R. s. Bluck has tried recently to solve the difficulties found by many commentators in *Phaedo 99d – 102a*. He thinks that the passage is not concerned with a single logical method, but that in 99d-e the λόγοι are Socratic definitions, while the hypotheses of 101d are something different – “provisional notions of Platonic Forms”. Most of his arguments are so detailed that they cannot fairly be summarised, but one of his main points is that on the traditional view, that the whole passage is concerned with one method, we cannot explain “the extraordinary way in which the argument is broken up”. I wish to suggest that this and many other difficulties arise from concentrating on this small section apart from its wider context, and that we ought to study it against the background of the *Phaedo* as a whole. We shall then find that a very similar discussion of logical method occurs much earlier in the dialogue, and that it concerns quite a simple point. This leads me to suppose that our passage too is not an obscure and badly constructed statement of some abstruse points by which Plato is trying to announce a new theory of dialectic, but an affirmation of certain quite elementary principles of psychological as much as of methodological importance. These, Plato believed, were needed by young men who had to deal with sophistic tricks of argument.

Let us go back to 85c, where Simmias is raising objections to Socrates’ attempted proof of the immortality of the Soul. He says that on subjects where it is difficult to arrive at the truth he must ἢ μαθεῖν ὅτι ἐξει ἢ εἰρεῖν, ἢ, εἰ ταῦτα ἄδοκατον, τὸν γοῦν βέλτιστον τῶν ἀνθρωπικῶν λόγων λαβόντα καὶ διεξελεγκτότατον, ἐπὶ τούτου ὕχομεν ὡσπερ ἐπὶ σχέδιας χινδυνεύοντα διαπλεύσαι τὸν βίον.

That is, there are three ways of trying to reach a conclusion, by learning from someone else, by one’s own experience, or, failing these, by adopting the most probable λόγος. In spite of these positive suggestions the objections raised produce great despondency, and make the company believe themselves poor judges of logical arguments and doubt if the matter is decidable at all. Socrates warns them against misology: they must not be like οἱ περὶ τῶν ἀντιλογικῶν λόγων διατρίβων, who come to believe that no argument whatsoever is sound. He then tries to answer the objections of Simmias and Cebes. In replying to Cebes he tells of his own youthful study of physical philosophy, and

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mentions a number of problems which had once seemed straightforward, but which he could no longer answer: these include why one man is taller than another, and why ten is greater than eight. He had hoped to get the answer from Anaxagoras, but, despairing of him and the whole physical method, he set out on his own course (δεύτερος πλοῦς). This involved studying things in λόγοι, not ἔργα, and, in particular, selecting on each occasion the λόγος that seemed to be the most reliable.

The whole passage echoes Simmias' earlier remarks: Socrates has failed μαθεῖν ἣ ἐφεύρειν what he wanted in physical philosophy, and he now embarks on the raft of the most reliable argument. Taking the λόγος he has chosen, i.e. the best hypothesis, he then accepts what is in accordance with it and rejects what is not. But the company do not quite see what he is getting at, and he tries to make his meaning clearer. It has usually been supposed that what they do not understand is his method, but his words can equally well mean that they do not see what the particular λόγος is which he has chosen and which he goes on to explain – the Theory of Forms. Taking this as his λόγος, he will now consider its consequences, and, in particular, hopes by its means to prove the one proposition in which they are interested, the immortality of the soul. But first he sets about showing how it helps to answer some of the problems mentioned in the earlier section, such as why one man is taller than another. This shows the wide utility of his hypothesis.

The mental scene shifts, and the suggestion of staging an argument creeps in. What is Cebes to do if he finds himself in a situation like this?

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1 He actually says that he can still not answer them, but in view of later developments we must treat this as misleading. It is a dramatic way of emphasizing his state of bafflement before he found the answers by means of the hypothesis of the Forms.

2 On this point I find Robinson's discussion entirely convincing. Plato has chosen a single metaphorical term to cover two different relations between propositions, deducibility and consistency, because he wants to refer shortly and without clumsiness to both. He means that he will accept those propositions that are deducible from his hypothesis, and reject those of which the contradictory is deducible. (Plato's Earlier Dialectic, p. 126)

3 Professor Allan has suggested that in 100a the words καὶ περὶ αἰτίας καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀκόλου ἁτέρων, followed by the reference in 100b to τῆς αἰτίας τὸ εἴδος ὡς πεπραγμένωμαι imply that Socrates is 'explaining a general method of which the assumption of Forms is an instance' and that 'the hypothesis of Forms is introduced as the kind of cause which he has made it his business to study.' But in 100a the words quoted are connected immediately with the conclusions, of all kinds, which are to be drawn from the chosen hypothesis, and not with the choice of a particular hypothesis. Further, the words at the beginning of 100b ὡς λέγω, οὐδὲν καὶνόν, ἀλλ' ἀπερ... οὐδὲν πάσχωμι λέγων seem to indicate that the point that needs explanation is what the hypothesis is. Finally, the Forms are not merely causal explanations. The arguments about the immortality of the soul which follow are of a much more general type.