

than for the right, that when you come to the home of the dead, you may have all these things to say in your own defence. . . . Do not let Crito persuade you to do what he says, but take our advice."

Be well assured, my dear friend, Crito, that this is what I seem to hear . . . and this sound of these words re-echoes within me and prevents my hearing any other words. And be assured that, so far as I now believe, if you argue against these words you will speak in vain. Nevertheless, if you think you can accomplish anything, speak.

CRITO. No, Socrates, I have nothing to say.

SOCRATES. Then, Crito, let it be, and let us act in this way, since it is in this way that God leads us.⁵

SOCRATES' DEATH AND ITS EFFECT ON PLATO

So the day of execution came, and Socrates' friends gathered around him for one last discourse.⁶ When it was finished

. . . it was nearly sunset. . . . Socrates said, "Come, Crito, let . . . someone bring the poison, if it is ready; and if not, let the man prepare it." And Crito said: "But I think, Socrates, the sun is still upon the mountains and has not yet set; and I know that others have taken the poison very late. . . . Do not hurry; for there is still time."

And Socrates said: "Crito, those whom you mention are right in doing as they do, for they think they gain by it; and I shall be right in not doing as they do; for I think I should gain nothing by taking the poison a little later. I should only make myself ridiculous in my own eyes if I cling to life and spared it, when there is no more profit in it. Come," he said, "do as I ask and do not refuse."

Thereupon Crito nodded to the boy who was standing near. The boy went out and stayed a long time, then came back with the man who was to administer the poison, which he brought with him in a cup ready for use. And when Socrates saw him, he said: "Well, my good man, you know about these things; what must I do?" "Nothing," he replied, "except drink the poison and walk about till your legs feel heavy; then lie down, and the poison will take effect of itself."

At the same time he held out the cup to Socrates. . . . Looking up at the man with wide open eyes, as was his custom, [Socrates] said: "What do you say about pouring a libation to some deity from this cup? May I, or not?" "Socrates," said he, "we prepare only as much as we think is enough." "I understand," said Socrates; "but I may and must pray to the gods that my departure hence be a fortunate one; so I offer this prayer, and may it be granted." With these words he raised the cup to his lips and very cheerfully and quietly drained it. Up to that time most of us⁶ had been able to restrain

⁵ For some of the discussion on this occasion, see pp. 143-45.

⁶ [Phaedo, who was present on this occasion, is relating the events of that day to Echecrates, another friend of Socrates', who was absent—AUTHOR.]

our tears fairly well, but [now] we could do so no longer; but in spite of myself my tears rolled down in floods. . . . Socrates . . . said, "What conduct is this, you strange men! I sent the women away chiefly for this very reason, that they might not behave in this absurd way; for I have heard that it is best to die in silence. Keep quiet and be brave." Then we were ashamed and controlled our tears. He walked about and, when he said his legs were heavy, lay down on his back, for such was the advice of the attendant. The man who had administered the poison laid his hands on him and after a while examined his hands and legs, then pinched his foot hard and asked if he felt it. He said "No"; then after that, his thighs; and passing upwards in this way he showed us that he was growing cold and rigid. And again he touched him and said that when it reached his heart, he would be gone. The chill had now reached the region about the groin, and uncovering his face, which had been covered, he said—and these were his last words—"Crito, we owe a cock to Aesculapius. Pay it and do not neglect it." "That," said Crito, "shall be done; but see if you have anything else to say." To this question he made no reply, but after a little while he moved; the attendant uncovered him; his eyes were fixed. And Crito when he saw it, closed his mouth and eyes.

Such was the end, Echechrates, of our friend, who was, as we may say, of all those of his time whom we have known, the best and wisest and most righteous man.⁴

Socrates loved life, but he had no fear of dying. And he certainly preferred death to weaseling out in some mean and ignoble way. He may also have felt that to die in this dramatic fashion would accomplish more for his purpose—the education and enlightenment of man—than anything he might do alive. If so, he was correct; for Plato was shocked into a philosophical career and so launched one of the greatest educational movements in history.

Plato was too young to have been one of Socrates' most intimate friends. He knew Socrates only during the last few years of the latter's life; but he set himself, in a series of biographical dialogues, to defend the good man's memory. And then, even after his own thought matured, he continued to use Socrates as the protagonist of his dialogues. The result was such a blending of opinions that nobody today can possibly tell where the historical Socrates in Plato's writings leaves off and the fictional mouthpiece for the theories of Plato begins. Probably Plato himself could not have told, and he would have regarded the question as unimportant. What matters, he deeply believed, is the truth itself, not who happens first to light on it. Besides, the discovery of truth is always, he thought, a joint work in which friends discuss together. That one of the friends in many of his discussions happened to be dead was for Plato probably a trivial detail. Happily, we can follow Plato in this indifference to the niceties of the "Socratic problem." Since we are concerned with the theory itself—the questions it was intended to answer, its success or failure, and its subsequent development in the hands of others—we need not attempt to separate Socrates' contribution from Plato's. Whenever "Plato's theory" is referred to, it may be taken to mean "the theory of Socrates-Plato."

Plato's Later Life

Socrates' death, then, confirmed Plato's view of the causes of Athens' defeat at the hands of the Persians: a bad state breeds only bad men; that a good state ruled by the many is inevitably unstable, and narrowly self-centered. But he did not abandon his interest in the state. It was his highest duty to try to discover how a good man might be happy and live well. He wrote letters, by studying every possible way in which private morals might be checked. As he grew older, he realized that "modern" degeneracy in democratic Athens but a widespread disease. Not until philosophers became the rulers would supreme knowledge and supreme power be possible. He was forced to abandon his plans for a new state. Plato fell back on the hope of exercising his influence through a process of education.

Meanwhile he had commenced writing. His education took the form, as has been said, of a process of dialectic. The dialogues are presented and criticized in conversational character, often a member of Plato's circle. The dialogues are not systematic; of course, the conclusions usually reach only negative results, which is concerned with theory of knowledge. "neither perception, nor true belief, nor opinion can be knowledge"—but fails to form a complete system as acceptable.

But even negative conclusions are not false views. In the dialogues many questions have enabled him to "give" answers. Characteristically, the party decides the question. The pursuit of truth has not run into a dead end.

We have to remember this conclusion when we find Plato criticizing in one of his dialogues a man who has committed himself. We have to remember that he has written over a long period of time and that he is not to be certain. Moreover, Plato was not only a philosopher but a pupil who could almost certainly have been an exposition of Plato's views.

Indeed, though he was a consummate