

The Meta-philosophy of *Phaedo*

On several occasions in his dialectical works, Aristotle invokes the thesis that soul is immortal, each time in order to illustrate a logical rule or strategy for debate. He does so twice in contexts where he explains how to exploit ambiguous terms in dialectical debate (*SE* 176b14-25, *Top.* 2.3 110a27-b13); once in a context where he describes the use of hypothesis to make an argument that is true of a species true of its genus (*Top.* 3.6 119b35-120a5); and on a fourth occasion in order to illustrate a paralogism with arguments similar to those in Plato's *Phaedo* clearly in mind (*SE* 167b21-37). Aristotle, it would seem, considered the thesis that soul is immortal to be a basic component of the dialectician's stock in trade. This paper considers some implications of this observation for the understanding of Plato's conception of philosophy, as it is developed in *Phaedo*.

One consequence of this observation is that the interest of *Phaedo* lies less in the content of its flawed arguments in support of the thesis that soul is immortal, and more in the meta-philosophical questions they raise concerning their role in the life of the philosopher. This shift in focus makes it useful to re-evaluate the position of *Phaedo* vis-à-vis on-going scholarly debate concerning the therapeutic and transformative aspects of ancient philosophy. The early stage of this debate is framed by the works of Pierre Hadot (1995, 2002), Michel Foucault (1988*a*, 1988*b*, 2005), and Martha Nussbaum (1994); while more recently John Sellars (2003), John Cooper (2012), and Konrad Banicki (2014, 2015) have made important contributions.

Hadot and Foucault emphasized the importance, to the ancient understanding of philosophy, of the philosopher's way of life (*bios*), as opposed to his discourse (*logos*). Their work sought to restore the fundamental role played by the Delphic maxim to "care

for one's self," in the pursuit even of that other, more famous Delphic maxim, "know thyself." Another way to characterize this distinction would be as one between a conception of philosophy that produces integrity of belief and action, or philosophy-as-*ethos* (PaE), and a conception of philosophy as one that produces true accounts, or philosophy-as-*logos* (PaL). While both PaE and PaL feature prominently in ancient sources, scholarship in the wake of Hadot and Foucault has debated the weight that should be accorded to one or the other conception of philosophy. Thus, while Hadot, Foucault, and Sellars rate PaE as primary, each in his own way, Nussbaum and Cooper rate PaL as primary.

As Hadot recognized, the Socrates of Plato's *Phaedo* supplies a rich elaboration of this theme: *Phaedo* showcases both the pursuit of truth that is characteristic of PaL and the integrity of belief and action that is characteristic of PaE. While the *Phaedo*'s striking comment that philosophers must "practice dying and being dead" (*Phd.* 64a), as well as the perspective that Aristotle sheds on the banality of the thesis that soul is immortal, might be thought to align *Phaedo* with PaE, this paper argues that Socrates' commitment to *logos* and its therapeutic powers ultimately aligns *Phaedo* more with PaL.

Bibliography

Banicki, Konrad (2014). "Philosophy as Therapy: Towards a Conceptual Model."

Philosophical Papers 43/1: 7-31.

_____. (2015). "Therapeutic Arguments, Spiritual Exercises, or the Care of the Self:

Martha Nussbaum, Pierre Hadot, and Michel Foucault on Ancient Philosophy."

Ethical Perspectives 22.4: 601-634.

Cooper, John (2012). *Pursuits of Wisdom*. Princeton.

Hadot, Pierre (1995). *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Blackwell.

_____ (2002). *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Harvard.

Foucault, Michel (1988a). *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*.

Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.

_____ (1988b). "Technologies of the Self." In *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar*

with Michel Foucault. Ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton.

Amehurst: University of Massachusetts Press.

_____ (2005). *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France*

1981-1982. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.

Nussbaum, Martha (1994). *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic*

Ethics. Princeton.

Sellars, John (2003). *The Art of Living: the Stoics on the Nature and Function of*

Philosophy. 2nd ed. Bristol.