeking out a body to which it can reattach itself. However, the soul of a man who has learned to stop relying on bodily perceptions and pleasures for truth, will leave the body and live in an invisible state among the divine and immortal. According to Plato, the soul is the reason for creation of life, which means it cannot succumb to death, thus it must be eternal and indestructible. This means that it is necessary for men to care for their souls properly because death does not end all of life: the soul lives on. As Socrates reminds his audience throughout the discussion, men learn how to prepare properly for death through philosophy and its teachings by finding truth after rejecting bodily pleasures.

Epicurus explains the mortality of the soul by proposing the idea that the soul cannot function nor exist without the physical body. Epicurus explains that death is defined as the cessation of sensation. According to Epicurus, perceptions from the senses should be used in order to examine and judge the world and its reality because the senses are trustworthy; any error of judgment happens only in the mind.

Epicurus explains that the soul is composed of fine particles dispersed throughout the entire body. When the physical body experiences death, the soul disperses because it no longer has the protective enclosure of the body which has allowed it to cause sensation. The soul is thus mortal since it cannot function properly without this bodily protection. Based on the idea that death is the deprivation of sensation, Epicurus makes it clear that death ought not to be feared. For death is not present when men exist, and when death occurs, men no longer exist. Epicurus emphasizes the study of philosophy in order to understand and confront death because he believes training to live well and die well are the same. A man cannot live a good life if he is focused on his own death because it distracts him from living a life of moderate pleasure.

At the first level of analysis it seems that Plato and Epicurus have opposing views about the materiality of the soul, immortality, and death. Plato offers an account of an immortal soul that detaches itself from the body at death, while Epicurus offers an account of a mortal soul entirely dependent on the physical protection of the body in order to function properly. While the two philosophers offer opposing views about separation of the soul and body and consequently immortality, the Plato and Epicurus agree on one point: philosophy is the proper preparation for death and if studied properly allows for a man to not fear death.

Further, this point of similarity – that philosophy is the proper preparation for death – is the conclusion reached by two starkly contrasting accounts. It is interesting that two opposing philosophies lead to the same conclusion. I suggest that this is because the ultimate point both Plato and Epicurus are suggesting is that fearing death is natural and men are not able to overcome the fears by themselves. Consequently, both philosophers provide accounts as rationalizations of death and afterlife. Both philosophers through their works urge their audience to subscribe to their ideas and follow their philosophies with the incentive that those who follow the philosophy properly will learn how not to fear death and live a better life.

Curiously, it seems that popular culture in the modern American society is attempting to provide this same comfort in the face of death. A topic that was once considered taboo to discuss in public, death, has now become an everyday experience through television, movies, music, and novels. Durkin explains that there is a paradox between Americans lacking a firsthand familiarity with death and dying and thus having high levels of death anxiety while also having an obsessive fascination with death, dying, and the dead.⁹⁷ He suggests that there are three interpretations of this paradox. First is the simple explanation that the society is not as much of a death-denying society as many scholars argue. Second, Durkin explains that the American society is a death-

⁹⁷ Durkin 2003:47

denying society that has a desire to learn about and experience death, which they do through popular culture. Finally, the paradox could be explained if great amount of death-themed media outlets are a further extension of death denial.

Today, in the average American household it is estimated that there are nearly three televisions.⁹⁸ Topics of death and dying appear in several soap operas, crime dramas, mysteries, documentaries, and comedies.⁹⁹ Some of the current top-rated shows that deal with the topics of death and dying include *The Walking Dead*, *Game of Thrones*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, *NCIS*, *Criminal Minds*, *Dexter* and even cartoon programs. In these shows there are suggestions and dramatizations of violent deaths, coping with death, investigating deaths and approaching one's own death.

A second media outlet discussing and dramatizing the topics of death and dying is cinema productions. Some recent movies revolving around death include *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Stand By Me*, *Death At A Funeral*, *Up, My Sister's Keeper* (2005), and *Titanic* (1997). These movies are classified as dramas, comedies, and cartoons, showing the broad expanse of genres focusing on topics of death and dying.

Another media outlet through which topics of death and dying is the music industry. Across several genres including popular, hip-hop/R&B, rap, rock, country, gospel, and alternative, thousands of songs have been composed with lyrics making references to death and dying. Examples of these songs include *If I Die Young* by The Band Perry (2011), *Die Young* by Ke\$ha (2012), *I Wish* by R. Kelly (2000), *Ready to Die* by The Notorious B.I.G (1994), *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* by Bob Dylan (1973), *Skin "Sarahbeth"* by Rascal Flatts (2008), and *Before I Die* by Kirk Franklin (2011).

⁹⁸ Nielsen 2009

⁹⁹ Durkin 2003:43

In addition to television, cinema productions, and the music industry, novels offer discussions about fictional and non-fictional approaching death and coping after death. Some popular novels that discuss these topics include *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom, *The Art of Dying: The Only Book for Persons Facing Their Own Death* (1997), *Before I Die* by Jenny Downham (2007).

Many psychologists have devoted their careers not only to studying approaches to death, but counseling and treating patients for grief, whether for a family member or owing to their own fears. Fortunately, because of social media there is an increase in discussion and community surrounding abnormal incidents of death. Professional treatment is not the only way to seek help, since there has been a rise in support groups and self-help literature, many being written from personal experience, theological or spiritual foundations, and philosophical perspectives. However, just as both Plato and Epicurus express in their accounts, philosophy is the true way to approach and prepare oneself for death. Psychology is necessary to put into words and operationalize our experiences of death using the scientific method, but philosophy offers true wisdom to approach death. So, the next question is: which account is correct? The short answer is: both.

In the modern American society, it is clear in daily life that death is a constant threat and it affects people in very different ways. In modern society, the growing threat of terrorist attacks and gang violence, in addition to normal aging and abnormal accidents, has increased the overall threat of death. These threats are prominent overall in the society, but there are factors that can affect their prominence in individuals' lives, as well as their understanding and ability to cope with death. These factors may include religious or spiritual beliefs, occupation, education, age,

geographic location, socioeconomic factors, race, familial relations, and genetic heredity, with many of these factors influencing and interacting with one another.

Often times, the first experience of death individuals have is with the death of an older relative. Deaths occurring in old age are often due to normal aging and natural declining of bodily functions, with more deaths now occurring because of irreversible neurological diseases including Alzheimer's disease and various forms of dementia. The interaction these individuals have with the death of an older relative usually occurs in the young to older childhood period of development, in which the cognitive concept of death is beginning to develop and expand. This interaction young individuals have with the death of an older family member is usually limited, including attendance at the funeral and the following bereavement events.

However, for some individuals, death seems to be a more common or frequent occurrence in their life. It is an established trend that in neighborhoods of low socioeconomic status there is an increase in crime, especially violent crime. This violent crime is blatantly visible to the community and many children are raised to learn the true meaning of survival of the fittest. From a young age, children are exposed to the violence that may include physical fighting and assault, domestic violence and rape, and even murder. Growing up in a culture such as this, these individuals become familiar with the violence and death of the community. These individuals witness and must experience deaths of neighbors, friends, and family members. Having this repeated experience of coping with death, these individuals in a way grow to understand and even get 'used' to death in a way that is very different from other individuals.

There are numerous, possibly countless situations to consider when discussing individuals' ability to cope with and understand death. Individuals can experience the death of an acquaintance, friend, co-worker, neighbor, or family member. Family members might include

grandparents, aunt and uncles, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, or children. Depending on the relationship, the death is experienced and understood in very different ways. For example, the death of a grandparent or a parent in adulthood is expected due to the natural aging process, however, the death of a child is usually quite unexpected. Parents who experience the death of their child often explain that it is the worst feeling and an occurrence no one should ever have to experience. The death of a grandparent can often be understood and accepted as normal because of old age and the natural declination of the body. However, often times parents whose children die young seek to find answers within a religious or spiritual institution or are left in confusion without answers as to *why* this happened.

Other situations that will be considered in this analysis of understanding and coping with death include soldiers and martyrs. Both soldiers and martyrs put themselves into possibly dangerous situations in order to protect the innocent or stand for an idea that is bigger than themselves. Soldiers and martyrs engage in an occupation which requires them to better understand and come to terms with the possibility of their own death for reasons other than natural aging and declination in functioning. While not every soldier and martyr is able to prepare for the possibility of their death, many are forced to realize the greater chance of death in their environment.

Soldiers and martyrs are not the only individuals who are able or have to come to terms with the possibility of their death to occur before natural aging causes death and their death to happen at any time in their environment. People diagnosed with terminal illnesses have a limit put on their time left to live. After being diagnosed with such an illness, many patients ask what their time frame is for living, to which doctors often give an estimate which may or may not be accurate. Many patients ask this question because due to human nature it is difficult to know

death is looming near without knowing exactly when it will occur. It is important for people to know when their death will happen so that they might say their goodbyes, tie up loose ends, and finish their life experience. Being able to do these things allows for not only the person going to die, but their friends and family, to have closure. Without this closure, there are many questions left unanswered, conversations left unfinished, and experiences left untried.

In summary, death is a universal experience in the sense that every individual experiences the death of others as well as their own. However, death is not universal in the sense that every individual experience of death is different and unique. Because of this, there is not a universal solution or explanation as to how to understand or cope with death. There are various support groups, therapies, philosophies, etc., to help individuals cope with death, however, no one solution is guaranteed to work for every individual. This makes the process of grief and coping difficult because each person must figure it out for themselves. The intent of this thesis is to explain how different people might understand the deaths they experience and subscribe to either the philosophy of Plato or Epicurus based on their experience.