

# Socrates' Prison Journal

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To  
my granddaughter  
Farah

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## PREFACE

The idea of this little book had been luring me for decades. I kept putting it off because I did not feel sure about where to draw the line between representing Socrates' thought and presenting my own. After having published *Let Us Philosophize* (1998) and *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005), as well as numerous articles, where I gave my reading of Socrates/Plato, I felt I could give myself free rein without worrying about fencing apart what might be read into Socrates/Plato and what is an accretion, provided always that the accretion be harmonious, in the writer's judgement, with the rest.

Beside the basic fiction of the prison journal, I have, from the start and throughout, introduced anachronistic citations, fictional situations, dreams and divine intimations, to emphasize the non-historic intent of this work. Nonetheless, I maintain that my reading is truer to the genuine spirit of the Socratic-Platonic philosophy than much that goes as scholarly and erudite analysis and exposition.

I am aware that there is much reiteration in the following pages. I go back again and again to the same subject and repeat again and again the same thoughts in various forms of expression. I feel that this is necessary, since one of my main concerns in this as in my other writings is to correct what I see as grave misunderstandings and distortions that have become firmly established within mainstream philosophical thought; I am also trying to introduce and clarify concepts and views which I claim to be original and important. Both these tasks call for and justify much reiteration and much insistence.

The notes appended to the journal are of a dual nature. The biographical and historical notes are for the benefit of the lay reader or the novice. These notes, when not drawn directly from the dialogues of Plato, are derived from sources that are readily accessible. With respect to these, I claim no originality and make no pretence of erudition. They are bits of common knowledge which I collect here simply for convenience. In the remaining notes I expand somewhat, for the purpose of clarification or emphasis, on certain ideas and views presented in the journal.

Following the notes I have reproduced in an Appendix an article which first appeared in *Philosophy Pathways* Issue 69, 19 October, 2003, in which I summarized a brilliant paper by Professor Enid Bloch on Plato's description of Socrates' last moments. Professor Bloch's paper deserves to be widely known as it corrects a mistaken objection to Plato's immortal portrayal of one of the most touching and inspiring scenes in human history.

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## DAY ONE

I, Socrates, son of Sophroniscus, of the deme of Alopece, having been condemned by the Athenians to die, was ready for the journey hence. But the god, it appears, does not want me to depart yet. For on the day before my trial the priest of Apollo had crowned the stern of the ship sent yearly to Delos. So my journey to Hades is not to be until the vessel completes its journey to Delos and back. How long that may take only God knows.

I therefore reflected: Why has the god deemed it proper to detain me here a while longer and not release me at once? Might it be that there is a task I have not yet accomplished in my service to the god? But what can I accomplish while confined in my prison?

I reflected long and I pray that the thought I arrived at may be conformable to the will of God.

Through all the years of my maturity I have devoted my time and my energies to the service of the god by helping all persons who were willing to lend me an ear to understand themselves and their true good. In so doing I felt that I was at the same time doing myself the greatest good. All the time I was becoming more and more of a whole person. But perhaps in my too eager involvement in my mission I did not stop enough to view as a whole that whole that the god was making of me.

Supposing then that the god wants me to do this, to reflect on my whole life and to collect as far as possible its many diffuse particulars into some unity, it occurred to me that the best I can do while in prison, during those hours when I am left to myself, is to carry out such a survey of my mind and my life. I also saw fit, the prison authorities permitting, to put my thoughts down in writing, for this too may have been the purpose of the god, that I may continue my service to God beyond my numbered days by making use of available means to reach those outside my immediate reach.

So by the help of God let me begin and may the outcome be such as God may find good.

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In my boyhood the glories of Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea, were fresh in the memories of all Hellenes. The Athenians were basking in

the opulence of the age of Pericles. Yet even then, even so, I perceived that in the lives of all, of the wealthy and powerful as much as of the poor and downtrodden, there was much unhappiness, much enmity and conflict. Even then, in my early boyhood, I strongly felt and was firmly convinced that one thing was needed to remove all that unhappiness, all that conflict and strife — one thing only: understanding.

I don't know what I would have answered had I been asked then what I meant by understanding. But I know what I felt. I felt that the serene quiet, the loving care, the friendliness, the sympathy, that I experienced in my relations with my father and mother and my closest friends were all one with that thing I called understanding. I felt that if only people had that understanding, there would be an end to all wars, all conflict, all strife, and all personal misery. I don't think I could have put that in words then. I know that even now I cannot give in a satisfactory formula of words the meaning of that single simple word. I also know that it is that simple intuition of my boyhood years that has been the inspiration and the driving force for all my doings and all my mental striving. It is that gift of the god, for it is truly such, that I have sought throughout my life to secure for myself and to bring to all my fellow-humans.

Thanks be to God for in this first of my prison meditations I have seen clearly the unifying principle that gives wholeness and intelligibility to my entire life.

## DAY TWO

This morning Crito and with him a crowd of my friends came to visit. They promised to come daily to see me for as long as I remain in prison. Several of them brought food — meat and olives and cheese and bread and relishes. We ate, and more than the food I enjoyed observing the amazed look on their faces when they saw me eat heartily. In particular Apollodorus nearly made me laugh. His obvious pain in my behalf and his relief at seeing me unagitated and unconcerned contested for moulding the expression of his eyes and features, so that my own feelings towards him were mixed: I was touched with pity for his suffering and was amused by his innocent confusion.

We spent the day conversing and they did not leave until the prison officer, a really gentle person, reminded them more than once that it was time for them to go.

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Surrounded by so many young people keenly engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, I found myself going back in thought to my early youth.

As a young man I read every writing of the wise men that I could buy or borrow. When any wise men came to Athens, as they often did from all over the Hellenic regions, I lost no opportunity to be present at their discourses and to engage them in discussion. I found great pleasure, indeed rapture, in the sciences they expounded and the intriguing questions they raised and explored, and yet the more pleasure and exhilaration I experienced the more I was filled with a strange sense of emptiness. The knowledge they pursued, the wisdom they offered, did not answer the questions I felt to be the most important.

What I felt was most important was to understand why human beings lived and behaved as they did. I thought I saw clearly that behind every intentional movement and every action of human beings was the idea of something they rightly or wrongly valued. I thought I saw clearly that human beings lived, in the strictest sense of the word, in a world constituted by ideas.

Men fought for honour; Achilles chose to die rather than fail in his duty to avenge Patroclus. And just as a courageous person accepts death in obedience to an idea, a coward in battle surrenders to the enemy for fear of what might come after death. — While writing this sentence I heard a voice breathing into my ear in a strange barbaric tongue that I somehow understood, "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all".

That we actually and truly live in such a world of ideas was thus to me from earliest youth a first principle and became the firm ground for all my thought.

Our lives are governed not only by the noble ideas of justice and temperance and courage, but they are no less governed by false ideas and ideals; by the belief that wealth secures happiness; by the conventional thought that it is right to return injury for injury; by the phantom idea of happiness that we spend our lives groping for without stopping to think what it is or where it might be looked for.

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I saw that human beings are, for good or for bad, human beings in virtue of their living under the sway of ideas. It is by living, strictly speaking, in a world of ideas that human beings live their characteristically human life with all there is in that of good and of evil.

I asked myself: Where do these all-important ideas come from? These ideas are not things that can be seen or heard or touched. They are not to be found in the world surrounding us. Even when we find instances of, say, justice in the world, it is only when we already have the idea of justice that we can view a particular act as just and another as unjust.

These ideas have their being and their origin in our *psuchê*. They are only seen, grasped, – or whatever metaphor you choose – by the mind. They are intelligible but cannot be perceived in any other way.

Thus I was led to the idea that what is of the highest importance for us, what constitutes our humanity, that by which we have our characteristic being as humans, is this intelligible world of ideas, which is quite distinct in nature and in origin from the perceptible world in which we have our animal life, in which we feed and drink and walk and sleep and procreate, and with which we transact through sight and hearing and touch and the sense of heat and cold.

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The prison guard is calling to me to extinguish the oil lamp and go to sleep.  
The man is doing his duty; I should obey.

## DAY THREE

Xanthippe came early in the morning, before the others, as she had also done the day before. She brought with her cooked food. I told her she did not have to give herself trouble on that account since my friends when they come bring with them food more than enough. In fact, at the end of the day they collected what was left, which was plenty, and gave it to the guard who was grateful. I am sure the man will wish me a long stay in prison. But Xanthippe said she would never forgive herself if she did not cook me my food herself. When my friends arrived I asked Crito to have someone accompany her home. She has to look after the children.

Now they are all gone and I am left to myself. Let me continue my reflections.

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So in very early youth I saw that we human beings differed from all other creatures in that we live in a world constituted by ideas originating in the mind. Those ideas are the source of our happiness, our glory, our misery, our shame. All the noble deeds ever done by woman or man were bred by an idea. All the atrocious acts ever perpetrated by woman or man were fostered by an idea.

Convinced that what is of first importance for human beings is the intelligible world of ideas, I sought, in my solitary reflections and in my conversations with others, to grasp the meaning of some of the ideas to which we attached great value and weight, such as the ideas of justice, reasonableness, righteousness, courage. But the more I searched the more I was baffled. None of those ideas was as simple as it seemed to be, none was self-contained. When I tried to examine any one of them, I invariably found that at one point or another, the particular idea I was examining merged into another. No single idea was just itself by itself. As in the water of a clear brook on which is reflected the image of a tree standing on its bank the reflected branches and leaves and the sunny interstices between the leaves superficially seem to be distinct but are borne by the one water beneath, so I saw that the virtues which we thought of as distinct, when examined closely, are found to be one.

When I fixed on any single virtue and tried to probe its character, I found that with every change of circumstance that virtue assumed a changed character. What was good in one setting became bad in a different setting. Telling the truth in certain circumstances produced more harm than telling a lie. Preserving life in certain circumstances resulted in more misery than taking away life. I saw that just as all those external things which people value – wealth and bodily strength and social standing and political power – can bring as much misery as happiness, and that only when conjoined with intelligence can they be good, so also even the virtues proper to human beings are not good when not united with intelligence or understanding. One thing remained invariably true: in all acts, in all dealings, the presence of intelligence made things good, the absence of intelligence made things bad or at best indifferent.

But when I tried to reflect on that intelligence itself, I found myself going in circles. At first I thought of that intelligence as a kind of knowledge. I then asked myself: What Knowledge? Knowledge of What? No particular knowledge could be satisfactory. All particular knowledge, all science, all expertise, was itself something that could only be good when conjoined with intelligence or understanding. The only initially satisfactory answer was that understanding was knowledge of the good. But I had already found that all particular good is only good in virtue of intelligence.

In the end I came to the view that as all virtues are ultimately one, so also that one virtue is one with intelligence, and that intelligence is not any particular knowledge but the exercise of understanding, the living activity of the mind, the life of intelligence.

## DAY FOUR

The views I have expressed in the preceding reflection did not become clear to me all at once or in a short time. Those thoughts kept brewing in my mind over a number of years. One thing of which I felt certain was that the way to that understanding which from childhood was my inspiration and my dream was to know my own mind. The Delphic inscription *gnôthi sauton* took for me a special deep meaning and became the beacon for my thinking.

Clearly, if we human beings are what we are in virtue of the mind and its world of ideas, then the mind, as it is our proper being, is also our proper worth. As I found that all good – goods of the world as well as goods of the human *psuchê* – is only good when infused with intelligence, and as I found that that intelligence is not to be identified with any particular area of knowledge or system of knowledge, but is simply the living activity of the mind itself, I saw that our proper good and only good was in the health and activity of the mind. Our wellbeing is in that and in nothing else.

I believed that if only people could see this clearly and hold to it constantly they would be endowed with all virtue. One who values one's *psuchê* and is concerned to keep it wholesome and unspoilt would neither seek unlawful gain, nor pursue inordinate pleasure, nor fear death above injury to one's *psuchê*.

When I expressed this view in my conversations, many, even among friends who commonly received my opinions sympathetically, were incredulous. At this point I do not wish to interrupt the flow of my reflections to discuss objections to my views. I believe that the god has given me this opportunity to collect my thought in a coherent unity for my own enlightenment. If, having accomplished this task, with the help of God, the ship should not yet have arrived back from Delos, I may go further into this and other points.

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Having embraced the *gnôthi sauton* as my prime rule of life, and believing that was the way to the understanding that can put an end to human ills, I made it my business to examine my *psuchê* and to exhort others to do the same. I soon discovered that the minds of most people – and I do not mean

to exclude myself – are cluttered and muddled with ideas, beliefs, and evaluations, dark and obscure and confused, which we receive, even while we are little children, from those surrounding us. Those ideas rule us. They are our tyrannical masters. We think by them and through them. We make our decisions under their sway. And the worst thing is that they are not *our* ideas. The only ideas that are ours, properly speaking, are those that originate in the intelligent activity of our mind or those that are tested in the fire of active intelligence, gaining the luminous intelligibility of the genuine offspring of the mind. To live under the sway of ideas not subjected to the examination of reason is slavery indeed.

I saw that no task was more necessary or more urgent than the task of examining my own mind and helping others examine theirs, to untangle, clarify, and harmonize ideas, to realize order and coherence within ourselves. I believed that we would then see clearly that our *psuchê* is our reality and our whole worth, and is the fount of all value and wellbeing. Nothing in the world would then induce us to accept injury to our *psuchê*.

It was at the time when I was engaged in these examinations that Chaerephon took it into his head to inquire of the oracle at Delphi whether any man was wiser than Socrates. When Chaerephon reported the answer of the Pythian priestess, at first I was baffled, but upon reflection I found in it confirmation of what I was doing. I felt that what the oracle meant was that there is no wisdom in all the external knowledge that people eagerly pursued and prided themselves on. The only true wisdom and the only worthwhile knowledge is to be sought within ourselves.

It was while serving at Potidaea that I found a deeper and ampler meaning in the oracle. But the guard is again reminding me to put off the oil lamp and go to sleep. Until tomorrow then.

## DAY FIVE

While serving at Potidaea I had more leisure for quiet reflection and meditation than I had in the city. My mind was busy reviewing and assessing my past investigations and questionings, knitting my thoughts together into an integrated vision.

Early in youth I had found that the investigations of the wise men who inquired about *phusis* could not tell me anything about what was meaningful and what was valuable in human life. That the earth was formed from air by condensation; that the sun and moon are made of fire and stone like the fire and stone we have on earth; that observing the movement of the stars and calculating the swiftness of their movement relative to one another can enable us to know in advance when an eclipse of the sun will take place, as we are told was done by Thales — all that may be true and may be of use in many walks of life. But I could not see how that could help me understand the things I was really concerned about.

Then I heard Archelaus expounding the teaching of his master Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, saying that the *nous* orders all things and is the cause of all things. I was delighted and thought that I would find in the teaching of Anaxagoras the understanding I sought. But when I read his book I was disappointed. For even though Anaxagoras said that *nous* ordered everything, when he sought to explain how things came about, he adopted the same method as the wise men of Ionia; he had recourse to air, ether, water, and the combination and separation of such things.

For a while the bitterness of my disappointment irked me, until I came to see the error in my seeking understanding in that area at all. I said to myself, suppose Anaxagoras had explained to me as fully as can be why and how the earth is in the position it is, where rain comes from and how it falls, how plants grow, and how when we eat the produce of the earth and the flesh of cattle we grow and become strong, would I then have understood the meaning and purpose of all these things?

If someone tried to explain my being now seated here in prison (this was not the example I thought of then, but there is no harm in my making use of it since I am here now) by giving a full account of my muscles and bones and joints and how they enable me to move and to adjust my limbs so as to assume my present posture — would that make my being here in prison

intelligible? Far from it, by the dog of the Egyptians. What makes my being here at this moment understandable is that, having been condemned by the Athenians, I have thought it right that I should submit to the sentence rather than escape as many of my friends wanted me to do.

I decided that the investigation of *phusis* may be good for others but is not the thing for me. I resolved to renounce natural investigation and to devote myself entirely to the examination of the ideas that make us choose one way of life rather than another, that make us adopt one attitude towards other persons and towards happenings rather than another.

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That was the position I had reached by the time I left Athens to serve at Potidaea. At Potidaea, as I have said earlier, I had the opportunity to reflect leisurely. I came to see clearly that the investigation of *phusis* and the investigation of the ideas that have their origin and being in the mind are two modes of investigation that have nothing in common. We can have beautiful and useful *epistêmê* by observing the outside world and by studying and thinking about natural processes. But this *epistêmê* is not what gives insight into the meaning of things.

Hence, I no longer seek to understand anything by what are called natural causes. I no longer seek to understand anything by anything external to it. When I look at a beautiful boy, clever persons can give a thousand thousand explanations of the beauty of the boy, but these explanations do not – no one of them and not all of them together – give me understanding of that beauty. I am content to say that it is by the idea of beauty that I see the beautiful boy beautiful. The only wisdom attainable by human beings is to realize that there is no understanding to be found outside the mind. This is the ignorance I willingly confess and will not give up. This is the meaning of the Delphic injunction *gnôthi sauton*.

I had early in my life distinguished between the perceptible world and the intelligible world of ideas, between the world in which we live and the world we live. I now came to see that the perceptible world itself has no meaning except in virtue of the ideas that are bred in the mind. When we see two sticks lying side by side, what we see is just this configuration of a background or rather underground of one colour varied by streaks of another colour. When I call these streaks of a different colour sticks, when I call them two, when I say they are equal to one another or that one of them is longer or shorter than the other, I am laying on them ideas generated by my mind: the ideas of stick, of two, of equal, of longer, of shorter are not in the

things, are not in the world outside the mind, and have no being except in the mind. Without these ideas the patches of colour are there and are somehow received by my eyes but have no meaning. The meaning is given them by the ideas.

I then reflected that in all the examinations I had carried out in trying to understand the meaning of such ideas as justice, reasonableness, courage, beauty, however much I tried, I could not fix the meaning of any such word by relating it to anything outside of it. All these ideas seemed always to flow and merge into each other, but to understand any of them by itself I found that in the end I had no other way but to look at the idea itself. Moreover, in examining these ideas, I always found them inseparably bound with a kind of *epistêmê*, but when I tried to know what *epistêmê*, *epistêmê* of what?, I found there was no satisfactory answer other than knowledge of the good, and when I inquired what good? I again found that there is no good without *epistêmê*. I saw that just as understanding is to be found nowhere but in beholding the ideas of the intelligible world, so also the good is to be found nowhere but where that understanding is.

## DAY SIX

Last night when I tried to sleep after having put the preceding thoughts in writing, my mind kept busy, going again and again over those reflections of my Potidaea days, so that now, although I have spent the intervening day conversing with my friends on various other subjects, I find myself going back to those same thoughts.

Inquiry into the origin of things and into the process by which they come about and displaying the end-result in terms of the original elements and the evolutionary process – the method favoured by those wise men who inquired *peri phuseôs* – that doubtless is a method of inquiry abounding in the fine pleasures of intellectual adventure and in the material rewards of knowing the ways of nature. But though we can know much about the world outside the mind that is useful, yet, however much we may know, the mystery of the inner essence of things remains untapped. We may one day know how the universe came about, but can never know why.

The cosmos may have come about by a Big Bang (a strange rumble coming from nowhere made me say that although I do not know what it could mean), but why, and what the thing itself that banged was, and what made it bang, all that we do not understand, and even if we came to know what that thing that banged was and could describe the steps by which the bang came about, all of that would still remain ultimately mysterious. I do not know what strange *daemon* took possession of me and made me write these weird things. I try to put what I mean in other words but still feel that the words are somehow not my words: Outside the mind and of the things outside the mind there may be *doxa*, there may be *epistêmê*, but there can be no *noêsis*. That kind of understanding is to be sought only in the mind and can only be found in the things of the mind.

When faced with a medley of disparate sights or sounds or events we have no understanding either of the separate bits or of the collection. When we work the many (which could not then even be called many) bits into a tapestry which has a unity, a wholeness, of its own, we then find the whole intelligible and the constituent elements obtain meaning in the whole. This is the only kind of understanding within our reach: to see things under a form, a pattern, an idea, created by the mind. This is the only understanding I understand. And if I seek to understand that whole, that idea, which gives

intelligibility to things, I do not find satisfaction in any expression of that idea in terms of any ideas external to it, nor can I understand it as itself a separate idea among other ideas unless I see the one and the others as elements in a new whole, under one new idea.

Again, we can investigate our own ideas, shed light on their obscurities and see their interconnections with clear eyes, but the ideas themselves in themselves remain just what they are. Beauty is beauty and that is all we know.

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That was the outcome of my search for the meanings of those magical words — justice and reasonableness and beauty and the like. The only understanding I have is in beholding the ideas which make things for me what they are. Other than that I understand nothing. That is the ignorance I find it necessary to acknowledge and to confess if I am not to be victim to that lie in the soul which is the worst ignorance and the worst lie. That is what I mean when I say that all I know is that it is by Beauty that all that is beautiful is beautiful.

Understanding is not to be discovered anywhere in the world outside the mind; understanding is not to be reached by a process of reasoning. The function of reasoning is to elucidate ideas already in the store of the mind. Truth, *alêtheia*, understanding flares in the soul when the soul turns its sight within itself — it then engenders, procreates, from its own reality new realities which shine in the luminosity of their own reality — that is the intelligibility, the self-evidence of philosophical insight.

I pray to the good god that I may yet be given the opportunity to clarify further this view which I find so important and which others still find obscure. Now I have to sleep.

## DAY SEVEN

Why could I not find satisfaction in Mind as presented in the philosophy of Anaxagoras? For Anaxagoras mind was simply a principle of motion. Things cannot move themselves, the cosmic process could not start itself, therefore there must be something that moves things, something that started the cosmos rolling. Mind is then just whatever makes things move. For Anaxagoras, mind was a postulate of an unknown something without mind. That is not the mind I was eager to find in his book, the mind that is the only reality we know, the locus of the only understanding we enjoy.

But the evil of one-sidedness in thought is very great. It is part of the essential falsity of all that is partial, that is not whole. When I express my disappointment with the philosophy of Anaxagoras and say that it confirmed in me a suspicion that I had had all the time, namely, that the investigation of natural things on the one hand and the consideration of first principles, ideals, and values on the other hand are two radically different modes of thought and that neither can do the work of the other and that I chose to renounce the one and to follow the other exclusively — many of my friends take me to mean that the pursuit of natural science is of no value.

This is a gross misunderstanding. The investigation of nature is not only practically useful and even indispensable for facilitating the day to day communal living of human beings, but also the habit of thought bred by scientific investigation, with its insistence on observation, systematization, fidelity to facts, the harmony of antecedents and consequents — that in itself is a discipline necessary for the administration and economy of a household or a city, no less necessary than the information, inventions, and tools that are the fruit of natural investigation.

To illustrate the difference between the two modes of thought, the scientific and the philosophical, I will mention one instance. Anaxagoras was the teacher of Pericles. No doubt Pericles was indebted to Anaxagoras for much of the mental equipment that helped Pericles bring about the achievements for which he was acclaimed. But what were those achievements? He made Athens rich and powerful. Can anyone claim it was among his concerns to make the Athenians good and wise? What good were for the Athenians their wealth and their power without virtue and wisdom? Were not the wealth and the power themselves, *sans* virtue and wisdom, the

cause of all the evils that befell the city in the past three decades — after Pericles' death, it is true, yet not because of Pericles' absence, but precisely because of the 'good' brought about by Pericles, the indifferent 'good' that cannot be truly good in the absence of the virtue that is wisdom, the wisdom that is virtue.

Enough for this day. I must go to sleep.

## DAY EIGHT

Many have found my views on moral questions incredible. With all the goodwill in the world I cannot see what they mean. I appreciate the plausibility of some of their objections. But, although I will readily admit that I am as foolish as they commonly think I am, I cannot see how anybody can think me so stupid as to think what they think I think.

I am convinced that we are human beings in virtue of the ideas which govern our actions and give meaning to our life. These ideas have their origin and their being and their reality inside us, in that in us which we know immediately and which is absolutely the only thing which we know immediately and unquestionably. As we have to give this thing a name, we may call it our *psuchê*. I take the word from the common speech of the Hellenes, although I know that the word has been used to mean many things different from what I use it for. Later on, if the gods grant me the time, I will try to distinguish my meaning from other meanings attached to the word and other views built around the word.

Our *psuchê* as the fount and the home of the ideas that alone give meaning and value to our lives and to everything we do and have and enjoy, is our sole and most precious treasure. (The grammatical superlative here is not quite logical but let that pass.) Obviously then, whatever prospers our *psuchê* must be cherished by us, if we are reasonable, and whatever harms our *psuchê* must be shunned by us, if we are reasonable.

To think that any good is good in and by itself, independently of what it does in the *psuchê*, is an illusion that is harmful in that it blinds us to our only true good. To think that any evil is evil in and by itself, independently of what it does in the *psuchê*, is an illusion that is harmful in the same way. Even life is not an absolute value. It is often better for a person to die than to live. Only the wholesome *psuchê* is good simply and without qualification.

The *psuchê* is the seat of intelligence, or, leaving out the metaphor, is active intelligence, is the activity of intelligence. And that is our final good. Any particular good is good for some end. When we ask why that end is good, we find that it is good for some other end. It might be said that there are goods which are good in themselves. Health we say is good in itself. The feeling of wellbeing is fine. But if we live permanently and exclusively in a state of a feeling of wellbeing, we are less than human beings, we are just a

state of ebullient feeling in the natural world. For health to be meaningfully good it has to express itself, to realize itself, in activity, and the activity when not merely good as a means to some other good is only good as meaningful and intelligent, and its goodness is in its meaningfulness, as an exercise of living, active, creative intelligence. When wholesome activity does not come out fully as that, it may still be said to be good in a way, and that is the justification for the common view that health is good in itself, but it is only properly humanly good when it has its meaningful place in a meaningful whole which itself has its final meaning and value as living intelligence.

All good deeds affirm and realize intelligible and intelligent ends. All bad deeds lack or thwart intelligible and intelligent ends. As such good deeds benefit the *psuchê* and bad deeds harm the *psuchê*. In this outlook I find full justification for the view that virtue is one with intelligence and for the view that to suffer wrong is a lesser evil than to commit wrong, but I know that these views still call for much clarification. If God grant me the time, I will attempt such clarification. Now I have to heed the guard's bidding, put off the oil lamp, and go to sleep.

## DAY NINE

I never feel so baffled and dismayed as when I see some of my dearest friends, who are themselves intelligent and good, find it hard to believe that intelligence and goodness are fundamentally one. This morning, while we were conversing, someone once more reminded us of the case of Alcibiades. Well, how could anyone imagine me to be blind to the fact that someone can have a penetrating intellect and yet be wanton and wayward when the case of Alcibiades has so often and so long given me cause for grief and for harassing thought?

When Alcibiades first began to attend at the discussions I had with my companions I had hopes for him but, even then, not without trepidation. He clearly had talent, ambition, vigour, generous feelings, and the physical endowments that could well serve his spiritual gifts. But, I say, I had fears. In the first place, he was too unruly, and, secondly, he was already soaked in the erroneous ideas that demotic culture weaves around the notions of ambition, glory, victory, power, pleasure, and the like.

He was too unruly. We speak of impulses. We say we act on impulse and that our action is impulsive. Well, on a certain level of life – our life or all life – we see an object rushing towards us and we push it off. We see a little cuddly object and we hug it tenderly. On that level we are not specifically human; our 'action' is not action but part of a wider field of activity in which we are ingredients. But the rushing object may be joined to an idea: it is a missile I have to thwart, a ball I have to catch and hold, a test projectile I have to withstand. A punch received from a friend in boxing practice may be as hard and as painful as one received from an angry foe, but it feels very different. Here I heard the strange voice whispering, "There is in the mind no volition or affirmation and negation save that which the idea, in so far as it is an idea, involves." Again it whispered, "Will and intellect are one and the same thing", and then the whisper added faintly, "My name is Spinoza".

We have countless impulses that are part of our natural equipment in the same way as our breathing and digestion are part of our natural equipment. Some of these impulses remain raw and we exercise them on the level of animal life. That is necessary for life and it is good. But on the human level our impulses are worked into a system of ideas, connecting them with ideals, ideal ends, family and social norms, and so on. This system of ideas may be

consistent, well-ordered, coherent, or it may be disorderly and inharmonious. When people object to my views by adducing the experience of *akrasia*, I can only say that *akrasia* is a case of impulse that has not been well-integrated into a coherent system of ideas. The choice or decision involved in *akrasia* can be construed as a failure of judgement.

The rationality of moral conduct does not mean the guidance of action by reason. The guidance of action by reason is in fact an amoral capacity. Some morally laudable action may be poorly or badly reasoned and some morally reprehensible action may be astutely reasoned. Examples of evil craftiness are so abundant that there is no need to give instances. The rationality of moral conduct resides in the underlying ideals and principles – the ideals and principles inspiring the outlook of the person concerned – being coherently related to the central moral value, the worth of the intelligent principle, the *nous*, the *psuchê*. This is the understanding that I have always been seeking.

Alcibiades was nourished on the erroneous ideas that our society has spawned around the notions of power, glory, and the like. These are the erroneous ideas that I have made it my life-mission to unravel and to dispel. Unfortunately, Alcibiades' abundant energy and the personal endowments that made him an idol of the people and consequently a captive to the people's illusions and false dreams, gave him little time to look within his *psuchê* to clear it of encumbering junk, put its furniture in order, to be able to behold that precious kernel which is our all in all.

It is time for me to go to sleep but I am painfully aware that I have not dispelled the many misunderstandings that surround my views on morals and moral activity. If God permit me the time, I will once again or more than once again try to clarify my position.

## DAY TEN

Of all my friends, the son of Ariston is the one who has the deepest philosophical understanding. He is also the one who, I am afraid, can do most damage to what I have been trying to say, what I have been trying to get at.

He is a poet. That fits him to grasp what is essential in philosophical understanding. It also involves the danger of — not himself misunderstanding, but leading others to erroneous understanding. But that is not the harm that I most fear may come from his side.

It is his infatuation with and absolute faith in mathematics that I dread. He has several times expressed in my presence his conviction that the study of mathematics is the best — rather the necessary — preparation for philosophizing. On the contrary, I believe that much mathematics is the worst possible preparation for philosophy. A mathematician learns to think in abstractions and symbols and is tempted to regard those abstractions and symbols as what is real. Further, a mathematician expects his reasoning to lead to exact demonstrable conclusions. Both these tendencies are inimical to the philosophical approach.

I have repeatedly tried to warn him of seeking or expecting final and fixed conclusions in philosophy. He understands and appreciates what I say in this respect. But then his mathematical habit of thinking gets the better of him, he forgets himself, and seems to seek proofs and demonstrations and definitive conclusions in philosophical discussions.

When I engage in my investigations into the meanings of ideas, investigations which seek to reveal that we can never find the meaning of an idea in any external determination, that we can only find meaning by turning inside ourselves and looking inside our own minds; investigations that aim at reaching nothing but the *aporia* that delivers one sole message: *gnôthi sauton* — when I engage in these investigations, Plato again and again seems intent on turning the investigation into a search for a valid definition on the model of geometrical definitions. The strange thing is that he also understands the true dialectical end of the elenctic discussions. But the mathematical mould of thought, like an erotic obsession, keeps luring him. It is as if he were two persons in one, thinking in two different ways.

Again, when I try to show that to do unjust deeds is foolish because to do wrong is to injure one's soul, which is the greatest evil that can befall anyone, Plato seeks to construct a formal argument to prove that injustice is folly. Such mental exercises are good and fine and to anyone whose soul is well-ordered they are highly pleasing and sound convincing. But they cannot turn a soul that has been deformed by bad beliefs, by false ideals and evaluations, to virtue. What I seek to do in my examinations is to lead the interlocutors to come into contact with the roots of good in their soul and connect these with everything else.

If God permits me more time here, I shall have more to say of Plato on many counts.

## DAY ELEVEN

I had often seen Plato as a child, in company with elders of his family, at sacrifices and other gatherings. Even then when he was yet a small child I saw in him much promise. Whenever I was engaged in discussion with anyone and the child happened to be about the place, he would sneak in among the audience and listen attentively. But I think it was about the time of the infamous incidents of the mutilation of the Hermae and the profanation of the Mysteries that he began trying to take part in our conversations. By the time of the oligarchic revolution of the Four Hundred at Athens he was already a regular member of the group that habitually associated with me.

Plato is as much enamoured of mathematics as of poetry. It is these two loves of his that make me hopeful and yet fearful for philosophy in his hands.

Perhaps it was his love of mathematics that laid him open to more of the influence of the Pythagoreans than is good for him. He has been touched by their imaginative flights about the things beyond this world but also by their attachment to mathematics.

Pythagoreans are reductionists. (This is a word that comes to me from I know not where.) Because all things can be subsumed under mathematical constructions, the mathematical constructions are thought to be all that is real. Plato is sorely tempted by this mode of thinking. Because the intelligible forms lend meaningfulness to things and things are only understandable under the forms, Plato often speaks as if the forms are all that is real. In over-emphasizing the reality of the forms, which I myself have been calling the realm of reality, he risks seeming to undervalue the only reality we are immediately aware of, the reality of the active, creative intelligence that gives birth to the forms and lends intelligibility to all things.

The mathematical mode of thought has also led him to expect too much of the definition of terms. To give an account of an idea in terms that are other than the idea itself inevitably fails. There is falsity inbuilt in it. But it is beneficial in a dual way. It discloses the interconnection, the relatedness, and the ultimate unity of ideas, while clearing away misconceptions and mistaken associations. It also leads us to the insight that an idea is its own meaning, its own light. That is the final fruit of all my examinations of the meanings of words.

I am confident that Plato has well grasped all this. Yet his fondness for mathematics keeps him looking for definitions like those of mathematics for moral ideas. He should know, he surely knows, that it is an impossible task and yet he cannot give it up. One day that temptation may lead him to drag philosophy into regions that are not hers.

## DAY TWELVE

Aeschines of Sphettus has many a time said it is his intention and his dearest wish to continue my mission. His enthusiasm is admirable. But I don't think he has sufficiently grasped what I have been trying to do. He has a keen mind and a passion for argument. When I engage in a discussion with him or with another person in his presence, exploring the meaning of a concept, he cannot rid himself of the idea that, with sufficient diligence, the discussion can reach a satisfactory conclusion, a valid definition.

I find it hard to make my companions understand that a definition that can be reached and be found satisfactory is of no use for my purpose. Certainly we can reach good serviceable definitions in many spheres. These become tools with which we can do practical work. But they do not give us understanding.

I try to make my companions see that in exploring the meaning of a word I want them to see that nothing that our thought can extend to stands alone, itself by itself. All things in thought, all things in the world – for the world is only meaningful in our thought – are interwoven with everything else. And we only reach understanding when our quest leads us back to look inside our own minds. Only in our living, active intelligence is there reality. Our living, active intelligence is itself the only reality we know of. And only in turning the mind's eye inwards, to the mind's own creative activity, do we have understanding.

In vain do we seek to find a common character among all the things we call by one name. The things are not called by one name because we have discovered in them something common. They are called by one name because our creative intelligence has arrayed them under one pattern of the mind's own creation. The mind has given them a character. When I explore the meaning of a name I do not expect to find the meaning in the things; I expect the things to send me back empty-handed to look at the meaning in its proper abode and birth-place, in the mind. This is what I have tried to put into the words: It is by Beauty that all things beautiful are beautiful.

I try to make them understand that the *aporia* in which our searches end is not a failure remediable by more diligent search but is the necessary clearing of the ground to lead the mind back to its own inner light.

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Of all my friends and companions the only ones that do not give me any anxiety are the ones who, like my dear friend Crito, live by their inner light, being honourable and kindly and good, without trying to find reasons or to give reasons for their goodness.

When this thought takes hold of my mind, I ask myself, what use then is all the labour I have put myself to? But I know that my labours have not been uncalled for.

In the first place, even a good person, by examining oneself, reaches a higher plane of fulfilment, a new species of perfection, a different quality of goodness.

But of weightier practical importance is the consideration that without constant examination and re-examination of our values and beliefs and presuppositions, we are in danger of having our inner light befogged and enveloped in false notions, or at best notions that have been dulled and dampened and that need to be revitalized and illumined.

To return to those of my companions who are intellectually alert and keen, I am saddened to see that many of them take hold of a single thought or a single valuable trait, and by thinking it suffices for the guidance of life, put themselves in danger of wronging themselves and wronging life itself. Such, I am afraid, is the case with Antisthenes, such is the case with Aristippus. With Plato it is otherwise, his span is so wide, his grasp is so plentiful, that the waves of his thought beat and knock against each other like the tumultuous waves of the ocean. He is the one that can penetrate to the profoundest depths. But his very richness is likely to confuse those who will try to follow him.

I have been writing fervently, as if driven by a daemon (not my habitual kindly daemon) and I do not know whether what I have written makes sense or not. So I had better stop, put off the lamp, and go to sleep.

## DAY THIRTEEN

As much as I at times am alarmed by Plato's reinless imagination, I am filled with awe at his fecund intelligence. In his creative mind thoughts that outwardly, even to their originators, seem contradictory, grow into a new whole on a higher plane of understanding.

Plato was deeply impressed by Heraclitus's insight into the essential impermanence and unreality of all the denizens of the natural world. It seems to me that he could never forgive the world its deceptiveness.

He was also equally deeply impressed by the soaring vision of Parmenides of a Reality that is one, constant, unchanging, and intelligible.

To any ordinary mind these two views seem to stand in irreconcilable conflict. As I write these words a prophetic voice tells me that in Plato's creative mind they are already blissfully wedded and will in time give birth to blessed progeny. Plato will see the One as the realm of the intelligible whose invisible realities lend reality to the fugitive shadows of the perceptible world. He will see the fleeting, insubstantial particular things of the actual world as the ever-dying, ever-regenerated body in which, and in which alone, the Real has objective existence.

Plato will give to all posterity the idea of an ultimate Reality that is above and beyond all that is. All the great thinkers before our time have sought to discover the original, the initial, substance of all things. They and their thought were firmly fixed within the natural world. Even the venerable Parmenides sought a comprehensive Being in which the contradictions and the fallaciousness of the world are denied, but which itself is just an alternative, existing world. Plato will give humanity the idea of a Reality in which we and our world become real, in which the contradictions and fallaciousness of the world are not left out but are healed in the creative oneness of the one, in Creative Eternity.

Plato will call that Reality the Form of the Good and will say that while it transcends knowledge and existence, it gives birth to understanding and true being.

My prophetic voice whispers to me that if Plato does not give his vision the dressing I have given it, he will yet give the inspiration that will lead others to dress it in many and varied robes through which that transcendent Reality is beheld.

My prophetic fervour has so consumed me that for a while now I was hearing and yet not hearing the prison guard repeatedly telling me to extinguish the oil lamp and go to sleep. Now I must do so.

## DAY FOURTEEN

One day, upon entering the palaestra at the Lyceum, I noticed a group of young men, obviously deep in some serious conversation. I moved toward the group. From their posture and attitude I could see that they were intently listening to one of them. At first I could not see who the speaker was, but when I came to within earshot I recognized the quiet but intense tone of the young Plato. I approached quietly, trying not to attract their attention. Plato was speaking with the distraught air of inspiration. He was saying something like this:

"A line is a line. It is just that. We can never make it mean anything more or less than that. But we create the idea of a point. The point is nowhere in the world. Can never be anywhere in the world. But we can make it do many wonderful things. We can think of a line as made up of points. And then we can make that thought produce many beautiful geometrical constructions. But we can also make it produce equally beautiful, but very perplexing, paradoxes, as Zeno of Elea did. It's a reality that has its origin and its whole being in the mind, not in the world, but which can nevertheless make the world meaningful and beautiful and useful, or, sometimes, very frightful. And just as the point, which can work all these wonders, does not exist anywhere in the world but is a reality in the mind and only in the mind, so also the line does not exist in the world but only in the mind. The line that the geometers draw and make use of in their constructions and their arguments is only a shadow-image of the reality that is nowhere but in the mind. Nothing that we can see or touch or perceive through any of the bodily senses is truly real. It is nothing but a fleeting shadow of what is real."

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I stood listening, enraptured, but with fright in my heart. I had long felt that Plato was the one among my companions that grasped the true significance of the distinction I have been emphasizing between the intelligible and the perceptible. But his unbridled enthusiasm and his fiery imagination can surround his insights with blinding glare.

As I said before, Plato's poetical nature, such a lovable thing in him, while it gives him profound insight, at times makes me afraid. When I speak of the

intelligible realm and intelligible ideas, he is fired with enthusiasm, and I can almost literally see him soaring in an intelligible Elysium with actual intelligible Ideas floating all around.

He would ask someone, "Don't we say there is Justice? Don't we mean by that that Justice has being?" And I try to explain that by the intelligible realm I mean the living activity of intelligence and by the intelligible ideas I mean the creative forms and patterns in which intelligence moulds perceptible things and thereby makes them intelligible, that I cannot make sense of independently subsisting forms or ideas. And I know that Plato understands that and does not need me to explain it to him, that he understands the essential distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible, that he knows that the intelligible ideas are not things among things, and yet the poetic garb in which he clothes the thought can lead others into error. I am afraid that it will also lead Plato himself into difficulties when he tries to present his thought in an orderly form.

A voice whispers to me, ages hence, someone from the land of the Nile will say: ideas do not exist but are real; things exist but have no reality except in the mind.

## DAY FIFTEEN

Plato, even as a boy, had political aspirations. He had ample reason to feel strongly that conditions in Athens needed radical reform. He did not need me to give him that conviction as many have insinuated. Unlike my contemporaries who grew up when Athens was under the sway of the intoxicating memories of recent victories and the hubris of present prosperity, Plato and his contemporaries had their formative years amid the calamities and disasters brought about by folly and ignorance. When the Thirty, men of his own kin and class, took over the rule of Athens, it was natural that he should expect them to remedy the faults of the thoughtless rule of the many. He was soon shocked and dismayed to find that those he had thought of as the elect few showed greater lack of wisdom than the uncultured many. And when the many returned to power they showed in their turn that they had not learned anything from their recent experiences. I feel for Plato. I know how embittered and how pained he is by all of this. And yet I feel that Plato still nurses the fond hope that the ills of society can be cured by good political organization and legislation. I fear he may yet have more bitter disappointments in store for him.

That was not my way. I have always been convinced that only good citizens can do their city good. And a good citizen is one who understands what is worthwhile in life. The service that a philosopher, as a philosopher, can render his city is not to give counsel in war or peace, nor to prepare construction plans, nor even to propose legislation for ordering any area of the communal life. Nor is it to impart to the citizens any skill or capability or knowledge. It is first and last to lead the individual citizens to understand what is truly good and what is truly bad and to expel false ideas about what is good and what is bad.

A philosopher, as a philosopher, has no part in government and no role in the practical activities of the community. A philosopher may happen to be a good engineer, a good physician, a good legislator. He can serve his community in this or that capacity in parallel with his service as a philosopher, but the two, even in the same person, do not form a mixture.

Again, a student of philosophy may and should take part in discussing the problems facing his society, and the discipline of thought gained in the study of philosophy may make him better able to discuss such questions

reasonably. But philosophy is not a science that can bring to such discussions any positive contributions of its own.

It is commonly assumed that a philosopher has to give advice and guidance in the practical affairs of his city. In what area? In what field of activity? When it is a question of construction of public works, obviously it is the engineer that can advise. When it is a question of health, it is the physician; when of finance and trade, it is the economist; when of war, it is the general. Will the philosopher lay down guiding principles for these experts? What kind of guiding principles? Principles governing their fields of expertise? Obviously not. Moral principles, ideals, and values?

Superficially, this sounds more like it, but the danger involved in this is too great. For any moral principles or ideals or values enshrined in a fixed form inevitably turn into fetters and shackles incompatible with the creativity necessary for meeting the constantly changing conditions of life. Even more seriously, an established system of principles, ideals, and values, will in time clash with other such systems, for no such system can ever be the sole definitive one for all the peoples of the world. This will breed more bitter enmities and more deadly struggles than even greed for wealth or power.

As I see it, a philosopher can only work on individuals, and then not by imparting any knowledge or beliefs or definitely formulated principles. A philosopher's function is to think, and by thinking incite others to think for themselves. A philosopher's function is to shake all foundations, destroy all systems that pretend to be true and final, so that only the value of this idol-destroying power – the power of active, creative reason – remains unshaken.

That is why I have always thought it my mission – as I put it to the judges at my trial – to be a gadfly stinging people as individual persons to wake them up from the dreams of false beliefs and values to the one precious reality within each and every one of them.

## DAY SIXTEEN

When my friends gathered this morning as usual, I inquired of them of the goings on in the city and of those of our friends who were not present and then we fell to general conversation, one saying one thing and another thing. While we all took part in the give and take of small talk, I observed that Antisthenes was absent even in his presence. I said, "What is it, Antisthenes?" He said, "I had a strange dream the previous night. I saw a strange man in strange attire. The man spoke in a strange barbaric tongue; he said, 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen.' Somehow I thought I could understand that as if it were spoken in plain Hellenic speech, yet I still found it very strange. It seemed to agree, or rather to echo, a thought that has lately been very much on my mind. I have been increasingly feeling that we can never speak the truth of anything."

Antisthenes seemed dazed while he spoke. I said, "You seem to have a point there. Possibly we can never speak the truth of anything. Indeed, how could we when our friend Plato has been telling us that there is no *alêtheia* in things. Indeed, how could there be when Heraclitus has told us that things are never constant and are never what we say they are and when the divine Parmenides sternly warns us that in what seems to mortals there is no true belief? But, my friend, even though we may never speak the truth of anything, we may yet speak what is meaningful. For the meaningful comes from within us and has the reality of our inner reality."

There was a long silence during which all seemed to be in a state of amazement at what I had been saying. Then someone, I think it was Hermogenes, said: "If we make use of the art of Prodicus, we may still be able to speak truly." Most of those present, apart from Antisthenes, seemed to have been comforted by these words. I reflected for a while then said: "I never willingly missed an opportunity to meet Prodicus when the wise man came on a visit to Athens. I was always filled with admiration for the man's ability to draw nice distinctions between words. I thought that was a great help towards clear thinking. But at times I could not help having an uneasy feeling that there might be something deceptive in going after too much refinement of words. I felt there was much *hubris* in thinking we can force words to yield truth by stretching them on the rack of nice refinement. I think that words only yield what we put into them. And what we put into

them can never be fixed once and for all. Indeed, all the time while we are using the words, and while we are examining the words and trying to draw distinctions between them, in that very process we are putting new meanings into them. With every employment of a word in a new context – and every occasion of use brings with it an original context – with every such employment we are actively, creatively, generating new meanings. That is why in my examinations of the meanings of words, I always found we cannot confine any meaningful word within a stringent frame of abstractions. And I always felt that the true value of these examinations was in nothing else but in making us look for meaning within our mind and not in any external determinations. I felt that the purpose and end of all my self-examinations and of my examinations of others was to realize that the only seat and source of *alêtheia* was in our *psuchê*."

When I said that there was some prolonged silence as if my friends were trying to find some meaning in what I had been saying. None of them commented. After a while the conversation took another turn, leaving Antisthenes to his solitary musing.

## DAY SEVENTEEN

When my friends were here today, in the middle of our sundry conversations, Apollodorus said, "O Socrates, I have once again engaged in a discussion in which I tried to defend the position that no one commits wrong willingly, but failed to convince my interlocutors who, as usual, produced the challenge of what they call the experience of *akrasia*. I wish you would once more enlighten me and all our friends here on this question."

So I spoke and answered many questions and replied to some objections, repeating much of what I had said on previous occasions and of what I have already written in some of these prison papers. I will now try to put down what I hope may be of some help in this regard.

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Many of the positions I have been concerned to clarify continue to be misunderstood by persons close to me. I feel that my labours throughout my life will have been frittered to no avail if these positions are not properly understood. I will therefore in these notes return again and again to clarifying my meaning while the god permits my remaining here.

I do not know what makes human beings good or how they become good. I do not know what makes human beings bad or how they become bad. Like everybody else I know some things that help towards making a child grow into a good person and I know some things that contribute to making a child or a grown up person turn out bad. I never claimed or pretended to have anything more or anything better to say on these questions than any of my fellow citizens.

What I always insisted on and was concerned that people should be clear about was that a mature person of sound mental powers will necessarily do good when that person has true understanding of what is truly good and valuable. I insisted that what is truly good and valuable for us and in us is only our untrammelled intelligence that gives us this understanding and that what cramps our intelligence and makes it fail to attain this understanding are ideas, ideals, and values that can all be seen to be false and illusory if only we are willing to think freely, not shirking to question all our passively

received beliefs and judgements. This is the crux and the essence of the position I have been insisting on, that virtue is understanding and that understanding is the whole of virtue. This is all I mean when I insist that all wrongdoing is ignorance, and when others say that this view is not true or is not obvious or needs proof or clarification, I confess that I am utterly incapable of understanding what they mean.

I never thought or said that an unfortunate person whose mind has been warped by bad upbringing or maimed by bad experience can be turned to virtue by any theoretical instruction. A prophetic voice tells me that someone not yet born will one day wisely say that such characters are maimed as regards their potentiality for virtue and that such a condition calls for medication rather than edification.

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Perhaps my position can be seen more clearly in this way. When individuals are faced with situations that involve great sacrifices or the need to undergo great hardships, then, contrary to what would be expected if the resulting decision depended on the outcome of a struggle between separate powers of the *psuchê*, we find that the more painful the sacrifice needed and the more daunting the hardship anticipated, the more readily, indubitably, and unwaveringly a good person finds it easy to make the morally right decision. Why? Because, as I see it, the opposed judgements of value involved are distinctly drawn and it is easier for the mind to see where the right course lies. In such cases, one who succumbs to temptation and follows the morally worse course, will easily be seen as one whose judgements of value have been corrupted by bad upbringing or bad influences. On the contrary, when, for instance, the choice is between two pleasures, one commonly regarded as lower and the other as higher, but which are not essentially opposed, even a good person may go for the lower good because its idea might then be more vividly present in the mind.

I keep reverting to this and keep saying again and again what I have already often said because, while what I say on this question seems to me so plain and simple, I find that to many of my friends it seems baffling, as the discussion initiated by Apollodorus today has again reminded me. In any case, what concerns me in the first place is not to maintain a theory or defend a point of view, but to emphasize that for us human beings to live a good life, a life true to our proper worth as human beings, and that hopefully may be a happy life, we have, by constant, unrelenting examination, to sift and sort our judgements of value, to cleanse them of dross, to free them of

obscurity and entanglement, that we may see clearly that one thing only proves ultimately, finally, absolutely good in itself: a soul good and intelligent, not borrowing value from anything outside itself, but of itself shedding beauty and goodness and intelligibility on all things.

The strange voice that of late has been in the habit of whispering to me mysterious words in unknown tongues now breathes into my soul: *Aimer et penser: c'est la véritable vie des esprits.*

## DAY EIGHTEEN

I had been in the habit of speaking of my *psuchê*, our *psuchê*, and so on. I had always spoken of *psuchê*, *nous*, *phronêsis*, as meaning one and the same thing. I am my *psuchê*, my *psuchê* is myself. It never occurred to me that *psuchê* or *nous* is a separate thing. Even though I knew that Pythagoras and the followers of the Orphic way spoke of the *psuchê* as something separate that comes from another sphere, whither it goes back after death, that did not affect my thinking of *psuchê*. In time I found more and more of my friends, most of all Simmias and Cebes and also Plato, earnestly discussing the whence and whither and other things relating to the *psuchê* as a thing by itself. With all goodwill I tried to follow their discussions, but I could not see of what concern that could be to me. To me my *psuchê* is my inner being, the one thing which I know to be real. It is that which I immediately feel to bloom and thrive when I do a good deed and which darkens and is depressed when I do something bad. My *psuchê* is my inner being as I inwardly know my being; it is that in which alone resides my wellbeing or my woe. I have no interest and find no sense in inquiring what it is, for whatever be the outcome of the inquiry it can in no way add to or enhance the immediate knowledge I have of my *psuchê*, my inner reality.

When I said such things to my friends, some of them would declare that the *psuchê* I speak of, what I mean by *psuchê*, is a totally new idea, something no one has thought of before, and is totally unrelated to what the Hellenes mean by the word, to what Homer or Hesiod meant by it, or to the *psuchê* that is spoken of in Pythagorean and Orphic circles. If that is so, and it may well be so, that confirms me in my view that the mind gives birth to ideas that come from nowhere else and are to be found nowhere else. The mind out of its own reality breeds new realities – not true statements but true beings – that have no being in the world outside the mind. It is in the world of the realities of the mind that we have our proper being as humans.

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As I have said, I have always thought of my *psuchê* as the whole of what I am. But when I say – what to me seems quite obvious – that no one does wrong willingly, many of my friends often object that this is contradicted by

what we see all the time all around us and in our own experience when we know that some action is wrong and yet do it. I have always tried to explain that when that happens it is because we are then confused by having conflicting judgements about what is good and what is bad all jumbled together in our mind. When we fail to sort out our beliefs and bring them into harmony, then when acting we are likely to be impelled by a bad belief while the good belief is also in our mind but not clearly related to our action.

Plato has suggested that if we say that in our *psuchê* there are separate powers, a power of desire, a power of honourable feeling, and a power of reasoning, then we can explain that when it is the power of desire that impels us to act, the action can be opposed to what it would have been had we been moved by the power of reason. I do not see how that explains the problem of our acting against our better judgement.

When I have an itch in some part of my body and I scratch, that is wholly a movement of my body like the motion of my heart or lungs or stomach. It is not an act on the plane of my reasoning being. But if the doctor had told me not to scratch and yet I do, it is because I have both the idea that scratching would give me relief and instant pleasure and also the idea that not scratching helps towards bringing about permanent relief more quickly and I have not so ordered my mind as to make the latter idea have greater prominence in my mind.

When at time of war I run away from the enemy, 'knowing' that that is wrong, I do not at the time truly know that; the knowledge uppermost in my mind then is that the enemy will injure me. If I had beforehand put my store of judgements in proper order I would have stood to the enemy.

The explanation of the experience commonly referred to as *akrasia* in terms of a conflict between different parts of the *psuchê* may be a simple, sensible, intelligible representation of how people behave in situations involving choice. This does not in any way affect the view that human beings, acting as human beings, will not do what their mind clearly judges to be wrong. When they commit wrong they are necessarily subject to a condition that I can only describe as ignorance.

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All human beings want to do what is good for them. When we understand that what is good for us is only what is good absolutely – because it is only that that ensures the health and beauty of our soul – then we can never want to do what is bad. When we do what is bad we are not one with our sound

*nous*. Plato would say we are then moved by desire. I say that then we are our desire.

I would be utterly mad if I denied that people are all the time doing bad things, which they call bad, without being coerced by others. They do the bad things of their own accord. I think it is harmful to right thinking to say that such people do the bad things willingly, because only a healthy, well ordered mind knows what is good for it, what it wants, and therefore only such a healthy, well-ordered mind acts willingly.

## DAY NINETEEN

How humbling it is to realize that there is nothing anyone can say that may not give rise to misunderstanding. I have been saying that a philosopher, as a philosopher, does not have a role to play in the political life of the city. In saying this I do not mean that a philosopher may not be concerned with the affairs, the ills and the wrongs, of the city. Like every good citizen, like every good human being, a philosopher must speak against all folly and all wrong. But a philosopher does so not as a philosopher but as a responsible citizen or rather as a conscientious member of the human race. Philosophy has no special knowledge or principles applicable to practical situations. Philosophy has two functions: one that I have always been insisting on and emphasizing, namely, removing the cobwebs of false judgements and evaluations that trap us into wrongdoing, and another that I have been led to appreciate by my younger friends, especially the son of Ariston, namely the creation of ideas that give us vision and new ideal worlds to live in. Plato says that what I have been saying about the intelligible plane of being as distinct from the perceptible and about that in us which thrives by doing good and suffers by doing wrong are such creative ideas that truly give us new ideal worlds to live in.

Let me make myself perfectly clear. I am not saying that philosophers as individual persons have no capability for contributing or no duty to contribute towards dealing with the questions of their community. As individuals they have the same duties, the same opportunities as all enlightened, morally alert citizens. What I am saying and insist on is that philosophy is not a science or art or expertise and has nothing special to contribute to practice. In other words, philosophy has no content; it is a way of life or an approach to life that may or should make individuals worthy in themselves but not good for anything in particular.

Plato has many times expressed a fond dream, that if ever a philosopher were to rule a city, then that city would be wisely governed and its citizens would be happy. That a philosopher should ever come to rule is not inconceivable though hardly reasonable to expect. But suppose it happened. What could the philosopher do for the citizens? Suppose that she or he has, or has good advisers that have, all the special knowledge necessary for successful government, what can she or he do?

Such a ruler can feed the citizens and give them peace and prosperity. What then? If the citizens themselves are not wise, their prosperity will only make them ask for more, perhaps at the expense of their neighbours, leading to conflict, as when the Athenians, crazed by the strong wine of power and material affluence, unjustly crushed the Melians for not wanting to be involved in a conflict that was as senseless as it was damaging. I will not say with some that the Athenians in acting so unjustly brought upon themselves the many woes that have since befallen them. I do not pretend to know anything about the causes of actual events and I will freely concede that it is conceivable that the Athenians might have succeeded in achieving and consolidating for a long time their unjust ambitions. What I say with full conviction is that the Athenians in perpetrating that act of injustice, there and then harmed what is best in every one of them as human beings and what is best in their communal culture, and that that harm to the soul could in no way be counterbalanced by any worldly success or gain however great.

Will the ruler try to make the citizens good and happy by making them wise? That sounds like the only true way, but how will she or he do that? By making good laws and establishing good institutions? These certainly help in many obvious ways but they will not rule out the evils that come from folly, greed, and prejudice in individuals. Will the ruler make the citizens wise by publishing moral codes and precepts? Waiving the consideration, important and vital though it is, that any established code or precept will soon turn into harmful dogma and superstition, such codes and precepts at best will only have effect in individuals that freely respond to them.

So in the end a philosopher, even if she or he happens to be absolute ruler of a state, can only help citizens by reaching out individually to their free minds. So let a philosopher rule if there be opportunity, and let that ruler give the citizens all the indifferent 'goods' that can come from sane administration – social harmony and comfort and prosperity – but let that philosopher-ruler not forget for a moment that the only true good she or he can do is to reach out to the citizens as individuals and help them see that their true worth, true good, true happiness is nowhere to be found but within themselves. The role of ruler and the role of philosopher remain distinct even if conjoined in the same person.

## DAY TWENTY

When I used to visit Diotima of Mantinea she spoke to me many things — many things which at the time I understood, or thought that I understood, and many more things which at the time I did not understand but which are now coming back to me, which I now clearly hear in her melodious voice and feel I understand for the first time. I believe it is the will of the god that I write them down as I hear them — from Diotima's dictation.

So now, as I prepared my writing materials for putting down my reflections for this day, I recalled distinctly, in her very tones, how on one occasion she admonished me saying:

"Don't ever forget or mistake the true aim and purpose of the dialectic method I taught you. Don't you ever fancy that the *aporia* into which, if the method be properly followed, it inevitably leads, is a failure or a barren result. That *aporia* is the true goal of the dialectic, for from it springs forth the creative insight into the principle of philosophic ignorance. The fruit of the elenchus should be the realization that *alêtheia* is not to be found outside the mind, nor even in any formulation of the mind, but only within the mind, in the self-evidence of the ideas engendered by the mind.

"I have taught you before, o Socrates, that dialectic is the coping stone of philosophy. So what exactly is dialectic? As I have often said, in philosophy there never is a simple or a final answer. But I tell you that without constantly exercising the faculty of giving and receiving reason it is not possible for anyone to know anything of true value. This is dialectic, the highest exercise of pure reason, through which alone you may attain the vision of Reality. When, purely by dialectic, by pure reason unhampered and unsullied by mixture with the unreality of the phenomenal, you seek to advance towards realities, you reach the perfection of the intelligible realm and have communion with the Good. That is the ascent of which I spoke to you on another occasion when I taught you how to rise through the mysteries of Love to the vision of absolute Beauty.

"This vision you will only reach through your own thinking and reflection. No one, neither I nor anyone else, can hand you the truth about it. No definite formulation of thought can give you insight into Reality. No form of words can be true to the highest and profoundest realities. You have to make the journey yourself.

"Thus while it is through dialectic alone that you can behold those realities, dialectic will not yield any final truths regarding those realities. Dialectic will usher you into the divine sanctuary of Reality, but when you speak of your vision of Reality, you will speak in allegory and myth. Beware of the delusion of thinking you can ever utter the truth. For all language, all thought, is imperfect and cannot contain the real.

"Where then do we find a first principle untouched by falsehood? Remember the secret of the elenchus that I taught you. In constantly, unrelentlessly, questioning all presumed truths, you keep the fire of your intelligence alive, and in that living intelligence you live in reality and behold Reality.

"No final truth will ever be spoken of Reality or of any of the realities, the mysteries of life and love and goodness and beauty — that Reality and those realities can only be lived. All representation of those realities in speech and thought, even the purest of rational representations, are myths. Those insightful myths are creations and gifts of dialectic. And dialectic must examine and question them and demolish their foundations. This ceaseless exercise of creation and demolition of myth is the life of intelligence, the only reality.

"Philosophy, the exercise of pure intelligence, is true life, life in reality, and philosophy does not yield truth but meaningful myths that give us insight into the realm of reality, the living, creative activity of our own minds.

"Yes, I say that truth is a shadow which we seek in vain to grasp. And yet I say we must always seek the truth. Is there a contradiction here? No. Eristics, impostors, charlatans, intentionally seek to evade the truth. They implant falsehood within their soul — within what soul they have. A person of moral and intellectual integrity (these are inseparable) will seek the truth, knowing it can never be fixed and fastened: she or he will make of the quest for the truth their guiding star, knowing it can never be finally attained but must never be let go out of sight. Thus they water and nourish the seed of truth in their soul that it bloom and flourish and bring forth flower and fruit and spread abroad light and aromatic fragrance."

## DAY TWENTY-ONE

One day I spoke to Diotima about a thought that had baffled me. "How strange it is", I said, "that perplexities and uncertainties grow around our most firm convictions and our most confident certainties – not only grow around them but they become so bound up with them that they seem to grow necessarily out of our very certainties. I have often been amazed by that," I said.

Diotima looked for a long while at me with her habitual profound, unperturbed look that I often felt to be letting wisdom flow straight from her eyes into my soul so that I somehow immediately understood what she was about to put into words. Then she spoke and her quiet soft voice seemed in the same way not to emit words to my ears but to pour sense into my heart. She said, "O Socrates, you should rather see that as an inestimable blessing. What would become of our profoundest certainties if they remained unquestioned? They lose the inward luminosity of self-evidence and become extraneous dogmata, dead beliefs, festering with the corruption of falsehood because cut off from the rejuvenating breath of active understanding."

I recalled that conversation as I sat down to put in writing the following thoughts which had been hovering in my mind even as I was earlier talking with my visitors on other matters.

I have spent all my life admonishing people to pursue philosophy and virtue, these being one and the same thing as I have always thought. It could not be otherwise. Virtue is the excellence proper to a human being, and that excellence is intelligence, understanding. And the enjoyment of that excellence proper to a human being, the life of intelligence, is genuine satisfaction and bliss, the only happiness not mixed with any deception, so that no one who understood that could ever will to live otherwise or to act in any way deviating from the dictates of intelligence. That was what I meant when I used to affirm what to many seemed to be a paradox, that no one errs willingly in the moral sphere, that all wrongdoing is ignorance and failure of understanding.

But when I see how hard it is to bring people to recognize these, to me, self-evident insights, I am confronted by the baffling question, Can virtue be taught? If not, have my lifelong labours been a hopeless and vain wrestling

with the impossible? If yes, why is there not a clear and sure way to that as there is for teaching all the arts and sciences?

At this point the fecund words of the wise Diotima come to me bearing new meaning — as her words, whenever I recall them, always breed in me meanings I had not seen in them before. Yes, the understanding, the intelligence, that is our birthright, is cluttered and encrusted with foreign dogmata, lifeless beliefs, false values and judgements imposed from outside and accepted unquestioningly. My mission has been to clear away this junk and by questioning arouse the dormant understanding, revive the inert intelligence, and let the *psuchê* shine in its own light.

So to the question, Can virtue be taught?, there is no 'yes' or 'no' answer. If, in our children, we keep the inborn intelligence alive, if we feed their understanding with beauty and love, as Diotima on many occasions said to me; if we come to the aid of those who have not been so fortunate in their upbringing, whose souls have been dimmed and loaded with vile matter, helping them by wholesome questioning to turn their eyesight back to their inner reality — that is the way to lead people to virtue. But there is no science, no ready-made knowledge, no practice and no proceeding to supply virtue from the outside.

I am satisfied that it is not in vain that I have spent my life admonishing people to wisdom and to virtue. I may or may not have been good at it, I may or may not have had any success, but my efforts have not been senseless. I have done the best I could to bring people to their own good and to the only true happiness, the bliss of a wholesome soul, and if the ship from Delos should have arrived this day and I die tomorrow, I shall die in peace.

The oil-lamp is flickering, as if in support to the calls of the prison guard that I put off the lamp and go to sleep. I must obey.

## DAY TWENTY-TWO

One day, waking up at dawn, I found myself impelled to leave my house, not knowing where I was to go. I walked on, not even asking myself where I was heading, until I found myself before Diotima's residence. I knocked at her door and, without asking who it was, she said in a voice that seemed to come from far away, "Come in, Socrates." As I stepped in, her eyes beamed straight into mine and, without waiting to receive my greeting, she spoke abstractedly, softly, as if continuing a soliloquy she had been engaged in.

"Only what is whole is real. Our living experience, the seat and fount of all knowledge and all understanding, is a whole. Thinkers create in that whole distinctions that split the oneness of living experience. This is necessary. This is the nature of thought. Artificial distinctions are the tools of thought. But when we think those distinctions are fixed in the nature of things, then this illusion starts breeding endless falsehoods.

"So one thinks: I consist of a mind and a body. This is a good thought; it enables me to attend to my inner reality. It is necessary if I am to know my true nature and my true worth. But if I take the mind and the body to be two things existing side by side, I begin to face insoluble problems, meaningless problems, such as How did the mind come about or how did the body come about? How does the mind interact with the body or the body with the mind if they are two separately independent things?

"The fragmentation of a person into body and soul is only one example of the fragmentation of a whole, the institution of an ideal distinction into a factual separation, that inexorably brings its nemesis with it.

"It is the same with all the distinctions that thought creates for its workings. Once we forget that they are fictions, tools for specific purposes, they start generating puzzles and riddles. Whenever we fragment a whole, unless we take care to remember that the fragmentation is only legitimate for serving a specific purpose, we lose sight of reality and get lost in a maze of illusions.

"It is the same with all creations of the mind. 'Infinity' is a child of the mind that does very good service for the mind. But if you start questioning it, thinking it is an actual thing, it leads you round and round in a vicious infinity of its own. 'Nothingness' is a child of the mind that does very good

work for the mind. But if you suppose it to have an existence in its own right, you tumble into its emptiness and find no bottom to arrest your fall.

"You must necessarily fragment every whole to make it thinkable, to possess serviceable tools of thought. But beware of thinking the fragments have any reality. To have any understanding you have to turn back to the whole. You must necessarily create fictions to let finite thinking picture reality. But beware of thinking that your fictions are what is real. To have understanding you must turn your gaze from the fiction to the intelligence that creates the fiction."

Diotima's voice is fading away and it is time that I go to sleep.

## DAY TWENTY-THREE

One midsummer morning I woke up to a harsh voice calling, "Socrates!" I recognized the voice of one of Pericles' boys attending on the beautiful Aspasia. "Well, friend," I said, "what brings you at this unlikely hour?" "My lady Aspasia wants to see you," he said. "But it is yet too early." "My lady said I must catch you before you went out on your customary wanderings."

As soon as the sun was up I went to see Aspasia at her residence. I was taken to her room. Upon entering I greeted her with, "Joy, divine Aspasia!" "Why do you call me divine, Socrates?" "You are beautiful, you are good, you are wise; therefore you are a goddess." She laughed and said, "You are a big liar, Socrates. But I will return your compliment and say you are truly prophetic, for the divine is just what I want to talk to you about." Saying this, she held out a book she had in her hands. "What book is that?", I asked. "A book of the wise man of Abdera," she replied, and immediately began reading out the following words: "In respect to the gods, I am unable to know either that they are or that they are not, for there are many obstacles to such knowledge, above all the obscurity of the matter, and the life of man, in that it is so short." She paused for a while, then said, "Well, Socrates, what do you think of what Protagoras says here?"

"The words of a wise man", I said, "must never be passed over lightly. It seems to me that the wise Protagoras has truly spoken wisely. But then other wise persons, poets and poetesses, priests and priestesses, have told us many wonderful things about the gods."

Aspasia was deep in thought. Then softly she spoke inspired words. "Of what the poets and the priests tell us about the gods, some things are wonderful and beautiful, but many of the things they tell are opposed to the beauty and the goodness a pure soul aspires to."

"Have I not said that you are wise and truly divine, Aspasia? The good poets, the genuine poets, speak to us in parables. They tell us that there is something divine and holy and beautiful and good. Of this we may be sure. For myself, nothing can make me doubt that goodness and intelligence and beauty are real and are all reality. This is all we know and all we can say with assurance."

Aspasia said, "You have given voice to what was in my mind, Socrates. But if I ask myself: where is the divine to be found?, then, as I feel sure that

the divine is real, I also feel sure that the divine is within the human soul. But where else?"

"It is in this regard that Protagoras speaks most wisely when he says: 'In respect to the gods, I am unable to know either that they are or that they are not.' You know, dear Aspasia, that I have for long given up looking for knowledge outside the mind. It is only in the things proper to the mind and in the operations of the mind that the idea of knowledge and the idea of certainty have meaning."

Aspasia, trying not to laugh, said, "You mischievous Socrates! As is your habit, you have not given me a clear answer to my question. Like a miser you keep your wisdom to yourself and refuse to teach me."

"My dear Aspasia, it is you who have been teaching me on this occasion as on every other occasion. To fend off the charge of being a miser, however, I will give you a bit of advice. If you ask me what you are to make of the stories told of the gods by poets and priests, I will say, enjoy them as fables and judge them good or bad on their merit as fables. You will then have done honour to the poets and to your intelligence. If anyone asks you whether those stories are true or not true, answer him with the wise words of Protagoras, or better still, answer him with the wise words of Aspasia when she said that some of those tales are beautiful but many are opposed to the beauty and the goodness a pure soul aspires to."

Then I was delightfully amazed when Aspasia, after seeming for a while lost in thought, spoke in a wonderful manner as if inspired, as if to confirm my naming her goddess. Indeed the words she spoke were not of this world. These were her words:

"Truly, in vain do the wise seek to prove the existence of God or the non-existence of God.

"Those who try to find in the investigation of nature evidence of an intelligence governing the world are wrong in demanding too much and expecting too little of science. Science cannot explain anything but science can and eventually will give account of much that at present we find baffling.

"It would be nothing remarkable if the investigation of nature could give a satisfactory account of the ultimate origins of life, a description of the step-by-step process by which the supposedly lifeless original stuff of nature develops into a living organism. That possibility may not even be far off in time. Would they then have 'explained' life? I think much muddled thinking is due to our failure to distinguish between giving an account or description and giving an explanation. The reality of life will remain a mystery even after we have given a full description of how it has come about, just as the

delight in the fragrance of a rose will remain a mystery even after we have given a full account of all that goes on in the body, which sometime will be named chemical and neural processes.

"If we are concerned to affirm the reality and the value of things spiritual, we go about it in the wrong way both when we try to enlist science and when we try to confute science. Science has its domain which knows nothing of value. Value is in the dream world we create for ourselves."

As I write these words, a sneaking doubt invades my mind. Were these actually the words I heard from Aspasia or has some god inspired them in me as I was writing? Perhaps to sweep away the atrocious things told in Holy Books?

I now have to go to sleep.

## DAY TWENTY-FOUR

That day when I spoke with Aspasia about the existence of the gods, on leaving Aspasia's residence I went straight to Diotima's. As soon as I entered Diotima spoke as if commenting on the conversation I had just had with Aspasia.

"Truly," Diotima said, "in vain do the wise seek to prove either the existence of God or the non-existence of God. They err when they deal with the question in the same way as they carry out their investigations into *phusis*. Thus some such wise persons deny the existence of God for the wrong reasons and declare themselves atheists, and when some of them have a change of heart or change of mind, they declare they have gone back to belief in the existence of God, but then again necessarily for the wrong reasons, since their approach was faulty from the start.

"Earlier they had thought that if the investigation of nature can give a coherent account of how things have come to be as we find them to be, then that is all the reality and all the truth there is. They – all those who seek wisdom in the world outside of us – cannot see that all that the investigation of nature can give us is a description of successive states of affairs or schematic formulae for anticipating states of affairs or for bringing about other states of affairs. All of that does not exhaust the reality that cannot be objectified, observed, or described, but can only be lived. The failure to see this is a fault that will live long with the wise and that will some day be dubbed reductionism.

"That is the error of those who proclaim that God does not exist, that the soul does not exist, that love is an illusion, that the mind is a faint reflection – one day they will invent for it the word epiphenomenon – on the ground that their science cannot locate God, the soul, love, the mind, out there in spacetime." (What strange language Diotima was using, I wondered.) "But who said", Diotima continued, "that God can exist? Of course the theologians and the scriptures of the religions established among both Hellenes and barbarians say so. But that is the God that some may readily house in nature and others just as readily banish from nature. Not so the God that we find within ourselves, the God that a genuinely wise man will one day find proclaimed by the starry heavens above us and the moral sense within us – not, mind you, by the marvel discovered by wise mathematicians

and astronomers in the stellar system but by the sense of beauty, the loveliness inspired in us by the starry heavens, or, it would be truer to say, projected by us into the starry heavens.

"Then some of those wise persons who readily put God in nature and as readily cast him out of nature get wise to their error. The elemental stuff of nature couldn't just have rolled itself out on its own. If we say, first there were atoms, well, those atoms must have had some impetus to start tumbling and knocking against each other. Some will say, there must have been a first cause. Others will say, some mind must have created the universe. Created? What a strange notion. Did the universe have to be created? All we know is that it is just there. And if we think of a first cause, an initiator, well, it could just as well be the evil Ahriman of the Zoroastrians as the couple Gaea and Uranus of our tradition. There is no choosing between them.

"No, we cannot find the first cause by diligent search in the world of nature nor by stringent reasoning on the model of our worthy geometricians. For my part, I content myself with saying that, for the world process to be intelligible, we have to think of ultimate reality as intelligent and good.

"Let me say once again that, just as some who busy themselves with the investigation of *phusis*, say that they cannot find God where they have searched for him, so others of them will say that, in the efficacy and intricacy of the ordering of nature, which surpasses our comprehension, they find evidence of a mind responsible for that efficacious and intricate order. First I will say that, while on the one hand what we find incomprehensible in our present state of knowledge may sometime become comprehensible, on the other hand there will probably always be things that remain beyond the comprehension of the human race. But to make that our ground for believing in God in any form or description amounts to equating God with the area of our ignorance, which is hardly flattering for any God. God would be just that clever fellow who does things we cannot understand.

"What should concern us is not the existence or non-existence of some God somewhere out there, whether that God has something to do with people's lives or not. What should concern us is the affirmation of the spiritual realities, the affirmation of the reality of the spiritual life that is the whole of our worth as human beings.

"Those who want to advance the cause of spirituality by finding evidence for the existence of God in the wonders of nature have chosen the wrong battleground. The battle of spirituality against materialism – which your young friend Plato will one day call the Battle of Gods and Giants – cannot be won in the field of nature. It can only be fought and won in the field of our inner reality. The God we find out there is not worth the trouble of going

out to find him. The only God worth seeking is to be found nowhere but within ourselves."

That was one lesson Diotima taught me in her prophetic manner and her words so impressed me that they remained fresh in my mind throughout my life, and I am glad I can now record them as part of my attempt to capture the meaning of my life in words.

I must now go to sleep.

## DAY TWENTY-FIVE

Last night I saw a strange dream. I saw myself seated with friends in the Lyceum when a comely man, a stranger to me, came straight to us. As he was approaching I heard someone call him the wise man of Stagira. He greeted us and said he would like to join us in conversation. We welcomed him and asked him to be seated.

Immediately, as though he had come on purpose to perform some assigned mission, he said to me, "O Socrates, I will readily admit that what you say in general about virtue and the good for human beings is more excellent than the teaching of Pythagoras. Still, I know that, since you love the truth, you will not be angry with me when I say I believe you are wrong when you make the virtues forms of knowledge."

I said, "Much gratitude do I owe you for correcting my mistake. But do me the favour of explaining more plainly what you find wrong with the view you say is mine."

The Stagirite said, "In making the virtues sciences you ignore the unreasoning part of the soul. Your good friend Plato has, some time after your departure to Hades, correctly divided the soul into a reasoning part, a passionate part, and a desiring part, both parts unreasoning but the spirited more akin to reason while the desiring part is farther removed from reason."

I said, "Worthy friend, in saying that I make the virtues sciences you make me wiser than I know myself to be. But to this point we may come back later. About the parts of the soul, indeed I expected Plato to improve much on the thoughts he developed while he was associating with me. But so slow-witted am I that I cannot see in what way this partition of the soul might help. If the spirited and the desiring parts are separate from the reasoning part, then how does their action differ from – if it is not improper to speak of such things – sneezing or sinking into a coma when one's head is hit? The action then, if it is to be called an action, is not an action of the human being as a human being. But if these parts are not truly separate but are somehow joined with the reasoning part, then the more a human being lives truly as a human being, the more the impulses and the inclinations offered by those parts are integrated into the system of goals and values ordered and harmonized by reason, from which issue all acts of a human being acting truly as a human being."

I was embarrassed by the way I was carried away by enthusiasm. I thought the stranger would have every right to say that my speech provided a good example of an act of passion unguided by reason. Fortunately for me, it seems that the Stagirite found what I said too hollow to be worthy of comment.

Instead of commenting on what I had said he continued, "So you think that, since knowledge is a noble thing, best able to govern human beings, if a person knows what is good and what is bad, then that person will not be overcome by anything so as to make him act otherwise than as knowledge dictates, reason being all the support needed for right action."

I said, "Yes, that is what I believe."

Despite his gentle nature and urbane manner he retorted sharply, "But this is starkly contradicted by the facts."

I was taken aback but with an effort managed to hold my ground so that I could somehow say, "I know that people do bad things which even they call bad, but do they then know what is good and what is bad? What people call bad, even when it is actually bad, they call bad for the wrong reason. What people call good, even when it is actually good, they call good for the wrong reason. If people knew that only what prospers the soul is good and only what harms the soul is bad, then no one would willingly do what is hurtful to one's inner treasure."

The Stagirite mused for a while then said, "If you maintain that when people are bad, it is out of ignorance and not of their will, then you will have also to maintain that when they are good, that also is not of their will."

That baffled me and for a while I didn't know what to think. There was a catch somewhere. Then I thought I saw where the problem was. I said, "There is a mixture of two questions here. These must be set apart if we are to think aright. First there is the question as to how we come to be good or bad persons. Then there is the question about how we do good or bad deeds. The question as to how we come to be good or bad persons is a greatly entangled one and to attempt to consider it now would take us away from the problems we have been discussing. When it comes to the question about doing good or bad deeds, to say that one who knows what is good necessarily does the good and therefore does not act of one's will is to wrangle about words. Or, seen from another angle, here too we have a mixing of two different questions. We must set apart will and choice. We choose between alternatives, weighing a greater advantage against a lesser advantage or a greater loss against a lesser loss. But when we are to do good or bad the idea of choice is not relevant. A mother does not choose to suckle

her baby and she is not less free for that. I will not say she has no choice but I will say that she is not faced with the need to make any choice."

My verbiage exasperated the stranger; I know the feeling all too well. He said, "Let us go back to the point you said we may revert to later. You think that all the virtues are forms of knowledge, so that to know what justice is, is to be just."

"My dear friend," I answered, "if that were what I thought, I would lose all hope of ever finding a single just person. For no one knows what justice is. But I believe that by seriously examining the meaning of justice and contemplating the idea of justice inherent in our mind, we nourish and strengthen the *aretê* and *dunamis* of justice that is – I will not say 'in our *psuchê*' but – somehow one with our *psuchê*. We do not become just by knowing what justice – a justice separate from and other than us – is, but by discovering, uncovering, the justice that is in us."

Apparently my answer did not satisfy the stranger. He said, "Socrates, I know that the knowledge of virtue is what you sought after all your life, but we do not want to know what courage is, but to be courageous; we do not want to know what justice is, but to be just."

I said, "My dear friend, I assure you that those of my comrades who gave you to understand that my pursuit was for knowledge of what virtue is have failed to understand me and have misinformed you. As I have said just now, I did not expect them or want them to find the meaning of justice or courage or piety anywhere outside themselves, least of all in any formula of words, but to find it in themselves by contemplating their own inner reality. And I assure you that it was always my conviction that we are not brave by knowing about bravery but by knowing what attitudes and deeds are wholesome for our soul and what harmful, and so with all virtue, we do not acquire virtue by knowing about virtue but by having clear and constantly alive insight into what gives our soul health and beauty and what harms and distorts our soul."

At this point some noise coming from beyond the prison gate disturbed my sleep and interrupted my dream. The objections that the stranger advanced to my views in the dream were all familiar to me from my friends and others but somehow I felt that the dream related to a time beyond the present time. What that might mean I do not profess to know.

## DAY TWENTY-SIX

One day I said to Diotima, "O wise Diotima, the wise Orphics and the followers of Pythagoras in their mysteries teach that the human *psuchê* is a stranger in this world, having come from another holier and purer world and is a prisoner in the body; that human beings must live a life undefiled by the body that their *psuchê* may upon departing from the body return to her abiding home. I feel that there is something beautiful and ennobling in this teaching but I cannot see how we can know that all of this is as they say."

Diotima said to me, "What do the wise know of worlds beyond our world, of time beyond our time? It is not given to humans to know that."

I said, "They say that even while in this world we have to live spiritually in the other world, severing ourselves from this world and from the body."

Diotima looked intently into my eyes and said, "This would be to turn spiritual life into an insubstantial dream. Those wise men truly are in communion with reality. But their vision of that reality is confused because, when they seek to give account of their experience of reality, instead of turning their mind's eye inwards they gaze into the nothingness of the other world.

"Sane otherworldliness is of this world and is realized in this world. To seek the good life in the things of this world is folly; to seek it outside and beyond this world is insanity.

"Sane otherworldliness realizes the value of this world – our world, our only world – in a dimension transcending the world but inseparable of it. The temporal by itself is illusory; the eternal apart from the temporal is a lifeless abstraction. The temporal finds its reality in the eternal; the eternal finds its actuality in the temporal.

"It is only in our constantly dying body that we may live in spiritual eternity. It is in spiritual life that our body overcomes its essential mortality. It is in the incessantly wasting body that the eternal spirit lives.

"This is the mystery of life, death, and eternity."

## DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

I have repeatedly spoken of Plato in these my prison diaries. I am convinced that he is the one of my companions who will carry forward and develop all that I have been concerned to convey throughout my life, not separating and running away with one element or one line of thought, neglecting others, thus distorting the whole, as Aeschines, Antisthenes, Aristippus and others would do, but with insight into the essence of the whole, letting the various elements and dimensions fall in place, even when – as is inevitable – at times emphasizing the one or the other. I prophesy that Plato will donate to human culture a wealth of thought that posterity will take millennia to comprehend.

I was musing these thoughts last night when I fell asleep. As soon as I drowned in sleep (I guess so; how can one measure time in sleep?) I had an amazing dream. I saw Plato, more advanced in age than he is now, seated on a podium before an alert audience, most of them clearly younger than he. It was obviously a regular place of learning. He was speaking quietly, intensely, and his audience hardly breathed. So charmed were they with his magical words! And so was I. Even now after all the give and take I have gone through with my friends throughout the day (Plato was not with them), the words echo distinctly in my mind, so that now I can put them down as I heard them in the dream:

"The ideal world, the world of ideas and ideals, the world of beautiful forms, of sweet melodies, of enchanting mathematical equations, of charming physical theories, of fairies, of fictional characters and situations – all created by the mind –, in which we have a life all our own, our proper human life, which constitutes our spiritual being, our being on the spiritual plane, — that is our reality, and that is all the reality we know, and if all that is but a dream, then **THE DREAM IS THE REALITY!**

"Our inner reality is all the reality we know. Yet our mind has an inborn yearning for the whole of reality, for the All, for ultimate Reality.

"The wise go out in search of reality. In vain! Reality is **NOWHERE**. Reality is the **WHERE** where all that is has its where. To behold reality they have to go not **OUT** but **IN**.

"That Reality we cannot know objectively as something outside ourselves. And if 'knowledge' of that Reality comes to us from outside ourselves, it

turns into a hollow hulk. When our mind cries out in anguish, O Holy Reality, let me see thy face!, there resounds the answer, The reality within thee is the model!

"That ideal of Reality, that idea of the perfect, self-sufficient being that is intelligent and good, is our only means for communion with the All.

"That Reality, good and intelligent, is living and life-affirming. Living and intelligent, it perpetually creates, for an intelligence only lives in the act of creation. For even what seems as passive, receptive understanding is essentially creative.

"What do we know about that Reality? What can we say about that Reality? We behold that Reality, we commune with that Reality, in living our inner intelligent life on the spiritual plane. But we can only give expression to our vision of Reality, to our experience of Reality, in metaphor, parable, and myth.

"It is important never to forget that our expression of Reality – and thus our 'knowledge' of Reality, for all 'knowledge' involves determinate formulations – is always embodied in metaphor, parable, and myth. To forget this is to turn the insight given expression in the myth into a mind-enthralling superstition. That is why, while it is necessary that we constantly give expression to our insight into Reality in creative myth, it is no less necessary always to demolish our myths, showing they are nothing but myths.

"Thus while we have to create gods to make our life worthwhile, we have also to declare our gods to be our own creation. Without God our life is a vain shadow. With a God that is not born out of our inner reality our life is miserable serfdom.

"Our life, with all that we value, all that we hold dear, is but a dream, but I repeat to you: **THE DREAM IS THE REALITY!**"

What a strange dream! Yet I feel it is as prophetic as it is meaningful. Perhaps this dream signifies that my days are now nearing their end. Perhaps the ship from Delos has arrived or is about to arrive and some god wanted to help me crown my meditations with these thoughts. Be that as God wills. I must now go to sleep.

## DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

Before daybreak, sensing the presence of someone in the room, I woke up to find Crito seated at the foot of the bed. I was surprised as it was earlier than the usual time for admitting visitors. I asked him what made him come so early and how he managed to be admitted. Stutteringly, he said he bore heavy news. I asked him if the ship had arrived from Delos. He said no, but from reports that reached the city from Sunium it was expected to arrive this day, in which case I will have to take the hemlock tomorrow.

Once again he entreated me to accede to his advice and the advice of my other friends and flee. He had obviously made all preparations for my escape. That he was allowed to go in at this unlikely hour was evidence that I would have no problem going out. My problem was not to answer him; all the arguments he urged he had urged on a dozen previous occasions. My problem was to soothe the poor old man's agitation and make him see that what I was ordained to face was not such a calamity.

We live our life a moment at a time. In each moment the whole of the life we lived before is present. But we never live but the present moment. As we live moment by moment, we die every moment. And when the momentary repetitions of our life and death come to an end, we merge in the ocean of life from which our individual life for a while was separated. I did not say that to Crito but it was at the back of my mind all the time that I was talking to him.

More relevant to my decision not to accept my friends' plan for my escape is the consideration that this decision was inseparable from my earlier decision to stand trial. When Meletus and his friends brought their charges against me, I saw that not as an indictment of my person but as an indictment of what my whole life and life-work represented, of what my whole life and life-work meant. I decided to accept the challenge and to turn it into an occasion for defending what I stood for all my life. I had to do that to make my life meaningful to myself in the first place. That decision would not be rational without my accepting whatever followed from it. In fact, from the very first I was nearly certain of the outcome. The sentence was not a surprise to me; I expected it, and as I expected it I have to accept it.

I know that people will dispute whether one ought to submit to a formally correct judicial sentence even when it is substantially unjust. I do not think

we can – or that it is right – to lay down inflexible rules even where moral considerations are clearly involved. The only principle we must inexorably adhere to is that we must under all circumstances preserve our inner worth, our moral integrity. No two sets of circumstances are ever identical, no two persons are ever identical, and persons in similar situations may make morally good decisions that are outwardly opposed.

That too I did not say to Crito. I gave him the replies I had reiterated so often that they almost ran on my tongue without rippling the stream of my inner thought. And I knew the poor man knew all the time that his mission was hopeless, but he felt in loyalty to our lifelong amity that he must not give up; and, to assuage his tormenting grief, he needed to keep hoping that the inevitable may yet not befall. Yet that hope in fanning the fire of his grief to cool it kept it alive. Only the irreversible end will give him peace. For his sake, I pray that it may come soon.

We continued our give and take until it was official visiting time and we were surprised by the entry of my customary group of visitors. Crito fell silent in mid-sentence, and our friends, who obviously knew of his mission, for he had come on behalf of them all, sensed his failure, and for a while were dumb. I initiated the conversation by asking about those of our comrades who were not present. I asked in particular about Plato and they told me that he had been taken ill. I asked them to convey to him my best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Upon my mentioning Plato, Terpsion remembered a geometrical problem he had discussed with Plato, and the conversation rolled on and the gloom dissipated. So we continued our customary discussions in the customary manner until it was time for them to go.

Now it is time for me to go to sleep and tomorrow it may be time for me to go to the final sleep. Be that as God may will.

## DAY TWENTY-NINE

When my friends came in this morning the first thing they announced to me, even before we had exchanged greetings, was that the ship from Delos had not arrived yesterday. They could not say it however in the manner proper to the good news it was supposed to be, for, even though they did not put it in words, their mien and tone intimated it was now beyond reasonable doubt that it would arrive this day and tomorrow will be the last day for us together.

I asked them to be seated. They sat down and were silent. I told them of the dream I had related to Crito yesterday when he said the ship was expected to arrive during the day. For just before I woke up to find Crito seated by me I had seen in my dream a stately and beautiful woman dressed in white, who said to me: "The third day hence to fertile Phthia shalt thou come." I told Crito at the time I took that to mean that I was not to depart on the following day but on the day after. It now seemed that the prediction was truthful.

Simmius said, "Happily, o Socrates, you have spoken in terms of a journey hence. When Cebes and I attended the lectures of Philolaus at Thebes we heard from him, and are persuaded, that the soul in the body is in a temporary abode, having descended hither from a higher and purer region, whither she will return. When we die, it is only the lowly and corruptible body that dies, but the soul that was caged in the body, is released and travels forth to her proper and permanent abode."

Menexenus then said, "I too have heard such opinions but I cannot say that I have been given sufficient reasons to convince me of their truth." Simmius said, "If Cebes will cooperate with me, we shall try to recall the arguments advanced by Philolaus. These opinions may bring some comfort, not to Socrates, who does not appear to feel as if faced by some tremendous happening, but to us who are sorely grieved by his impending departure."

Simmius and Cebes then began recounting many arguments they had heard from Philolaus, all intended to show that what we call death is a separation of soul and body, the body, as befits its corruptible nature, then falling apart, while the soul, true to her divine origin, endures. I followed their demonstrations attentively and found great pleasure in their subtle reasoning but did not actively participate in the discussion. Cebes then said

to me, "Why do you not speak your mind, Socrates, either supporting the arguments we advance or else refuting them?"

I said, "O Cebes and Simmias, I too have often heard such opinions and arguments. It would indeed be a fine thing if the soul upon leaving the body – if that is what happens in death – were to journey, with her rational powers preserved intact, to some other abode, where she would commune with other souls, similarly pure and similarly rational. But I do not think it is within the power of human thought and reasoning to know whether such tales speak the truth or are no more than pretty fables. Others more clever than I am may be able to say whether the arguments and demonstrations propounded are worthy of trust. But how could I claim that when all my life I have been saying that the only wisdom permitted me by God is to know that I know nothing?"

"I am not troubled by any thought of what may be after I am dead. If my soul travels somewhere else, if only I preserve my understanding, I shall be happy. But if death is the end of all for me, what cause do I have for complaining?"

"I do not understand what it means to speak of the soul as a thing among things, residing somewhere in the body, some placing it in the heart, some in the brain, and someone in the pineal gland — these last words have been mysteriously whispered in my ear though I have no idea what they could mean. To speak of the soul in that manner belongs to that kind of investigation of things *en tois ergois* which I renounced long ago.

"The divinity and the eternity of the soul that I speak of have no relation to things here or there or to any stretch of time long or short. But as I am convinced that God must be intelligent and good, I feel that by the intelligence in me and by that love inherent in me of what is beautiful and what is good, I am one with God. It is this divinity and this eternity that I live momentarily in my thought and in my deeds; and if I live long or if I live for a day, I have truly lived eternally."

The discussion by Simmias and Cebes, with interspersed comments by some of the others, had taken a long time, and as I was speaking, the prison guard was reminding my visitors that visiting time was up. And now as I write these words the man is reminding me that it is time for me to extinguish the lamp and go to sleep.

## DAY THIRTY

As I was going to sleep last night, I heard the outer prison gate rattling. Presently the prison guard brought in Xanthippe, sobbing and wailing, carrying our youngest child in her arms. The authorities had given her permission to spend this last night with me. I comforted her as much as I could and asked her how she came from home at this hour of night. She said Crito had arranged for her to be accompanied to the prison gate. I asked her to stop her lamentations and her wailing for the sake of the child and for my sake. She made an effort to control herself, but throughout the night, as I slept, I could hear her sobbing, and now and then breaking out into wailing and subdued howling.

At daybreak, the Eleven came in, ordered my chains be taken off, and announced to me officially that I was to die this day before sunset. When the Eleven left, my friends who had been kept waiting outside, were admitted. Xanthippe, who had been crying all the time, now broke into loud lamentations and piercing shrieks, pounding her breast and beating her face. I asked Crito to have her conducted home. He motioned to his boys and they led her out, her wailing and shrieking reaching us from beyond the outer gate.

My friends sat down in their by now accustomed places. I asked if Plato had recovered from his illness. They said he was getting better but was not yet well enough to go out. I asked if they had any news of Aristippus and of Cleombrotus. They said they were believed to be in Aegina.

Apollodorus was weeping and sobbing and many of the others were wiping away tears. I said, "What is this, my dear friends? Is this your idea of how best to make use of these last hours for us together? Are we not to converse of understanding and virtue and of the beautiful and the good while we can? Have we not always been agreed that to contemplate these and discourse of these and hold them before the mind's eye is the greatest good a reasonable person can enjoy? If you do not now show me by your words and deeds that you are still of this opinion, I shall depart in sadness."

We then talked of this and that, some asking for clarification of a point raised in our former conversations, others remembering and relating some experience we had been through together. Nearly everybody tried to say something. There were some smiles and even some laughter. Some tried to

hide their tears; others hid their faces in their palms and sobbed softly, while Apollodorus never stopped crying.

The day wore away. I retired to bathe. Then Xanthippe came and with her the children, accompanied by women of the family. We talked for some time, then I thought it best for them to leave.

The prison officer came to tell me, in obedience to his duty, that I have to take the poison before sunset. I asked Crito to go and ask the attendant to prepare the cup and bring it. I asked my friends to allow me, while the cup was being prepared, to write this last of my daily recordings in prison.

Here is the attendant entering, carrying the cup. Soon I will be no more. Seventy years have I lived. I did not give myself that life. It was a free gift, from whom I know not. While it lasted it was good. What more can I ask for?

## NOTES

### DAY ONE

1) Socrates was born around 470 BC. In 399 BC he was indicted by Meletus, Anytus and Lycon on the ground that he was guilty of not recognizing the gods recognized by the state but introducing new divinities in their stead and that he was also guilty of corrupting the young. He was condemned to death.

2) In Athens a person sentenced to death would normally be executed within twenty-four hours. In the *Phaedo* Plato explains the circumstance which led to the delay in execution in the case of Socrates:

Echecrates: ... What was the reason for this?

Phaedo: An accident, Echecrates; the stern of the ship which the Athenians send to Delos happened to have been crowned on the day before he was tried.

Echecrates: What is this ship?

Phaedo: It is the ship in which, according to Athenian tradition, Theseus went to Crete when he took with him 'the fourteen', and was the saviour of them and of himself. And they are said to have vowed to Apollo at the time, that if they were saved they would send a yearly mission to Delos. Well, the custom has continued without a break to this day, and the whole period of the voyage to and from Delos, beginning when the priest of Apollo crowns the stern of the ship, is a holy season, during which it is strictly forbidden to pollute the city by executions; and when the vessel is detained by contrary winds, the time spent in going and returning is very considerable. As I was saying, the ship was crowned on the day before the trial, and this was the reason why Socrates lay in prison and was not put to death until long after he was condemned." (*Phaedo*, 38a-c, tr. Jowett.)

3) Plato nowhere mentions the exact time Socrates remained in prison, but Xenophon specifies thirty days (*Memorabilia*, IV. viii. 2).

4) God and the god/s: In making Socrates fluctuate between these terms I follow Plato's practice throughout the dialogues.

5) "... the prison authorities permitting": While in prison Socrates composed a hymn to Apollo and versified some of Aesop's fables; so the

fiction of his writing daily reflections at that time is neither unrealistic nor far-fetched.

6) Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea were the decisive battles (between 490 and 480 BC) that finally put an end to the Persian threat to the Greek cities.

7) Pericles (c. 495-429 BC), the Athenian statesman who dominated Athenian politics between 449 and 429 BC when he died. His name is almost synonymous with the golden age of Athens.

## DAY TWO

8) Crito, Socrates' lifetime personal and family friend. Plato portrays him as a simple, kindly man, not particularly given to philosophy. Plato names one dialogue after him and gives him an off-scene appearance in the *Euthydemus*. He is also (inevitably) mentioned in the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*.

9) Apollodorus of Phalerum, a young devotee of Socrates. In the *Apology* he is named among the persons offering to give security in case Socrates was sentenced to a fine. In the *Phaedo* we see him weeping all the time and bursting out in a loud and passionate cry when Socrates drinks the hemlock. He is the narrator in Plato's *Symposium*.

10) Achilles, the hero of the Homeric *Iliad*. Plato more than once alludes to Achilles' decision to avenge his friend Patroclus and die rather than live in safety having neglected what he saw as his duty towards his deceased friend.

11) *Psuchê*, usually translated 'soul', but in Plato's usage it is often best translated by 'mind'. It is a cardinal and uniquely significant concept in Socrates' and Plato's thought, to the consideration of which I revert repeatedly in the journal, and I have found it best in many cases to retain the original Greek term.

12) "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all", *Hamlet*, act iii, scene 1. I have purposely scattered anachronisms throughout the journal, partly to show clearly that my intention is not, in the first place, to represent the thought of the historic Socrates but to present a philosophy derived from Socrates and Plato. To further emphasize this I have also repeatedly resorted to the artifice of dreams and fictional conversations.

## DAY THREE

13) Xanthippe, wife of Socrates. Late sources, perhaps exaggerating on some hints in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and an inconsiderate gibe in his

*Banquet*, have pictured her as a shrew. There is nothing in Plato's works to confirm that view. It is understandable that a simple woman, married to a genius with a mission, would complain of her husband's neglect of his private affairs. I hope I have done her justice.

14) At the time of Socrates' trial and death, at the age of seventy, he had three sons, two of them lads, Lamprocles and Sophroniscus, and one still a baby, Menexenus.

15) Knowledge, intelligence, understanding: Plato draws no sharp distinctions between *epistêmê* (knowledge, science), *nous* (mind, reason), *phronêsis* (intelligence, understanding), *sophia* (wisdom), and other related terms. To translate *epistêmê* in all contexts by 'knowledge' or 'science' can create serious misunderstanding.

#### DAY FOUR

16) Delphi, in central Greece, was the principal sanctuary and oracle of Apollo. Greeks came to the ancient shrine to consult the god on important matters. The god spoke through his priestess, named the Pythia.

17) *Gnôthi sauton*, meaning "Know yourself", was inscribed on the front porch of Apollo's temple at Delphi. Socrates found in those words lasting inspiration.

18) Chaerephon, an enthusiastic companion of Socrates. He seems to have been impulsive. He put to the oracle at Delphi the question whether any man living was wiser than Socrates and received the response that none was. By the time of Socrates' trial Chaerephon was no longer living.

19) Potidaea: Athenian troops besieged Potidaea from 432 BC till the winter of 430 BC. Socrates served there. He was 38 at the start of the siege and clearly had ample opportunity to be by himself then. In the *Symposium* Alcibiades relates how on one occasion Socrates stood from early morning one day till sunrise on the following day completely engrossed in thought.

#### DAY FIVE

20) *Phusis*, nature. The works of the earliest Ionian philosophers were regularly titled *peri phuseôs*, about nature.

21) Thales of Miletus (c. 624-547 BC), commonly regarded as the earliest Greek philosopher. Like all early thinkers, he set no bounds to his speculations and intellectual interests. He was probably well-acquainted with both Egyptian and Babylonian science and is believed to have introduced Egyptian methods of land measurement into Greece. He "had probably

familiarized himself in Sardis with the elements of Babylonian wisdom, and he borrowed from it the law of the periodicity of eclipses, which enabled him to foretell the total eclipse of the sun on May 28, 585 B.C., to the utmost astonishment of his fellow-countrymen" (Theodor Gomperz, *The Greek Thinkers*, English translation by Laurie Magnus). In the sphere of cosmogony, he seems to have speculated that the primordial stuff of the universe is water. He thus set the agenda for the long line of speculative investigators into nature that followed him. We may see him as the originator of the concept of nature or the universe as a unified system.

22) Archelaus of Athens, disciple of Anaxagoras. Some late sources make him a teacher of Socrates, but perhaps this was no more than an unfounded conjecture.

23) Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 500-428 BC), one of the most original of Greek thinkers. He resided and taught in Athens for nearly thirty years, 460 to 430 BC. It is possible that Socrates may have known him at first hand. However, in the *Phaedo* Plato makes Socrates say simply that he "heard someone reading, as he said, from a book of Anaxagoras." Further on he says, "I seized the books and started to read them as fast as I could in my eagerness to know the best and the worst" (*Phaedo*, 97b, 98b, tr. Jowett).

24) Readers acquainted with Plato's *Phaedo* will readily see that I have here drawn heavily on the autobiographical account Plato there puts in the mouth of Socrates. I see the Socratic 'autobiography' in the *Phaedo* as of the utmost importance for understanding the thought of Socrates and of the true nature of philosophical thinking and hence I have repeatedly commented on it in my writings.

25) *Epistêmê*, 'knowledge', but see the note under Day Three on 'knowledge, intelligence, understanding'.

## DAY SIX

26) The Big Bang, the cosmological theory proposed early in the twentieth century. As stated earlier, I introduce these anachronisms not only to highlight the purposive transgression of the strict bounds of historicity in the journal, but also in certain cases to show the relevance of the thought to present-day problems.

27) "Outside the mind there may be *doxa*, there may be *epistêmê*, but there can be no *noêsis*": This is the gist of Plato's theory of knowledge as presented primarily in the central part of the *Republic*. I believe I am not misrepresenting the thought of Socrates here, for Plato's position simply

unfolds the Socratic insight. See my *Plato: An Interpretation*, particularly chapters 6 and 7.

28) *Alêtheia*, 'truth', but in Plato's writings, more often than not, the word means reality, what is real as opposed to what is illusory. See my *Plato: An Interpretation*, ch. 6, "Knowledge and Understanding".

## DAY EIGHT

29) "Many have found my views on moral questions incredible": They still do, and I find that incredible. In the opening paragraph of chapter 2 of *Plato: An Interpretation* I wrote: "It is common to characterize the moral philosophy of Socrates as consisting of a collection of paradoxes: the unity of all virtue; the identity of virtue and knowledge; the maxim that it is better to suffer wrong than commit wrong; and the topmost paradox, that no one does wrong voluntarily. ... Yet I believe that in the early dialogues of Plato – which can be safely regarded as giving a truthful account of Socrates' thought – we have a coherent and highly defensible moral philosophy."

## DAY NINE

30) Alcibiades (c. 450-404 BC), an Athenian general and politician. He was brought up by Pericles. He was a friend and ardent admirer of Socrates, though his indomitable political ambition kept him from joining those associates of Socrates who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to philosophy. In the *Symposium* Plato puts into his mouth the most graphic description we have of Socrates' personal traits and manner. His career was turbulent and he ended by being murdered in Phrygia.

31) Spinoza (1632-1677), one of the greatest philosophers of all time. The sentences I gave in the text are from *Ethics*, II. xlix and Corollary. I meant to insert this anachronistic interpolation because I find Spinoza's moral philosophy in complete agreement with Socrates', and I thought that seeing the Socratic position in the light of Spinoza's may help those who are baffled by Socrates' ethics to appreciate its rationality.

32) *Akrasia*, a later form of the term *akrateia*, rendered by the Lexicon as 'incontinence, want of self-control'. The notion has been the centre of much discussion in moral philosophy and particularly in comments on the moral philosophy of Socrates and Plato. The *locus classicus* for discussion of the notion in Plato is in the closing part of the *Protagoras*, 348c-360e. I return again and again to the discussion of the notion in this book because I think the topic is one surrounded by much misunderstanding.

33) The rationality of moral conduct: Let me reproduce here a note from my old scrapbook:

Why is it that when we speak of the overwhelming of judgement by emotion or passion we always think of blameworthy instances? Not only are there cases where a generous impulse could very likely be impeded by prudence, when we would act above our habitual selves and would afterwards say, "What a fool I was and yet I am glad I did it"; but it would seem that in general obeying our impulses is usually harmless and is even requisite for the unhampered flow of life and for the enjoyment of life. Our life is so much the poorer inasmuch as we cannot let ourselves go. In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where Angel Clare embraces Tess as she is milking the cow, he blames himself for letting his heart outrun his judgement. Yet, thanks to his lapse of judgement, the world enjoyed a moment of glory and poor Tess could carry to her untimely grave a ray of light. Just as there is nothing intrinsically wrong in our acting – as for most of the time we have to – purely on the physical, the physiological, or the biological level, so there is nothing intrinsically wrong in our acting purely on the emotional level. Most of the time that is morally wholesome. But owing to the complexity of human existence, our emotional drives often have to be integrated by our reason into a wider environment and harmonized with other interests. When we fail, when we are morally wrong, the fault is not in our desire or predilection or sentiment; the fault is in our failure to be alert and alive on the rational plane. Moral wrongdoing is poverty of intelligence and Socrates, rightly understood, is fully vindicated.

## DAY TEN

34) Son of Ariston, Plato: In Greece this mode of naming or addressing a person was a gesture of endearment.

35) Scholars have been debating for more than two millennia how much of Socrates' thought there is in Plato's dialogues and how much must be ascribed to Plato himself. This is a debate that can never come to a final conclusion. I do not mean what I make Socrates say of Plato in the journal to be in any way a contribution to this debate. (See the concluding paragraph of the Appendix.)

36) *Aporia*, as used in connection with Socrates' critical examination of ideas, means perplexity. Socrates' examinations regularly end in such perplexity. Scholars know this full well and still insist that the purpose of

those examinations was to reach valid definitions. This is one of the main topics where I seek to demolish firmly settled misconceptions and misunderstandings that inflict much damage on philosophical thinking. Plato may have been inadvertently responsible for initiating these misunderstandings but it was Aristotle that gave them the force of authority, an authority which scholars and professional philosophers have since docilely followed.

## DAY ELEVEN

37) The mutilation of the Hermae and the profanation of the Mysteries: This refers to infamous incidents in Athenian history which occurred in 415 BC. Thucydides in his *Peloponnesian War* writes:

"While they were in the midst of their preparations [for the expedition against Sicily], the Hermae or square stone figures carved after the ancient Athenian fashion, and standing everywhere at the doorways both of temples and private houses, in one night had nearly all of them throughout the city their faces mutilated. The offenders were not known, but great rewards were publicly offered for their detection ...

"Certain metics and servants gave information, not indeed about the Hermae, but about the mutilation of other statues which had shortly before been perpetrated by some young men in a drunken frolic: they also said that the mysteries were repeatedly profaned by the celebration of them in private houses, and of this impiety they accused, among others, Alcibiades. ... " (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book VI, tr. Jowett, abridged).

38) Revolution of the Four Hundred: took place in 411 BC.

39) The Pythagoreans: Pythagoras was born in Samos c. 582 BC, migrated to Italy, and founded an influential philosophical-religious society "whose members bound themselves to a life regulated by definite religious and ethical principles." (Zeller) Pythagoras adopted the doctrine of the transmigration of souls from Orphic mysticism, and the aim of the way of life practised by the Pythagoreans "was to be freed from the circle of births and to enter again into the last, divine state of bliss." (Zeller) Pythagoras discovered the numerical ratios governing the intervals of the musical scale and it may have been this that led to the doctrine that the fundamental nature of things is number. The Pythagoreans made important contributions to the study of mathematics, music, medicine, and other disciplines.

## DAY TWELVE

40) Aeschines of Sphettus, a follower of Socrates. He wrote a number of Socratic dialogues, of which only fragments have survived.

41) Antisthenes, another follower of Socrates. "Our knowledge of him is slight and fragmentary. But such as it is, it has served to stimulate an immense amount of conjecture and hypothesis about him" (G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries*, 1930, 1948, p.160).

42) Aristippus of Cyrene, an intimate companion of Socrates. Some sources name him as the founder of the Cyrenaic school.

43) Socrates' daemon: In the dialogues of Plato, Socrates on a number of occasions mentions a peculiar sign or voice that he at times experiences as warning him not to do something that he was about to do, but never positively prompting him to do something specific. Although he often mentions this sign, sometimes playfully and at other times seriously, and although he occasionally describes it as a divine sign, he never makes much of it.

## DAY THIRTEEN

44) Heraclitus (c. 544-484), born in Ephesus, was one of the most original and most profound philosophers of the pre-Socratic period. He emphasized the impermanence of all particular things and encapsulated this principle in the famous dictum: "We cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh and ever fresh waters are constantly pouring into it."

45) Parmenides of Elea (c. 540-470), another mighty figure of the pre-Socratic period. He emphasized the oneness, wholeness, and immutability of reality and identified the real with the intelligible: "It is the same thing that can be thought and that can be" (Frag. 3, F. M. Cornford's rendering).

46) Creative Eternity: This is the central notion and central principle of my philosophy, which I have put forward principally in *Let Us Philosophize*, Book Two, "Reality", and in *Plato: An Interpretation*. I do not however see myself as unjustly ascribing to Plato a thought foreign to him. In the *Republic* the Form of the Good is, to my mind, clearly living, active, creative. In the *Symposium* the creativity of reality can be clearly sensed. In the *Sophist*, the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus* it comes out explicitly. I find myself in full agreement with A. N. Whitehead when he says that Plato's "mathematical forms are essentially referent to process. This is his own doctrine when he refers to the necessity of life and motion. But only

intermittently did he keep it in mind." (*Modes of Thought*, The Free Press, 1968, pp.92-3.)

#### DAY FOURTEEN

47) The Lyceum: A garden dedicated to the Muses and Apollo Lyceus. The palaestra there was one of Socrates' habitual haunts. Later on Aristotle was to found there his school of philosophy.

48) Zeno of Elea, the favourite disciple of Parmenides. He defended the Parmenidean conception of the oneness of reality by constructing a series of arguments to show that the assumption of multiplicity leads to paradoxical conclusions.

49) "A voice whispers to me, ages hence, someone from the land of the Nile will say: ideas do not exist but are real; things exist but have no reality except in the mind." The distinction between reality and existence which I introduced and insisted on in *Let Us Philosophize* and which I have tried to clarify and defend in *Plato: An Interpretation* and elsewhere in my writings is, in my view, of the highest importance, and again I contend that it is well-grounded in the thought of Socrates and Plato.

#### DAY FIFTEEN

50) The Thirty: The group of thirty oligarchic tyrants who usurped power at Athens in 404 BC when Athens had finally lost the war with Sparta. Plato's uncle Charmides and his cousin Critias were of the Thirty and took the most violent line among the group. They invited Plato to work with them, and in his youthful enthusiasm for reform was at first sympathetic with their aims, and would have gladly cooperated with them. But as he watched developments, he was shocked by the reign of terror they instituted. The democracy, restored in 403, in turn dismayed him by putting to death the man he was to describe as the best, most wise and most just of all whom he had known.

#### DAY SIXTEEN

51) "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen." ("About that of which one cannot speak, one must be silent.") That was the last word, literally and metaphorically, of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

52) "In what seems to mortals there is no true belief", Parmenides, *The Way of Truth*, I, 28-30.

53) Hermogenes: I confess that I just picked up a name from the list given by Plato in the *Phaedo*. Xenophon gives him a role in his *Banquet*. I don't know if anything is known of him beyond the bare name.

54) Prodicus of Iulis on the island of Ceos, a Sophist probably younger than Protagoras. He occupied himself with linguistic studies, particularly with the study of synonyms, where he insisted on drawing fine distinctions between the meanings of seemingly synonymous words. Plato represents him in the *Protagoras* as an invalid and mentions him in other dialogues and makes Socrates say that he had attended some of Prodicus' lectures.

## DAY SEVENTEEN

55) The 'someone not yet born' is Aristotle. The statement that follows is made up of phrases culled from different parts of the *Ethica Nicomachea*. For a fuller note on Aristotle see under Day Twenty-Five.

56) A happy life: I am tempted once again to give here words I had written years ago in my scrapbook:

To seek a happy life is blameless but rather foolish, because, the world being what it is, you will in all likelihood be baffled in your quest. But seek a meaningful, a worthy, life. If you are fortunate, you will receive happiness as an added bonus. If you are unfortunate, you will have the contentment of your own worth.

57) *Aimer et penser: c'est la véritable vie des esprits*. Voltaire.

## DAY EIGHTEEN

58) *Psuchê, nous, phronêsis*: 'soul', 'mind', 'reason', but see note on *psuchê* under Day Two.

59) The Orphic way: A religious movement organized in communities whose membership was open to those who underwent the rites of initiation and promised to obey the rule. "The Orphics taught ... that though men were certainly fallen, they were yet akin to the gods and might rise again by a system of 'purifications' ... and dwell with the gods for evermore" (John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thatles to Plato*). Orphism influenced Pythagoreanism, or perhaps one may say that Pythagoreanism was an offshoot of Orphism.

## DAY NINETEEN

60) ".. crushed the Melians": In 416 BC the Athenians made an expedition against the island of Melos. "The Melians are colonists of the Lacedaemonians who would not submit to Athens like the other islanders. At first they were neutral and took no part. But when the Athenians tried to coerce them by ravaging their lands, they were driven into open hostilities." Thucydides gives an imaginative account of the talks between the Athenians and the Melians in which he clearly pictures the haughty and unprincipled stance taken by the Athenians. They intransigently held to their unjust demands and rejected the Melians' offer to be friends and enemies neither to the Athenians nor to the Lacedaemonians. Then they surrounded the town of Melos with a wall. In the end, the Athenians sent fresh troops. "The place was now closely invested ... the Melians were induced to surrender at discretion. The Athenians thereupon put to death all who were of military age, and made slaves of the women and children." (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book V, tr. Jowett.)

## DAY TWENTY

61) Diotima of Mantinea: In the *Symposium* Plato makes Socrates say that the mysteries of love he is about to disclose he had learned from a woman "wise in this and many other kinds of knowledge", the priestess and prophetess Diotima of Mantinea. Scholars are not agreed as to whether there actually was such a person or whether she was a pure fiction of Plato's invention. In any case, whether there ever was a historic Diotima or not, the role she plays in the *Symposium*, no less than in my book, is purely fictional. I have found it convenient to make use of the character to let Socrates say things that I believe to be genuine developments of Socratic thought without ascribing them to the historic Socrates.

62) The elenchus: The Lexicon defines the Greek word *elegchos* as "a cross-examining, testing, for purposes of disproof or refutation." The term has been appropriated for the Socratic examination of meanings or ideas. The Socratic elenchus is another topic which I strongly feel to have been misunderstood and erroneously represented in mainstream philosophical circles. For a fuller treatment, see chapter 3 of my *Plato: An Interpretation*.

63) Dialectic: The idea of dialectic is closely related to the idea of the elenchus. Plato uses the word loosely in various contexts in different senses, but in the *Republic* he presents a conception of dialectic that is, to my mind, the very heart of philosophical thinking. For my reading of the *Republic* conception of dialectic see *Plato: An Interpretation*, chapter 7, pp.217-220.

64) "giving and receiving reason": A favourite phrase of Plato's that he frequently uses as a variant to the term 'dialectic'.

#### DAY TWENTY-ONE

65) Can virtue be taught? This question, underlying all of Plato's works, is dealt with specifically in the *Protagoras*, on which I comment in chapter 4 of *Plato: An Interpretation*.

#### DAY TWENTY-TWO

66) If the thought expressed here, which is fundamental to my philosophy, appears to be vague, I can only refer the reader to my *Let Us Philosophize*.

#### DAY TWENTY-THREE

67) Aspasia, the gifted wife of Pericles, came from Miletus, the cradle of philosophy, was on intimate terms with Anaxagoras, and was in time formally charged with *asebeia* (impiety, ungodliness). It is this circumstance that inspired me with the idea of the conversation about the gods with Socrates.

68) The wise man of Abdera: Protagoras (c.485-415 BC), the deservedly most famous of the itinerant teachers, known as Sophists, who roamed Hellenic cities in the fifth century BC, offering higher education on a wide range of subjects for pay. Protagoras continued to teach for some 40 years. The famous opening sentence of his book *The Truth* ("Man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, of those that are not that they are not") was critically examined in Plato's *Theaetetus*. His other well-known dictum about the gods, quoted here, is perhaps the first explicit enunciation of agnosticism in the history of Western thought.

#### DAY TWENTY-FOUR

69) ".. the starry heavens above us and the moral sense within us": "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above and the moral law within*." The opening words of the Conclusion of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. (T. K. Abbott's translation.)

70) Ahriman of the Zoroastrians: In Zoroastrianism, the ancient Persian religion, Ahriman is the god of darkness, the eternal destroyer of good,

bringer of death and disease, the personification of evil. He stands opposed to Ahura Mazda, the god of Light.

71) Gaea and Uranus, in Greek mythology, Earth and Heaven as gods. Gaea, Mother Earth, daughter of the god Chaos, gave birth to mountains and seas and to Uranus, Father Heaven, who then became her lover and her husband. From their union were born the Titans.

72) The Battle of Gods and Giants: In the *Sophist*, 245e ff., Plato examines the claims of idealists and materialists and, drawing on Greek mythology, represents their contest as a Battle of Gods and Giants.

#### DAY TWENTY-FIVE

73) The wise man of Stagira is of course Aristotle. Aristotle was born fifteen years after Socrates' death. He joined Plato's Academy in 367 BC when he was seventeen and remained there till Plato's death twenty years later. Aristotle's objections to Socrates' ethical views, like his account of Socrates' method (representing the Socratic elenchus as a search for definitions, etc.), have solidified into unquestioned dogmas of mainstream philosophy to the detriment, in my view, not only of our understanding of Socrates, but also to our whole approach to philosophy. I have been striving in my writings to correct this. Aristotle's criticisms of Socrates' ethical views are found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Magna Moralia*. When I found these conveniently collected in A. D. Lindsay's introduction to the volume of Socratic Discourses (in the Everyman Library), I thought it would be a good thing to make Socrates reply to these criticisms in a similarly convenient setting. I have followed Lindsay's exact arrangement.

74) *Aretê*, the Greek word for goodness, excellence; wider in sense than the English 'virtue' in modern usage.

75) *Dunamis*, the Greek word for power, might, strength. Plato in certain contexts gives it the sense of faculty, capacity for a specific function.

#### DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

76) Once again I have to ask the reader who finds what I have written here hazy and vague to turn to *Let Us Philosophize*.

#### DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

77) For Crito's plan and the arguments he used in trying to persuade Socrates to escape, see Plato's *Crito*, in the first part of which we find the simplest and most beautiful expression of Socrates' moral position. I consider that in a half-dozen pages of the *Crito* we have all the moral philosophy we need, if only we were to absorb it properly.

78) Sunium: "A headland at the southern extremity of Attica and about thirty miles from Athens." (I copy Hugh Tredennick's note to his translation of the *Crito* in *The Last Days of Socrates* (1954, Penguin.)

79) Meletus, who formally filed the indictment against Socrates, a youthful tragic poet of no fame, "with lanky hair, a scanty beard, and a hooked nose", as he was described by Socrates in the *Euthyphro*.

80) Plato had been taken ill: In the *Phaedo* Plato makes a point of explaining his absence on the last day of Socrates' life.

81) Terpsion: Another name that I just picked up from the names supplied by Plato.

## DAY TWENTY-NINE

82) "The third day hence to fertile Phthia shalt thou come." Homer, *Il.* ix. 363. In the *Crito* Socrates relates this dream to Crito.

83) Simmias and Cebes, of Thebes: Associates of Socrates and disciples of Philolaus. In the *Crito*, Crito says that Simmias brought with him money for the purpose of arranging the escape of Socrates and that Cebes was quite ready to do the same.

84) Philolaus of Croton, a Pythagorean philosopher.

85) Readers familiar with Plato's *Phaedo* will observe that I have inverted the roles of Simmias and Cebes on the one hand and Socrates on the other hand. In the *Phaedo* Plato makes Socrates argue for the immortality of the soul against the sceptical objections of Simmias and Cebes. For my critique and interpretation of the *Phaedo* see chapter 5 of *Plato: An Interpretation*.

86) Menexenus, another one of the companions of Socrates named in the *Phaedo* as present. There is a dialogue of Plato's named *Menexenus*, though its authenticity has been disputed.

87) The pineal gland: Descartes has seriously suggested that the soul is located in the pineal gland. As politicians say, No comment!

88) *en tois ergois*: In the 'autobiographical' episode of the *Phaedo*, Socrates says that he has given up the attempt to find philosophical understanding by investigating actual things and has sought that understanding instead by investigating ideas. I consider this as an original and most profound insight into the radical distinction between the proper

spheres of science and philosophy respectively, so that we can justly regard this as the true birth of philosophy proper or as the coming of age of philosophy. In all my writings I have insisted on this view and have tried to explain what I mean in saying this, as I believe that thinkers, throughout the twenty-four centuries that followed Socrates' death, by losing sight of this vital insight, have led both science and philosophy into confusions, muddles, and quandaries, that gravely harm both philosophy and science. Since I have been putting forward this view in all my writings, it is impracticable to specify references, but for a compact statement I may cite "Philosophy As Prophecy", downloadable from my website, [www.back-to-socrates.com](http://www.back-to-socrates.com), and to be included in a volume of collected essays hopefully soon to be published.

## DAY THIRTY

89) Xanthippe's night visit: In the *Phaedo* we are told that when Socrates' friends were admitted into the prison early that morning for their last visit, they found Xanthippe "sitting by him, and holding his child in her arms." So presumably she had spent the night with Socrates in his prison.

90) The Eleven: The board of officials responsible for enforcing the penalties imposed by the courts.

91) ".. pounding her breast and beating her face": Plato writes "*boôsan te kai koptomenên*". C. J. Rowe in his edition of the *Phaedo* renders this by "crying out and lamenting" and comments, "*koptesthai* ('beat oneself', sc. in grief) seems to have come to mean no more than 'grieving', as perhaps at *Rep.* 619c." An Egyptian woman, even today, wailing her husband or any departed dear ones would actually beat her face and pound her breast vehemently. Now with the media showering us daily with heart-rending scenes of loss and bereavement from the Middle East and further east, even Western readers can take the phrase used by Plato in its literal sense, as intended.

92) "I asked if they had any news of Aristippus and of Cleombrotus. They said they were believed to be in Aegina." At *Phaedo*, 59c it is Echecrates, to whom *Phaedo* is relating the incidents of Socrates' last day, who puts the question and receives that answer from *Phaedo*.

93) In the closing pages of the *Phaedo* Plato gives a touching account of the last moments of Socrates' life. Many scholars have questioned the veracity of that account on the ground that the known effects of hemlock poisoning are at variance with Plato's description. Professor Enid Bloch carried out meticulous research and has argued convincingly for the

accuracy of Plato's account. I summarized Professor Bloch's important findings in an article which appeared first in *Philosophy Pathways*, Issue 69, 19 October, 2003, and which I reproduce here as an Appendix.

## APPENDIX

### **CAN WE TRUST PLATO?**

[This article was first published in *Philosophy Pathways*, Issue 69, 19 October, 2003. I have altered one word in the first paragraph.]

Apart from Plato's immeasurable value for philosophy, his works are a source of much incidental information in diverse fields; sometimes they are our only or our primary source, as for instance, for the major representatives of the Sophist movement. To what extent can we trust Plato as a witness for factual matters where we have no means for corroboration or refutation? Luckily, a test-case is available in the shape of Plato's account of the last moments of Socrates' life.

In the closing part of the *Phaedo* Plato gives us a graphic and very touching description of Socrates' death. The passage, familiar to all students of philosophy as it is, is still worth quoting in full.

He walked about until his legs grew heavy, as he said; then he lay on his back, for so the attendant had directed. After a while, the man [who gave him the drug] felt him, examining his feet and legs; then he pinched his foot hard and asked if he felt it. Socrates said he didn't. Then he examined also the legs, and moving upwards in this way he showed us that he *psuchoito te kai pēgnuto* (usually translated: was growing cold and stiff). Again he felt him and said that when it reached the heart he would depart. It had reached the region around the groin when he uncovered his face – for he had covered it up – and said (and those were his last words), "O Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; don't neglect to offer it." "That will be done," said Crito. "See if you have anything else to say." To that question, there was no answer. After a short while he stirred. The man uncovered him and his eyes were set. Seeing that, Crito closed the mouth and the eyes. (117e-118a.)

This account was subjected to grave doubts, particularly during the past three decades. Though Plato does not specify the poison administered to Socrates, but refers to it simply as *to pharmakon* 'the drug', it was generally assumed to be hemlock, and Plato's account was challenged on the ground

that hemlock poisoning would have produced effects quite at variance with Plato's description. This was poised to be established as the standard view.

C. J. Rowe, commenting on this passage in his edition of the *Phaedo* (1993, Cambridge University Press) wrote:

Phaedo's description of the event in [117]e4-118a14 appears to omit some of the more violent symptoms of hemlock poisoning (e.g. nausea, vomiting). Burnet (Appendix I), supposing the description to be historically accurate, relies on the suggestion that the symptoms might vary with different individuals; more plausibly, Gill 1973 argues that the symptoms have been deliberately selected (a) to show S[ocrates]'s physical toughness, (b) for aesthetic reasons, and (c) to 'illuminate, in visual form' the account of death given earlier in the dialogue, as the purification and liberation of the soul from the body (hence the stress on the numbness spreading upwards into the trunk, the loss of sensation indicating the departure of the soul).

Professor Enid Bloch, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY, has now researched the question and has given her findings and conclusions in a remarkable article, "Hemlock Poisoning and the Death of Socrates: Did Plato Tell the Truth?": <http://www.nd.edu/~plato/bloch.htm> She has in fact performed a wonderful feat of research with a dedication and thoroughness that are truly admirable, for, as she explains, "accurate knowledge of hemlock is hard to come by these days, and to discover it one must navigate a veritable thicket of botanical, toxicological, neurological, linguistic, and historical complexities."

Bloch explains that there are a number of plants with different properties that all go by the name hemlock. Two of them in particular, poison hemlock and water hemlock, have quite different characteristics. Scholars who have cast doubt on Plato's account had in mind the effects of water hemlock whose toxins attack the brain and spinal cord, and would produce "a far nastier and more violent end" than Plato has pictured. Toxins from poison hemlock, on the other hand, as Bloch has established, target the peripheral nerves, and would induce the peaceful death described by Plato.

There remained a textual difficulty. Plato says that, beginning with the feet and legs and then going upwards, Socrates' body *psuchoito te kai pēgnuto*, which is usually translated as "was growing cold and rigid". Now "growing cold and rigid" runs counter to the effects of a poison which targets peripheral nerves. Bloch's approach to the problem shows great perspicacity and imaginativeness. Starting from the insight that "the translation of Plato's words might be wrong, or ... the implications of 'cold and stiff' in English might not be the same as in the original Greek", Bloch

explored Homer, Hippocrates, Aristophanes, to conclude that, for Plato's contemporaries, the phrase *psuchoito te kai pēgnuto* carried the sense that "Socrates' legs were 'stuck' or 'congealed', remaining fixed where they were. They were 'cold', that is, inert, lacking in activity and energy, unable to move and unable to feel. In other words, Socrates' legs were paralyzed."

I have to quote Professor Bloch's conclusion in full:

The long, persistent controversy over the death of Socrates may finally have reached its end. By moving back and forth between the ancient and modern records, by uncovering the many layers of botanical and linguistic confusion, by learning the lessons of modern neurology, and by entering fully into the centuries-old debate, we have been able to bring every piece of the puzzle together. After so much complexity, the answer is almost simple. Socrates died gently and peacefully, just as Plato said he did. For Plato not only told the truth, he did so with astounding medical accuracy.

So it seems we can trust Plato's testimony when it comes to historical and factual data. This, I believe, has no bearing on the question of whether the philosophical content of the *Phaedo* is to be ascribed to Socrates or Plato, nor in general on the objectivity of Plato's representation of Socrates' thought. Plato, in my view, fully appropriated Socrates' philosophical thought and outlook. In presenting and developing that philosophy, it would have been hard for Plato himself to draw a fine line between what was due to Socrates and what to himself. Moreover, I believe that Plato must have felt that he would be untrue to the spirit of the master if he did not present his thought in the best possible light, which would necessarily be Plato's own light. There is no question of veracity here, for Plato was not writing a history of philosophy but, essentially, carrying on a mission. Even if we go so far as to assume that, in the process, he may have varied, altered, or falsified the original, he could not be conscious of that any more than Paul of Tarsus could have been conscious of having falsified the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. For us, today, it is the philosophy in the Platonic Dialogues that matters. Each of us is at liberty to say: I conjecture this was what Socrates thought and that was what Plato contributed; but if we are wise we have to acknowledge that, for each of us, that conjecture is her or his private myth.

