Socratic Magnanimity in the *Phaedo*

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In his famous treatment of the magnanimous or ‘great-hearted’ man (ὁ μεγαλόψυχος) in *Nicomachean Ethics* iv 3, Aristotle remarks that it is a characteristic of such a person that he is capable of showing the right sort of contempt: the μεγαλόψυχος is properly καταφροντητικός (1124b4-6, cf. b1-2, b29-30; cf. *EE* 1232a38-b12). Yet it also seems that Aristotle regarded Socrates as something of a model of the virtue of great-heartedness (μεγαλοψυχία).¹ This should not be surprising, because surely a large part of the appeal of Socrates derives from the disdain, or contempt, that he displays for any good, or any consideration, that comes into conflict with his acting rightly. Now these observations lead naturally to the question of whether Plato, then, in any of the texts of the dialogues, deals directly with this great-heartedness of Socrates, either by trying to explain in what it consists, or through giving an account of that on which it is founded.

I shall maintain that Plato does both of these things in the *Phaedo*. He is aware that Socratic ‘contempt’, as I shall call it, is something that needs to be explained and accounted for, and that it plays a large role in Socrates’ being a virtuous man. The *Phaedo*, then, in this regard makes its own contribution to Platonic ethical theory, worthy of our attention. But, moreover, through our appreciating better Plato’s view of the matter, it is to be hoped that we may arrive at a more just understanding of Aristotle’s discussion of great-heartedness, and of the large role he accords it in his treatment of the virtues.² If Socrates is contemptuous, then surely there is a good sort of contempt, and it is presumably *this* that Aristotle picks out as characteristic of an important virtue.

By ‘contempt’ I mean an attitude which presupposes that we have divided desires, or goods, into at least two kinds; that we rank one kind higher than another; and that it therefore becomes natural to say, in some contexts, that, in preferring something of the higher kind, we ‘count as nothing’ something from

¹ See the argument of Gauthier 1951, 55-118, esp. 116-117. An additional piece of evidence, not cited by Gauthier, is the similarity between Socrates’ profession of his own worth in the *Apology*, and Aristotle’s famous formula for great-heartedness. When Socrates ponders what sort of ‘penalty’ he should be assessed for his supposed ‘crimes,’ he asks: τί οὖν εἰμι ἄξιος παθῆν τοιοῦτος ἄν; (36d1); yet Aristotle defines the great-hearted man as ὁ μεγάλων αὐτὸν ἄξιος ἄξιος ἄν. The similarity suggests, of course, not that Aristotle derived his formula from Socrates or Plato, but rather that what Socrates was displaying, at that point in his trial, was what Aristotle wished to pick out with that formula.

² I attempt such a re-evaluation of the Aristotelian discussion in Pakaluk 2004.
the lower kind, that is, that we look on desires or goods from the lower kind ‘with contempt’. It is essential to contempt that the claims presented by desires or goods of the lower kind do not differ simply in degree from those of the higher. Contempt requires at least an implicit acknowledgment of the incommensurability of some goods. It is not that elements from the higher domain count more, or are weighted more, than those of the latter; rather, they have a difference in status and play a different role in practical reasoning.\(^3\) Again, to say that we have contempt for a thing, is to suggest that we in some sense appreciate its attraction, but that we reject it as having that attraction.\(^4\) We are furthermore distant in some way from that for which we have contempt: the contemptible is not something we identify with, and we therefore gain control and some degree of mastery over something, by holding it in contempt.

We said that the attitude of contempt presupposes a ranking. There are various ways in which such a ranking can be understood: goods or desires of the higher sort might articulate an ‘ideal’, for instance, relative to which those of the lower sort are judged admissible or not; or, more strongly, the higher sort might be regarded as ranked lexically above the lower (see Taylor 1997, esp. 176). But it is not necessary to decide among these interpretations here, since Plato is more interested in what follows from denying such a ranking, than in explaining the exact nature of the ranking.

Plato early on attributes to Socrates the view that the ability to have the right sort of contempt is essential to having virtue. He has Socrates say in *Apology* 28b-e, in defense of his own course of action, and his own conduct in the trial, that ‘a man should not attend (ὑπολογίζεσθαι) to danger in living or dying…but look to this alone, when he acts: whether his actions are just or unjust, and whether they are the deeds of a good man or those a bad man’. To illustrate this, Socrates approvingly cites Achilles as someone who ‘showed such contempt for danger, in comparison with enduring anything disgraceful’ (τοσοῦτον τοῦ κινδύνου κατεφρόνησεν παρὰ τὸ αἰσχρόν τι ὑπομείναι) that he rejected without consideration his mother’s plea, that he not try to avenge the death of Patroclus, ‘treating death and danger as though they were nothing’ (τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ κινδύνου ἀληγώρησε). ‘Do you think he gave any thought to death and danger? (μὴ αὐτὸν οἶει φροντίσαι θανάτου καὶ κινδύνου;)’, Socrates asks in conclusion.

In this passage, to show contempt for something is ‘to pay no heed to it’ (ὑπολογίζεσθαι), ‘to despise it’ (καθαφρονεῖν), or ‘to count it as nought’ (ἀληγορεῖν). Socrates asserts that considerations of justice and virtue should be ranked higher than those of security and danger, so that we should choose the former in contempt of the latter, when they might conflict. Note that in this part of the *Apology* there is even some suggestion that contempt for death simply is virtue: someone who has contempt for death, *a fortiori*, will have contempt for

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\(^3\) See the distinction between ‘weight’ and ‘status’ in Anderson 1997, 106-107.

\(^4\) Thanks to Julia Annas for helping me to appreciate better this aspect of Socratic contempt.
any other inducement opposed to virtue; and anyone who could not show contempt for death would lack virtue, since he would always be liable to ‘desert his post’, precisely through the fear of death (29a1-2).  

The theme of contempt of death continues throughout the Apology: consider, for instance, Socrates’ strong statement at 32d1-2, that his refusal to comply with the unjust order of the Thirty showed, in deeds, that he ‘didn’t care one whit about his death’ (ἐμοὶ θανότοι μὲν μὲλέτι...οὐδ’ ὀτιοῦν). Socrates of course also displays such contempt in the very way he conducted his defense, which the jury interpreted as contempt of them, and of their power to decide his fate—a misunderstanding that Socrates tries to forestall, by saying that he is aware that he might appear arrogant (αὐθαδίζομενος, 34d9) or contemptuous (ἀτιμάζων, 34e1).  

But then contempt is a continuing preoccupation of Plato: for instance, he develops a ranking of goods, which might serve as a precondition of contempt, in the refutation of Polus in the Gorgias, where considerations of nobility and shamefulness (τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ αἰσχρὸν) have priority over those of pleasure and pain. The ascent passage in the Symposium takes contempt to be an achievement of someone who has made sufficient progress along the scala amoris, since someone who comes to love something at a higher level, which is τιμώτερον, becomes capable of dismissing with contempt something at a lower level (cf. καταφρονήσαντα καὶ συμπρός ἡγησάμενον, 210b5-6). And Plato’s resolve, in Republic x, to banish the imitative arts from the ideal city, seems to spring from a concern that the imitative arts lead us to ‘nurture and water’ desires in us which should simply be dismissed (606d).  

In each of these cases Plato is concerned, also, to establish what might be called ‘the metaphysical basis of contempt”—that is to say, that fundamental picture of the world, which must be correct, if contempt is to be reasonable. In the Symposium, that picture is simply the scale of more perfect participation in the Forms by particulars; in the Republic, it is the hierarchy marked out by the Divided Line and explained allegorically by the Cave. But in the Phaedo, my

5 In saying that Plato is evidently testing out the idea that contempt of death is a necessary and sufficient condition for virtue, I do not mean to suggest, of course, that he regarded such contempt as eo ipso sufficient for virtue. I mean, rather, that Plato was prone to regard such contempt as sufficient for virtue, given certain background conditions—one of which, I would suppose, is that there are features of any καλὸν action, which make it a καλὸν action and therefore the sort of thing that a virtuous person would do: say, it is καλὸν because it is fitting, or equal, or in some way balanced and symmetrical, or suitably proportionate, or the sort of thing that would fit within some ideal community of gods and righteous human beings (an ideal by which Socrates seems to guide himself in the Phaedo, and which Plato explicitly regards as a kind of paradigm of human laws, in the Laws, see 739d-e). As Gorgias 507a-508a indicates, Plato was prone to see virtue as what fits a human being into a prior order, observed by the gods, which is quasi-mathematical in character.  

6 Xenophon refers to Socrates’ ‘exalting himself’, μεγαλουντιν ἐαντόν, Apology 32.1, and his ‘lofty talk’, μεγαληγορία, 1.4: 2.1-3.

7 Both of these pictures suggests the at least prima facie incommensurability of higher goods on the scale, as regards the lower.
concern here, it is substance dualism, and Plato’s view in that dialogue, as we shall see, seems to be something like the following: a person can have true virtue just in case he is capable of the right sort of contempt; but he can maintain that sort of contempt, only if he recognizes that the soul is a substance really distinct from the body, and that he is his soul; thus, that someone recognize the truth of dualism is a sole condition of his having true virtue.

I shall be concerned with a sequence of three texts: (i) Socrates’ Defense (Phaedo 63b4-69e5), where Socrates presents a defense to Simmias and Cebes, as if to a jury, against the imagined charge that his lack of concern over his imminent execution displays a censurable lack of self-regard;8 (ii) a text which I shall call the ‘Virtue Passage’, which occurs at 68b8-69a4, near the end of Socrates’ Defense, in which Socrates argues that a person has the cardinal virtues just in case he is a ‘true philosopher’; and (iii) the text on the ‘Right Exchange’, 69a6-c3, which immediately follows the Virtue Passage, and which has occasioned much commentary in the secondary literature,9 where Socrates apparently contrasts a right and a wrong way of exchanging present goods for future or more important benefits. I shall presume that a correct understanding of (iii) depends on a sound interpretation of (ii), which in turn requires our having arrived at a just assessment of (i), to which I therefore first turn.

Socrates’ Defense

Typically it is thought that Socrates’ Defense is merely literary or rhetorical, that it professes Socrates ‘faith’ in the immortality of the soul, perhaps, but that the substantive, philosophical argument of the Phaedo actually begins after Socrates’s Defense, when Socrates introduces the so-called ‘Cyclical Argument’. I take a different approach and understand Socrates’ Defense itself to be doing philosophical work. Socrates’ Defense, I maintain, is meant to establish the initial and intuitive plausibility of substance dualism,10 which is then presupposed by the subsequent arguments of the dialogue. The chief question guiding the Phaedo, on this way of looking at things, then becomes, not whether we have souls which are capable of continuing to exist after the destruction of the body,

8 The ‘charge’ is articulated at 63b8-9, that Socrates is acting wrongly by not trying to resist his own death (ηδίκουν ὄν τῷ ἀγανακτών τῷ θανάτῳ); and the chief plank of Socrates’ defense against that charge, is that he has good reason to expect that he will join with the gods, and with better men than those who are currently his friends, after he has died (παρὰ θεοὺς ἄλλους σοφοὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθούς, ἔκειται καὶ παρ’ ἀνθρώποις τετελευτηκότας ἀμείνοις τὸν εὐθάνατον, 63b7-8). See the repetition of the charge at the conclusion of the defense, at 69d8, and the repetition of Socrates’ chief claim at 69e1-2.


10 I use ‘substance dualism’ as a handy label to convey quickly something like the view that, I think, Socrates wishes to defend. I mean by that term simply the view that the soul is a substance distinct from the body and capable of existing independently of the body. I do not mean the additional thought that any existing thing can be sorted into one of two exclusive classes, res cogitans or res extensa, though Socrates in the Affinity Argument seems to favor a division of reality into the incorporeal and corporeal not unlike this.
but rather, given that we do have souls of that sort, do they in fact continue to exist very long, and, in particular, can it be shown that they continue to exist forever?\footnote{I develop and defend this interpretation in Pakaluk 2003.}

Socrates’ Defense establishes the initial and intuitive plausibility of the independent existence of the soul through an argument not unlike Descartes’ argument for a real distinction. Plato presupposes that the independent existence of the soul is possible if it is conceivable, or adequately defined. But it is conceivable, or adequately defined, if some activity can be assigned to the soul ‘alone by itself’, that is, if there is some activity in which the soul can engage without using the body as an instrument.

Socrates and his interlocutors quickly identify and put aside activities of the soul which clearly require the body—eating, drinking, and sex (64c). They then turn to the activity of ‘thinking’ (φρόνησις) and consider whether it requires the body: ‘What about our attaining to thinking? Is the body an obstacle to it, or not?’ (65a9). They presuppose that thinking is a kind of perception of something—they refer to it as a ‘grasping’ or ‘touching’ of the truth (τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ἀπτεταί, 65b7), ‘a viewing of the truest nature of things’ (τῇ ἀληθεύσατον θεωρεῖται, ε2). Therefore—they reason—if thinking were something that we accomplished through the body, it would be accomplished through those parts of the body that serve as instruments of perception, the familiar five senses. However, from the experience of thinking—Socrates and his interlocutors agree—it turns out that one succeeds better at thinking, the less use one makes of sense perceptions and images derived from sense perception: ‘That man would come to the purest knowledge of each thing, who, as much as possible, came to each thing with his reason alone (αὕτη τῇ διανοίᾳ), not introducing sight into his thinking, or dragging in any other sense along with his reasoning part, but who, making use of his reason alone by itself in purity (αὕτη καθ’ αὑτήν εἰλικρινεί τῇ διανοίᾳ χρωμένος), tried to hunt down each thing by itself in purity’ (65e6-66a3).\footnote{In general, for longer quotations such as this, I use the Gallop translation, with occasional changes.}

Thinking, therefore, in its purest form, does not make use of images. But images are supplied through the sense organs; hence, thinking does not make use of sense organs. But the sense organs are the only bodily instruments of perception; hence, reasoning in its purest form does not make use of the body at all. Thus, thinking is an activity in which the soul can engage without the assistance of the body.\footnote{Insofar as this argument presupposes that thinking is akin to perception, we may take it to be a crude precursor to Aristotle’s argument, apparently for the immateriality and separate existence of the human capacity to think, in De anima iii 4.}

Socrates and his interlocutors arrive at a notion of pure thinking by making an extrapolation from, or idealization of, our better and worse efforts at thinking: if we think better to the extent that our thinking is shorn of distracting sense-images, then the best and clearest case of thinking would be that which is entirely
shorn of sense-images. But such would be thinking that was carried out independently of the function of the sense organs. We can conceive of this sort of activity, and we can define it as the limit of our better efforts at thinking; thus this sort of activity is possible; thus the soul is distinct from the body and, in principle, capable of existing upon the destruction of the body: nothing hinders the soul from thinking, when the body is destroyed, because it is not by means of the body that it thinks, even when the body is animated.\footnote{That it is plausible for Socrates to argue that a complete separation of soul and body is possible, as the limit of various degrees of incomplete separation, which can be experienced, is more fully discussed in Pakaluk 2003.}

The argument is of course undergirded by the introduction of the Forms. We might wonder why the Forms are introduced at all in Socrates’ Defense. In fact they are introduced in an oblique and almost mysterious way, as the ‘being’ (τῆς οὐσίας, 65d13) and ‘truest reality’ of things (τὸ ἐληθεύστατον, e2). We may surmise that the manner of their introduction points to the purpose of their introduction. The Forms are introduced for the limited purpose of providing content to Socrates’ notion of ‘thinking’ and of the soul: pure thinking is simply activity of the soul that has the Forms as its object; and the soul may be understood essentially as a capacity to perceive the Forms. And that Forms are the object of thinking furthermore suggests that that activity does not properly belong to something corporeal: ‘it would never be permissible for the impure to have contact with the pure’ (μὴ καθαρὸ γὰρ καθαρὸ ἐφάπτεσθαι μὴ οὐ θεμιτὸν ἤ, 67b2, see again Pakaluk 2003).

That the soul has an activity all its own, distinct from any activity in which it can engage using the body as an instrument, is crucial to the central line of thought in Socrates’ Defense. Socrates had been challenged by his friends to explain why it was reasonable for him not to be disturbed by the prospect of his own death. Should he not have done more to avoid it? Should he not even now resist its approach? To Simmias, Cebes, and the others, Socrates might have seemed to be carrying on with a censurable lack of regard for his own welfare. So Socrates presents a mock ‘defense’ as if to the jury, to justify his attitude. His defense, in effect, is that he cares little for his ‘life’ in one sense, because he cares about his ‘life’ in another sense. What philosophers have discovered, in coming to see that thinking is the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’, is that there is an entirely distinct activity of the soul, which is unknown to the many; and, in pursuing and favoring this sort of life, philosophers might seem to be indifferent as to what is popularly called ‘life’.

Take living to be activity of the soul. Then—Socrates is maintaining—there are two kinds of living: activity of the soul which requires the body (such as eating, drinking, and sense perception, and the enjoyment of pleasures that arise from these); and activity of the soul which the soul can carry out ‘alone by itself’, without the assistance of the body, and to which, even, the body proves a hindrance. Socrates’s defense is that his indifference as to whether he ceases to live
in the first sense is not censurable, because his aim throughout life has been to develop and increase his living in the second sense. Since (we are to assume) Socrates really is his soul, and thinking is therefore the activity that is his above all, then Socrates has in fact been displaying proper self love, in paying little heed to his life in the usual sense; by implication, most people, who fail to recognize this activity, fail to love themselves at all.\(^\text{15}\)

Note that the theme, that a philosopher has contempt for the condition of the body, its pleasures and good states, is introduced at the very beginning of Socrates’ Defense and runs throughout that passage. A true philosopher, Socrates maintains, has contempt for the body and for those activities of the soul that evidently involve the body: he has no regard for the care of the body (ἐντύμους ἠγεῖσθαι, 64d8); he despises (ἀτιμώξειν, e1) adornments of the body; and he cares nothing (μηδὲν φροντίζων, 65a6) for those pleasures that come through the soul’s activity jointly with the body. The same holds as well of the activity of sense perception: ‘Then in these matters, too,’ Socrates insists, ‘the soul of the philosopher greatly despises the body (μᾶλλον ἀτιμῶξει τὸ σῶμα) and flees from it, and seeks to become alone by itself?’ (65d1-2). In short, the recognition and esteem for the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’ goes hand-in-hand with the capacity to show contempt for goods procurable through the activity of the soul using the body as an instrument.

The Virtue Passage

If such is the background provided by Socrates’ Defense, then how should we understand the Virtue Passage? Socrates (or Plato) is presuming that each person is going to regard his own life, well lived, as the ultimate end of his action. Socrates’ Defense, however, has opened up two candidates for what counts as ‘one’s own life, well lived’. The first is the only sort of life that most people recognize, namely, that involving activity of the soul that requires the body as an instrument: life that manifests itself in sense perceptions and bodily pleasures. The second is the sort of life that only ‘true philosophers’ have discovered and pursue: that of the soul, ‘alone by itself’, thinking about the true realities, the Forms.

Socrates is wont to say that someone who takes the first sort of life as his ultimate end cares above all for ‘the body’: such a person is a ‘body-lover’, a φιλοσώματος (68c1). A ‘body-lover’ is someone who loves the body rather than the soul, because he esteems only those activities of the soul in which the body plays a role. For such a person, that the soul is operating in conjunction with the body is a condition of his finding anything loveable in the soul at all. Socrates takes this to be a love properly for the body, presumably on analogy with love for another: a person who loves his friend only on the condition (say) that his friend is wealthy may be said properly to have love for his friend’s money, not his

\(^{15}\) This way of stating the point draws out the striking similarities between Socrates’s view in his Defense and *Nicomachean Ethics* ix 4.
friend.\textsuperscript{16}

Someone who, in contrast, regards the second sort of life as his ultimate end cares above all for the soul, but Socrates calls such a person, not a ‘soul lover’, as we might expect, but rather a ‘wisdom lover’, φιλόσοφος (68c1). The reason for this, presumably, is that Socrates is presupposing that love of the soul involves loving it for what it itself is and does: the soul is essentially the capacity to think of the Forms, and its characteristic activity is simply activity of that sort. A lover of the soul is therefore a ‘thinking-lover’: he is ‘in love with thinking’ (ήρων δὲ φρονήσεως, 68a2); he is ‘thinking’s true love’ (φρονήσεως δὲ ἄρα τις τὸ ὄντι ἐρῶν, a7). Socrates takes φρόνησις to be σοφία,\textsuperscript{17} since he reasons that a ‘true philosopher’ (τὸ ὄντι φιλόσοφος, b2-3) must be a true lover of thinking (see a68-b4). Hence, on this line of thought, a soul-lover is a wisdom-lover.

We should note the equivocation in Socrates’ use of the terms φρόνησις and σοφία. As we have seen, elsewhere in Socrates’ Defense φρόνησις means simply, as we have explained, thinking (λογίζεσθαι, 65c2, διάνοιξθαι, e8), or the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’. In this sense it could not be identified with any virtue of wisdom. It is of course implausible to take the mere activity of thinking to be a virtue: we would want to say, at least, that the virtue involves a habit of thinking, or the organizing of one’s life so that thinking is possible. In fact Socrates prefers to construe the virtue as the love of thinking—above all, as being the life of one’s true self.\textsuperscript{18} So we need to distinguish two senses of ‘wisdom’ (φρόνησις, σοφία) in these passages: (i) wisdom as meaning simply the activity of the soul in thinking; and (ii) wisdom as meaning the love of this sort of activity over anything else of which the soul is capable. Call these the ‘activity of φρόνησις’ and the ‘love of φρόνησις’, respectively. Yet the equivocation might justifiably have been overlooked by Plato, since he would have found it easy to agree that the love of wisdom (in one sense) is itself wisdom (in another sense).\textsuperscript{19}

Socrates’ Defense, then, in revealing the soul as a distinct and independent substance, is meant to reveal also two fundamentally distinct forms of life, which are at odds with each other. Once the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’ has been discovered, then a person is faced with a choice as if between God and Mammon: either he loves his soul, by loving its proper activity above all, and consequently has contempt for the body, or he loves his body and neglects or despises his soul. A ‘true philosopher’ by definition loves his soul; everyone else loves his body above all, in the sense explained.

Socrates wishes to argue that having the virtues or not is correlated with this

\textsuperscript{16} But note that the term φιλοσόμωται carries with it the suggestion: ‘loving his own body in the first instance, but generally being drawn to things bodily’ and thus (Plato thinks) binding one’s soul to future cycles of reincarnation. (I owe this observation to Catherine Osborne.)

\textsuperscript{17} Gallop, indeed, typically renders φρόνησις as ‘wisdom’.

\textsuperscript{18} Hence the facility with which Socrates likens philosophy to romantic love for a person, as at 68a2-b2.

\textsuperscript{19} Of course in the Apology Socrates maintains that it is a sort of wisdom to recognize that one lacks wisdom. Note too the general preference in Plato for φιλόσοφος over σοφὸς or σοφιστὴς.
choice: a person has the virtues if and only if he is a true philosopher. He takes the virtues to be enumerated by the standard list of cardinal virtues: wisdom (φρόνησις); courage (ἀνδρεία); chastened and controlled appetite, or ‘temperance’ (σωφροσύνη); and justice (δικαιοσύνη). So he wants to show, for each of these virtues, a pair of claims having the form:

A. If x is a true philosopher, then x has ___________ (a sufficiency claim).

B. If x has ____________, then x is a true philosopher (a necessity claim).

where some cardinal virtue is mentioned in the blank space.

That this pair of claims holds good as regards the virtue of wisdom is trivial, since to have the virtue of wisdom is to love φρόνησις, and Socrates, as we have seen, takes (the activity of) φρόνησις to be equivalent to (the activity of) σοφία. He gives a terse argument for the A. direction at 68b: a true philosopher, by the meaning of the word φιλόσοφος, simply is a lover of wisdom, but (the activity of) wisdom is φρόνησις; thus he is a lover of φρόνησις (68b). The B. direction would similarly hold true simply by the meaning of the words, as Socrates has been using them. So Socrates next argues for the relevant pair of claims as regards courage and temperance. In effect, the burden of the Virtue Passage is to show that the cardinal virtues besides wisdom hinge on wisdom, understood as the love of φρόνησις.

His arguments that a true philosopher has these virtues (the A. direction) hinge on the notion of contempt: a true philosopher loves above all the life of the soul alone by itself; therefore he has contempt for the pleasures of the body (ολιγώρος ἐξειν, 68c10), and for the joining of the soul to the body that is the condition for these; therefore, he takes considerations of what is ‘orderly’ (and presumably καλόν) to trump those of bodily life or pleasure, when they conflict; but that is just what it is to have those virtues. The virtues follow not merely from one’s taking the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’ as one’s true life, so much as from the contempt for the other sort of life, which results: ‘the condition of not being keen about one’s appetites (τὸ περὶ τῶς ἐπιθυμίῶς μὴ ἐπτοῆσθαι), but rather of having the posture of holding these in contempt and, consequently, remaining well-ordered (ἀλλ᾽ ὀλιγώρως ἐξειν, καὶ κοσμίως), is a condition that is proper only to those who hold the body in utter contempt (τοῖς μάλιστα τοῦ σώματος ὀλιγωροῦσιν) and live a life that consists of a love of wisdom (ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ζῶσιν)’ (68c8-12).

Socrates is meant to be a living example of these inferences. By willingly remaining in prison and accepting the death sentence, he is letting a consideration of right—which seems scrupulous to Crito and the others—trump a concern for his bodily life, thus showing ἀνδρεία; and he displays σωφροσύνη in not indulging his emotion of self-pity, not weeping, and, at the end of the day, not clinging to pleasures and trying to extend his life as long as possible.21

20 Note that, if we take understand 68b in this way, then the Virtue Passage is properly taken to begin at 67e1.

21 Socrates says that he will gain nothing by trying to prolong his life (οὐδὲν γὰρ ὁμιλείτευτεν ἀλλὰ περὶ τῆς ὑποταγῆς τοῦ ἄλλορ καὶ τῆς ἀψευδής σκέψεως τῆς, 116e9-117a1), a nice expression of contempt, and his demeanor as
Socrates’ argument for the second sort of claim (the B. direction) for these virtues proceeds deductively (68d5-69a4). If ‘the others’, that is, those who are not true philosophers, love above all the life that the soul carries out using the body as an instrument—which they must, if they have neither identified nor come to esteem the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’—then, by the nature of the case, such persons are simply incapable of choosing anything above their own life, if these should conflict, or, when death is not a possibility, of holding back from pursuing the most pleasant course of action. By the nature of the case, they could not allow, for instance, a consideration of the shamefulness of a pleasure to count as a reason against choosing that pleasure.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* iii 8.1116a29-36, Aristotle gives an example of a spurious form of courage: soldiers who remain at their positions on the front line only because their commanding officer is standing at the rear, ready to beat and kill anyone who abandons his post. Socrates is in effect claiming: this *must* be the way to construe the action of any non-philosopher who remains at his post when death threatens (τὸν θάνατον ὑπομένειν, cf. 68d9). Plato says that this phenomenon is ‘strange’ (ἀτοπος, d3) and ‘inconsistent’ (ἀλογον, d12) because such a person is ‘courageous by reason of his fear and cowardice’ (τῷ δεδιένει ἀρα καὶ δέει ὁνδρεῖοι εἰσι πάντες πλὴν οἱ φιλόσοφοι, d11-12). What is strange is that someone who has an attribute may nonetheless appear to have the opposite attribute. We are intended to resolve the apparent inconsistency by following Socrates’ argument and agreeing that such a person’s courage is merely apparent.22 Socrates’ point is the mundane one, that the principle of non-contradiction excludes our attributing courage simultaneously to those who, we know, are acting from cowardice.23

Similarly, when death and dying are not at issue, the *only* grounds on which a non-philosopher can resist a bodily pleasure, by the nature of the case, is that his doing so will lead to more pleasures of that sort. Plato thinks that we can predict that such persons, ‘body lovers’, will act badly whenever the requisite motives are lacking, which may of course include incentives and punishments supplied by death.

22 Bostock 1986, 31 objects to the Virtue Passage: ‘Suppose I am thirsty, but abstain from drinking the weedkiller through fear of death, and instead go off to get a drink of water. Surely that is not a case of cowardice?’ But so far Bostock has imagined a case where no real motive is required. Suppose, rather, that you are very thirsty (you have been in the desert for days), and the weedkiller is actually very tasty. In that case some rather strong, opposing motive is required, if you are not to drink it. Yet suppose you find that the *only* thing keeping you from drinking is the negative consideration that you would thereby cease to live. Certainly such a person would have, at best, only low or impoverished motives available to him. And Plato does not say, in any case, that body-lovers *appear* to be cowardly: he claims that they *in fact* are cowardly, despite appearances.

23 Note that, so understood, there is no serious appeal here to any principle that ‘like causes like’, as some have wanted to say, in interpreting the Final Argument. The cowardice, or fleeing from death, which must motivate non-philosophers *always*, even when they are remaining at their post in battle, is not a prior ‘cause’ of their courage, which is a later ‘effect’: rather, their cowardice is present and active, and it excludes its opposite.
laws and social conventions. A brief aside on the virtue of justice, δικαιοσύνη: It is noteworthy that Socrates says nothing explicitly about how this virtue follows from φιλοσοφία, though later he asserts that it does (see 69b2, c2). We may take Plato to be presuming that justice is present or not depending upon whether courage and temperance are. This at least seems to be the import of the apparently ‘throw away’ remark at the beginning of the Virtue Passage, 68c1-3. Socrates there says that a person who does not recognize and esteem the activity of a soul ‘alone by itself’, and is therefore a ‘body lover’, will consequently be, in addition, either a ‘lover of money’ (φιλοχρήματος), a ‘lover of distinction’ (φιλότιμος), or both (68c2). We can easily see why Socrates would claim this: money and distinction are the ordinary means by which one procures bodily pleasures and comforts. (We should understand φιλοτιμία as a seeking of distinction precisely as a guarantee of future good treatment.) Now Plato is wont to identify this pair of motives as those that principally induce people to act unjustly. Remove them, then—as they would be removed, Socrates thinks, if the life of the embodied soul is not making the first claim on our affections—and presumably justice falls out as a consequence. These considerations, then, provide the basis for the A. and B. claims as regards justice. The A. direction: if someone is a true philosopher, then he will have contempt for bodily goods and find considerations of rightness and fairness decisive for action. The B. direction: if someone has justice, then he is not motivated by love of money or distinction, but this implies that he does not love the body above all, and thus he must love something else more, i.e., he is a philosopher.

24 Note that Glaucon’s worry would follow directly from this: the ring of Gyges neutralizes the effect of such superadded incentives and punishments.

25 Both of these passages assert only the A. direction apparently—that justice follows from being a true philosopher.

26 For instance, Laws 938b5-c5 implies that φιλονικία (which Plato frequently uses as an equivalent of φιλοτιμία) and φιλοχρηματία are the only two possible motives underlying an injustice; Rep. 581c3-5, not unlike the Phaedo, presumes that there are only three motives on which human beings can act (διὰ ταύτα δὴ καὶ ἄνθρώπον ἔγινεν τὰ πρώτα τριττὰ γένη εἶναι, φιλόσοφον, φιλότιμον, φιλοκερδέζες), and compare also 586d4-e3.

27 Bostock 1986, 34 objects: ‘The virtues of courage and temperance are in fact untypical, and are often distinguished as “self-regarding” virtues, since they can perfectly well be manifested in actions which do not affect other people. But most virtues are “other-regarding”, and essentially concern one’s behavior to others. These virtues it seems that our philosopher will lack altogether. At any rate the temptation to act only with his own ends in view is a temptation he will certainly have, and apparently he will see no reason to resist it’. But, again, we must be taking Plato to be presuming that there are some sorts of actions that befit intelligent beings in their relationship to one another, and are therefore worth choosing—the realm of what is καλὸν (see n5). Contempt of embodied life, he therefore presumes, will lead to ‘other regarding’ virtue by making it possible for considerations of what is καλὸν to be decisive for action.
On the reading of the Virtue Passage that I have been developing, we must take Socrates’ remarks in the passage on the ‘Right Exchange’ to be parasitical and derivative. That is, in characteristic fashion, Plato is simply introducing a striking metaphor or analogy, to represent something that he has already proposed argumentatively.

Socrates has been drawing a distinction between the genuine virtues of ‘true philosophers’ and the spurious virtues of everyone else. What makes it seem that non-philosophers have the virtues, is that they do in fact sacrifice or reject goods: even non-philosophers will reject pleasures, and they will reject safety (when they freely expose themselves to dangers), thus mimicking, Socrates thinks, the temperance and courage of true philosophers. But the nature of this rejection of goods differs fundamentally in the two cases. The reason is that non-philosophers reject goods only in order to procure goods that are similar in kind, whereas philosophers reject goods or one sort in order to procure goods that are of an incommensurably higher sort. As we have seen, Socrates thinks that, because philosophers have come to recognize and value the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’, which is ranked incommensurably higher than goods procured through the activity of the soul together with the body, they are therefore capable of having a proper contempt for the latter sort of goods and can reject them decisively, when such goods would conflict with the good of the soul on its own.

The distinction between these two types of rejection is nicely brought out by the imagery of commercial exchange. Let us say that, when someone rejects X in order to procure Y, then he has ‘exchanged X for Y’ or ‘purchased Y with X’. Then the first type of rejection is modeled nicely by market transactions: to reject a good of one sort, in order to procure a commensurable good, is analogous to making a purchase to acquire something that similarly has commercial value. A person may, by shrewd buying and selling, increase his wealth, but he will never obtain, by those means alone, anything other than wealth.

The second type of rejection—that of which a true philosopher is capable—is modeled, not by market transactions, but rather by the way in which we would immediately trade any amount of counterfeit money for genuine money. As we have seen, Plato’s view is that lower ranked goods, when they conflict with higher ranked goods, have no worth: they should be dismissed with contempt. But similarly counterfeit money, whatever its uses elsewhere, has no worth when there is a choice between it and genuine money: it should be traded for genuine money without hesitation. A true philosopher, because he has recognized and come to esteem the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’, recognizes and loves a good that is incommensurably greater than any good attained by the activity of the soul using the body as an instrument. He alone, then, is capable of rejecting goods in the decisive way in which we dispense with counterfeit money.

For Plato, contempt is a prerequisite for the decisive rejection of, and therefore control over, bodily goods of the sort that we expect to see in the manifestations
of true virtue. But this attitude of contempt cannot be taken for granted; it is not available to everyone. Rather, it is an achievement, which requires an ability to draw a certain sort of contrast between goods. We become capable of drawing that contrast precisely by discovering higher goods, in relation to which the goods we had until then recognized, seem to be dispensable. In the *Phaedo*, as was said, the higher good that the philosopher has discovered is the soul as independently existing, capable of acting ‘alone by itself’.

With the argument thus recast, we are now in a position to give an account of 69a6-c2, which has received much attention in the secondary literature. That passage, although obscure when read on its own, is relatively straightforward if seen, in the manner explained, as a continuation of the line of thought of Socrates’ Defense and the Virtue Passage.

(1) 69a6-b1. ὃ μακάρει Σιμμία, μή γὰρ ὁψι ψυχή αὐτή ἢ ὡ ὅθη πρὸς ὠριτὴν ἄλλατη, ᾧδονάς πρὸς ἴδονάς καὶ λύπας πρὸς λύπας καὶ φόβον πρὸς φόβον καταλλάττεσθαι, καὶ μείζω πρὸς ἐλάττῳ ὠσπερ νομίσματα, ἀλλὰ ἢ ἑκεῖνο μόνον τὸ νόμισμα ὁρθόν, ἀντὶ οὗ δεῖ πάντα ταῦτα καταλλάττεσθαι, φρόνησις.

Here Socrates simply draws the contrast, just explained, between the two types of rejection of goods, or two types of ‘exchanges’: that in which a good is rejected to procure something commensurable to it, and that in which goods of a lower sort are rejected with contempt, in favor of goods of a higher sort. The former is what is found in spurious virtue, as just explained (hence αὐτή). The latter requires the love above all else of φρόνησις, the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’.

(2) 69b1-5. καὶ τοῦτο μὲν πάντα καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον ὄνομαινα τε καὶ πιπρασκόμενα τῷ ὄντι ἢ καὶ ἀνθρεία καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη, καὶ συλλήβδην ἁληθῆς ἀρετῆ μετὰ φρόνησις, καὶ προσημινομένων καὶ ἀπογιγμομένων καὶ ἱδονῶν καὶ φόβων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων τῶν τοιούτων.

Luce 1944 seems to be correct that Socrates has in mind two steps, or moments, in the virtuous activity of a true philosopher, as indicated first by τοῦτον πάντα and then by μετὰ τοῦτον, but the interpretation so far sketched gives a natural interpretation of these steps: take τοῦτον πάντα (sc. ὄνομαινα τε καὶ πιπρασκόμενα) to refer to the true philosopher’s aim to foster φρόνησις, or the activity of the soul ‘alone by itself’, which comes of his taking φρόνησις to be what living is for him; take μετὰ τοῦτον to signify the indifference he consequently shows toward other goods, and hence their subjection to considerations of what is καλόν, given that he has and fosters φρόνησις. Since a true philosopher has contempt for pleasures, fears, and other goods commensurable to these (καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων τῶν τοιούτων), it makes no difference whether they come or go—so long as he has what is truly valuable (that is, he is μετὰ φρόνησις).

Note that on the interpretation developed here, καὶ συλλήβδην ἁληθῆς ἀρετῆ
The reason is that, as we have seen, Plato wishes to argue that being a true philosopher, that is, someone’s having identified and fostered φρόνησις, is both sufficient and necessary, in the sense explained, for genuine virtue. Now χωρίζομενα κτλ., which follows immediately, is clearly the statement of a necessity condition. So it is natural to take καὶ συλλήβδην ἄληθῆς ἀρετῆς μετὰ φρόνησεως as expressing a sufficiency condition, that is: if φρόνησις, then ἄληθῆς ἀρετῆ. But that is just the sense of the text, when it is taken as an independent clause. And then it is natural to take καὶ προσγιγνομένων κτλ. as a further expression of the sufficiency of φρόνησις (or, rather, the love of φρόνησις) for virtue.

Furthermore, we should take συλλήβδην to summarize something that comes before, and καὶ συλλήβδην ἄληθῆς ἀρετῆς μετὰ φρόνησεως would nicely summarize the sufficiency argument Socrates had argued for earlier at some length. But if one takes it to summarize merely the list of virtues, then one member of that list, φρόνησις, is mentioned, gratuitously so, immediately after the supposed summary, which is awkward.

Moreover, surely ἄληθῆς, 69b3, is meant to express the same idea as τὸ ὄντι, b2. Now call an expression such as ἀνδρεία an unqualified (and hence potentially ambiguous) reference to a virtue, but an expression such as τὸ ὄντι ἀνδρεία or ἄληθῆς ἀνδρεία as a qualified reference. If we understand συλλήβδην, as on the standard reading, to be summarizing a list, then, since the items on the list are unqualified, the occurrence of ἄληθῆς would be otiose: that work would already have been done by τὸ ὄντι earlier. On the other hand, given that we do find ἄληθῆς, then it should be playing a role like that of τὸ ὄντι; yet it can do that only if we take συλλήβδην to be qualifying the clause, as in the interpretation defended here.

Here is a summary of the argument that the fostering of φρόνησις is necessary for genuine virtue. Note that, with Socrates now contrasting ἄληθῆς ἀρετῆ with σκιαγραφία, Plato has shifted to a new image. The language of ‘exchange’ has come to an end with ἀλλαττόμενα ἀντὶ ἀλλήλων; hence, strictly, b6 marks the end of the passage on the ‘right exchange’.

28 The standard punctuation, followed for instance by Rowe, is καὶ τοῦτο μὲν πάντα καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο οὖνομένα τε καὶ πιπρασκόμενα τῷ ὄντι ἦ καὶ ἀνδρεία καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ συλλήβδην ἄληθῆς ἀρετῆ, μετὰ φρόνησεως, κτλ.
29 Bluck 1955, 156n1 argues, in favor of the standard punctuation, that συλλήβδην usually sums up in a word or phrase, not a clause, but there are more than enough instances in Plato of συλλήβδην qualifying a clause, e.g., Symp. 206a11, Charm. 159b5, Meno 88c4.
30 This relatively simple point is not noted by any of the commentators. I take it as a mark of the soundness of the interpretation proposed here that it naturally uncovers articulations in the text which would otherwise be ignored.
Looking back, we can see that the ‘right exchange’ passage consists, simply, of three passages: (1) a passage (69a6-b1) which contrasts the two sorts of rejection of goods, displayed in spurious as opposed to true virtue; (2) a passage (b1-5) which summarizes the argument that φρόνησις or the love of φρόνησις, is sufficient for someone’s correctly rejecting goods; and (3) a passage (b5-6) which summarizes the argument that φρόνησις, or the love of φρόνησις, is necessary for someone’s correctly rejecting goods.

After this, Socrates shifts now to language suggestive of a contrast between appearance and reality, in order to elucidate, in another way, the difference in status between the higher good of φρόνησις and other goods. The new thought is this: the independent reality of the activity of thinking depends upon the existence of the Forms; but these differ from everything else in the way that truth differs from appearances; hence the difference between the genuine virtues of a true philosopher and the spurious virtues of everyone else, will amount similarly to the difference between truth and appearance. Ultimately the difference in kind among goods, necessary for contempt, is just the difference between truth and appearance; hence, a view of the world not capable of making out such a distinction is incapable of providing a basis for contempt.

(4) 69b8-c3. τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς τῷ ὄντι ἢ κάθαρσις τις τῶν τοιούτων πάντων. καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρμός τις ἢ.

Here Plato shifts to a third image: that of purity and impurity. And this passage is followed by yet another (c3-d1), in which a contrast is drawn between those who have, and those who have not, been initiated into secret rites. So in this final speech in his mock defense, Socrates gives us a succession of four contrasts: (i) market exchanges vs. the exchange of counterfeit for genuine money; (ii) appearance vs. reality; (iii) impurity vs. purity; and (iv) uninitiated vs. initiated. All of these involve analogies, illustrating the distinction he had already drawn argumentatively.

We should presumably take τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς to be not something that is emphatically reduplicated by τῷ ὄντι, but rather a reference to Truth, the object of thinking and the end of a true philosopher’s striving: compare similar assertions in Socrates’s Defense, at 66b8, cf. 66a6, d7, 67b1. Hence to say τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς τῷ ὄντι ἢ κάθαρσις τις τῶν τοιούτων πάντων is to say that ‘in fact, Truth is something set apart from corporeal existence’: it is a lightly veiled assertion of the separate existence of the Forms. Then we may take καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρμός τις ἢ to be drawing the conclusion that, analogously and consequently, a virtue will be a condition of the soul that, similarly, separates the soul from the body—the chief theme of Socrates’ Defense. φρόνησις is here mentioned separately because, as Socrates has argued, the separation of soul from body effected by the soul’s thinking ‘alone by itself’ is constitutive of the separation displayed in the other virtues. This separation as displayed in the other virtues is, as we have seen, construed by Plato as a posture of contempt—a radical and decisive putting away of
considerations having to do with the soul’s activity in union with the body.

This line of thought concludes Plato’s investigation of Socratic contempt, supplying what might be called the full ‘metaphysical basis’ for contempt as an expression of virtue: a person can adopt the posture of rejecting bodily goods, whenever they conflict with rational considerations, however slight, only on condition that he recognizes that there are goods entirely independent of bodily goods, and if he takes his proper life and activity to involve the possession of goods of that sort. The argument of the texts of the *Phaedo* that we have been examining, then, is that virtue involves the right sort of contempt, but that that sort of contempt is available only to someone who recognizes and esteems the soul as existing separately from the body.

Conclusion

Socratic magnanimity may be characterized as an exaltation of the soul over the body, which consists in a readiness to reject anything whatsoever that is incompatible with the indications of what is κολάν. Plato, as we have seen, supposed that such an attitude required that a person be capable of drawing a distinction in kind among goods, so that not all goods are commensurable; and, in the *Phaedo* at least, he thinks that a person can draw such a distinction only if he distinguishes properly between body and soul. Straining with images to express his point, Plato maintains that to draw such a distinction, in our judgments and in our preference for φρόνησις over anything else, simply is for the soul to become distinct from the body: the judgments of a virtuous person, and his contempt, effect the distinction acknowledged by those judgments themselves. For Plato, then, magnanimity is a virtue that expresses, not simply by acknowledging but also by actually displaying, the power of the soul over the body.

For these reasons it is appropriate that Plato attempts to account for Socratic magnanimity in his dialogue on immortality: for the contempt of death that Socrates shows is meant to be direct evidence for the distinctness of his soul from his body, as much as for his courage—just as the argumentation of the dialogue, as a display of φρόνησις and the love of φρόνησις, is meant itself to be a participation in the discarnate existence, to which Socrates hopes to attain upon death.31

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