

**An analysis of the concepts of death and soul immortality:  
from *Phaedo* to contemporary interpretations**

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## Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the notions of death and immortality of the soul as they are developed in Plato's *Phaedo*, as well as their evolution through time so as to fit into various historical and cultural concepts, such as Christianity, Neoplatonism and contemporary philosophy. Plato's philosophical ideas remain relevant to this day, not only through the existing corpus but also through extensive secondary scholarship. In fact, many Platonic concepts and beliefs, such as body-soul dualism, the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge through virtuous living and the desire to approach what is holy and good, have survived through the Christian and Neoplatonic philosophical tradition. The soul is a fundamental element in Plato's philosophy, and it has been discussed extensively by philosophers, religious thinkers, and modern scholars alike. The central topic of this research will be to establish a connection between the Platonic tradition and descending schools of thought on the issue of death and soul immortality. It will attempt to address questions such as how the Platonic philosophical notion of soul immortality was perceived by post-platonic thinkers and how it was subjected to alterations to serve a new purpose and provide answers to existential questions. It is also of great interest to highlight some of the differences as well, to indicate where the next schools of thought differentiated from Plato's philosophy and inserted new ideas and beliefs to build their own philosophical frameworks. Conversely, *Phaedo* has been examined extensively from researchers throughout time and one of the basic aims of this dissertation is to contribute to this dialogue of scholars and continue the analysis and assessment of *Phaedo*, maintaining the relevance of the Platonic thought in the modern era. Regarding the primary sources this research will focus on selected segments from *Phaedo*, as well as post-Platonic texts, and contemporary scholarship. By employing a comparative analysis of the primary sources and a variety of secondary literature, this dissertation will try to present a comprehensive view of how those different cultural and intellectual notions regarding death and soul immortality have shaped the human understanding of those matters.

## Introduction

One of the most interesting and mysterious aspects of the human experience has been the concept of the human soul as well as death, which have lingered across centuries and millennia as two of the most interconnected and persistent philosophical concerns. Humans – whether they are aware of it or not – are constantly confronted with those two mysterious elements of their existence and are prompted by a little inside voice to explore those meanings, discuss their thoughts and perceptions of them and share their findings with others. If one were to do a deep dive into ancient mythologies across civilizations and look through the philosophical texts on metaphysics and science, they would land to the conclusion that the question of the nature and possible immortality of the soul have a central place in them. Humanity was searching always for meaning, initially in the sky and stars and eventually, particularly in relation to the enlightenment era, within themselves.

Plato's *Phaedo* is constructed as a dramatic dialogue of the ultimate moments of Socrates, narrated by Phaedo, one of his disciples. The dialogue consists of an investigation of the nature of the soul and its immortality through a series of arguments which Socrates contradicts in his unique style. Thus, this dissertation aims to discuss and examine how the key ideas of *Phaedo* - meaning the concepts of death and soul immortality - have been interpreted by other scholars, and why they remain relevant in the contemporary world. Moreover, this research examines some of the most important questions deriving from delving into the platonic tradition. How do Plato's conceptualizations of death and the soul's immortality in *Phaedo* compare with those of subsequent philosophical and scientific traditions? In what ways have these notions evolved or been challenged from ancient times until today? And finally, why do the notions of death and soul immortality remain intellectually and culturally significant in modern times, especially in the light of new technological developments?

In order to address those questions, the following dissertation implements a comparative approach, which involves a close reading and analysis of selected segments from *Phaedo*, as well as texts from the pre-Socratics to modern times. The segments which will be analysed will come from a translated version of the texts<sup>1</sup> rather than the original ones, however the Loeb version will also be consulted along with other

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<sup>1</sup> Nehamas, Woodruff (1995), Gallop (1975).

relevant commentaries for the texts. It is important to note that whenever it is deemed appropriate for a phrase or term from the primary source to be included for emphatic or terminology reasons, then it will be included within the text with the translation and text citation in the footnotes. This dissertation also incorporates interpretations of the Platonic corpus by later thinkers and schools of thought, where the main segments will be evaluated regarding their similarities and differences with other traditions. The arguments will also be reviewed under a historical and contextual light, where the philosophical notions will be examined within their broader historical, cultural and intellectual backgrounds. Finally, in the last chapter, elements of interdisciplinary reflection will be introduced, especially when engaging with contemporary opinions influenced by the fields of science, artificial intelligence, and post-humanist theory.

This dissertation is organised in four chapters, each one focused on a different aspect of the topic, maintaining however a chronological order of the evolution of the principles in question. The first chapter includes a discussion of key passages of *Phaedo* related to death and soul immortality, as well as an analysis on the argument of recollection, Plato's theory of Forms and the historical and philosophical context of Plato's writing, such as his predecessors. This chapter will include segments of *Phaedo* and their interpretation. Furthermore, this first chapter will begin from presocratic philosophy, discussing not only Platonic views on death and soul immortality, but also the notions of philosophers such as Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Aristotle and Epicurus. The second chapter will navigate towards Neoplatonism, as a philosophical notion from late antiquity, which further explores and adds to the platonic philosophy, by using elements from other philosophical schools, such as Aristotelian and Stoic ones. The chapter will include comparisons of selected Neoplatonic authors, such as Plotinus and Porphyry, as well as a discussion on the soul's nature, its relation to the corporal world. Furthermore, this chapter will explore how early Christianity interprets the concept of death and soul immortality, while always keeping base with the platonic ideas as expressed in *Phaedo*.

Following on the themes of chapter two, the third chapter will focus on body-soul dualism, and the role consciousness plays in defining the self and in philosophical thought. The distinction between the immaterial soul and the physical body and how they are interconnected will also be discussed. The fourth chapter will then gravitate towards contemporary philosophical and scientific, and perspectives on the concept of

soul immortality. It shall explore how modern thought engages with the idea of the soul's existence beyond corporal death and how contemporary thought challenged traditional beliefs about the immortality of the soul. An important theme of this chapter will be soul immortality in the digital age, the challenges artificial intelligence places on the traditional concept of soul immortality and how it contributes to understanding the concepts of life, death and the post-human existence.

This study overall contributes to the continuous conversation regarding the nature of the soul, death and the concept of immortality by connecting philosophical notions with modern thinking (of particular relevance today in relation to artificial intelligence). It is interesting to examine how the Platonic thoughts in *Phaedo* have endured change and adapted to different times, still maintaining their meaning for those who encounter them through the works of Plato or the works of others. Ultimately, this study seeks to understand not just how humans perceive death and the soul, but why it continues to matter so deeply.

## Chapter 1: Defining the soul in Ancient Philosophy

“The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform,  
indissoluble, always the same as itself.”

Plato, *Phaedo*, 80b

“The soul is the form of a natural body having life potentially in it.”

Aristotle, *De Anima* II.1, 412a

The soul and its nature are two of the most fundamental questions of humanity and have been thoroughly examined by science, religion and scholars around the world. It is only fitting that the very first part of this study aims to explore how the soul is defined and how it is understood as a concept in ancient Greek thought. From the Homeric epics, through Presocratic philosophy, the Platonic tradition, Aristotelian thought, the Epicureans and even today, the concept of the soul remains a major philosophical question for modern thinkers to examine. As Damasio states, neuroscientific studies on consciousness, suggest that while materialist models can explain aspects of brain function, they still struggle to fully account for subjective experience and continuity of self - areas long attributed to the soul.<sup>2</sup> However to understand those limitations, one would have to go back to the way in which the soul has been interpreted by scholars of the time.

One of the first and most noteworthy references to the soul or *psyche*<sup>3</sup> in Ancient Greek literature is in Homer’s *Iliad*, which is reported to have been composed roughly around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. In the Homeric epics, the soul is considered a life bearing force and when a body died the soul would soon abandon it to move to the underworld. The soul does not seem to possess consciousness or immortality, or any similarity to the soul as presented the Platonic tradition, but it is perceived as a weak post-mortem echo of a person’s life. An example of the understanding of the soul in Homer derives from the

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<sup>2</sup> Damasio (1999), 79-81.

<sup>3</sup> The human soul, mind, or spirit. The word comes (in the mid 17th century) via Latin from Greek *psukhē* ‘breath, life, soul’. *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (2006).

*Iliad* and particularly the verses after Hector's passing, where Hector's soul is described to be leaving his mortal body and moving somberly towards the underworld.<sup>4</sup> The soul seems to be a shadow of Hector's personality but not quite the reflection of his person. Another example is when Patroclus dies and his *psyche* drifts towards the underworld.<sup>5</sup> In the text there is no mention of soul immortality, for as Patroclus' body dies, his soul immediately follows the path to Hades silently and solemnly, as if it only contains a tiny excess of life. Similarly, when Odysseus visits the underworld, the souls are pictured as ghosts with no memories, reason or feelings unless they drink sacrificial blood which allows them to experience some clarity for a while.

Thus, in the Homeric tradition the soul has not yet reached an immortal and rational status, and it is closely identified as death and more specifically "the last gasp of breath exhaled by a man who is dying", meaning that the soul is the defining element between being alive or dead.<sup>6</sup> The Homeric man does not seem to have consciousness of the self and thoughts and emotions are described as *thymos*, *noos* and *menos*, which seem to be related to the physical body.<sup>7</sup> This portrayal of the soul aligns with scholarly opinions that Homeric souls are frail remnants, not rational, ethical, or immortal beings.<sup>8</sup>

This view of the soul leads to the question of the etymology of the word itself which is quite the complex task as the word does not come with a direct translation. The word might derive from the Greek stem *ψυχ-* which relates to *breath*, *cold* and *wind*.<sup>9</sup> Another definition would be that the word might be defined as *breath of life*, *life*, *soul*, and *spirit*, or *life*, *ghost*, *soul*, and *spirit*.<sup>10</sup> This linguistic setting echoes the airy element of the *psyche* in early Greek thinking.

It was the presocratic philosophers who started to reframe the soul as a fundamental principle of ontological depth.<sup>11</sup> By the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Pythagorean thought introduced

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<sup>4</sup> *Iliad* 22.361–363. "Even as he thus spoke the end of death enfolded him and his soul fleeing from his limbs was gone to Hades, bewailing her fate, leaving manliness and youth."

<sup>5</sup> *Iliad* 16.856–857. "His spirit fluttered from his limbs and went to Hades, lamenting its own fate, the loss of youthful manhood".

<sup>6</sup> Clarke (1999), 59-60, Snell (1953), 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Bremmer (1983), 53-54.

<sup>8</sup> In Guthrie (1950), Jaeger (1947) and Snell (1971). For Snell, *thymos* is related to emotional matters, whilst *noos* is in charge of intellectual ones.

<sup>9</sup> In Dedović (2022), 24 and Clarke (1999), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Autenrieth (1895), 294 and LSJ (1940) 2026, in Dedović (2022), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Although the term "philosophers" when referring to the Presocratics is considered anachronistic, it will be used in the current study as the foundation of Presocratic thought is focused on rational thought and on a variety of disciplines and topics, which ultimately paved the way for western thought and philosophy. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Presocratics*).

the notion of the soul's immortality and transmigration, proposing that the soul was divine and subject to moral laws of cosmic justice.<sup>12</sup> This notion redefined the soul, which is viewed by the Pythagoreans as eternal, rational, and connected with the cosmos through the process of *metempsychosis*.<sup>13</sup> The term *metempsychosis* has an etymological proximity to *psyche* at first glance and according to Cornelli, it translates to the idea of *blowing a soul back into a body*.<sup>14</sup> The latter suggests that death is a necessary requirement for *metempsychosis*, thus bringing together the two notions of death and the soul and connecting them in a circular sense of life continuity.

For Philolaus, a key Pythagorean, considered the soul as harmony, a numerical ratio that unifies the body.<sup>15</sup> This metaphysical view understands the soul not merely as a spirit in itself, but as a structural principle (*logos*) that fuses the physical and the spiritual elements into a single living entity, which is in tune with the cosmos. As Aristotle later reports, Pythagoreans thought of the soul as a numerical harmony, resonating their belief in a universe controlled by order.<sup>16</sup> As Cornelli notes, the notion of the soul as harmony seems to waver between being the centre of the physical body and an eternal being.<sup>17</sup> The body in this case is the vessel in which the soul lives for a while before it migrates to another. According to Luchte, death is not the body's entrapment, but the release of the soul into a transitional *topos* in between embodiments.<sup>18</sup> Pythagorean thought changes the course of the soul's journey, suggesting that life is somehow "recycled" and the soul is endless through transmigration and always remains in tune with the universe.

Heraclitus views the world as ever changing and shifting and his notion of the soul follows this discipline. The soul is not only constantly moving and expanding, but it

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<sup>12</sup> Guthrie (1962), 173-175. For further reading regarding Pythagorean philosophy see English translation in Laks and Most's *Early Greek Philosophy: Western Greek Thinkers* (2016: vol. 4, part 1).

<sup>13</sup> Luchte (2009), Transmigration distributes souls through the stirrings and strivings of beings; this soul migrates across body to body, flows through a labyrinth of instants, to chance upon the thread that keeps the fire of wisdom still burning. Hussey, (1997), 143. *Metempsychosis* 'was the doctrine of the repeated incarnations of an immortal 'soul' or self, in human or animal or plant bodies.

<sup>14</sup> Cornelli (2016), 3. According to Cornelli, metempsychosis first appeared in Diodorus Siculus, and the etymology does not even derive directly from the word *psychē*. In Casadio (1991), 122-123. *It was formed from the verb empsychōō, 'to animate' (which in turn is connected through émpsychos and psychē to the verb psýchō, 'to blow'), to which the preverb meta (Lat. trans), which denotes not only change, but also succession or repetition, and the suffix sis, denoting abstract action were added.*

<sup>15</sup> Huffman 1993, 268–270.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* I.4, 407b27–408a10.

<sup>17</sup> Cornelli (2013), 140. More on ancient Greek dualism in the following chapters.

<sup>18</sup> Luchte (2009).

also has a rational aspect through *logos*, which suggests that the soul is somehow structured and has an ethical element to it.<sup>19</sup> Heraclitus suggests that the soul is not merely an essence, but a process, which is getting stronger or weaker depending on its engagement with reason. It is neither eternal nor fixed but governed by the same unity of opposites that structures the cosmos.<sup>20</sup> Heraclitus considers the elements of nature important when it comes to understanding the nature of the soul and his ontology as a thinker. *For it is death to souls to become water, and death to water to become earth. But water comes from earth; and from water, soul.*<sup>21</sup> This interesting dichotomy, has an ethical aspect to it or a scaling of the vitality of the soul depending to its connection to reason and fire.<sup>22</sup> Although Heraclitus does not directly suggest soul immortality or transmigration, it is implied through the fragments that a soul moves in harmony with the cosmos. Long notes that for Heraclitus the soul is an active participant in the flow of the universe, and it is capable of transformation and consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to the view of Heraclitus, Parmenides implies a different ontology. In the phrase “what is, is, and what is not, is not”,<sup>24</sup> he suggests understanding reality as a well-rounded sphere, equally balanced in every direction.<sup>25</sup> For Parmenides, existence is unchangeable and immutable, it never changes and is omnipresent, filling the entire universe. Thus, if reality is one, whole and static notion, then the soul, which is conceived as always evolving, stirring and fluctuating, should not exist. Such a point of view could provide the framework for understanding life, death and the soul from a philosophical aspect. As Barnes argues, this leads to a philosophical paradox: the soul, in order to be real, must be unchanging - but such a soul cannot comprise of memory, growth, or perception.<sup>26</sup>

Plato's opinions and discussions of the soul are considered some of the most influential contributions to ancient and modern philosophy and maintain great importance in debates on identity, consciousness and also metaphysics. In *Phaedo*, which is one of his

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<sup>19</sup> Heraclitus DK B45 “Traveling on every path, you will not find the boundaries of soul by going -- so deep is its logos.”

<sup>20</sup> Taylor (1997), 43.

<sup>21</sup> Heraclitus, *DK B36*.

<sup>22</sup> Kirk (1962).

<sup>23</sup> Long (1999), 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Parmenides, *DK B2*: “ἔστιν γὰρ εἶναι, μηδὲν δ’ οὐκ ἔστιν.”.

<sup>25</sup> Parmenides, *DK B8* “συνεχὲς γὰρ ἔστιν· τέλειον γὰρ ἔόν, παντοθενές, ἰσοπαλὲς πανταχόθεν, ἰσοπαλὲς γὰρ ἔστι πανταχῇ.” Translation: “It is continuous; for what is complete, extending in all directions, equal in every way, it is so from all sides.”

<sup>26</sup> Barnes (1982), 160.

dialogues set during Socrates' final hours, Plato presents a sustained argument for the soul's immortality, intertwining metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical philosophical notions. Through the persona of Socrates, Plato presents four core arguments, the Cyclical Argument, the Theory of Recollection, the Affinity Argument, and the final argument which aim in establishing the soul as of immortal nature.<sup>27</sup> Each one of those arguments fortifies the conclusion that the soul, as a disembodied and rational being, transcends physical death.

In order to discuss the soul in Plato, one must begin from the theory of the Forms in the platonic tradition. Grayling describes the platonic world as two realms, the Realm of Being which is perfect and unchanging, and the Realm of Becoming, which is the imperfect world we experience as humans, filled with temporary items and possessions.<sup>28</sup> All things in the Realm of Becoming are imperfect copies of everything that exists in the Realm of Being and thus everything we experience and touch is merely a shadow of its true Form.<sup>29</sup> In *Phaedo*, Plato justifies the human knowledge of the Forms through the immortality of the soul, stating that since the soul used to inhabit the world of Forms, it possesses knowledge of them, and since the soul is immortal once a body has died, it is not destroyed but exists somewhere until it is born again.<sup>30</sup>

This resurfaces the question of how Plato defines the “soul” in his philosophy. In *Phaedo* Socrates argues that the soul is “most like that which is divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble”.<sup>31</sup> This notion creates a contrast with the physical body, which is perceived as mortal, illusory and unstable.<sup>32</sup> The soul survives corporal death and cannot be destructed thus there is kinship with the Forms. As Grayling puts it, the soul is a thing of life and by nature it escapes death, thus making it immortal.<sup>33</sup> However in the *Republic*, Plato presents a more elaborate theory of the soul, where the soul is trichotomized in the *Logistikon*, which is that rational part of the soul, the *Thymoeides*, which is that part that allows us to experience emotions and the

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<sup>27</sup> The Cyclical Argument (*Phaedo*, 69c–72d), The Recollection Argument (*Phaedo*, 72e–77d), The Affinity Argument (*Phaedo*, 77e–80b), The Final Argument (*Phaedo*, 102a–107b).

<sup>28</sup> Grayling (2019), 88–89.

<sup>29</sup> Grayling (2019), 88–89.

<sup>30</sup> *Phaedo*, 70c–d, trans. Gallop (1975).

<sup>31</sup> *Phaedo* 80b, trans. Gallop (1975).

<sup>32</sup> Further analysis on body-soul dualism will be included in the following chapters.

<sup>33</sup> Grayling (2019), 89.

*Epithymetikon*, which includes desire for material things and pleasure.<sup>34</sup> Although, this is a more structured definition of the soul, in *Phaedo*, Plato offers a more ontological approach aiming to lay the foundation for his immortality arguments.

The Cyclical argument in *Phaedo* (70c–72e) is based on the principle of opposites and suggests that all things derive from their opposites, for example life from death, and death from life. Socrates states that “the living come from the dead, and the dead from the living”.<sup>35</sup> This implies a continuous process of rebirth, in which the soul precedes birth and outlasts death. Annas interprets this argument as depending on an ontological symmetry, presuming a fundamental metaphysical necessity for natural equilibrium.<sup>36</sup> While this provides an innate notion of the soul's perseverance when it comes to death, scholars such as Gallop have critiqued its ambiguity regarding how this cyclical exchange actually occurs, especially in the absence of an empirical mechanism.<sup>37</sup> From a wider Platonic context, this argument is akin to the theory of the cosmos as a self-regulating order, as discussed in *Timaeus*. The Platonic cyclical view of the soul reflects early Orphic and Pythagorean influences, particularly the concept of *metempsychosis*, which Plato approaches through reasoning.<sup>38</sup>

Plato's second argument which is the Theory of Recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*), was first introduced in *Meno*.<sup>39</sup> According to the latter, learning is the process of reclaiming and remembering knowledge that the soul possessed before embodiment. For Plato, our understanding of theoretical and undisputable concepts, such as equality or beauty, demonstrates that the soul must have encountered them in an earlier, non-physical state.<sup>40</sup> Sorabji emphasizes that Plato's epistemological dualism underlies his metaphysical one because knowledge of Forms is non-empirical and since the body is a source of distraction, the soul must have existed independently to access knowledge and truth.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the recollection argument strengthens the soul's immaterial nature by creating a connection between the soul and eternal, intelligible beings and

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<sup>34</sup> *Republic*, Book IV, 436a–445e. For further study on the presentation of the soul in the *Republic*, see Cross & Woosley (1964), 121–145.

<sup>35</sup> *Phaedo*, 71c–e.

<sup>36</sup> Annas (1982).

<sup>37</sup> Gallop, (1975).

<sup>38</sup> Guthrie (1969), 338–341.

<sup>39</sup> See McPherran, (1997) 281–295. McPherran analyses how the theory of recollection supports the soul as a pre-existing notion and reinforces Plato's dualist metaphysics.

<sup>40</sup> *Phaedo* 74c–75b.

<sup>41</sup> Sorabji (2006), 19–36.

suggesting that the soul through this kinship has access to knowledge surpassing the mortal things.<sup>42</sup> Yet, this argument has its limitations. Burnet points out that even though the recollection argument presumes the existence of the soul before birth, it does not by itself establish its post-mortem persistence.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the first two arguments seem to have formed with the aim to be used as supporting evidence for the following two arguments and state that in fact the soul is in fact of immortal nature and not of akin to death.

In the Affinity Argument Socrates attempts a more ontological demonstration of the nature of the soul, by drawing a distinction between the physical world and the realm of Forms.<sup>44</sup> Socrates proves through comparing the soul and the body and the visible and the invisible, that the soul is similar to the Forms and thus shares their immortality. As Hackforth notes, the affinity argument is not meant as a conclusive proof but rather as a persuasive analogy intended to prepare the mind for more thorough philosophical thinking.<sup>45</sup> For the Final Argument, Socrates proves that not only is the soul of divine and immortal nature, but also indestructible.<sup>46</sup> The soul, by nature, cannot die, for if it died it would not have been a soul and thus it must be eternal. The Affinity and Final Arguments establish the soul's divine nature in the Platonic philosophy, laying the foundation on the relationship between body, soul, and existence.

By contrast, Aristotle proposes a more naturalistic and functional view of the soul. In *De Anima*, he defines the soul not as an independent, immortal element but as the "form" of the living body.<sup>47</sup> For Aristotle, the soul is what makes a living being alive. Although Aristotle does recognize the *nous* as having a potentially unattached or perpetual aspect, he remains unclear about whether this applies to all humans or only to divine intellect.<sup>48</sup> Aristotle understands the soul as a form of art which in order to be expressed requires the proper instrument which is a body, thus separating the two notions and also contradicting the theory of *metempsychosis* as posed by the Pythagoreans that any soul can enter any physical body.<sup>49</sup> His philosophy shifts the

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<sup>42</sup> *Phaedo* 74b–76e.

<sup>43</sup> Burnet (1911), 14.

<sup>44</sup> *Phaedo* 78b–84b.

<sup>45</sup> Hackforth (1955), 78–80.

<sup>46</sup> *Phaedo*, 102b–107b.

<sup>47</sup> *De Anima II.1*, 412a20–412b9.

<sup>48</sup> *De Anima III.5*, 430a23–430b10.

<sup>49</sup> *De Anima* 407b. It is as absurd as to say that the art of carpentry could embody itself in

focus from metaphysical immortality of the soul to cognitive function and biology as key to understanding the soul.

Contrary to the metaphysical dualism of the platonic philosophy, the Epicureans established a more materialistic theory regarding the soul. For Epicurus, the soul is composed of fine, fast-moving atoms that invade the body and concentrate in the chest area, where sensations and emotions reside.<sup>50</sup> This physical soul bestows humans with perception and consciousness but disappears at death, leaving no residue or afterlife.<sup>51</sup> The Roman poet Lucretius further expands those arguments in his poem *De Rerum Natura*, stating that "death is nothing to us, nor does it concern us at all, since the nature of the mind is seen to be mortal".<sup>52</sup> For the Epicureans the term *anima* describes the mind and the soul as a single item, a material thing which perishes when a person's life ends with death. In contrast to Plato, the soul in this doctrine is neither divine nor immortal, but temporary and corporeal and since there is nothing after death, it ceases to exist. Lucretius considers the fear of death as irrational, insisting that souls are formed of mortal seed, and are born and die like other things.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the Epicurean soul is finite, material, and momentary and through accepting this notion, one manages to live without fear of dying.

This chapter has traced the evolving concept of the soul from the Homeric epics to the materialistic lucidity of Epicurean philosophy. Throughout this spectrum, the concept soul appears to be a persisting element in each era's metaphysics, whether it is divine, rational, or corporeal and the way thinkers view the soul could depict how humanity faces life, death, and meaning of life. In the following chapter the discussion will drift towards Neoplatonic and Early Christian views on the soul.

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flutes. Instead, each art must use its tools, each soul its body. In Cornelli (2016), 6. Further analysis on Aristotelian views on soul/body dualism in later chapters.

<sup>50</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 10.63–67. See also Long, (2006), 19.

<sup>51</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, §124 "Death is nothing to us; for what has been dissolved has no sense, and what has no sense is nothing to us.". See O'Keefe (2010), 46–49.

<sup>52</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III.830–869. See also Sedley, David. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*. Cambridge University Press, 1998, 121.

<sup>53</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III.417–423.

## **Chapter 2: Neoplatonic and Early Christian Perspectives on Death and Soul Immortality**

### **2.1 Recurring themes in Neoplatonism related to the soul's Immortality**

Following the Epicurean rejection of soul immortality, a new movement flourished in the late antiquity. It was given the name Neoplatonism due to its interest in the Platonic notions and the way the scholars interpreted them and reinvented them. Neoplatonism largely focused on the Platonic tradition in regard to the nature of the soul. Thinkers of this school of thought believed in the idea expressed in *Phaedo*, that the soul is immortal and of a higher nature and considered death as an integral step towards the ascension of the soul to the where divine resided. Similarly to Platonism, for the Neoplatonists the ultimate cause of the universe is a single unitary mind which was divined and called the One or the Good.<sup>54</sup> For Neoplatonism the soul can achieve ascension through purification, which is known in the Platonic tradition as engagement with philosophy throughout one's life. In the works of Plotinus and Porphyry, one can see how the concepts of death and the nature of the soul are further developed and interpreted.

However, it is just as important to set the historical context during which these ideas were developed. Gerson remarks that between the platonic dialogues and Plotinus, exist about six hundred years of studying and reflecting on the dialogues, the work of Aristotle and the indirect tradition, which all played a part in the development of the Neoplatonic philosophical notions.<sup>55</sup> During that time, the world underwent many political and scientific changes, the concept of religion started to become stronger and the concept of theology was being developed. As the world shifted from the Classical to the Hellenistic and the Early Christian eras, multiple schools of thought were formed in order to study and further develop ideas posed by their predecessors. This should be considered the natural flow of philosophy during time as the questions posed by earlier thinkers remained relevant and worthy of further analysis. What is noteworthy of that time though is that thinkers seemed to gradually overlook the differences between the different schools of philosophy and somehow started to merge the knowledge and doctrines together to craft something new.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Grayling (2019), 143.

<sup>55</sup> Gerson (2020), 225.

<sup>56</sup> Stace (1920), 368-371.

Neoplatonism is considered to be the last school of Greek Philosophy, even though the doctrines were not developed in the area of Greek dominance and historically it belongs in the early Christian era as most of the writings date in the first centuries AD.<sup>57</sup> Philo of Alexandria lived and fully experienced the transition from the Hellenistic to the Christian era, with all the new ideas posed and the focus shifting towards theology. Although Philo's works focus on the more religious aspect of philosophy, he does include his own theory on the soul, having studied Plato's works.<sup>58</sup> For Philo, there seems to be a quite strict dualism of body and soul as he presents a double dichotomy, and he suggests that the two main elements of the human being are the destructible body and an immortal soul, as Yli-Karjanmaa presents it in their study.<sup>59</sup> It is very interesting to note that Philo accepts the immortal nature of the soul without questioning it or using an actual argument to justify it, similarly to what is practiced in *Phaedo*.<sup>60</sup> In his writing he mentions the death of the soul and the sense of purpose it carries, as the soul needs to undergo moral transformation in order to ascend. However, when Philo refers to soul immortality, he does so in a theological manner, as human immortality is a result of God's immortality and such an achievement should bring a human soul close to divinity.<sup>61</sup>

Among the philosophers of late antiquity Plotinus stands out as a thinker of exceptional depth, subtlety, originality and power, and according to Gerson, Plotinus is the basis for all Platonists up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> *Ennead IV* is dedicated to the soul's nature, its separation in segments and its immortality. His philosophy stems from his interpretation of the ideas expressed in the Platonic dialogues as well as in Stoic philosophy and the Aristotelian doctrines.<sup>63</sup> Thus, for Plotinus the human being consists of the body and the soul and the proof of the immortality of the soul is not a proof of the immortality of human beings.<sup>64</sup> Influenced by *Phaedo*'s Final Argument where the soul has the same meaning as "to be alive", Plotinus suggests that the soul is self-subsistent and not

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<sup>57</sup> Stace (1920), 369-370.

<sup>58</sup> For further reading on the philosophical notions of Philo, see Yli-Karjanmaa in Long (ed.) (2021), 161-177.

<sup>59</sup> Yli-Karjanmaa in Long (ed.) (2021), 162-164.

<sup>60</sup> Yli-Karjanmaa in Long (ed.) (2021), 161. For Philo the terms immortal and imperishable are interchangeable, similar to what Plato suggests in *Phaedo*.

<sup>61</sup> Yli-Karjanmaa in Long (ed.) (2021), 174-175.

<sup>62</sup> O'Meara (2010), 301 and Gerson (2020), 225. For further reading on Plotinus see O'Meara in Gerson (ed.) (2010), 301-306.

<sup>63</sup> O'Meara (2010), 307.

<sup>64</sup> *Enn. IV 7 [2]*, 1.1-7, in Gerson (2021), 180.

relying on a body and thus the soul is what brings life to the body and since bearing life is what the soul does, it is immortal.<sup>65</sup> The paradox of the soul is that it cannot not exist, as its existence and life bearing qualities require a constant continuity of being, so it cannot be destroyed. Hence, Plotinus separates the soul from the body, which is prone to death, challenging main Hellenistic interpretations regarding human nature and the soul.<sup>66</sup> This metaphysical notion establishes the ontological immortality of the soul in the philosophy of Plotinus, which is rooted in his definition of the soul.

Plotinus further supports this notion by suggesting that the soul continues to exist as an individual element after death, which covers a gap in the Platonic philosophy where the soul after death merges into the universal intellect.<sup>67</sup> In *Ennead IV*, he questions the existence of individual Forms within the divine Intellect or the One, which preserve the soul's essence after death.<sup>68</sup> For Plotinus immortality is not the soul's unity with the One or the Good after physical death, but it is more of a continuance of existence within the intellectual realm. Another integral element to Plotinus' interpretation of the soul's immortality is morality. Plotinus emphasizes that by leading a moral life the soul can ascend from the physical world, in order to fully partake in the eternal life of the Intellect.<sup>69</sup> He considered that the means for the ascent of the soul are provided by philosophy, which, in leading us to knowledge, leads to a higher level of life.<sup>70</sup> Hence, the purified soul achieves immortality, whereas the corrupt soul must undergo further cycles of purification to ascend.

Porphiry was a student of Plotinus and the one who continued his work after his death, separating the *Enneads* into segments as well as creating his own doctrine in a plethora of disciplines and commentaries on various philosophical works. In *De Antro*, he develops his doctrine on soul salvation and describes death as a fleeting immersion into

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<sup>65</sup> *Enn. IV 7 [2]*, 9.7–9, 11.7–14, and *Phaedo* 102a10–107b10. Gerson (2021), 180–181.

<sup>66</sup> Long (1986), 210–216. In O'Meara (2010), 307–308 “Plotinus wishes to make between body and soul, a distinction which implies not only that soul is not body, but that body depends on soul for whatever unity, structure and life it might have. For Plotinus body is composite, having mass and occupying space.”

<sup>67</sup> In O'Meara (2010), 308 “Each Form is both thought and thinking, an intellect, and all are Intellect: the unity-multiplicity of Soul, a unity of which spatially divided bodies are incapable, is even more intensive in Intellect, where the greatest degree of unity of any multiplicity whatever is reached in the identity of thinking and its object.”

<sup>68</sup> Gerson (2021), 191–195, *Ennead IV.7 (9)* and Gerson (2020), 226, *Ennead V.1*, “Plotinus states that the hypostases One/Good/Intellect and Soul are derived directly from Platonic dialogues.”

<sup>69</sup> Plotinus *Ennead. I.6.5*.

<sup>70</sup> O'Meara (2010), 322.

the material world, where the soul's divinity is concealed but not extinguished.<sup>71</sup> Porphyry, though the use of allegory places immortality within an ethical context, as the soul's eternal continuation depends on its moral and intellectual condition, and death functions as a merely transitional phase in the journey of the soul.<sup>72</sup> The ideas of Porphyry regarding soul immortality and death seem to resemble closely those expressed in Plato's *Republic*, as the soul of those who lead moral lives and engage with philosophy ascend towards the Good or the One, which is where divinity and immortality reside, while simultaneously he agreed with Plotinus' notion that through rationality one can understand and approach the divine.<sup>73</sup> Neoplatonists considered the soul as a lasting, immaterial principle of life.<sup>74</sup> Unlike the Epicureans, who denied the existence of anything past death, Neoplatonists presented a layered ontology that incorporated metaphysics, ethics, and cosmology in order to explain and understand that nature of the soul and its place within the cosmos.

However, the notion of the soul's immortality in Neoplatonism cannot be fully comprehended without identifying its greatest aim, which is to achieve the One, the source of all existence and all that is good.<sup>75</sup> This is the ultimate purpose, which all philosophical and spiritual efforts are directed towards. Porphyry has placed at the end of his edition, the *Enneads*, three treatises which lead the reader to the Good or the One and in so doing must be surpassed, as must all thought and discourse.<sup>76</sup> Neoplatonic philosophy re-interprets the Platonic notions on the soul's immortality and its connection with death, suggesting that death is an essential part of the soul's ascension towards divinity. As Plotinus establishes the soul's spiritual and eternal nature as well as its desire to reach the Good, Porphyry presents death as a transformative experience which leads to immortality through purification. This combined approach showcases a comprehensive study of the soul in late antiquity, although as Christian theology

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<sup>71</sup> Porphyry, *De Antro*, sec. 5 trans. tertullian.org. "The soul is not extinguished by its own proper death but only overwhelmed for a time", Akçay (2020), 155-156.

<sup>72</sup> Akçay (2020), 152-153.

<sup>73</sup> Grayling (2020), 144-146 "Plotinus himself took it that Platonism entailed that there must be a first and absolutely simple principle that underlies the appearance of complexity and plurality, and is the embodiment of the eternal truth of things: and this in essence is Plotinus' doctrine of the 'One'." I recognize that the concept of Good has many contexts. In the *Republic* the Good is seen as a metaphysical principle including all life, however this notion is beyond the scope of this research.

<sup>74</sup> Gerson (2020), 232.

<sup>75</sup> O'Meara (2010), 322-323. "The ascent of the soul through philosophy is a return to where soul, in its higher part, always is and lives, in Intellect and in its source in the One."

<sup>76</sup> O'Meara (2010), 322. He refers to *Enneads* 6.7, 6.8 and 6.9.

developed in the following years, the way the soul was interpreted and linked to the Good would follow other paths than those paved by the study of Plato and the practices of pagan religion.<sup>77</sup>

## **2.2 Christian Responses to Platonic notions on the Soul**

During late antiquity a shift took place in the intellectual scene regarding the soul as religion became more popular as a concept and some of its aspects merged with philosophy and the cosmology of classical Greek thought made room for the notion of theurgy.<sup>78</sup> According to Lankila, during that time religion transformed itself from a “social practice” to a “belief” system and it became a part of social life.<sup>79</sup> Until then Neoplatonism was influenced by Platonism when it came to its religious aspects, which in many ways resembled a type of mystagogy, although the idea of a divine presence within the soul was always a recurring theme.<sup>80</sup> Given the notions of the One or the Good, it is evident why Neoplatonism became so attractive to Christians of the time, which is why they were willing to implement congenial aspects of it into their metaphysical and moral theology.<sup>81</sup> The concept of the soul which partook at divinity and held a moral character, is quite similar to the notion of the Christian soul seeking to approach God’s divinity as it was developed in Christianity.

This historical period with the declining of the Roman Empire, the rise of Christianity and the war against paganism, provided the framework for early Christian thinkers, to reconsider earlier notions of the soul’s immortality and incorporate them in a discussion under the spectrum of theology.<sup>82</sup> Neoplatonists began to interpret existing philosophical notions in ways which involved religion and metaphysics. According to Inge, the struggle between Christianity and Neoplatonism remains one of the most intriguing chapters of the history of religion, for the simple reason that the two systems had too many similarities, the main one being their “inwardness”, meaning their detachment from the world and their focus on approaching divinity, which is the

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<sup>77</sup> O’Meara (2010), 324.

<sup>78</sup> For further reading on theurgy see Shaw, G. (1985), 1-28.

<sup>79</sup> Lankila (2016), 148.

<sup>80</sup> Lankila (2016), 149.

<sup>81</sup> Grayling (2019), 143. For further reading on the divinization of Plato’s Good see Gerson (2008), 93-112.

<sup>82</sup> Grayling (2019), 148. For the terminology and the use of the word religion and *threskeia* in Neoplatonism and early Christianity, see Lankila (2016) 152-153.

ultimate good.<sup>83</sup> This is a very precise portrayal of the relationship between the two philosophical schools and one that describes it perfectly.

For Iamblichus, theurgy ensured the deification of souls through their incorporation to the orders of the cosmos.<sup>84</sup> In the *Elements of Theology*, Proclus describes the soul as immortal and imperishable, partaking in knowledge and undergoing cyclic reinstatements, while also being in sync with the divine intellect.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to the *Phaedo*, where immortality is proved through rational evidence and eschatological myth, Proclus suggests that through theurgy the soul is elevated, and thus secures its immortal fate.<sup>86</sup> Gerson notes how Proclus identifies the One as the first principal of all with the primal God, as well as the source of all divinity and “divinity itself” stripping it from all personal attributes.<sup>87</sup> This development set the ground for Christian discourse with Platonism, where soul immortality was not just a metaphysical notion but held a kinship to divinity, salvation and eschatology.<sup>88</sup>

Augustine in his early work suggests that there are only two subjects of philosophical inquiry and those are God and the soul, making very clear that he was familiar both with the Neoplatonic notion of the One, as well as the Biblical creation of man in the image of divinity.<sup>89</sup> In his philosophical notion, the soul is created *ex nihilo*, rational and immaterial, and destined for eternity.<sup>90</sup> Thus, for Augustine, immortality is not merely achieved by philosophical exercise or ritual practice but rather it is the gift of divine grace, since he is influenced both by the platonic tradition and the scriptures. The upward path – ascension – for Augustine is the same with the one of Plotinus; first comes “purification,” which makes life good, followed by “contemplation” and finally “vision” of the divine.<sup>91</sup>

Whereas Augustine represents the early Christian engagement with Platonism, Aquinas creates a doctrine which includes traces of Aristotelian, Platonic and Christian

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<sup>83</sup> Inge (1900), 330.

<sup>84</sup> Shaw (2014), 19-20 and 26-27 “The embodiment of the soul and its perfection in theurgy was seen by Iamblichus as essential to cosmogenesis.”

<sup>85</sup> Proclus, *Elements*, Prop. 187–211, Dodds (1963), 163–170.

<sup>86</sup> Chlup (2012), 180–184.

<sup>87</sup> Gerson (2008), 107-109.

<sup>88</sup> Lankila (2016), 150–153.

<sup>89</sup> Augustine *Sol.* 17 in O’Daly (1987), 1. Note the use of the word “man” instead of “human”. For the sake of the argument the original term will be used when deemed necessary.

<sup>90</sup> O’Daly (1987), 22, 32-35.

<sup>91</sup> Inge (1900), 338-339.

traditions. Aquinas' conception of the soul is that it can be defined as "the principle of life" as the essence of the human individual.<sup>92</sup> In *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas suggests that the human soul is subsistent, incorporeal and incorruptible and thus immortal.<sup>93</sup> In contrast to Plato's work, Aquinas proposes that the soul, as the substantial form of the body, possesses intellect and will and thus can survive death.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the preexistence or transmigration of the soul as presented by the platonic tradition are rejected, as Aquinas suggests that each soul is created by God along with the physical form of the being.<sup>95</sup> Although Aquinas probably did not have access to Platonic works, he was influenced by Neoplatonism and that is evident in his works, as well as from Augustine's work, which includes a great deal of Platonic notions regarding the soul and its nature.<sup>96</sup>

Both, Augustine and Aquinas, are influenced by Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, while reframing it within a different context. This is proof that Platonic philosophy shows extreme resilience in the passing and changing of time, as it has managed to evolve through the different schools of thought, always remaining relevant. This was expressed very accurately by Whitehead when he stated that every thought in the past two millennium can be reduced to a series of footnotes to Plato.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Grayling (2019), 173.

<sup>93</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.75.2 and I.75.6.

<sup>94</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.75.2, Stump (2003), 201-203.

<sup>95</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.75.6, Grayling (2019), 174.

<sup>96</sup> Stump (2003), 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> Whitehead (1979), 39.

## Chapter 3: Soul & Body Dualism and Consciousness

### 3.1 Soul & Body Dualism

In simple terms can be defined as the contrast of two distinct entities such as the immaterial soul and the physical body. This theory of dualism has come to be associated with what has been called the “Mind-Body problem”, which is evident in Descartes.<sup>98</sup> However, traces of it can be found in the Platonic corpus and more specifically in *Phaedo*, where the matter of soul immortality is discussed and analysed in relation to the nature of the body. For Plato, the true substances are not physical bodies, which are ephemeral, but the eternal Forms of which bodies are imperfect copies.<sup>99</sup> In *Phaedo*, Plato provides the framework that the soul is immortal and immaterial and thus it is related to the Forms and is separate from the body, which represents all that is corporeal and transient. In this context, the soul is beheld as the element which breathes life and animates the body, which creates a contradictory connection among the two entities, as well as a conflicting one. Although the soul is of fully different nature from the body, in order for life to occur the two must somehow interact.

Obdrzalek supports the spatial theory, according to which the soul takes up space within the body, can extend itself, it interacts with the body, - thus establishing a connection among the two and a physical element to the nature of the soul - it animates it until it dies, which occurs when it departs from it.<sup>100</sup> According to this view, the interaction of the soul with the body sustains life and requires in theory that the soul must have a corporal element to it.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, for Descartes, the soul and the body interact with each other, but they are also two distinct entities. Influenced by Galileo’s view of the universe, similar to the mechanism of a clock, Descartes considers the body as a purely physical mechanic entity with the soul – or the mind, as he uses the two terms interchangeably – as the rationality element which governs over it. The result bears similarity to the platonic notion that the soul and the body are different in nature but maintain a connection in order to function. Aristotle, challenging the Platonic dualism, suggested that the soul cannot exist without the body, or the body without the soul.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy VI*.

<sup>99</sup> *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition).

<sup>100</sup> Obdrzalek (2024), 36-40.

<sup>101</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy VI*.

<sup>102</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima II.1*, 412.

For the later, neither the soul nor the body can function independently, and they should be considered a united being, rather than two distinct elements.

In *Phaedo*, in order for Socrates to prove that the soul is immortal and that it continues to exist after death, Plato draws the distinction between the soul and the body, and this separation is defined as “death”.<sup>103</sup> This notion refers back to the Homeric understanding of the soul and the use of the term *ἐμψυχον*, which indicates that one is alive as long as the soul animates the body and they die when it leaves it.<sup>104</sup> The later brings forth the Homeric image of the soul leaving the body after death similar to a ghostly, shadowy essence which no longer bears life. In *Phaedo*, Plato redirects this image into a philosophical context, suggesting that even though life is dependent on the soul’s existence within the body, the soul itself exceeds the body’s corporal nature.

Throughout the dialogue, the Socratic line of thought suggests that the true aim of the philosopher is to obtain knowledge, but the body and the senses tend to confuse and distract their souls from doing so (in fact both Plato and Descartes considered the senses unreliable), and since death is the separation of the soul from the body, then knowledge should be more accessible after death than during life, and thus death should not be feared but welcomed.<sup>105</sup> Death here is not only viewed as a step towards the ultimate aim, but also as the release of the soul from bodily chains and burdens. Still as Kjeller Johansen notes, there is an ambiguity in the notion of separating the soul from the body, as it can be considered an “intentional” or “functional” separation.<sup>106</sup>

Naas raises attention to a part of the dialogue where body is explicitly paralleled to a cloak and the soul to a weaver who weaves and wears it, and Socrates argues that the true philosopher should pay no attention and give no care to the adornments of the body.<sup>107</sup> He also discusses the difference in the moral value of the body and the soul as the true philosopher should turn away from the body and concern himself with the

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<sup>103</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 64c, in Kjeller Johansen (2017), 18-19. “Meanwhile, ‘being dead’ (literally, ‘having died’, perfect tense) is ‘the body’s having come to be apart, separated from the soul, itself by itself, and the soul’s being apart, alone by itself, separated from the body’”, transl. from D. Gallop (ed.), *Plato. Phaedo*, Oxford 1975.

<sup>104</sup> “ἐμψυχον”, as in breathing life into or animated, in LJS. See the first chapter for the Homeric notions on soul immortality and death.

<sup>105</sup> Kjeller Johansen (2017), 20.

<sup>106</sup> *Phaedo* 65a1 in Kjeller Johansen (2017), 20. For further study of the type of body-soul separation in *Phaedo* see Kjeller Johansen (2017) and Pakaluk (2003), Degrees of separation in the “*Phaedo*”.

<sup>107</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 87a-88b in Naas (2020), 24.

soul.<sup>108</sup> This comparison emphasizes the clear boundary that Plato establishes between the soul and the body in *Phaedo* and the hierarchy of the two according to their significance. The body here is temporary, material and even replaceable, while the soul is immortal, immaterial and the essence of being. Naas' approach is noteworthy as he forms an analogy and interprets dualism in *Phaedo* stating that what the clothes are to the body, that is what the body is for the soul.<sup>109</sup> Hence, the body is viewed almost like an instrument to the philosopher's existence, always governed by the soul, which has to resist the physical distractions.

Boys-Stones when examining the *Phaedo* and why the narrator of the dialogue is Phaedo instead of Plato, makes the remark that Phaedo had been a war prisoner and forced to work as a prostitute.<sup>110</sup> He presents an analogy of Phaedo's life and the soul in the dialogue, which is also imprisoned and trapped in polluting service to carnality during life, but as the soul is purified and released from the corporal prison through philosophy, so does Phaedo is liberated from enslavement and becomes a philosopher.<sup>111</sup> This approach suggests another level of dualism in *Phaedo*, as the soul undergoes the process of purification through philosophical thought and get separated from the body in order to orientate towards the truth. Phaedo's transformation to a philosopher reflects the purification, freedom, and ascension of the soul. Thus, confirming the Platonic notion that philosophy prepares the soul to be freed from the physical prison of the body, as philosophizing is nothing other than practicing for death.<sup>112</sup>

Thus, the dualistic approach of the soul is evident in *Phaedo* and philosophy after Plato. Death operates as a facilitating factor, which assists the soul reach its potential and separate from the bodily chains. The philosopher who views this as a fact, is conscious of their existence and the kinship between their body and soul and they are aware of the separation which is to take place should they desire to achieve immortality.

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<sup>108</sup> Naas (2020), 25.

<sup>109</sup> Naas (2020), 26.

<sup>110</sup> Boys-Stones (2004), 2.

<sup>111</sup> Boys-Stones (2004), 2. For further study on the pessimism with which the body is presented in Plato see Wagoner (2019), 74-99.

<sup>112</sup> Wagoner (2019), 74.

### 3.2: Consciousness, immortality and death

In his *Soliloquies* Augustine writes “*Tu, qui vis te nosse, scis esse te? Scio. Unde scis? Nescio.*”<sup>113</sup> This phrase includes the concept of self-awareness and consciousness of one’s knowledge and place within the world. It is similar to the Socratic notion of “*ἐν οἷδ᾽α, ὅτι οὐδέν οἷδ᾽α*”, which translates to “all I know is that I know nothing”. Both those segments suggest that being alive and having a soul means being able to use reason and being capable of thought. However, consciousness here presents a paradox as admitting ignorance and simultaneously being aware of thyself within the cosmos, suggest wisdom and knowledge. Consciousness could be regarded not only the basis of self-awareness but also the foundation for questions about soul immortality, death, and the act suicide as an ethical matter. In the previous chapters it has been established that the soul is considered of rational and intellectual nature and thus consciousness could be considered the expression of its rationality, a form of awareness of the space we take up in the universe.

In *Phaedo*, Plato examines the concept of immortality of the soul by linking it to the intellectual forms, rationality and memory.<sup>114</sup> It is suggested that the soul is the essence of a being, and it is what survives physical death, carrying knowledge and recollection from the Intellect of Forms. Socrates discusses the soul’s immortality and its parting of the body through the process of physical death, defining the latter as the body-soul separation. He seems to be aware that his soul will not follow his body after he dies and uses this argument to comfort himself and his disciplines.<sup>115</sup> The question posed here would be whether Socrates has a sense of self during his last moments and whether he understands the concept of the self or an aspect of it.<sup>116</sup> Although Socrates seems lucid and aware of his impending death, there is no indication that he comprehends the notions of self or consciousness, even though he seems sure for the future of his soul.

Heraclitus seems to be interested in the matters of the self as he says that he went in search of himself and looked for the logos of the soul.<sup>117</sup> The use of the term logos is noteworthy here as it suggests that part of what it means to be a human is partaking in

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<sup>113</sup> In Stock (2017), 130 (transl.). *Do you, who wish to know yourself, know that your self exists? I know. How do you know? I do not know.*

<sup>114</sup> Through the argument of recollection.

<sup>115</sup> *Phaedo* 115C.

<sup>116</sup> For further reading on the notion of the Self and the fundamental questions it poses see Sorabji (2006).

<sup>117</sup> Heraclitus, *frags.* 45, 101, 116, Diels-Kranz, in Sorabji (2006), 34.

reason. Plato creates a connection of consciousness, reason, and soul immortality. If the soul is related to the intellect of the Forms and possesses reason and if reason includes being aware of death and understanding its purpose as a conscious act towards immortality, then the soul is connected to consciousness.

Plotinus took interest in the notions of consciousness, knowledge and soul immortality as a process of ascension. Sorabji summarizes his view of the self by saying that there are multiple selves, two or three, or an indefinite number.<sup>118</sup> According to Smith's interpretation of Plotinian thought, when a man enters the physical world a second man or self-attaches itself to the primary man, the higher self and it is the philosopher's duty to rediscover this higher self which lies within and to return to it through contemplation.<sup>119</sup> The two selves are conscious of the other but true self-knowledge may only occur, when the person transcends their empirical self and live at the level of the higher self.<sup>120</sup> O' Meara notes that the intellectual instruction practiced in Plotinus' school can be regarded as aiming at bringing souls to self-knowledge, nearer to the life of Intellect.<sup>121</sup> If death is the means through which immortality occurs then it could be considered as the way to transmigrate the self into higher levels of existence. Proclus incorporates theurgy into his philosophy as he considers that through devotion to the divine the soul will develop the consciousness to gravitate towards it.<sup>122</sup>

The development of philosophy brought along the development of religion and as the focus turned towards the divinity, the position of the self in the world shifted as well, focusing on who the self is when standing in front of the divine. Christian philosophy, while implementing many Platonic and Neoplatonic notions, interpreted consciousness and immortality under a theological scope always aiming towards the divine presence. Augustine suggests that the soul is conscious of itself and possesses knowledge of its existence, although is ignorant of the origins of this knowledge.<sup>123</sup> This is a reference

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<sup>118</sup> Sorabji (2006), 130.

<sup>119</sup> Smith (1978), 292.

<sup>120</sup> Smith (1978), 292.

<sup>121</sup> O'Meara (2010), 320.

<sup>122</sup> Chlup (2012), 178. "Let us ascend to the true aim, which is an assimilation to him. Let us recognize our Lord, let us feel love for the Father. Let us hearken to his call. Let us run towards warmth, escaping from the cold. Let us become fire. Let us pass through fire."

<sup>123</sup> In Stock (2017), 129-130 (transl.). "(the soul) is unable to be ignorant of itself, even when it is seeking to know itself. When it is seeking itself, after all, it knows that it is seeking itself. This is something that it could not know, if it first did not know itself. It does not seek itself or look for itself anywhere else than within itself. As a consequence, if it knows it is looking for itself, it clearly knows itself. Moreover, the whole of the soul knows all that it knows; that is to say, it is in seeking or looking that it knows itself; therefore, the whole of it knows itself and it knows the whole of itself. It does not

to Augustine's segment from the second book of the *Soliloquies*, where, according to Stock, *scio* is an affirmation that he is aware that he exists through the permanent existence of his soul.<sup>124</sup> The latter is proof of how in early Christianity consciousness of the self, incorporated an eschatological element, while suggesting that approaching the divine is the fulfillment of human nature.

In modern philosophy, consciousness plays a central role in Descartes' philosophy. Descartes describes the intellect as "the power through which we know things in the strict sense [that] is purely spiritual, and is ... distinct from the whole body."<sup>125</sup> His prominent notion "*Cogito, ergo sum*", suggests that the use of cognitive ability means that existence has occurred, and taking into account his interchangeable use of soul and mind one could translate the saying as "I think and practice philosophy and thus I exercise my soul and therefore I exist".

The mind and the soul – whether a single unity or two – are the means through which we experience and perceive the world around us, and according to the philosophical tradition they also survive bodily death. The notion of the soul's immortality inevitably suggests that the body is mortal and will eventually cease to exist. In *Phaedo*, Socrates informs his interlocutors that a philosopher should be ready and willing to die, as this would grant them immortality and purification of their soul.<sup>126</sup> Hence, he refuses to escape prison and save his life, choosing to drink the hemlock and die, in full consciousness. In *Phaedo* Socrates condemns suicide as an act of insult to the gods.<sup>127</sup> Werner suggests that suicide is inconsistent with philosophical purification, as it represents a premature termination of the process of purification, such that one might risk departing life without having adequately prepared themselves.<sup>128</sup> Nonetheless, performing suicide would require a thought process and one being conscious of their existence or lack of within the cosmos.

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know anything else, only itself, which, as noted, it knows thoroughly and completely. The question arises: If it knows itself, why does it continue to seek itself if it knows itself while it is seeking itself? For, if it were ignorant of itself, it could not possibly know itself, while it was seeking itself." *De Genesi ad Litteram* 7.21.28.

<sup>124</sup> Stock (2017), 131.

<sup>125</sup> Blum (2019), 7.

<sup>126</sup> Werner (2018), 157.

<sup>127</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 61b–62c. For further reading into Suicide in *Phaedo* see Werner (2018).

<sup>128</sup> Werner (2018), 178.

The platonic view on suicide as presented in *Phaedo* was embraced by Christianity and implemented within its doctrines, granting a theological aspect to it and suggesting that suicide is condemned as an act of sin. Augustine in *City of God* writes that *Christians have no authority for committing suicide in any circumstances whatever*.<sup>129</sup> The Christian tradition takes the concept of suicide further suggesting that committing suicide does not allow a person a chance at resurrection or divine grace. It appears as if throughout the philosophical tradition that has been examined, suicide is continuously rejected by the different schools of thought. Death by suicide – although a choice based on consciousness – does not provide a philosophical or even spiritual end of life, but a sinful act against human nature, according to the Christian tradition. Greyson notes that humanity's belief that some part of our personality may survive bodily death is also linked to common experiences that offer evidence for the postmortem survival of consciousness and although these phenomena have been reported for centuries, they have become more prevalent as modern biomedical technology has allowed us to bring people back from the brink of death and, indeed, to blur the boundary between life and death.<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, the notion of suicide is a topic of ethical dimensions and of many interpretations depending on the historical and cultural context it is being examined in.

The human experience in relation to the self and the meaning of death and life remained relevant and interesting for contemporary philosophers and thinkers in the years that followed and in the next chapter their interpretations of such matters will be discussed.

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<sup>129</sup> Augustine, *City of God* I.20.

<sup>130</sup> Greyson (2010), 168-169.

## **Chapter 4: Interpretations of Death and Soul Immortality in Contemporary Eras**

### **4.1 Death and Soul Immortality in Modern Philosophy**

In a rather laconic manner Gerson recognizes the soul as the principle of life.<sup>131</sup> This statement is of great interest for many schools of thought and generates further questions regarding the nature of humanity, the purpose of existence and the mystery of death. Being human is to always wonder and inquire regarding those matters and contemporary thinkers were no different than their predecessors. As theology developed along philosophy new terminology emerged and the soul acquired a divine nature, the concepts of faith, salvation and piety became central in discussions regarding soul immortality and death. The modern philosophical era focused its attention on maintaining a connection with the previous classical tradition and to place the concept of death within the frameworks of the emerging Christian dogma and scientific progress.

Before Descartes, an Islamic philosopher named Avicenna, imagined a man who exists through flying without being aware of anything, not even the feeling of touching limbs.<sup>132</sup> This “flying man” is aware only of his essence and not whether he has a body and thus, Avicenna reaches the conclusion that the soul can exist independently from the body and is conscious of its existence.<sup>133</sup> This notion reminds one of Augustine and his similar views on the soul, as well as the body-soul dualism as a topic of philosophical thought. For Descartes, the mind and the body are two separate substances, with the human souls being considered as immaterial.<sup>134</sup> His philosophy can be summarised in the phrase “Cogito, ergo sum”, translating to “I think, therefore I exist” and it is an indication of the dualistic approach he suggests when it comes to the body-soul relationship. Descartes seems to think that humans are composites of mind and body, at least in this life,<sup>135</sup> and thus are aware of their bodies in contrast to Avicenna’s flying man who is solely aware of his soul. According to Chamberlain, Descartes’ philosophy suggests that humans exist as mind-body unions, but that they

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<sup>131</sup> Gerson (2020), 232.

<sup>132</sup> Sorabji (2006), 222.

<sup>133</sup> Sorabji (2006), 222-226. See Sorabji (2006), 222-226 for textual references of Avicenna and similarities with the Augustinian philosophical notions.

<sup>134</sup> Blum (2019), 5.

<sup>135</sup> Chamberlain (2022), 21-22.

might also exist as minds separate from the body.<sup>136</sup> In simpler terms, for Descartes there are two views of the self, the first is the self as a thinking thing, and second is the self as a human being.<sup>137</sup> Hence the relationship between the two depends on the union between them. Chamberlain suggests that human beings are actually constituted by their senses – through which they experience and understand the world around them – and their possible constitution is by the intellect.<sup>138</sup>

During the Enlightenment Era, philosophy focused on a promethean, anthropocentric view of man without God, and ignored the limits of man and the moral and existential significance of death.<sup>139</sup> For Kant, immortality is considered connected to morality and reason. He claims that any attempt to provide an explanation of what the immortality of the soul is like from the perspective of a human, is beyond the limits of human reason, and if the moral law is real then the soul must go towards holiness.<sup>140</sup> However, as Surprenant notes, Kant's thought was not about proving soul immortality, but rather showing that believing in morality brings rational faith, and this infinite progress is associated with immortality.<sup>141</sup> His notions are more focused to cognition and the mind rather than the soul or the relationship of the body and the soul. Although inevitably all three are interconnected through the flow of philosophical thought it is important to note that Kant is more interested in the science of cognition and the development of his transcendental arguments.<sup>142</sup> In addition, Kant discussed consciousness of self only in the context of other objectives, and his remarks on the topic are extremely scattered.<sup>143</sup>

Nonetheless, for Kant, immortality has an ethical element to it, and death is not considered the liberation of the soul from its corporeal prison, but an entrance to a moral cosmos which extends further than that physical one. As for the body-soul relationship, although Kant does distinguish the soul from the “bodily machine,” he affirms that the soul is susceptible to physical forces.<sup>144</sup> According to Carpenter, his cosmological

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<sup>136</sup> Chamberlain (2022), 21-22, 26.

<sup>137</sup> Chamberlain (2020), 10-11. See Chamberlain (2020), 27 regarding his description of the Cartesian self.

<sup>138</sup> Chamberlain (2020), 27.

<sup>139</sup> Kokosalakis (2020), 406-407.

<sup>140</sup> Surprenant (2008) 95-96.

<sup>141</sup> Surprenant (2008) 95-96.

<sup>142</sup> Brook, Andrew and Julian Wuerth, "Kant's View of the Mind and Consciousness of Self", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.).

<sup>143</sup> Brook, Andrew and Julian Wuerth, "Kant's View of the Mind and Consciousness of Self", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.).

<sup>144</sup> Carpenter (1998).

theory depends on how spirituous matter interacts via repulsion and attraction with physical matter.<sup>145</sup> Hence, in order for the soul to achieve its best form of existence it needs to interact with a healthy body and in order for immortality to be achieved one needs to live by their moral obligations and in rational faith.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy takes a more existential turn towards the human experience of life and death. In his essay named *Natural law*, Hegel suggests that the ability to die liberates humans.<sup>146</sup> He also claims that immortality and believing in God are connected, so turning inwards and getting to know the soul and becoming conscious of it, diminishes the need for an afterlife as immortality is considered as “eternity” rather than duration, as Inwood puts it.<sup>147</sup> For Kojève, in one of his lectures on Hegel, by forming self-consciousness one can understand their own nature and soul and thus what a person is, is what remains after physical death.<sup>148</sup> For Kierkegaard, the human experience requires faith in order to achieve immortality and his notions are deeply rooted in Christian religion. The soul represents the living unity of the self who is inscribed in the temporal but who belongs to the eternal.<sup>149</sup> Thus, the soul partakes in the present time and also is an element which survives death, through faith and devotion to God. As Shim puts it, death in Kierkegaard’s philosophy symbolizes the uncertainty of life, and it is a process towards understanding the meaning of self-identity and existence, a process in which the individual is constantly reflected and reproduced.<sup>150</sup> This statement in itself includes the element of eternity and transmigration as it suggests that the soul is in a state of constant change and movement.

Similarly to Kierkegaard, other existentialists presented ideas on the human experience. Heidegger transcended conventional interpretations of life and death, suggesting that death poses as an opportunity for humans to discover themselves and reflect on their place within the cosmos.<sup>151</sup> For Heidegger, death is an inevitable and unavoidable part of life and a process through which one grasps the essence of being and their authentic

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<sup>145</sup> Carpenter (1998).

<sup>146</sup> Inwood (2017), 69.

<sup>147</sup> Inwood (2017), 75-76.

<sup>148</sup> Inwood (2017), 75-76.

<sup>149</sup> Bowen (2024), 9. See Bowen (2024) for further reading on the role of patience in Kierkegaard’s philosophical notion and the example of Anna the Prophetess to support his claim.

<sup>150</sup> Shim (2020).

<sup>151</sup> Wong (2024), 455.

self.<sup>152</sup> His philosophical stance is to accept the certainty of death and look inwards within the self to discover truth and authenticity. This relates to using rationality and self-consciousness in order to determine one's orientation in life and fully understand the meaning of their existence.<sup>153</sup> Nietzsche, claims that "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."<sup>154</sup> The latter suggests that the collapse of Christianity as a dogma equals to the loss of faith towards immortality. For Nietzsche, living is an effort to find meaning without the existence of an immortal soul and with a rational certainty of death as the end of life.

Camus discusses the human detachment from the world under the decline of Christianity and faith, in a rather pessimistic light. In *The Stranger*, Mersault is in a prison cell and seems to not care for the death that awaits him, nor does he feel remorse or sadness, having gained a sort of clarity.<sup>155</sup> The absurdity of humanity is the collective efforts to find meaning in a world which is not governed by rationality or having any moral compass. This is what Nietzsche probably meant with the declaration that "God is dead". Living in a world devoid of moral values and meaning, humans must create their own purpose. Nagel, although critical of Camus in many aspects, agrees that life is in fact worth living.<sup>156</sup> He focuses on the bigger picture of life and the meaning of existence and living.

As philosophy progressed and science developed the collective thinking drifted towards death as a philosophical notion both in its relation to living and with whether there is continuation of life after death. Technology has facilitated and at the same time complicated the matter as more and more studies are being made regarding the soul, its nature and the human experience.

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<sup>152</sup> Wong (2024), 455-456.

<sup>153</sup> For further reading on Heidegger's Dasein see Grayling (2019), 490-495.

<sup>154</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181.

<sup>155</sup> Camus, *The Stranger*, 122-123.

<sup>156</sup> For further reading on Nagel's views on Absurdity see Nagel (1987), Gordon (1984), and Thomas (2018).

## 4.2: Soul Immortality in the Digital Era

The immortality of the soul is considered quite a controversial topic for discussion in the era of technological advancements, as well as an outdated concept, due to its religious aspects and it often seems not to fit in with the fast-moving world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>157</sup> For the modern human, the soul is not a straightforward concept and its definition depends on many factors such as their upbringing, religious beliefs, personal experience, field of work and external influences. However, it is commonly accepted that the soul or the spirit or essence is an important aspect of the human experience and a notion that has travelled to modern world since antiquity. According to Plato, the soul is indestructible and eternal and Christian tradition has implemented this notion in their philosophy suggesting that by having a pure soul – which translates to living a pious life – one can achieve immortality and approach the divine being. For many functionalist philosophers and thinkers, the mind and the soul are one united being, which generates what is called consciousness.<sup>158</sup> For the field of neuroscience consciousness exists within the brain and can indeed survive the event of brain death, through an electromagnetic, transmissive model of consciousness.<sup>159</sup>

Being able to think and consider its place within the world, the humankind has desired immortality and longevity. Throughout history people have crafted stories of immortal beings, technological miracles which have kept a person alive or their mind, have developed religion and tried to save their souls from the emptiness of non-existence and have spent lifetimes searching for a cure for death.<sup>160</sup> In the dystopian show “Black Mirror” there was an episode where a person created an android body which would include all the memories and personality of a deceased loved one as grief management, but in the end the technological creation lacks the essence of the person, their personal identity or in other words their soul.<sup>161</sup>

The rapid rising of artificial intelligence created ethical and existential questions regarding the metaphysical soul and its survival. As technology progresses human lose traditional faith and turn towards technology and science to achieve immortality in a

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<sup>157</sup> Brittz (2018).

<sup>158</sup> Jones (2007), 67-68.

<sup>159</sup> Rouleau (2021), 1-22.

<sup>160</sup> Carden, Gibson (2021), 141-142.

<sup>161</sup> Carden, Gibson (2021), 141-142. For further reading on the subject see Carden, Gibson (2021).

more physical manner and not under the scope of a theoretical belief system. Artificial intelligence has been used to simulate human patterns and produce original “thoughts” and opinions and generating human like communication which is hard to be detected even by digital tools. As Platovnjak puts it “if Descartes overemphasized the importance of the human mind and struggled to properly integrate the existence of his body, with the development of artificial intelligence, nowadays we struggle to find an adequate place for the human mind. Human essence, described as a thinking device like computer software, is apparently losing its importance with the fast development of super-computers and artificial intelligence, steadily occupying more space and replacing humans in decision-making, planning, and ethical thinking.”<sup>162</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of artificial intelligence is how it has been used to create images of people’s dreams and metaphysical experiences, such as near-death experiences.<sup>163</sup> The troubling aspect here is how can a machine depict a feeling or a sensation through colour and imagery without the human element actively engaged. Another interesting aspect of artificial intelligence is the way humans can use it to discuss as if they would speak with a friend, get advice from it and even allow it to help them get through heartbreak and grief. Many wonder whether artificial intelligence can be conscious or can possess qualities of the soul, such as love, grief and empathy. It can certainly imitate such qualities through pattern recognition and machine learning, but the question still poses.

Jones, in his examination of existentialist Jeffrey Olen suggests that the “continuity of consciousness” constitutes the reincarnation of the soul.<sup>164</sup>

“If the soul is thought to be the crucial element of the person, it is difficult to see how it could be anything but the mind. If it is our character traits, personality, thoughts, likes and dislikes, memories, and continuity of experience that makes us the persons we are, then they must belong to the soul” (“Personal Identity and Life After Death,” 2003, p. 331).<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Platovnjak (2023), 976-977.

<sup>163</sup> For further reading on consciousness in near death experiences see Greyson (2010).

<sup>164</sup> Jones (2007), 68.

<sup>165</sup> In Jones (2007), 68.

“If it is possible to ‘program’ another brain to have the same psychology as the brain I now have, then it is possible for me to change bodies. And if it is possible for me to change bodies, then it is also possible for me to survive the death of my body” (“Personal Identity and Life After Death,” 2003, p. 333).<sup>166</sup>

In his study Rouleau, discusses the survival of consciousness after permanent bodily death, through medical involvement, 3D printed brains and the simulation argument.<sup>167</sup> Although he focuses on the nature of consciousness and its embodiment within the brain, one needs to consider the resources needed in order to maintain consciousness outside the breathing living creature. That would require energy supplies, technological expertise and human staff ready to troubleshoot issues with the code or the network. But above all there are serious ethical aspects to be considered regarding transferring consciousness or suggesting that artificial intelligence possesses it.

Nonetheless, through artificial intelligence new challenges come up for the posthuman experience and for the prospect of immortality. The soul or consciousness might need to be redefined in the digital era, as immortality is being reimagined as data collection and simulation possibilities. Soul immortality and death in the contemporary world probably differ from the notions Plato presented in *Phaedo*, although they concern an element of humanity that has managed to remain somewhat mysterious. The matter of the soul becomes more relevant than ever as all the technological achievements guide many people to turn inwards and consider themselves why life is progressing as is, whether immortality is in fact plausible and if immortality means eternal life or an eternal stream of consciousness in the sense of information being passed through generations. In a way, modern philosophy and science being concerned with the soul could be considered solid evidence that the Platonic ideas were highly influential. They relate to humans across generations and through time and are still eagerly discussed and analysed to this day.

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<sup>166</sup> In Jones (2007), 68.

<sup>167</sup> Rouleau (2021).

## Conclusion

This dissertation has followed an intricate path through time from the Homeric notion of the soul and its depiction as a shadowy essence departing after death, to the Presocratic philosophers and the Platonic immortal soul, the Neoplatonic notions of the soul immortality and death, the early Christian philosophy, contemporary thinkers and finally the modern technological era. The initial questions posed in this study concerned the journey of the soul through centuries and the different interpretations different schools of thought provided for this notion, as well as why such an issue has remained interesting and relevant through time. The latter is maybe the greatest question of all as its answer is not only ambiguous but also unclear and rather complicated.

The study begun from some major questions which were introductory to the context such as what is a soul, how is it defined, what are the conditions of existence and what makes a being alive. From the vague reference to the soul in the Homeric epics, the study moved towards the Presocratic thinkers who set the basis for future understanding of the soul and the place of humanity within the cosmos. Pythagoras views the soul as a transmigrating entity through the process of metempsychosis, while Heraclitus suggests that the soul actively engages with reason and exists in sync and continuity with the cosmos. Parmenides views the soul in constant movement and changes and Plato, in *Phaedo* lays the foundation for the immortal soul. For Aristotle, the soul is closely connected to the cognitive abilities of the human nature and for the Epicureans the soul is material and transient.

Having discussed some of the different interpretations and understandings of the soul, the second chapter focuses on Neoplatonism and the Early Christian tradition. Philo, in a theological context speaks of the death of the soul and achieving immortality, as Plotinus views the soul similar to an immortal life-bearing element, able to survive after corporal death. Porphyry bestows death as a transformative experience leading the soul to immortality through the process of purification and Iamblichus introduces theurgy as the means towards deification. Augustine, one of the most important thinkers of his time, presents a path towards the One, through purification of the soul and finally Aquinas views the soul as akin to the intellect and as immortal but interconnected with the mortal body. The third chapter includes a discussion on body-soul dualism, where the relationship between the body and the soul is being discussed and analysed and for

the second half the discussion gravitates towards consciousness, the human experience as expressed in Plato and the philosophical notion of suicide.

The final chapter of this dissertation is about contemporary philosophy and the way the notions on the soul have survived through modern times. Beginning from Avicenna's "flying man" and drawing the parallels with Descartes well-known existential phrase "Cogito, ergo sum", it is established that the term soul has been translated to being aware and conscious of thyself and hence physical senses are a grounding and vital factor of the human experience for they are the means through which one interacts with the cosmos. The study moves towards Kant's moral and cognitive view of the soul and Hegel's self-consciousness as a main element. Kierkegaard suggests a religious aspect of the soul and claims it belongs to the divine and not the mortal, thus suggesting a sort of transmigration through asceticism. Heidegger is focused on achieving authenticity through becoming self-conscious and Nietzsche's pessimistic remark that "God is dead", suggests a not so stable belief system based on religion and salvation. The chapter ends with a mention to Camus' work in *The Stranger*, where the soul is set to find meaning in a meaningless world.

The study ends with a discussion on the soul in the era of artificial intelligence and the technological advancements which provide a new context for the soul immortality and death. In a world where technology is slowly taking over original human thought and has become the centre of the human experience the questions regarding the soul and its nature still remain unanswered. It is in the human nature to wonder and be interested in our nature and the elements of our beings that make us feel and experience the cosmos surrounding us and hopefully future research will shed light to the fundamental questions regarding the soul. The inquiries posed in this research will hopefully continue to exist and be discussed by thinkers throughout time, as the scientific developments become increasingly intriguing and complicated.

To end this study, no other myth is more fitting to express the soul's importance in life than the myth of Psyche, as it embodies the path of the human soul through torment, struggle and divinity. Psyche is granted immortality (*immortalis esto*) having gone through tests and suffering.<sup>168</sup> Throughout the myth, Psyche becomes a symbol of

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<sup>168</sup> *Apul. Met. 6.23. Sume, 'inquit 'Psyche, et immortalis esto.*

human resilience and transformation, similar to the concept of the soul, extending throughout centuries resembling a butterfly, always maintaining its beauty and bearing hope.

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