Socrates’s reply to Cebes in Plato’s *Phaedo*¹

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(1) Whatever soul occupies it brings life to;

(2) soul does not admit the opposite of life, i.e. death;

(3) soul is not-dead.

What does (2) mean, and is the argument valid? One way of interpreting (2) is this:

whatever has soul lacks death, i.e. whatever has soul is not-dead.

This follows from (1), but does it entail (3)? Only with the aid of another premise:

soul has soul.

A second way of interpreting (2) is this:

soul lacks death.

This entails (3), but it follows from (1) only with the aid of this premise:

soul occupies soul.

Any other interpretation of (2) would be bound to leave a similar gap somewhere in the argument. It is therefore fallacious, because both the premises whose addition would make it valid are false.

The argument is used in a much discussed passage of Plato’s *Phaedo*, 105c 9-e 9.² The fallacy was pointed out by D. Keyt, *Phron.* 8 (1963) 167-72, but its presence has been denied by J. Schiller, *Phron.* 12 (1967) 50-8, and H. Erbse, *Phron.* 14 (1969) 97-106. According to Schiller and Erbse, Keyt’s conclusion rests on the assumption that in

¹ Both the content and the form of this article have benefited from the learned and perceptive comments of Jonathan Barnes.

² Plato does not infer (2) directly from (1) but appeals to what has previously been agreed (d 10-11), namely that nothing admits the opposite of what it brings with it (a 3-5); this generalization rests in turn on a specific case, that of ἂν τῶν τριῶν ἔσθαι and τὸ ἄρτιον (104d 5-e 5), in which the opaque expression ‘does not admit’ is not used but could perfectly well have been (e 1 τὰ τρία ἄριστα τῶν τῶν ἄρτιων ἔσθαι που δέσιτε δέσιτε). Whether the argument of 104d 5-e 5 is valid, and whether the generalization can be extracted from it, depends on the meaning of ἂν τριάς and τὰ τρία, which is controversial (cf. n. 12); but the generalization does not follow if τὰ τρία does not mean the same as ἂν τῶν τριῶν ἔσθαι. It may be, then, that the fallacy under discussion has its roots in 104d 5-105a 5; but the language of 104d 5-e 5 is so slippery that the argument about soul in 105c 9-e 9 exposes it far more clearly.
Plato treats soul as a form. This assumption, however, has no bearing on the validity of the argument. The truth of (1) and (2) depends, so far as ψυχή is concerned, purely on its ordinary meaning, and the only premise that Plato might not have been able to accept without treating soul as a form is 'soul has soul', which plays no part in his formulation. Schiller and Erbse have therefore done nothing to show that Keyt’s attack fails.

Plato’s argument in 102 b 3-107 a 1 employs a number of analogies. At first sight it appears that they may be set out schematically as follows:

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<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>ἀυτό τὸ μέγεθος</td>
<td>τὸ θερμόν</td>
<td>τὸ περιττόν</td>
<td>ζωή</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν μέγεθος</td>
<td>πῦρ</td>
<td>ἡ τῶν τριῶν ἱδέα</td>
<td>ψυχή</td>
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<tr>
<td>(c)</td>
<td>Socrates</td>
<td>σῶμα</td>
<td>ἰδέα κατάσχη</td>
<td>σῶμα</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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When (b) ‘occupies’ or ‘approaches’ (c), it ‘brings up’ (a); that is to say, it ‘does not admit’ the opposite of (a). The analogies in II-IV hold good in all relevant respects so long as III (c) refers to sets of three objects and not the number three or ‘particular three’ or any other modern invention. I (a) and (c) also fit well enough into the

3 ‘Although Keyt does not accuse Plato of equivocating on “soul” in the course of the argument, one of the two fallacies he attributes to him stems from Plato’s treating the soul as if it were a form’ (Schiller 50). Keyt’s objection disappears ‘so bald man (wie Schiller) erkennt, dass Hackforth, auf den Keyt sich beruft, irrite, als er annahm, Platon habe in unserem Abschnitt die Seele – ausnahmsweise – als Idee konzipiert’ (Erbse 100).
4 As Keyt says, ‘Plato’s initial premiss amounts simply to the statement that whatever has soul is alive’ (169), which for Socrates and Cebes, or any speaker of Greek, is true by definition.
5 Had Plato considered it, he would perhaps have been reader to accept it if he had thought of soul as a form; for though there is no indication that he would have accepted ‘Socrates has Socrates’, he is not averse to self-predication of forms (e.g. 102 d 6-7, Protag. 330 c 2-ε 2).
6 This strange phrase is used by D. O’Brien, C.Q. 61 (1967) 212 n. 1, 216-9.
7 Two minor complications are caused by 105 c 4-6 oὐδ’ ὁ ἄριθμὸς τὁ ἐγγένεται περιττός ἐστιν, οὐκ ἄριθμόν ἤ ἂν περιττότης, ἀλλ’ ὅ ἂν μονάς. (1) The expression ὁ ἂν ἄριθμόν, which may be thought to imply that by III (c) Plato means numbers rather than objects, is just a convenient parallel to ὁ ἂν σῶματα, which cannot stand for a plurality. For ἄριθμός in the sense ‘set’ cf. Phaedrus 247 a 2; Jonathan