

The Attunement Theory of the Soul in the *Phaedo*

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0. Introduction

At *Phaedo* 86b7–c2 Plato makes Simmias, one of Socrates' main interlocutors in the dialogue, present the theory that the soul is the 'blend' (κρᾶσις) and 'attunement' (ἄρμονία) of the hot, cold, dry, wet and certain other such things that make taut and hold together the body.¹ According to this theory, when those things are properly and proportionately held together, the soul exists as a sort of attunement; when, on the other hand, they are improperly and disproportionately loosened or tautened because of illness or for some other reasons, the soul perishes at once, just like other sorts of attunement. Simmias thus casts serious doubt upon Socrates' previous arguments in the dialogue that the soul is immortal.

Who originated this attunement theory of the soul is a historical conundrum: there is no reliable evidence for identifying its authorship. Among the older thinkers, however, there is one attribution that receives some support from ancient writers: the Pythagoreans, especially Philolaus. For example, Plotinus, Olympiodorus and Philoponus discuss the view that the soul is an attunement by reference to the Pythagoreans;² Macrobius, more specifically, reports that Pythagoras and Philolaus said that the soul was an attunement.³ However, Plotinus and Philoponus, presumably bearing in mind Plato's arguments against the attunement theory in the *Phaedo*, takes pains to distinguish the Pythagorean attunement theory from the one Simmias introduces in our passage, that the soul is the attunement of bodily elements. Therefore, their reports constitute little evidence for, or rather evidence against, the view that Simmias' attunement theory derives from the Pythagoreans.⁴ (Olympiodorus merely says that the doctrine of soul as an attunement was held by Simmias and certain Pythagoreans.) There is also good reason to doubt Macrobius' report, aside from the fact that it is quite late. For Aristotle does not assign the attunement theory to the Pythagoreans, but introduces it as a view held by 'many'

¹ All translations of this paper are from Sedley and Long 2011. But they are occasionally modified where necessary for the clarity of exposition.

² Plot. IV 7.8⁴; Olymp. in *Phd.* 10.2, 3–4 [Westerink 1976, vol. 1]; Phlp. in *de An.* 70, 5–18.

³ DK 44A23.

⁴ Cf. Gottschalk 1971, 192–3.

(*de An.* 1.4, 407b27–32) or ‘many of the wise’ (*Pol.* 8.5, 1340b17–19). And he ascribes basically different views of the soul to the Pythagoreans (*de An.* 1.2, 404a16–20, 407b20–23). If Macrobius’ report were accurate, it would be strange that Aristotle does not mention the doctrine in question as Pythagorean.

Despite all this tenuous doxographical evidence, however, many modern scholars have accepted the Pythagorean origin of Simmias’ attunement theory of the soul, mainly because they think that the *Phaedo* gives us enough evidence for the attribution of the theory to Philolaus.⁵ At 61d6–7, for instance, Simmias and Cebes, who are both Thebans, are said to have been acquainted with Philolaus in their city; at 88d1–6 Plato makes Echebrates, who is reported by Diogenes Laertius to have been a Pythagorean and disciple of Philolaus, express the feeling that Simmias’ attunement theory of the soul has an extraordinary attraction.⁶ At 86b7, moreover, Simmias claims that ‘we’ take the soul to be something like an attunement, and at 92d1–2 that he accepted the attunement theory of the soul just as ‘most people’ do; by ‘we’ and ‘most people’ those scholars take him to mean the Pythagoreans, including Philolaus. For those reasons Simmias is widely supposed to be acting as their spokesman in the dialogue. It is highly likely that Macrobius’ report likewise derived from reading those passages in the *Phaedo*. The issue then boils down to the question whether the dialogue really corroborates the Pythagorean origin of Simmias’ attunement theory of the soul.

In this paper I challenge this common reading of the dialogue, that Simmias’ attunement theory of the soul is to be credited to the Pythagoreans or Philolaus, by carefully examining those passages in the *Phaedo* that are assumed to support the view.⁷ I share with some other commentators the opinion that he is not depicted as a representative of a specific philosopher or school, but rather as that of ordinary educated people, if not of the man in the street.⁸ They, however, have not gone on to

⁵ Barnes 1979, 386–91; Burnet 1911, 82; Caston 1997, 319–23; Cornford 1922, 145–50; Guthrie 1962, vol.1, 306–19; Horky 2013, 171; Sedley 1995, 11; Sedley and Long 2011, 78, n. 41; Young 2013, 474, n. 17. Cf. Huffman 1993, 326–32, who concludes that we have no reliable external evidence that Philolaus thought that the soul was an attunement, but nevertheless goes on to argue that his theory of the soul would not have been so different from what Simmias describes in the *Phaedo*.

⁶ D.L. 8.46. Cf. Iamb. *VP* 251.

⁷ Gottschalk 1971, 193–4 briefly summarises various suggestions about the authorship of Simmias’ attunement theory: the Eleatics, Empedocles, Alcmaeon, the Sicilian medical school and Heraclitus. Rowett 2017, 373–87 has recently argued that the theory derives from Heraclitus.

⁸ Archer-Hind 1894, 105–6; Gallop 1975, 148; Hackforth 1955, 101–3. Rowe 1993, 6–7, 204 also rejects that Simmias is treated as Pythagorean, but thinks that Simmias’ attunement theory is based on some technical discussion in the Platonic circle.

explain why Simmias' attunement theory of the soul is said in the dialogue to have attracted many people, which is a question crucial to assessing its nature as a philosophical theory. It seems to me that we can have a fairly clear answer to the question by examining the wider context in which Simmias' attunement theory is introduced, especially its relation to Socrates' preceding argument, the affinity argument. If my reading of the relevant passages is correct, then the attunement theory of the soul as presented in the dialogue is hardly based on profound theoretical grounds. Plato introduces it as one of the popular beliefs that appeal only to apparent plausibility in the intellectual atmosphere where materialistic views of the world had become dominant. It is therefore wrong to use the dialogue as evidence for identifying the philosophical authorship of the theory; trying to do so will rather distort what Plato intends to convey about the nature of Simmias' attunement theory of the soul, which I shall focus on clarifying in the paper.

1. Criticisms of the Pythagorean Origin

The first point to discuss is an obvious problem with attributing Simmias' attunement theory of the soul to the Pythagoreans, who believed in the transmigration and immortality of the soul. Simmias introduces the theory to object to Socrates that the soul, if a sort of attunement, will perish straightaway when the body whose elements constitute that attunement is destructed. It is hard to believe that any Pythagorean thinker could endorse a theory that clearly implies the mortality of the soul. This problem will simply go away if we do not suppose that Simmias' theory is Pythagorean. However, scholars have attempted to resolve the issue broadly in two different ways.

Some have thought it possible for Philolaus to have rejected immortality, because the fact that he was a Pythagorean does not necessarily mean that he accepted transmigration and immortality, and we do not have external sources that explicitly confirm his acceptance. In view of the implication of Simmias' attunement theory, therefore, they have concluded that Philolaus actually forsook the Pythagorean orthodoxy.⁹ It seems to me, however, that the *Phaedo* strongly indicates that he believed in the existence of the afterlife. At 61e6–8 Cebes reports that Philolaus preached against suicide. But since he also says that he did not hear anything clear about it from him (61d8, e8–9), all that is clear from this passage is the mere fact that Philolaus prohibited suicide for some reason. The opponents have therefore argued that, since prohibiting suicide does not logically imply supporting

⁹ Huffman 1993, 330; McKirahan 2016, 67, 69.

the existence of the afterlife, Philolaus could abandon the doctrine of transmigration and immortality. Given the context, however, this reading is highly implausible. For the prohibition on suicide is brought up for discussion when Socrates has claimed that Evenus, if he is a philosopher, will be willing ‘to follow’ (ἔπεσθαι) someone who is dying, namely Socrates (61c2–d5); Socrates then remarks at 61d9–e3 that he will happily tell Cebes about issues related to suicide because it is appropriate for someone who is about ‘to travel there’ (ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν), namely Socrates, to consider thoroughly and tell stories about what the stay there is like. As you see, the subject of forbidding suicide is closely intertwined to that of the posthumous fate of the soul. It would therefore be rather odd to mention Philolaus in this context, if Plato assumed him to be the originator of Simmias’ attunement theory. In fact, Socrates goes on to explain that the reason for banning suicide is that human beings are one of the gods’ possessions and in a sort of prison, and therefore that one must not release oneself from it or run away (62b3–9). This claim clearly assumes that the soul continues to exist after it is separated from the body. It is true that he introduces such an esoteric doctrine simply as hearsay (ἐξ ἀκοῆς, 61d9–10) and what is said in secret accounts (ἀπορρήτοις, 62b2–3), not connected to Philolaus. I therefore agree that the passage cannot be used as evidence that Philolaus endorsed that specific doctrine.¹⁰ My claim, however, is that the present context that presupposes the existence of the afterlife makes it extremely unnatural, if not impossible, to suppose that Plato thought of him as endorsing a theory that implies the immediate destruction of the soul after death, and therefore as preaching against suicide for reasons that have nothing to do with the soul’s survival after death, such as the reason that this single life is invaluable, and so on.

Another solution that has been suggested in the literature is to suppose that Philolaus could endorse both Simmias’ attunement theory and the immortality of the soul, either because he did not realize the incompatibility between them, which was first exposed in the *Phaedo*,¹¹ or because he thought that what can survive after death is different from the soul that is an attunement.¹² It seems to me, however, that neither option is convincing. As for the former, Plato takes it for granted that taking the soul as an attunement straightforwardly entails that it perishes immediately after death. There is no inkling in the dialogue that there may be a sort of attunement that

¹⁰ Cf. DK 44B14, 15. Huffman 1993, 402–10 offers a detailed discussion of why these fragments are spurious. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss their authenticity, but my point does not rely on them being genuine.

¹¹ Sedley 1995, 12–13. This possibility is also mentioned by Burkert 1972, 272.

¹² Huffman 1993, 330–2.

could survive death. Socrates' sole focus in dealing with Simmias' objection is therefore to establish that the soul is not an attunement at all, rather than that it is not the sort of attunement Simmias presents it as. It is hard to suppose that Philolaus was confused about, or unaware of, the direct relation of the attunement theory to the mortality of the soul that is treated in the dialogue as self-evident. The second option, on the other hand, is supported by the fact that in fragment 13 Philolaus connects the soul (*ψυχή*) to the heart, and intellect (*νοῦς*) to the head. The idea is that he might have thought that, even though *ψυχή* perishes at death, some other psychic element like *νοῦς* still survives and transmigrates. I do not mean to deny that Philolaus himself could make that distinction, avoiding the obvious contradiction between the attunement theory of *ψυχή* and his belief in transmigration and immortality. My point, however, is that this distinction is well beyond what Simmias offers in the *Phaedo*, and that the dialogue cannot be read as attacking the concept of that immortal psychic element which is different from *ψυχή* as a material life-principle. At 91e5–92e4 Socrates gives his first reply to Simmias' objection, by means of the theory of recollection. The gist of his argument here is that, while the theory of recollection entails that the soul existed before the body it enters comes into existence, an attunement cannot exist before its constituents come into existence. This argument clearly suggests that the discussants presuppose that a psychic element that may transmigrate is identical with the attunement in question. If Plato had meant to criticize Philolaus' idea of a separate psychic element that survives, however, this identification would make no sense, because the argument is utterly inefficacious against those who distinguish between the psychic element that existed before birth and the soul as an attunement that came into existence after birth.

The second point to discuss is Simmias' remark at 92c11–d2 that he accepted the attunement theory of the soul for the same reason that 'most people believe it' (*τοῖς πολλοῖς δοκεῖ ἀνθρώποις*). As long as we take it at face value, it is natural to suppose that by 'most people' he refers to a wider range of people than the Pythagoreans. And it follows from this that 'we' at 86b7, corresponding with 'most people', refers to general intellectuals rather than members of a specific philosophical school. What is important here is that, when introducing the attunement theory, Simmias is guessing that Socrates is already aware that he supports it along with the others he refers to by 'we' (86b6). It implies that Socrates somehow learned or noticed their endorsement of the attunement theory on an

earlier occasion.¹³ It is true that he knows that Philolaus stayed with Simmias and Cebes for a certain period, mentioned at 61d6–7. Given, however, that Cebes there professes their ignorance of Philolaus’ view about the prohibition on suicide, it is difficult to suppose that his mere knowledge of Philolaus’ sojourn with them has led to his awareness that Simmias is about to present a Pythagorean psychology. At 64c4–9, more importantly, where Socrates asks Simmias whether he is satisfied with the definition of death as the separation of the soul from the body, Simmias shows no hesitation in accepting it, despite its obvious implication that the soul continues to exist independently of the body. He then goes on to act as an interlocutor loyal to Socrates’ guidance until Cebes starts objecting to Socrates at 69e5 that the soul may perish when separated from the body. Since Socrates’ definition of death is hardly compatible with the immediate destruction of the soul after death, it seems that Simmias, down to that point of the dialogue (69e5), has neither thought consciously of the attunement theory himself, even if he has implicitly endorsed it all along, nor given Socrates any clue to his endorsement of it. This also excludes the possibility that the direct reason for Simmias’ guess that Socrates anticipates his introduction of the attunement theory is supposed to be their exchange(s) had outside the dialogue. It emerges from my observation so far that there needs to be some indication that Simmias may put forward a theory of the soul that implies its mortality, after that point of discussion within the dialogue.

A plausible sign, I suggest, is the two main interlocutors’ constant anxiety about the soul’s dissipation after death, introduced first at 69e5–70b4. After Socrates has expressed his hope for an afterlife, Cebes objects to him that people strongly doubt that the soul can be detached from the body because they think that, once the soul is separated from the body, it is dissipated like breath or smoke, flies away in all directions, and isn’t anything anywhere (70a7). In response to this doubt, Socrates puts forward the cyclical argument and recollection argument to prove that the soul can exist without the body. Simmias insists, however, that Cebes’ worry about the

¹³ Cf. Rowe 1993, 204–5. Simmias says, ‘In actual fact, Socrates, I think that you yourself are well aware that we take the soul to be something of precisely this kind’ (καὶ γὰρ οὖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, οἶμαι ἔγωγε καὶ αὐτόν σε τοῦτο ἐντεθυμῆσθαι, ὅτι τοιοῦτόν τι μάλιστα ὑπολαμβάνομεν τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι). Rowett 2017, 379–83 has recently argued that the passage means that Socrates himself too once took the view Simmias is about to introduce because τοῦτο refers to the attunement theory rather than to the ὅτι clause as a whole. But if so, the perfect tense of the word ἐντεθυμῆσθαι would mean that Socrates still endorses the theory now, which clearly does not match the context. I do not think plausible Rowett’s claim that the perfect tense might suggest Simmias’ inference that Socrates has now abandoned such a naturalistic view as the attunement theory.

soul's dissipation, which is shared with most people (τὸ τῶν πολλῶν), still stands, and Cebes confirms this opinion once again (77b3–c1; cf. 80d8–e1).

Commentators often point out the similarity of their claim to the Homeric concept of the soul flying away like smoke after death (e.g. *Il.* 16. 856–7; 23. 100–1; 103–4).¹⁴ However, more attention should be paid to the difference: at least in the cited passages, of which Plato would have undoubtedly been well aware (cf. *R.* 386d–387a), Homer holds the view that the soul exists somewhere after death, especially in Hades, but both interlocutors express the fear that the soul may not exist anywhere after its dissipation.¹⁵ Some might object that Homer implies that the soul after death becomes witless, which can be seen as equivalent to ceasing to exist after death; and that, since Cebes also asks Socrates to prove that the soul keeps some power (δύναμιν) and wisdom (φρόνησιν) after death (70b4), his worry is still driven by the Homeric teaching.¹⁶ However, we cannot plausibly identify the soul's existence with its possession of intelligence for the following reasons. Despite Cebes' request to show that the soul retains intelligence after death, all the arguments Socrates makes for that specific point in the dialogue are the recollection argument, where souls are said to have had wisdom, separate from bodies, *before* entering human forms (76c11–12). Since this consequence, as we mentioned above, does not completely remove the interlocutors' anxiety, Socrates would need another argument, if the Homeric idea were at stake, for the soul's holding wisdom *after* death. Although he affirms at 77c6–d5 that immortality has already been proved if the recollection argument is combined with the cyclical argument (70b5–72d10), he does not mention the soul's wisdom there. He starts the cyclical argument by reformulating Cebes' worry simply into the question whether the soul exists in Hades or not (70c4–5), and concludes all its three sub-arguments by basically answering that the soul exists in Hades after death, respectively at 71e2, 72a6–8 and 72d8–10.¹⁷ Nor does Socrates touch on the problem of whether the soul keeps wisdom, in the final argument. The only point that is proved there is that the soul simply exists in Hades (107a1). All this shows that whether the soul possesses wisdom after death or not is a secondary point, and that their worry derives from

¹⁴ Burnet 1911, 46; Rowe 1993, 152–3.

¹⁵ At *Ap.* 40c8–10 Socrates ascribes the idea of transmigration to 'what is said' (τὰ λεγόμενα). Against Burnet 1924, 166–7, who thinks that the reference is to the mysteries, Stokes 1997, 191 and Slings 1994, 384–5 maintain that it is to popular opinion.

¹⁶ Burnet 1911, 46–7; Rowe 2007, 97–8.

¹⁷ See Sedley 2012, 147–8.

something different from such a traditional and religious view of the soul's existence in Hades as seen in the Homeric poems.

What, then, lies behind the interlocutors' objection to Socrates' view of the soul's surviving death? The answer, I suggest, is hinted by the very fact that they repeatedly refer to people's anxiety about the separability of the soul from the body, which is likely to have derived from some materialistic view of the soul that had become prevalent at that time. For the point of their worry is that the soul totally depends for its existence on the body. As we can see, this dependence of the soul on the body is exactly what Simmias emphasizes by the attunement theory. It is true that, when introducing the theory, he says that the attunement (of a lyre) is incorporeal (ἄσώματον, 85e5).¹⁸ When characterizing the soul as the blend (κρᾶσις) and attunement of bodily elements (86c1–2), however, he appears to mean that the soul as an attunement is just the state of those bodily elements that are rightly mixed and tuned.¹⁹ His point thus implies that what we call a soul is nothing other than the body which is in a certain state, namely that it is not an entity separate from, or independent of, the body.²⁰ Such a materialist understanding of the soul, I suppose, certainly paves the way for Socrates' later identification of the soul as an attunement with a composite (σύνθετον, 92a7–b3, b7–8, 92e5–93a10). This identification should not be so problematic as often thought,²¹ because if an attunement is identical with the body whose elements are tuned, then it is not strange to say that the attunement itself is a composite, just as the body is.²² In fact, Simmias does not show any sign of having changed his mind or of hesitating to accept Socrates' materialist specification of the theory. And it is hardly likely that Socrates is surreptitiously altering Simmias' original view for his sake, in the light of the pledge he has given immediately before, that he aims not to win a battle of words but to convince himself (91a6–b1). We can thus conclude that Simmias' attunement theory is fundamentally based on a materialistic view of the soul, and Socrates is faithfully describing it.

¹⁸ Gottschalk 1971, 180–1 claims that by ἁρμονία Simmias means the musical sounds a lyre produces, and therefore that the word ἁρμονία changes its meaning between that of the lyre and that of the soul. But, as Rowe 1993, 203 rightly points out, there should be no substantial change here because a lyre being in tune means its being able to produce musical sounds. Caston 1997, 321, n. 25 also supposes that ἁρμονία means a tuned state in all *Phaedo* passages.

¹⁹ Bostock 1986, 122–3; Gallop 1975, 148–9; Gottschalk 1971, 180–1; Hackforth 1955, 97–8, n. 1; Rowe 1993, 205.

²⁰ For the relation of Simmias' attunement theory to supervenience, see Caston 1997, esp. 319–23.

²¹ E.g. Hackforth 1955, 113, n. 1; Rowe 1993, 218.

²² Young 2013, 479–81 offers a helpful discussion of how an attunement can be seen as a material object.

On this reading, Cebes' representation of prevalent apprehension about the soul's dissipation and Simmias' full approval of it would certainly have prepared the context in which Socrates was expected to anticipate that Simmias, referring to many others, would put forward the theory that the soul is the attunement of bodily elements.

There is also good external evidence that the attunement theory had become wide-spread at that time due to a materialistic world view. In *Laws* X 888e–890a the Athenian introduces a doctrine of wise men (σοφῶν) that is said to have led young people to atheism. The doctrine is basically that all substances in the world, including the soul (cf. 891c), ultimately derive from the basic four elements (fire, water, earth and air), and that this generation process occurs in the way that the opposites whose characters inhere in the elements—the hot and cold, dry and wet, soft and hard, and so on—happen to be ‘attuned’ (ἀρμόττοντα, 889b6) and mixed together ‘by the blend of those opposites’ (τῆ τῶν ἐναντίων κράσει, c1). Then the Athenian says, ‘young people have been embroiled in such a situation *for a long time* (πάλαι, 890b4)’ and ‘doctrines of this sort have been disseminated, as it were, *over the entire human race* (ἐν τοῖς πᾶσιν ... ἀνθρώποις, 891b2–3)’. We can thus see from *Laws* X that it was quite common among young intellectuals in those days to regard not only the soul but all other substances in the world as deriving from the ‘attunement’ (ἀρμονία) and ‘blend’ (κρᾶσις) of opposites. It is striking that Simmias introduces the attunement of the soul in the *Phaedo* with these very terms. This strongly supports that he represents those young people who have discarded the traditional religious teachings under the great and far-reaching influence of a materialistic view of the world.

2. The Relation to the Affinity Argument

I have shown so far that Simmias' belief in the attunement theory of the soul does not stem from the Pythagorean tradition. It does rather from pervading anxiety among contemporary educated people about the soul's dissipation after death. This view will be reinforced by the fact that Simmias introduces the attunement theory in response to Socrates' affinity argument at 78b4–80c1. There Simmias states, ‘one might make *the same argument* about attunement too’ (85e3–4), and ‘when someone either smashes the lyre or cuts and snaps its strings, what if one were to insist, *with the same argument as yours*, that the attunement must still exist and not have perished?’ (86a4–6). By ‘the same argument’ he clearly refers to Socrates' affinity argument. Simmias' point is that if the soul is analogous to an attunement like a

tuned lyre, even though it is invisible and divine, it must perish before those bodily elements of which it is composed, just as the attunement of the lyre perishes well before the lyre and its strings (86a6–b5). This criticism corresponds to the conclusion of the affinity argument that the soul will not perish immediately after death because even the body, which is visible and mortal, remains for a long time (80c2–e1). It will therefore be worth considering in detail what the nature of the affinity argument is, to know the grounds for Simmias' attunement theory.

The affinity argument goes as follows. Socrates starts by proposing to identify what kind of thing is liable (προσῆκει) to be dissipated and what kind of thing is not, and then to consider which of the two kinds the soul is (78b4–10). (For the sake of simplicity, I will focus on the kind of thing the soul is said to be.) Following this proposal, he first points out that the incomposite is not liable to be divided (or dissipated), and that the unchanging is most likely (μάλιστα εἰκόζ) to be incomposite (c1–9). Then, I take it, he shows that the soul is analogous to the unchanging, from two points of view. First, the soul is more similar than the body to the invisible, and has Forms as its proper objects of knowledge (79a1–e8).²³ Second, the soul, which naturally rules the body and plays the master, is similar to and resembles the divine (79e9–80a9).²⁴ And he summarizes:

‘Consider then, Cebes,’ he said, ‘whether from everything that has been said our results are as follows: that soul is most similar to that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, and incapable of being disintegrated, and which always stays in the same condition and state as itself; but that body, on the other hand, is most similar to what is human, mortal, resistant to intelligence, multiform, able to be disintegrated, and never in the same state as itself. Besides these properties, my dear Cebes, can we name any other in respect of which it does not turn out in this same way?’

²³ This section might be divided into two parts, each of which independently contributes to the same conclusion that the soul is similar to the unchanging (Forms). However, Socrates' remark at d10–e1 ‘given *both* what was said before and what we're saying now’ may well suggest that they are in fact a continuous argument for the soul's similarity to the unchanging. Or the second part might be playing the role of supporting the agreement established at 79a9–11, that the invisible is the unchanging. In either case, the aim of this section is to show that the soul is more similar to the unchanging, by appeal to its common features with Forms.

²⁴ The divine is probably regarded as belonging to the unchanging. The ways in which Socrates introduces this section, ‘In this way too’ (καὶ τῆδε, 79e9) and ‘Again on this basis’ (καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα αὖ, 80a2), indicate that he is still concerned with the same conclusion that the soul is analogous to the unchanging. See Rowe 1991, 470; 1993, 187. Cf. R. 380d1–381c9, where gods are said to be least subject to change.

‘No, we can’t.’

‘Very well. If all this is the case, isn’t body liable to be quickly disintegrated, but soul, on the other hand, liable to be altogether incapable of being disintegrated, or nearly so?’

‘Yes, of course.’ (80a10–c1, trans. modified)

This summary of the argument is not faithful to the strategy Socrates mapped out at the beginning. His plan was to show that the soul belongs to the unchanging because the latter most likely belongs to the incomposite, which is not liable to be divided or dissipated. In the above passage, however, he appears to infer the conclusion that the soul is not liable to be disintegrated (indivisible or incapable of being dissipated),²⁵ directly from the point he has established in the argument, that it is most similar to the unchanging. (He probably mentions the other properties as those possessed by Forms and/or the divine.²⁶) But this direct inference is surely valid because something’s being always unchanging clearly entails its being not liable to be disintegrated (for disintegration implies a change). Rather, it is actually better than to argue that the unchanging is most likely incomposite and therefore not liable to be divided or dissipated, because the qualification ‘most likely’ implies the possibility that the unchanging is composite but nevertheless not liable to be divided or dissipated.²⁷ As a result, this specific inference is not only unnecessary but also misleading for establishing the soul’s indivisibility. Without discussing whether the unchanging is incomposite or not, Socrates could more easily or reasonably have reached the conclusion that the soul is not liable to be disintegrated, by focusing on its similarity to the unchanging.

Why, then, does Plato have Socrates take a short detour instead of saying more straightforwardly that the unchanging does not suffer any change, including division or dissipation? My answer is that Plato intends the affinity argument to make a clear contrast with Simmias’ attunement theory. The point of Socrates’ affinity argument is that the soul, which is similar to the invisible and divine, is analogous to the unchanging, which is likely to be incomposite. To this, on the other hand, Simmias objects that the attunement of a lyre, even if similar to the invisible and divine, is

²⁵ Although in conclusion Socrates uses the word ‘disintegrated’ (δισλυτῶ), this should differ little from ‘divided’ (διαπεθῆναι) or ‘dissipated’ (διασκεδάνυσθαι) (cf. 78b4–c5, 80c4–5).

²⁶ He mentions ‘immortal’ at 79d2 as a property of Forms, but probably regards it as a property of the divine as well because ‘divine’ (θεῖον) is contrasted with ‘mortal’ (θνητόν) at 80a2–9. The point that Forms can be grasped only with the reasoning of one’s thought (τῷ τῆς διανοίας λογισμῷ, 79a3) implies that they are intelligible. He also says at 78d5 that they are uniform.

²⁷ Cf. Rowe 1991, 471–2; 1993, 188–9.

nonetheless comparable to the composite, because it is the specific state in which its strings are properly tuned. The attunement theory of the soul, as we saw above, is thus essentially the materialistic view that allows the soul itself to be described as composed of bodily elements. The idea that the soul is analogous to the composite therefore plays a critical role in Simmias' objection to Socrates.

Let us also see Simmias' following remark when he introduces the attunement theory: 'the attunement is something invisible, incorporeal, and utterly beautiful and divine in the tuned lyre, whereas the lyre itself and its strings are bodies, corporeal, composite and earthy, and akin to mortal' (85e4–86a3). No doubt here he is picking up on those characters Socrates applied to the soul in the affinity argument, except for 'utterly beautiful', which I suppose he mentions to justify himself in attaching divinity to the attunement. It is noteworthy that 'incomposite' is absent from the predicates of the attunement, despite the presence of 'composite' in the opposite list. This must be because Simmias is about to put forward the view that the soul's nature in fact lies in being composite, as opposed to Socrates' insistence that it is incomposite.²⁸ In view of this dialogical background, we can reconstruct Simmias' motive for proposing the attunement theory in the following way. Listening to the affinity argument, Simmias conceived of the soul as equally or more similar to the attunement of a lyre because the attunement also shares invisibility, incorporeality and some divinity in the sense that beautiful sounds derive from that tuned state of the lyre; and he had known of the prevailing view that the soul is analogously the tuned state of the elements of which the body is composed; it follows from the affinity argument, he suspected, that the soul is more likely to be composite than incomposite, and will therefore be divided or dissipated after death, just as the attunement of a lyre is destroyed after the instrument is smashed. The point is that Simmias uses the analogy Socrates employed, for the purpose of establishing the exactly opposite conclusion that the soul is more likely to be composite.

Remember here what Simmias says when he realizes that the attunement theory clashes with the recollection theory: he abandons the former because he has held it without any demonstration but only 'with a sort of likelihood and outward appeal' (*μετὰ εἰκότος τινὸς καὶ εὐπρεπείας*, 92d1–2). The dialogical framework we have seen strongly suggests that the reason for his rejection is not that the underlying doctrine of some philosophical school—Pythagorean or not—has turned out to be less justifiable than the theory of recollection, but that the mere analogy of the soul to an attunement has turned out to be unlikely despite its initial attraction. We saw

²⁸ Rowe 1993, 204.

above that one of the key premises for Socrates' affinity argument is that the unchanging is most likely (μάλιστα εικός) to be incomposite, and the changing to be composite (78c6–8). The inference does involve a kind of likelihood of one thing being another. That some analogical reasoning plays a leading role in Simmias' thought is also supported by Socrates' following statement to Simmias at 92b8–9: 'Attunement is not like the thing to which you are *comparing* it (ὃ ἀπαικάζεις)'. He argues that, as long as the recollection theory is endorsed, the soul does not resemble an attunement, because it must have existed before entering the body, whereas the attunement of a lyre comes into being only after the lyre and its strings do. This criticism is clearly levelled at Simmias' comparison of the soul with an attunement. What Simmias implies by 'likelihood' (εικός) and 'outward appeal' (εὐπρέπεια) is therefore that his endorsement of the attunement theory was supported by some superficial analogies rather than by profound philosophical teachings.²⁹

Now we have sufficient reason to believe that the attunement theory appealed to mediocre intellectuals. According to Simmias, many people believe in the attunement theory for the same reason as he does, namely that the soul appears similar to an attunement because of their shared invisibility and divinity; this thought process does not involve any complex reasoning but only an analogical conjecture. At 79e3–6, in the middle of the affinity argument, Cebes expresses how easy the affinity argument is to understand, by saying 'from this approach everyone, *even the dullest learner*, would grant that soul is in every possible way more similar to what always stays in the same condition than to what does not.' By 'this approach' he is surely referring to the analogical inference that the soul is similar to the unchanging Forms, from the agreement that they are both invisible and have an essential link from an epistemological point of view (79a1–e8). Although he does not provide such an assessment of the next section of the argument (79e9–80a9), the way in which Socrates infers that the soul is divine (and, as we saw above, unchanging) is based essentially on the same analogical reasoning as the previous one. Cebes' claim of simplicity should also be true of this second analogical inference.

We need to notice in this regard that the affinity argument has a sophistic nature: it is mainly aimed at persuading people rather than at demonstrating the truth. At 91a1–6, in fact, Socrates himself expresses the fear that he may be acting like 'the utterly uneducated people' (οἱ πάνυ ἀπαιδευτοί) who do not care how things

²⁹ For a similar use of εὐπρέπεια, see *Euthd.* 305e–306c.

really are but merely strive to make their claims seem true to the audience.³⁰ Since he is responding to Simmias' and Cebes' criticisms of the affinity argument, this remark should refer specifically to his attitude towards the affinity argument, which does not contain any compelling reasoning. For there is no guarantee, as many commentators point out,³¹ that even if a thing is similar to another, for example, in one respect or even more respects, it is so in another respect as well. This is, however, exactly the procedure Socrates follows in the affinity argument. The soul is similar to Forms because it is invisible, and is similar to the divine because it naturally rules the body; *therefore*, Socrates concludes, it is also similar to Forms and the divine in the respect of invariability, which is likely to be incomposite and then undivided. It is because of this lack of logical rigour that Simmias was able to lead the same argument to the opposite conclusion, that, *because* the soul shares invisibility and divinity with an attunement, it must be a composite of bodily elements, which will perish soon after the body's destruction.

It is reasonable to ask why, then, Socrates presents such a sophistic argument as to aim to produce mere persuasion, despite the fact that his leading interlocutor in that section is Cebes, a philosophically more cautious and advanced interlocutor. What deserves attention here is that Socrates himself is clearly well aware of the limitation of the affinity argument as a proof of immortality. He does not maintain that the soul *is* what is incapable of being disintegrated but only that it is *most similar* to such a thing; and the conclusion is also described in the way that 'the soul is *liable* (προσῆκει) to be altogether incapable of being disintegrated, *or nearly so* (ἐγγύς τι)' (80b9–11). The verb translated as 'is liable' is clearly meant to weaken the certainty of the conclusion, namely of the soul's inclusion among the things incapable of being disintegrated (cf. 78b4–c4). In view of this role of the former qualification, on the other hand, the latter phrase, 'or nearly so', indicates not so much reservations about the argument itself as some limitations on the degree of the soul's indivisibility. The soul is shown to be closest to what cannot be disintegrated but might still perish in the future. The addition of 'or nearly so' undoubtedly

³⁰ Socrates goes on to say, 'I think that now I *will differ* (διοίσειν) from them only to this extent: I won't strive to make what I say seem true to those who are present, except as a byproduct, but instead to make it seem so as much as possible to myself' (my italics, 91a6–b1). The future tense suggests that the arguments he is going to give, namely his criticisms of Simmias' attunement theory and the final argument for immortality, are more substantial than the preceding arguments, and intended to demonstrate the truth seriously. But this does not imply that the recollection argument was less significant, because Socrates simply uses its outcome for his first criticism of the attunement theory at 91c7–92e4. Cf. Rowe 1993, 215.

³¹ Bostock 1986, 119–20; Gallop 1975, 140, 142; Rowe 1993, 189.

anticipates Cebes' objection that the soul will be strong enough to wear out and change many bodies but might be exhausted and dissipated in the end before the last body.³² It is then highly unlikely that Socrates seriously intends the affinity argument to constitute a proof of the soul's immortality.³³

One might object that the affinity argument must have more philosophical substance than I suggest, especially in view of its connection to the theory of Forms.³⁴ But I cannot see any element in the affinity argument that adds to the content of the theory of Forms in the dialogue. For the two features of the theory that are mentioned in the affinity argument are already discussed in more detail in the previous arguments. The first feature is that, while Forms always stay in the same state, particulars never do (78c10–e6). But this is the point Socrates emphasized in the recollection argument.³⁵ The second feature is that when the soul considers something through the body or sense-perception, it cannot grasp anything secure, but that when the soul considers something by itself, it can grasp stable things, namely Forms (79c2–d9). As Socrates himself notices at the beginning (79c2), however, he already made the same point earlier in the dialogue (65a9–67b6). Therefore, there is nothing new in the affinity argument in terms of the development of the theory of Forms in the dialogue. The mere use of the theory of Forms does not add any philosophical significance to the affinity argument.

In contrast, I suggest, Socrates' real motivation behind the affinity argument can be brought to light by looking at how he introduces the argument. Since Cebes first represented people's anxiety about the soul's dissipation at 69e5–70b4, the same concern has persisted among the interlocutors even after the recollection argument. Towards their lingering doubt, Socrates takes an unvacillating stance, saying that the soul's survival after death has already been proved by combining the recollection argument with the preceding, cyclical argument (77c6–d5). Thus, he characterizes their anxiety about death as a childish fear. In response, however, Cebes asks him to convince not themselves but *a child* inside them, who fears death as if it were a bogeyman; Socrates therefore takes on the job of *chanting spells* (ἐπάδεν) in order

³² Sedley 1995, 15–6.

³³ Pace Apolloni 1996, who argues that the affinity argument is of at least equal philosophical merit than the recollection argument and the final argument.

³⁴ I thank the referees for raising this objection.

³⁵ Strictly speaking, the 'equals' syllogism at 74a9–c6 itself does not contain the stronger claim that equal particulars *never* stay in the same state, but only the weaker one that they sometimes appear unequal. But we can see that Socrates is advancing the strong claim in the recollection argument, from his repeated claims that we think of *all* equal particulars as falling short of the Form of the Equal (75a1–3, a9–b2, b6–8; cf. 76d9–e1).

for them to chant it away (77d5–e10). This is how he introduces the affinity argument, which is clearly aimed at persuading less philosophical minds, ironically compared to scared children. And it is such an enchanting argument that Simmias uses for the purpose of advocating the attunement theory and inferring the death of the soul.

3. Conclusion

I hope that the observation so far has shown that Simmias' attunement theory of the soul is not of Pythagorean origin but derived from a materialistic world view that had become widespread at that time, and that it attracted many (probably young) informed people because of its appeal to such simple analogical reasoning as represented in Socrates' affinity argument. I have argued that Plato intends the affinity argument to pave the way for introducing Simmias' counterargument by means of the attunement theory. Those two arguments, as we saw above, have the same structure and the opposite conclusions: Socrates argues that because the soul is similar to the invisible and divine, it will be incomposite and imperishable, whereas Simmias argues that for exactly the same reason, it will be composite and perishable.

The pair of those two arguments surely anticipate Socrates' later warning against misology at 89d1–90d8, which is said to start sneaking in when one believes an argument to be true and finds it to be false later.³⁶ This connection is made clear by seeing Phaedo's report at 88c1–7 about what happened to Socrates' interlocutors who have just listened to Simmias' and Cebes' objections. Phaedo says that the interlocutors were firmly persuaded by the affinity argument, but that they have plummeted into doubt again because of those objections, so that they have become doubtful about not only any argument for immortality and other things but also the very facts of the matter. Plato's implicit message here would thus be that the affinity argument and Simmias' counterargument are perfect examples of arguments so disputatious (*ἀντιλογικὸς λόγος*, 90c1) as to cause misology, and therefore that those who naively believe in the attunement theory are on the verge of falling into that danger, unless they acquire expertise in arguments like Socrates, who presented the affinity argument with full understanding of its proper purpose and limit.

This leads to my final point that Plato directs Socrates' criticisms of the attunement theory at not only Simmias and the other interlocutors but also contemporary readers of the dialogue. I have argued that Simmias represents a prevailing, materialistic view of the world that ultimately leads to doubt about the

³⁶ Cf. Elton 1997, 316; Rowe 1991, 475–6.

separability of the soul from the body after death. Plato's thought would have been that there were many potential attunement theorists in those days, and that the powerful attraction of the theory had had so negative impacts on them as to lead many to disbelief in immortality, misology and so on. This gives an alternative account of why at 88d3–6 he describes Echecrates as an enthusiastic follower of the attunement theory. It is not because he was a Pythagorean but because, I suggest, he was meant to present the position of contemporary readers of the dialogue. The attunement theory would have been so influential, and Plato would therefore have needed to tackle it before putting forward the final argument of the dialogue that the soul is immortal.³⁷

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³⁷ This paper originally derives from the PhD thesis I submitted to the University of Cambridge in 2015. I am heartily grateful to my supervisor there, David Sedley, for reading numerous drafts of the section and giving me valuable comments each time. I also had a chance to discuss an earlier version of the paper at the Fourth Biennial Conference of the International Association for Presocratic Studies (Thessaloniki, June 2014). I would like to thank those who joined the discussion, especially Richard McKirahan and Carl Huffman, for their useful suggestions. I am also thankful to the referees of this journal for their helpful comments. Lastly, I sincerely appreciate the following financial support of the work for the paper: the scholarship from the Japan Student Services Organization and the postdoctoral fellowship from the British Academy.

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