

I. The *Phaedo*.

- A. Introductory Section: Socrates' execution is delayed because the Athenians are commemorating a significant if legendary historical event for their city. What is the event and what is its significance for interpreting the *Phaedo*?
1. Phaedo tells Echecrates that the events on the day of Socrates' death gave him "an unaccustomed mixture of pleasure and pain" (59a). Where else do we hear about pleasure and pain in the dialogue? What does philosophy have to do with pleasure and pain according to Socrates?
 2. Socrates has a repeating dream that tells him to "Practice the arts" (60e-61b). What did he first assume that dream means? What does he later decide it might mean?
 3. When Socrates says that a philosopher "should be ready and willing to die" (62d). In fact, he says that "those who practice philosophy in the proper manner" are practicing "for dying and death" (64a). How does he defend these claims?
 - i. Cebes says the majority of people think that philosophers are dead already, and if not, they deserve to be (64b). What significance does this majority opinion have?
 - ii. Part of Socrates' reasoning about philosophy and death is that he believes the body hinders the soul's search for truth. Give two reasons he believes this.
- B. The immortality of the soul. (The first two arguments focus on pre-existence).
1. What is the "argument from opposites" for the immortality of the soul? (70a-72e).
 2. All present agree that claim that if learning is really recollection, the soul must be immortal, but Cebes asks Socrates to give him more proof of the recollection theory. What is Socrates' argument that the experience of equal sticks or stones involves recollection (73a-77a)?
 - i. Explain what Socrates means by an "Itself" or a "form"/"idea" and what relation these have to "things" like the equal sticks? (some of this comes from later in the dialogue)
 - ii. Be able to give a similar argument using examples for "justice itself" or "beauty itself" (see 75d).
 - iii. If the soul possesses the truth of these "Itselfs" or forms before it is in a body, what do they conclude must happen at birth?
 3. The question of continuance of the soul after death (77b-84b).
 - i. In introducing this proof, Socrates suggests they have a childish fear and they in turn ask him to "sing a charm" to calm their fear. Socrates gives them some advice about where to find a good "charmer" once he is dead and gone (78a). What is the point of Socrates' advice; how does it relate to the overall purpose of the *Phaedo*?
 - ii. What is the basis of Socrates answer (78b-80d) to the objection that the soul might pre-exist the body, but then disappear or dissipate like smoke after the body dies? Explain.
 - iii. How does the fate of a soul that has practiced philosophy differ from the fate of other souls (see 80c-84b)?

- C. Simmias and Cebes raise new arguments about the soul not being immortal (the lyre/harmony argument and the weaver/cloak argument). When they do this, Phaedo says that they were all depressed and confused. (88c-89a) What is important about this stage of the discussion (think back to the *Meno*) and about Socrates' way of responding to it?
1. Why does Socrates suggest that Phaedo should cut his hair even before Socrates dies? (89b-91c).
 2. How is misology like misanthropy? How are they both mistaken attitudes (89c-90e)?
 3. How is this middle section of the dialogue important for the dialogue as a whole?
Hint: what is the “minotaur” that Socrates must slay?
- D. How does Socrates answer Simmias' argument that the soul is like a harmony, and thus is destroyed even though the parts of the body might remain for some time, like the parts of a lyre that is broken? In other words, why is the soul itself not a harmony? (91d-94e)
- E. When Socrates, as a young man, began to investigate the causes of all things, he at first likes the theories of Anaxagoras, and then is disappointed in them. Why? (97c-99c)
1. Socrates is sitting in jail, waiting to be executed, and talking with his friends.
According to Socrates, how would natural science explain *why* he is sitting there?
What does Socrates think of this explanation of the why or cause of things (98c-99a)?
 2. What does Socrates turn to as a “second best” way to think about causes? (99e-100b)
 3. Socrates says he turns to “words” to explain the causes of things, and says he assumes the existence of the “Forms”: the Beautiful Itself, Goodness Itself, Bigness Itself, etc.
 - i. What is the connection between a beautiful person or a beautiful statue and the Beautiful Itself? (100c-d).
 - ii. What's the problem with saying Simmias is taller than Socrates by a head but shorter than Phaedo by a head? Or by “a foot”?
 - iii. How do these “forms” help him explain better why Simmias is taller than Socrates but shorter than Phaedo (102b-e)?
 4. Socrates says that the form of Oddness always causes a number to be odd, and that Oddness will never itself become even. Furthermore, the number Three always “brings Oddness with it” and will never itself become Even. How does Socrates use this as an analogy to explain why the soul will never die? (103cd-107a)
- F. You will not need to know all the details of the story (myth) that Socrates tells from 107e-114c, but you should know some of its general character: the difference between the hollows of the earth where humans live “like frogs around a swamp” and what Socrates calls the “surface” of the earth (see especially 109b-111c), as well as the fates of the various souls in the underworld (113d-114c).
1. Socrates calls belief in this myth—not its details, but its main point—“a noble risk.”
What does this label say about the nature of philosophical “proof”?
 2. How is Socrates' death consistent with his arguments about philosophy in the dialogue?
 3. What do Socrates' final words, “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius” mean?

II. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

- A. Descartes starts out “Good sense is the most evenly distributed commodity in the world, for each of us considers himself so well endowed therewith that even those who are most difficult to please in all other matters are not wont to desire more of it than they have.” It may seem that Descartes is being ironic, but you should be able to explain why this can also be seen as true.
 - 1. If, as Descartes claims (2), “reason exists whole and entire in each of us,” what accounts for the fact that some people are better at “distinguishing the true from the false” than others?
 - 2. All you need to know of the rest of Part 1 is that all of Descartes’ previous studies—had failed to provide him any truly secure knowledge.
- B. What are Descartes’ four rules or principles—his “method”—for using his reason well? (11) What kind of thinking or subject are they modeled on?

III. Descartes, *Meditations*.

A. Meditation One.

- 1. What is Descartes strategy or plan for demolishing his false opinions and starting over to build up his knowledge from a secure foundation (59)?
- 2. Descartes’ senses seemed previously to have been the source his “most true” knowledge. Why does he now decide to question his senses? (60) (Note: there are two levels on which Descartes doubts his senses; account for both levels.)
- 3. Even if many of the things he seems to sense might be false, thinks Descartes, surely the “components” on which these images are based must be true. But then he thinks of one final reason that he might be wrong in his basic beliefs about his body and the external world. What is this theoretically possible cause of his uncertainty?
- 4. Is Descartes “in error” at the end of Meditation 1? Explain.

B. Meditation Two.

- 1. What is the point of the allusion to Archimedes at the start of Meditation 2 (63)?
- 2. How does Descartes come to the inescapable conclusion that the statement “I am; I exist” is necessarily true each time he thinks it?
- 3. Once he knows *that* he exists, Descartes asks “*What* am I?” What is his answer and how does he come to this conclusion (64-5)?
- 4. Descartes thinks further and comes to the conclusion that the “sensing,” strictly speaking, is “nothing other than thinking” (66) How does he get to this conclusion?
- 5. When Descartes considers a tangible physical object, like the piece of wax from a candle, he wonders whether what his senses tell him about it are at all true “properties” of the wax. He answers No—why? (67)
 - i. When he subtracts what his senses tell him about the wax, is anything left? What?
 - ii. How does Descartes understand the functions of the faculty of imagination?
 - iii. How does Descartes decide he most truly perceives what the wax is? (68)
 - iv. As he thinks further about the wax, he says that maybe he doesn’t have eyes to see it, or that he’s not really “touching” the wax, or that maybe he’s only “imagining” the wax” (69). What “truth” does this lead him back to?

C. Meditation Three

1. What does Descartes decide should be the criterion for when he knows something to be true with certainty? (70)
 - i. Besides his own existence, what kinds of knowledge does Descartes conclude are certain and true even if there exists a God who is a deceiver? (71)
2. What are the three classes of *thoughts* that Descartes says he finds in himself? (71)
 - i. Be able to explain each of the three classes of thought (The second class contains two related types of “thoughts.”)
 - ii. Which classes of thought does Descartes conclude he can make errors about? Explain (71).
3. Of his *ideas*, Descartes also finds three classes or sources. What are the three sources of ideas?
 - i. Descartes thinks that he’s found a good reason to believe that “Nothing is more obvious than the judgment that this thing is sending its likeness [image]...into me” (72). Explain his reason for thinking this.
 - ii. Next, explain why he ultimately rejects this seemingly obvious judgment (72-3).
4. Explain what Descartes means (and does not mean) by the term “objective reality” (73f).
 - i. By contrast, what is “formal reality”?
 - ii. What is the relation between the two? (73-74)
5. All ideas of corporeal things, and of other people and animals and even angels, Descartes says, he can explain as having arisen from his own thoughts (75). Explain.
6. “Of all my ideas, only my idea of God,” Descartes concludes, “could not have been produced by me or my thought” (76). Explain his reasoning as follows:
 - i. His idea is that God is an infinite being—infinite in power, knowledge, goodness, etc. Why can Descartes not be the source of this idea of an infinite being?
 - a. Why can’t Descartes get to this idea “by negation” of his idea of himself as a finite being (76)?
 - ii. There are things in his idea of God that Descartes can’t understand. Why does this show that Descartes himself isn’t the source of the idea of God? (77)
 - iii. If “I exist” is true, and “God exists” is true, maybe I am God, Descartes thinks. But he realizes this would be a false judgment. Why? (77)
 - iv. Explain why he thinks that God must not only exist, but exist *before* Descartes himself exists (78).
 - v. Even if Descartes himself has existed forever, he thinks, still God must exist (78-79). Why?
 - vi. Where has his idea of God come from, does Descartes conclude?
 - a. How does this make Descartes like a piece of pottery created by an artist? (80)