

Forms & the method of hypothesis throughout the *Phaedo*

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(T1) The method of hypothesis in the Final Argument (100a3–c7)

ἀλλ' οὖν δὴ ταύτη γε ὥρμησα, καὶ ὑποθέμενος ἐκάστοτε λόγον ὃν ἂν κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον εἶναι, ἃ μὲν ἂν μοι δοκῇ τούτῳ συμφωνεῖν τίθημι ὡς ἀληθῆ ὄντα, καὶ περὶ αἰτίας καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων, ἃ δ' ἂν μὴ, ὡς οὐκ ἀληθῆ. βούλομαι δέ σοι σαφέστερον εἰπεῖν ἃ λέγω· οἶμαι γὰρ σε νῦν οὐ μανθάνειν.

Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἔφη ὁ Κέβης, οὐ σφόδρα.

Ἄλλ', ἦ δ' ὅς, ὧδε λέγω, οὐδὲν καινόν, ἀλλ' ἄπερ ἀεὶ τε ἄλλοτε καὶ ἐν τῷ παρεληλυθότι λόγῳ οὐδὲν πέπαυμαι λέγων. ἔρχομαι γὰρ δὴ ἐπιχειρῶν σοι ἐπιδείξασθαι τῆς αἰτίας τὸ εἶδος ὃ πεπραγμάτευμαι, καὶ εἶμι πάλιν ἐπ' ἐκεῖνα τὰ πολυθρύλητα καὶ ἄρχομαι ἀπ' ἐκείνων, ὑποθέμενος εἶναι τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα· ἃ εἴ μοι δίδως τε καὶ συγχωρεῖς εἶναι ταῦτα, ἐλπίζω σοι ἐκ τούτων τὴν αἰτίαν ἐπιδείξειν καὶ ἀνευρήσειν ὡς ἀθάνατον ἢ ψυχὴν.

Ἀλλὰ μὴν, ἔφη ὁ Κέβης, ὡς διδόντος σοι οὐκ ἂν φθάνοις περαίνων.

Σκόπει δὴ, ἔφη, τὰ ἐξῆς ἐκείνοις ἔάν σοι συνδοκῇ ὥσπερ ἐμοί. φαίνεται γὰρ μοι, εἴ τί ἐστιν ἄλλο καλὸν πλὴν αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, οὐδὲ δι' ἕν ἄλλο καλὸν εἶναι ἢ διότι μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ· καὶ πάντα δὴ οὕτως λέγω. τῇ τοιαύτῃ αἰτίᾳ συγχωρεῖς;

“This is how I started out: On each occasion I hypothesize whatever claim I deem strongest, and I set down as true whatever I think harmonizes with it, both about cause and about everything else – and set down as false whatever does not. But I want to tell you more clearly what I mean. I think that at the moment you don't understand.”

“Indeed I don't,” said Cebes, “not entirely.”

“It is this: nothing new, but what I've always been saying, both elsewhere and in the argument thus far. I am proceeding onward in my attempt to demonstrate to you the kind of cause I've occupied myself with. I'll go back again to those much-spoken-of things and start from them, (i) hypothesizing that there is a Beautiful itself by itself, and a Good, and a Big, and all the rest. If you grant me these things and accept that they exist, then I hope, from these things, (ii) to demonstrate to you the cause, and (iii) to discover that the soul is immortal.”

“Then I grant you them,” said Cebes, “so hasten to your conclusion.”

“Consider, then,” he said, “if your share my opinion of what follows. It seems to me that if anything other than the Beautiful itself is beautiful, then it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful; and I say this for all things. Do you agree to this sort of cause?”¹

The (basic) tripartite structure of a hypothetical argument

- (i) HYPOTHESIS: whatever claim is deemed “strongest”
- (ii) INTERMEDIARY: a claim which “harmonizes” with the HYPOTHESIS
- (iii) CONCLUSION: the claim you wish to prove

¹Translations of the *Phaedo* are those of Sedley and Long (2010), with minor modifications.

The tripartite hypothetical structure of the Final Argument

HYPOTHESIS	INTERMEDIARY	CONCLUSION
there are Forms	(something about) the cause	the soul is immortal

A puzzle about the Final Argument's method of hypothesis

The Final Argument's INTERMEDIARY is, apparently, that Forms are causes / that all *F* things are *F* by the *F* itself (cf. 100c4–7)

How, then, does this relate to the Final Argument's HYPOTHESIS? Two proposed interpretations:

JUST FORMS the Final Argument's HYPOTHESIS = there are Forms²

FORMS PLUS the Final Argument's HYPOTHESIS = there are Forms + Forms are causes³

(T2) The initial hypothesis of the Recollection Argument (74a9–b1)

Σκόπει δὴ, ἢ δ' ὅς, εἰ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει. φαμέν πού τι εἶναι ἴσον, οὐ ξύλον λέγω ξύλω οὐδὲ λίθον λίθω οὐδ' ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ ταῦτα πάντα ἕτερόν τι, αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον· φῶμέν τι εἶναι ἢ μηδέν;

“Consider then whether this is the case. We say, I suppose, that there is ‘an Equal’ – by which I mean, not a stick equal to another stick, nor a stone equal to another stone, nor anything else of this sort, but something else besides all these, the Equal itself. Should we say that there is such a thing or not?”

(T3) The full hypothesis of the Recollection Argument (75c10–d2)

οὐ γὰρ περὶ τοῦ ἴσου νῦν ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν μᾶλλον τι ἢ καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ὀσίου καί, ὅπερ λέγω, περὶ ἀπάντων οἷς ἐπισφραγιζόμεθα τὸ “αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι”.

“Our present argument is no more about the Equal than it is about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, and the Pious, and, as I've been saying, about everything to which we affix the label ‘what it is’.”

(T4) The Recollection Argument described as a hypothetical argument (92d6–e2)

ὁ δὲ περὶ τῆς ἀναμνήσεως καὶ μαθήσεως λόγος δι' ὑποθέσεως ἀξίας ἀποδέξασθαι εἴρηται. ἐρρήθη γὰρ που οὕτως ἡμῶν εἶναι ἢ ψυχὴ καὶ πρὶν εἰς σῶμα ἀφικέσθαι, ὥσπερ αὐτῆς ἔστιν ἢ οὐσία ἔχουσα τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τὴν τοῦ “ὃ ἔστιν” ἐγὼ δὲ ταύτην, ὡς ἔμαυτὸν πείθω, ἰκανῶς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς ἀποδέδεγμα.

“The argument about recollection and learning, on the other hand, has been provided by means of a hypothesis worthy of acceptance. Because it was said I think that it is as certain that (iii) our soul existed even before it entered a body as that (i) there exists in its own right the being that bears the label ‘what it is’. And I have accepted that hypothesis, or so I convince myself, on both sufficient and correct grounds.”

²Cf. van Eck (1994, 29), van Eck (1996), Kanayama (2000, 51–60), Benson (2015, 194 ff.)

³Cf. Gallop (1975, 179), Bostock (1986, 163), Rowe (1993, 52–53), Rowe (1996), Frede (1999, 122)

(T5) The method of hypothesis in the Recollection Argument (76d7–e5)

Ἄρ' οὖν οὕτως ἔχει, ἔφη, ἡμῖν, ὦ Σιμμίας; εἰ μὲν ἔστιν ἃ θρυλοῦμεν αἰεὶ, καλὸν τέ τι καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ πᾶσα ἢ τοιαύτη οὐσία, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην τὰ ἐκ τῶν αἰσθήσεων πάντα ἀναφέρομεν, ὑπάρχουσιν πρότερον ἀνευρίσκοντες ἡμετέραν οὐσαν, καὶ ταῦτα ἐκείνη ἀπεικάζομεν, ἀναγκαῖον, οὕτως ὥσπερ καὶ ταῦτα ἔστιν, οὕτως καὶ τὴν ἡμετέραν ψυχὴν εἶναι καὶ πρὶν γεγενῆσθαι ἡμᾶς· εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστι ταῦτα, ἄλλως ἂν ὁ λόγος οὕτως εἰρημένος εἶη;

“So is this how things stand for us, Simmias? (i) If those things we are always going on about exist – a Beautiful and a Good and every such being – and (ii) if we refer everything originating from our senses back to this being, discovering what was previously ours, and compare them to it, then (i) just as these [Forms] exist, (iii) so too must our soul exist even before we are born. And if they don’t exist, then wouldn’t this argument turn out to have been made in vain?”

(T6) The motivation for the Recollection Argument (72e1–73a6)

Καὶ μὴν, ἔφη ὁ Κέβης ὑπολαβὼν, καὶ κατ’ ἐκείνόν γε τὸν λόγον, ὦ Σώκρατες, εἰ ἀληθὴς ἔστιν, ὃν σὺ εἴωθας θαμὰ λέγειν, ὅτι ἡμῖν ἢ μάθησις οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀνάμνησις τυγχάνει οὐσα, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον ἀνάγκη που ἡμᾶς ἐν προτέρῳ τινὶ χρόνῳ μεμαθηκέναι ἃ νῦν ἀναμνησκόμεθα. τοῦτο δὲ ἀδύνατον, εἰ μὴ ἦν που ἡμῖν ἢ ψυχὴ πρὶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ εἶδει γενέσθαι· ὥστε καὶ ταύτη ἀθάνατον ἢ ψυχὴν τι εἴκειν εἶναι.

“Indeed, Socrates,” Cebes replied, “[that the souls of the dead exist somewhere] is the case also according to that theory – if it’s true – which you are so fond of propounding, that (ii) learning for us is in fact nothing other than recollection. According to this theory, we must have learned at some previous time what we presently recollect. And this would be impossible (iii) if our soul did not exist somewhere before it came to be in this human form. And so, in this way, too, the soul seems to be something immortal.”

Ἀλλά, ὦ Κέβης, ἔφη ὁ Σιμμίας ὑπολαβὼν, ποῖαι τούτων αἰ ἀποδείξεις; ὑπόμνησόν με· οὐ γὰρ σφόδρα ἐν τῷ παρόντι μέμνημαι.

“But Cebes,” Simmias replied, “what are the proofs for this? Remind me, because I don’t quite remember at the moment.”

The tripartite hypothetical structure of the Recollection Argument

HYPOTHESIS	INTERMEDIARY	CONCLUSION
there are Forms	learning is recollection	our soul exists before we are born

The (detailed) tripartite structure of a hypothetical argument

- (i) HYPOTHESIS: a claim which supports / gives credence to / makes plausible the INTERMEDIARY, and which is itself more certain than it
- (ii) INTERMEDIARY: a claim which, if true, would entail the CONCLUSION, but which is itself not certain
- (iii) CONCLUSION: the claim you wish to prove

(T7) The method of hypothesis in the Cyclical Argument (70c4–d5)

Σκεψώμεθα δὲ αὐτὸ τῆδέ πη, εἴτ' ἄρα ἐν Ἅιδου εἰσὶν αἱ ψυχαὶ τελευτησάντων τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἴτε καὶ οὐ. παλαιῶς μὲν οὖν ἔστι τις λόγος οὗ μεμνήμεθα, ὡς εἰσὶν ἐνθένδε ἀφικόμενοι ἐκεῖ, καὶ πάλιν γε δεῦρο ἀφικνοῦνται καὶ γίνονται ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων· καὶ εἰ τοῦθ' οὕτως ἔχει, πάλιν γίνεσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἀποθανόντων τοὺς ζῶντας, ἄλλο τι ἢ εἶεν ἂν αἱ ψυχὰς ἡμῶν ἐκεῖ; οὐ γὰρ ἂν που πάλιν ἐγίγνοντο μὴ οὔσαι, καὶ τοῦτο ἰκανὸν τεκμήριον τοῦ ταῦτ' εἶναι, εἰ τῷ ὄντι φανερόν γίγνοιτο ὅτι οὐδαμῶθεν ἄλλοθεν γίνονται οἱ ζῶντες ἢ ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων· εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστι τοῦτο, ἄλλου ἂν του δέοι λόγου.

Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ἔφη ὁ Κέβης.

Μὴ τοίνυν κατ' ἀνθρώπων, ἢ δ' ὅς, σκόπει μόνον τοῦτο, εἰ βούλει ῥῆον μαθεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ ζώων πάντων καὶ φυτῶν, καὶ συλλήβδην ὅσα περ ἔχει γένεσιν περὶ πάντων ἴδωμεν ἄρ' οὕτως γίγνεται πάντα, οὐκ ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων τὰ ἐναντία, ὅσοις τυγχάνει ὄν τοιοῦτόν τι, οἷον τὸ καλὸν τῷ αἰσχυρῷ ἐναντίον που καὶ δίκαιον ἀδίκῳ, καὶ ἄλλα δὴ μυρία οὕτως ἔχει. τοῦτο οὖν σκεψώμεθα, ἄρα ἀναγκαῖον ὅσοις ἔστι τι ἐναντίον, μηδαμῶθεν ἄλλοθεν αὐτὸ γίνεσθαι ἢ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτῷ ἐναντίου.

“Let’s consider it in the following sort of way. Let’s see whether or not it turns out (iii) that when people have died their souls exist in Hades. Now there is an ancient saying which comes to mind, (ii) that souls exist there when they have come from here, and that they come back here and come to be from dead people. Now, if this is so – (ii) that living people come to be again from those who have died – surely (iii) our souls would exist there? For, I take it, the souls would not come to be again, if they did not exist. And so it would be evidence enough of the truth of (iii) this, should it really come to be clear (ii) that living people come to be from nowhere other than from the dead. But if this is not true, we would need some other argument.”

“Quite so,” said Cebes.

“Well then,” he said, “if you want to understand more easily, don’t consider this with regard to humans only, but in relation to all animals and plants too. In short, concerning everything that has a coming-to-be, let us see whether (i) they all come to be in this way: the opposites from nowhere other than their opposites – all those, that is, that actually have an opposite, as for example the beautiful is surely opposite to the ugly, and just to unjust, and there are countless others like this. So let’s consider whether everything that has an opposite necessarily comes to be from nowhere other than from its opposite.”

The tripartite hypothetical structure of the Cyclical Argument

HYPOTHESIS	INTERMEDIARY	CONCLUSION
all opposite things come to be from their opposite	the living come to be from the dead	the souls of the dead exist in Hades

(T8) The motivation for the Final Argument (95b9–c1, 95e8–96a1)

ἀξιοῖς ἐπιδειχθῆναι ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν ἀνώλεθρόν τε καὶ ἀθάνατον οὔσαν...

Οὐ φαῦλον πρᾶγμα, ἔφη, ὦ Κέβης, ζητεῖς· ὅλως γὰρ δεῖ περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς τὴν αἰτίαν διαπραγματεύεσθαι.

“You think it must be demonstrated that our soul is both imperishable and immortal...”

“What you’re seeking is no small matter, Cebes; we must study thoroughly the cause of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be in general.”

(T9) The final proof of the immortality of the soul (105c9–e7)

ὥς ἂν τί ἐγγένηται σώματι ζῶν ἔσται;	“What is it that, when it comes to be present in any body, makes the body alive?”
ἼΩι ἂν ψυχῆ, ἔφη.	“It is soul.”
Οὐκοῦν ἀεὶ τοῦτο οὕτως ἔχει;	“Now is this always the case?”
Πῶς γὰρ οὐχί; ἦ δ' ὅς.	“Yes, of course.”
Ψυχὴ ἄρα ὅτι ἂν αὐτὴ κατὰσχη, ἀεὶ ἤκει ἐπ' ἐκεῖνο φέρουσα ζωὴν;	“In that case, whenever soul occupies anything, does soul always come to it bringing life?”
Ἦκει μέντοι, ἔφη.	“Yes, it does.”
Πότερον δ' ἔστι τι ζωῆ ἐναντίον ἢ οὐδέν;	“Does life have an opposite or not?”
Ἔστιν, ἔφη.	“It does.”
Τί;	“What?”
Θάνατος.	“Death.”
Οὐκοῦν ψυχὴ τὸ ἐναντίον ὧς αὐτὴ ἐπιφέρει ἀεὶ οὐ μὴ ποτε δέξεται, ὡς ἐκ τῶν πρόσθεν ὠμολόγηται;	“So will soul never admit the opposite of what it itself always imports, as has been agreed from what was said earlier?”
Καὶ μάλα σφόδρα, ἔφη ὁ Κέβης.	“Very much so.”
...	...
Εἶεν· ὁ δ' ἂν θάνατον μὴ δέχεται τί καλοῦμεν;	“Very well. What do we call anything that does not admit death?”
Ἀθάνατον, ἔφη.	“Immortal.”
Οὐκοῦν ψυχὴ οὐ δέχεται θάνατον;	“Now soul does not admit death, does it?”
Οὔ.	“No.”
Ἀθάνατον ἄρα ψυχῆ.	“In that case, soul is immortal.”
Ἀθάνατον.	“Yes, immortal.”

The tripartite hypothetical structure of the Final Argument (proper)

HYPOTHESIS	INTERMEDIARY	CONCLUSION
there are Forms (which are causes)	a cause of <i>F</i> -ness cannot itself be un- <i>F</i>	the soul is immortal

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