The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues Study Guide

The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues by Plato

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This collection of conversations between classical Greek philosopher Socrates and those who question and/or challenge him is one of the earliest, and most significant, works of philosophy in history. Written by Plato, a pupil of Socrates and a noted philosopher in his own right, the four dialogues in this collection take place over a period of time from the beginnings of Socrates' trial in Athens to the day of his execution, and explore themes relating to the nature of existence, the nature of death, and the value of wisdom.

The first dialogue in the collection is given the title "Euthyphro," after the name of the first citizen who engages Socrates in dialogue. The two men encounter one another outside the Athenian version of the law courts, where Socrates is about to go on trial for corrupting the youth of the city and Euthyphro is about to bring charges of murder against his father. The two men debate the natures of both piety and justice, their conversation ending when Socrates proves to Euthyphro that his (Euthyphro's) actions are not what he believes them to be, and Euthyphro leaves in confusion.

The second dialogue, "Apology," starts out as a monologue, as Socrates makes his defense to the Athenian court. He begins by outlining his life story, describing how he became a philosopher through the influence of the gods, and how he sees himself as being on a quest for wisdom, rather than forcing it on others (which is a component of the crime he's charged with). He also engages Meletus, his chief accuser, in debate, attempting to prove to both Meletus and the court that the case against him has no merit. His efforts are in vain, however: the narrative describes how Socrates is found guilty of the charges against him and is sentenced to death, a consequence that Socrates accepts with humor and realism.

The third dialogue, "Crito," is the briefest of the four in this collection. It takes place in Socrates' prison cell, where he is visited by a wealthy friend and ally, Crito, who urges him to take advantage of the offers of support from him and other wealthy Athenians, and escape. Socrates gratefully and gently refuses, explaining that his sense of loyalty to the state and its judgment, which he believes to be inspired by the pure principle of justice, is too strong.

The fourth and final dialogue, "Phaedo," is the longest of the four, and is the only one in which Socrates is not physically present. The dialogue takes place a short time after his death, and consists of Phaedo, a student present at Socrates' death, telling the curious Echecrates about the end of Socrates' life. Phaedo describes how Socrates spent much of his last hours in debate with two curious philosophers, Simmias and Cebes, debating the nature of death, the nature of the soul, and what happens to the soul after death. Socrates states his belief that the individual soul returns to the physical world lifetime after lifetime, and that between the end of one lifetime and the beginning of the next, the soul can rest and/or be rehabilitated (if the departed lifetime was corrupt) in one of a number of spiritual "worlds." He also suggests that for anyone with a philosophical curiosity, death is nothing more than an opportunity to learn more about existence.

At the conclusion of these dialogues, an Attendant appears with instructions for Socrates on how he is to take the poison that is to end his life. Socrates willingly takes the poison, and Phaedo narrates the final moments of his death, concluding with the statement that Socrates was "the wisest and justest and best."

Dialogue 1

Dialogue 1 Summary and Analysis

This collection of conversations between classical Greek philosopher Socrates and those who question and/or challenge him is one of the earliest, and most significant, works of philosophy in history. Written by Plato, a pupil of Socrates and a noted philosopher in his own right, the four dialogues in this collection take place over a period of time from the beginnings of Socrates' trial in Athens to the day of his execution, and explore themes relating to the nature of existence, the nature of death, and the value of wisdom.

"Euthyphro" This dialogue is set on "the porch of the King Archon" (see "Objects/Places").

The first part of the dialogue reveals that Socrates is present on "the porch" because he has been accused by a citizen named Meletus of corrupting the youth of Athens, and of being "a poet or maker of gods, and that [he] invent[s] new gods and den[ies] the existence of old ones..." Euthyphro reassures him, saying "the affair will end in nothing." Socrates then asks Euthyphro why he's come to the palace, and Euthyphro explains that one of his father's servants killed a man, that his father captured the servant and left him in a ditch while seeking out the correct course of justice, and that as a result the servant died. Euthyphro claims that the "pious" thing to do is for him (Euthyphro) to charge his father with murder (see "Quotes," p. 16). Socrates then says he wants to understand Euthyphro's definitions of piety and impiety so he can use them to plead his own case with Meletus.

Euthyphro offers this definition: "Piety ... is that which is dear to the gods, and impiety is that which is not dear to them." This definition leads Socrates to close questioning of of what "dear" means, what relation is there between being "dear" and being "loved," whether all the gods hold all the same things "dear" and what proof Euthyphro has that the gods would all view his father's actions as impious and unjust. At the core of his questioning is curiosity about whether something is holy because it is loved by the gods, or whether it becomes holy as the result of being loved by the gods.

As Socrates asks more and more questions, Euthyphro becomes less and less able to answer them effectively (see "Quotes," p. 33), eventually excusing himself. Socrates cries out after him as he goes that he had hoped that Euthyphro could genuinely answer his questions, saying he had hoped to learn from him and therefore become able to defend himself against Meletus.

As is the case with any work of philosophy, there are several directions in which analysis can proceed - of the ideas in play and whether they're valid and/or proven, of the way in which those ideas are explored, of the relationship between this and other philosophies. Over the centuries, analysis of this particular philosophical work has

focused, to one degree or another, on all these and more. As a result, and as is also the case with any work of philosophy, it's virtually impossible to come up with a definitive interpretation of the work and its meaning, particularly since there has been, and still is, significant debate as to whose words these actually are (see "Important People - Plato" and "Socrates"). There are, however, ways to trigger further, deeper consideration, one of which is to compare the discussed philosophies with contemporary thinking.

One key point of comparison might be to consider what contemporary readers might see as missing from Socrates'/Plato's theories, and perhaps even from philosophy in general. One such element that contemporary existence and/or thought might find particularly intriguing is the lack of place given to individualism. While contemporary western life and/or spirituality and/or philosophy tends to include, to a significant degree, the importance of personal experience and perspective in determining the value and state of individual existence, Socrates, and for the most part other philosophers, tend to disregard the personal as a distraction. Later in the dialogues, in fact, Socrates essentially defines what is personal in terms of animalism and "lust" (for power, influence, control, money, sex, food, etc.), suggesting that the truest existence is one which strives to disregard those "lusts" in favor of a life based in idealism, contemplation, and simplicity. In the case of this particular dialogue, not once does Socrates suggest that there is any value in what Euthyphro as an individual might believe is justice. In fact, he goes in exactly the opposite direction, essentially demolishing Euthyphro's personally lived beliefs and suggesting (as he does throughout the dialogues) that the best way to be an individual human being is to strive to NOT be an individual human being, to not be a product of one's lived experience but instead to be a product of what Socrates suggests is ideal ("absolute") spiritually defined humanity. For further consideration of this question see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the apparent value ..."

Dialogue 2, Part 1

Dialogue 2, Part 1 Summary and Analysis

"The Apology" This dialogue is set in the Athenian courts of law, and begins with a plea from Socrates for those listening to both accept and excuse the informal language he uses to defend himself, saying he doesn't know the usual words used in more legal minded environments. He then explains what he believes to be the origins of the general belief that he considers himself the wisest of men. He tells how a young man (Chaerephon) went to the Oracle at Delphi to learn whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, and how the Oracle said there was none. Socrates (who says he's known all along that he has no true wisdom), then explains how he (Socrates) began to question all the so-called wise men he could find to discover how the Oracle could be right, since the Oracle was the voice of a god and therefore MUST be right. He adds that his (ongoing) quest brought him many enemies, that he believes his "wisdom" to be worth nothing in the face of the God who is all-knowing, and that he is continuing his quest (see "Quotes," p. 72). This section concludes with Socrates referring to how the young wealthy men of Athens have come to him seeking to be taught how to question the beliefs of others in the way Socrates does, and how these others, according to Socrates, have out of anger and unease formulated the charges against him.

Socrates then engages in dialogue with one such man, Meletus, challenging him to say exactly what he means by his charges. Socrates suggests that it would ultimately be foolish of him to be the kind of youth-corrupter that Meletus says he is, since to create corruption ultimately leads to the corrupted becoming destructive. He also argues that rather than not believing in any gods (as Meletus claims) he does believe in "divine and superhuman things" and therefore does believe, at least in some way, in the gods. He also comments on what other citizens have described as his foolishness in holding onto beliefs that bring him close to death, saying that if he were given the opportunity to avoid death by no longer practicing philosophical pursuits, he would continue pursuing his god-given destiny no matter what.

At this point, an interesting analytical route might be to examine the character of Socrates, or at least what Plato asks the reader to see as his character. Throughout the dialogues, there a strong sense of irony about both Socrates' questions and the way he expresses them, a sense that he already knows the answers and is guiding his listeners to what he (Socrates) sees as a better way of thinking. This sort of irony occasionally veers into something more negative - sarcasm, arrogance, and self-righteousness. There is also the sense, particularly evident in this dialogue ("Apology"), that there is a certain disingenuous nature about Socrates and what he's saying, a certain false humility - a quality that again manifests most notably in "Phaedo," particularly when he is speaking of his opinion (disguised as certainty) of what happens to the soul after death. The point is not made to suggest that what he says is invalid, but that the way he says it might have gone at least some way towards irritating people like Meletus into perceiving Socrates as a criminal.

Dialogue 2, Part 2

Dialogue 2, Part 2 Summary and Analysis

"The Apology," cont'd. As he continues arguing his innocence, Socrates suggests that the actions of Meletus and his other accusers are a greater crime than his, in that they are striving to "unjustly [take] away the life of another..." He also reminds his listeners that he has conversed with the older men of Athens (naming several, including Plato) as well as with the youth. Finally, Socrates contrasts himself with the man who brings his family to court to gain its sympathy. He reminds the court that he too has a family, but that to bring them into the trial would be a discredit to himself and the court - it would suggest that he is unable to defend himself on his own merits, and that the court would be unable to decide the case on those same merits. "There seems to be something wrong," he suggests, "in asking a favor of a judge, and thus procuring an acquittal, instead of informing and convincing him."

The narrative then indicates that the Athenian men have found Socrates guilty. He wonders what his sentence will be (see "Quotes," p. 93), and comments again that he has no fear of death, that exile will have no point (since he is unable to go against the will of the gods that he question wisdom - see "Quotes," p. 95), and that he has no money to pay more than a minimal fine. After receiving a sentence of death, Socrates humorously comments that those who voted in favor of his death seemed to be in something of a hurry, since he's an old man and would have died soon anyway. He also suggests that the reason he was condemned was because he didn't plead for his life like many others, adding that a far worse end than death is unrighteousness, which he says is the sin of those who condemned him. He then speaks to his allies and supporters, asking them to not grieve for him and explaining why death is, in fact, a cause for rejoicing - it is, he suggests, an opportunity to learn more, to question more, and to understand more. Finally, he asks that the friends who survive him take an interest in the lives of his sons, and if need be punish him for taking the sort of interest in life that he condemns - in things and/or activities that take human beings away from a search through, and understanding of, the human soul.

There is an apparent discrepancy between Socrates' professions of faith in the absolute will and wisdom of the gods (as manifest in his belief in the Oracle - see "Apology, Part 1" and "Objects/Places"), and the will and wisdom of the state, to which he acquiesces here and for which he intensely argues in "Crito." There is the sense both here and in "Crito" that Socrates believes that the wisdom of the state is in fact as inspired by God as his personal mission is, but if this is the case he entirely contradicts himself with his contention that he believes the court is committing the crime of unrighteousness. For further consideration of this aspect of Socrates' argument see "Topics for Discussion - Consider Socrates' perspectives on the authority ..."

It's also interesting to consider at this point the ways in which Socrates sometimes refers to plural gods and to a singular God (which, incidentally, is capitalized in this

document in the same way as it's capitalized in the Christian bible). The first point to be considered here is that any reading of this text in English is a translation, and so variances on the opinions of the translator must, to some degree, be taken into account. Nevertheless, there is the sense that Socrates' view of the nature of the gods (at times one god, at times many) seems, to some degree, contrary to the general perspective of the time (that there were many gods, each infallible but each with an essentially human capriciousness of emotion and intent).

Dialogue 3

Dialogue 3 Summary and Analysis

"Crito" This dialogue is set in Socrates' prison cell in the very early morning - Socrates has just awakened, and his friend and defender Crito has come with news that he (Socrates) will probably die later that day. Socrates, however, says he's had what he believes was a prophetic dream, in which it was revealed that he will not die until the following day.

Crito then (and apparently not for the first time) urges Socrates to let his friends help him escape. He suggests that Socrates is betraying himself, his friends, his city and above all his family by submitting, with apparent resignation and humility, to the sentence imposed upon him by Athens. Socrates acknowledges Crito's concern, and that of their friends, but then explains (at considerable length) why escape would be wrong. His argument is anchored by the question of whether evil should ever be prevented and/or answered by resorting to evil. When Crito answers that evil under any circumstances is wrong, Socrates explains that the act of escape would be an act of evil, of defiance of the city/state that raised him, defined him, nurtured him, gave him a home and security, and set rules of relationship that Socrates had all his life, agreed to (see "Quotes," p. 129).

Speaking in the voice of the city, he suggests that by escaping he is "breaking the covenants and agreements which [he] made at [his] leisure, not in any haste or under any compulsion or deception..." adding that if he went anywhere but Athens he would be seen as a traitor and treated as such even after his death. He (still in the voice of the state) also suggests that to raise his children anywhere but in Athens would be a betrayal of them and their potential, and concludes with the suggestion that friends who aid him in escape would also suffer - in other words, that they would be caused pain by an evil act. "This, dear Crito," Socrates says, "is the voice which I seem to hear murmuring in my ears, like the sound of a flute in the ears of the mystic ..." He goes on to say that anything more Crito might have to say would be in vain. Crito says he has nothing else to say, and Socrates then urges him to leave him "to fulfill the will of God, and to follow whither he leads."

The first point to note about "Crito" is the sub-textual equating of the will of the state with the will of God. It could be argued that this is essentially a classical perspective that began with Ancient Greece, carried through into Ancient Rome, and also was found in Ancient Egypt, but with the eventual advent of truer democracy and deepening knowledge of politics, has had less influence. It could also be argued, however, that the same perspective has through the ages been adopted by various societies, most recently the British Empire, the Soviet Empire, the American Empire and perhaps soon the Chinese Empire. For further consideration of this question, see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss the ways in which ..." Meanwhile, it's interesting to note that Socrates here values his own loyalty to the state (which has condemned him to death)

over the loyalty and generosity of his friends. To a contemporary reader this might seem extremely unlikely, but the statement must be considered in the light of Socrates' opinion of death - specifically, his belief that death is simply another opportunity for him to learn and understand. In other words, he may be grateful to the state simply because by condemning him, it's helping him achieve his main goals - to learn and to understand.

Dialogue 4, Part 1

Dialogue 4, Part 1 Summary and Analysis

"Phaedo" This dialogue is set in the small Greek town of Phlius, several months or years after Socrates' death. As Echecrates questions him, Phaedo confirms that Socrates' death was the result of his taking poison, that he (Socrates) seemed peaceful in his final moments (see "Quotes," p. 177), and that he was surrounded by friends, among them Simmias, Cebes, and Crito. "Plato," Phaedo says, "was ill." Phaedo then describes how, on the day of Socrates' death, the friends/students who visited him regularly arrived at the prison shortly after he'd been released from his chains. He describes Socrates massaging his leg and commenting on the strange relationship between pleasure and pain.

Then begins an extended discussion of the value of death, a discussion with begins with Cebes asking why, if death is an ultimate good, suicide is an evil. Socrates, through his usual question and answer method, suggests that because human life is a gift from God, to reject that gift (i.e., commit suicide) is a rejection of God. Socrates then argues that because the body is essentially troublesome and messy, it's impossible for a philosopher to come to any true understanding of spirit/wisdom/truth until the troubles of the body are no longer relevant - in other words, after the soul has been separated from the body by death. In this context, he also explores the theory of absolutes (absolute justice, absolute beauty, absolute good), all of which manifest to greater or lesser degrees in the physical world, and their true purity of which can only be understood outside that world. Finally, he suggests that if any philosopher is afraid of death, then he is not a true philosopher, for those who truly search and/or long for wisdom are genuinely eager for that state of being in which understanding of the absolutes, and therefore wisdom, can be achieved - in other words, death.

This section of "Phaedo" both develops and introduces several core elements of Socrates' personal philosophy. His understanding of death has been introduced before (notably in "Apology"), but is developed here with a certain sense of judgment, the clear implication that anyone who doesn't look at death as an opportunity is a lesser human being - an implication that reinforces the previously discussed sense of arrogance and/or self-righteousness in both the words and the philosophy. Meanwhile, the theory of absolutes is related here the discussion of death, foreshadowing discussions in later parts of "Phaedo" in which the soul is portrayed as being an absolute itself (for further consideration of the theory of absolutes see "Objects/Places" and "Topics for Discussion - Consider the theory of absolutes...") Meanwhile, it's essential to remember that Socrates' philosophies as portrayed and defined here aren't necessarily those of Socrates himself - scholarship over the centuries has repeatedly suggested, and found evidence, that the views on display here are perhaps more Plato's (see "Important People - Plato" and "Socrates").

Dialogue 4, Part 2

Dialogue 4, Part 2 Summary and Analysis

"Phaedo", cont'd. Cebes asks what happens to the soul after death, inquiring whether "...immediately on her release from the body, [she issues] forth dispersed like smoke or air and in her flight vanish[es] away into nothingness" or whether she remains intact and journeys to an underworld where it's possible to encounter other souls who have previously passed away. Here Socrates develops his theory of opposites, suggesting that in every aspect of existence (waking, that which is greater, that which is worse) has its opposite (sleeping, that which is less, that which is better), and that one leads into the other (waking leads to sleeping, that which is greater was once less, that which is worse was once better). He then likens death to sleeping and life to waking, suggesting that life comes from death in the same way as waking comes from sleeping, and therefore what comes into life (i.e., the soul) already exists in some form in death.

After a discussion of the absolutes in relation to the origins of knowledge (with Socrates suggesting that a degree of knowledge, particularly of absolutes, exists within the soul at the moment of birth), there is a brief discussions of how Simmias, Cebes and Socrates' other students are to continue their philosophical explorations after Socrates' death. Socrates then returns the discussion to the question of whether the soul remains intact after death. Here he develops the argument that because the body is of the physical (seen) world and because the soul is of the spiritual (unseen) world, the world of the absolutes, there is at least some possibility that at death a soul could return intact to that world. He suggests, however, that because the soul is tied to the corruptible body, there is also some possibility that a soul tied to a non-philosophical body could also become corrupted, and when it returns to the world of the physical it returns tied to a body that echoes the corruption of the previous life. Hence, a human being given to indulging in the lusts of the body (food, sex, comfort) returns to life in the form of a similarly lusty animal, or a predatory human being returns in the form of a wolf or hawk. He also suggests that a temperate, virtuous human being returns in the form of a social animal like a bee or an ant, or again in the form of a human being. Finally, he affirms that those who practice philosophical thought and action shun the actions and attitudes of the physical realm "because they dread the dishonor or disgrace of evil deeds..." (see "Quotes," p. 219)

Socrates' (Plato's?) theory of opposites leaves two important questions unconsidered. The first, and perhaps lesser, is the function of personal experience and perspective in determining what opposites are - specifically, what's better and what's worse. Most opposites can to some degree be measured - the relationship between taller and shorter, for example, is unarguable, whereas the relationship between beautiful and ugly is not. It might be useful to consider this theory in terms of subjective and objective opposites, with the measurable falling into the latter category. This, in turn, leads to the second, and perhaps more significant unexamined concern - the fact that the examples of opposites listed by Socrates are, at the very least, observable. Sleeping can be seen,

or at least experienced, as being the opposite of being wakeful. Beauty can be seen as being the opposite of ugliness, albeit from a subjective perspective. However, the soul cannot be observed, only intuited or believed in, therefore Socrates' extension of the theory of opposites to include an unobservable makes the theory flawed. In other words, he has taken it from the realm of factual into the realm of faith, a necessary lead-in to the description of death that follows (see "Themes - The Nature of Wisdom") but which, of necessity, calls into question (at least to a point) his philosophic credibility AND the true willingness to question of his hearers.

Another interesting point to consider include Socrates' reference to the soul as "she", with its implication that the physical body is essentially male in manifestation and attitudes. For further consideration of this idea, see "Topics for Discussion - In referring to the soul as feminine..." Finally, in his arguments about the rebirth of souls, there are undeniable echoes of the Hindu belief in reincarnation, and the New Age belief of each soul living several lives that can, in fact, be remembered (see "Topics for Discussion - What is your response to ...").

Dialogue 4, Part 3

Dialogue 4, Part 3 Summary and Analysis

"Phaedo", conclusion. Phaedo describes how, after a brief contemplative silence, Simmias and Cebes both present arguments against Socrates' theory. Simmias suggests that because the incorruptible soul is connected to the corruptible body, she might leave the body as the result of it being damaged (but not destroyed). Cebes suggests that the soul, having "worn out many bodies," might not herself perish "and leave her last body behind her", said circumstance being true death. Phaedo then describes to Echecrates how there was, in the moments after the questions, there was a degree of fear in the room that Socrates had been asked questions he couldn't answer. However, Phaedo then narrates Socrates' response - how he warned against becoming a hater of ideas for their own sake, how he proved Simmias' argument was false (essentially saying that the soul is not a product of the body but is merely connected to it) and that Cebes' fears, while well expressed, were groundless. In explanation, he develops his theory of absolutes (see "Dialogue 4, Part 1"), explaining that manifestations of the absolutes are all relative (i.e., greatness only exists in relation to smallness) but the absolutes themselves are all unchangeable (greatness will never become smallness). He suggests to Cebes that the body is a manifestation of an absolute, but the soul itself an absolute, is therefore unchangeable, and therefore cannot ever perish.

Socrates then offers an in-depth, often poetic description of the worlds that await the soul after death. There is the world above, or the world of the absolutes (where the souls who have lived purely and well, as well as those souls redeemed by their stay in the world below, live). There is also the world below, where those souls who have been corrupted by the deeds of their bodies are either sent for all eternity (if their crimes were bad enough) or sent through a process of redemption, so they can eventually ascend to the world above. After describing these two worlds, he admits that the details of what he described may not be literally true, but asserts that "something of the kind is true".

Crito asks Socrates how he wants to be buried. Socrates (smiling, according to Phaedo) says that the others listening must continue to remind Crito that after his (Socrates') death, the true part of him will be living in the realm of the blessed, and that only his body will remain. "Do with that," he adds, "whatever is usual, and what you think best." Then, as Socrates bathes and speaks with his family, Phaedo and the others reflect on what's about to happen (see "Quotes," p. 271). After the family has left, an Attendant comes in and says it's time to bring the poison, speaking kindly to Socrates and bursting into tears as he leaves. Socrates, in turn, speaks kindly of the attendant, and sends Crito to bring both him and the poison back in. Socrates asks the Attendant's permission to pray before he drinks, and the Attendant says each person prepares as he deems enough. Socrates asks the gods "to prosper [his] journey from this to the other world", and then drinks the poison. Phaedo describes how he and the others wept, "not for him, but at the thought of ... having to part from such a friend." Socrates admonishes them to

stop crying, and then as the poison takes its effect he asks Crito to take care of a debt he had forgotten to pay. Crito agrees, and soon afterward Socrates dies.

This dialogue, and the book, concludes with Phaedo's comment that "of all the men of his time whom I have known, he was the wisest and justest and best."

There are several noteworthy points of consideration in this section. First, Socrates further develops the theory of absolutes (see "Themes - The Theory of Absolutes"), juxtaposing it with his theories about the nature of the soul and of death. While the theory itself does seem plausible (there is, in every individual's life, a difference between concept/expectation and reality), there is a clear self-contradiction in his argument. If the soul is an absolute, how can it have been corrupted by the deeds of the body so much that it's sent to the kind of rehabilitative hell that he describes?

Second, the previously discussed hints of arrogance and self-righteousness in Socrates and his theories resurface here, portraying him as certain of his own worth and/or destiny and simultaneously (somewhat patronizingly?) seeing his pupils as lesser, almost failed human beings. The question, of course, is whether he applies this perspective to all humanity (the fairly obvious answer is probably yes).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this section is the point at which similarities between certain aspects of Socratic / Platonic philosophy and Christian theology become apparent. Specifically, Socrates' description of the two worlds has several key points of connection with Christian theology, with the Socratic "world above" corresponding to the Christian "heaven" and the Socratic "world below" corresponding to the Christian hell (particularly as portrayed by the Italian writer Dante in "The Divine Comedy"). The point is not made to suggest that Christian theology used Socratic/Platonic philosophy as its template for heaven/hell (although according to scholarship it's certainly possible), but rather to suggest that awareness of certain spiritual truths and/or situations transcends (unifies?) belief systems and cultures. There are also echoes of Christianity in Socrates' willing death, which parallels Christ's, and perhaps in the generous spirit of the Attendant, whose empathy has echoes with that of the repentant thief crucified at Christ's side.

Characters

Plato

One of the most famous and most respected of the Classical Greek philosophers, Plato is the author (editor?) of the Four Dialogues. He was a pupil of Socrates, and wrote the Dialogues in part as a literary monument to his teacher, a memorialization of Socrates' ideas, the spiritual perspective that gave rise to those ideas, and the methods Socrates used to impart those ideas to others (methods that Plato incorporated into his own teaching - see "Objects/Places - The Socratic Method"). Over the centuries, however, scholarship has come to question how much of "The Dialogues" is in fact a representation of Socrates' thinking and how much is Plato putting words and/or ideas into his mentor's mouth, perhaps to give them more weight and/or credibility. The lasting impact of "The Dialogues" on philosophy through the centuries remains considerable, whatever the truth of their content may be.

Plato's other philosophies and teachings are collected in famous works such as "The Republic," "The Symposium," and "The Laws." As passed on through Plato's own pupils, including the equally famous Aristotle, his belief systems can be seen as the basis for a range of spiritual / philosophical perspectives, including Christianity. Among the most well known of these perspectives is one of the ideas developed in "Phaedo" - that of absolutes, also referred to as "forms." Simply stated, this theory suggests that there is a difference between the intellectual/spiritual concepts of an object or state of being and its concrete manifestation in the realm of physical existence. Others, such as his belief in government by enlightened dictatorship, have been essentially discredited.

Socrates

Socrates is one of the earliest, and most well known, of the Classical Greek philosophers. According to legend, he was physically quite ugly and unkempt - short, with somewhat distorted facial features, and a determination to sacrifice the needs/desires of the body in favor of enriching his mind and/or soul. Early in life he was a soldier, but soon turned his mind to questions of philosophy - first scientific philosophy, but later the philosophy of ethics in particular and existence in general. It's important to note that according to scholarship, he never actually wrote anything down - what is known of him and his work emerges through the work of other philosophers, particularly Plato. It's also important to note that Socrates is known not only for his philosophical perspectives, but also for his unique (idiosyncratic?) means of encouraging others to develop their own perspectives - the so-called "Socratic Method" (see "Objects/Places"). As presented in the four dialogues in this collection, in utilizing this method of discussion and thought provocation, Socrates could be both ironically humorous and utterly merciless, dissecting the arguments of those with whom he dialogues with clinical, linguistic and/or semantic precision. In other words, his method forced individuals with whom he dialogued into clear, specific understanding.

Finally, it's essential to note what Socrates himself (according to Plato - see above) said about his philosophical and conversational approach - certain that he himself was quite ignorant, he questioned others in order to both understand their perspectives and the ways of existence. In other words, his philosophy was grounded in a search for clarity and understanding, not (as in the case of many other philosophers) in a self-righteous sense of certainty.

Euthyphro

Euthyphro is the Athenian citizen with whom Socrates has his first dialogue, and for whom that first dialogue is named. While Socrates is portrayed in this dialogue (and indeed throughout the Dialogues) as rational and patient (if occasionally cutting), Euthyphro is portrayed as judgmental and something of a shallow thinker. The same might be said of all those with whom Socrates dialogues (see "Crito" and "Simmias and Cebes" below), but it must be remembered that Euthyphro, like the other "characters" in "The Dialogues", is essentially functional and little more, present to serve Plato's purpose of revealing (and revering) the philosophies of his mentor, and perhaps even his own. In other words, Euthyphro comes across as impatient and judgmental in order to heighten Socrates' patience and essential wisdom.

Meletus

A citizen of Athens who, with the help of other prominent citizens (named as Anytus and Lycon) brought charges against Socrates and maneuvered the senate into convicting him and pronouncing a sentence of death.

The Athenian Assembly

The Assembly is the judicial body that accuses, tries, and condemns Socrates, and listens to his "apology" (the second dialogue). It was a parliament of sorts, representative of the population of the city of Athens and therefore (at least in theory) of the will of all the people. However, where subsequent democratic assemblies were elected, the Athenian Assembly consisted of all the male citizens of Athens over the age of eighteen.

Crito

Crito is the friend of Socrates with whom he converses in the third dialogue, and from whom the name of that dialogue is taken. Crito was, according to scholarship, a contemporary of Socrates in terms of age and experience, but was much wealthier and more influential. His support for Socrates, and his empathy with his (Socrates') situation is evident both in "Crito" and in "Phaedo," where Crito is portrayed as one of the friends listening to Socrates' final words and also as the one most concerned with what is to

happen, both to Socrates and to his family, after Socrates' execution takes place. He is, in short, the most emotional and overtly supportive "character" in the book.

Phaedo and Echecrates

Phaedo, present during the last moments of Socrates' life, is the pupil of Socrates who narrates the fourth dialogue in this collection. He doesn't participate to any significant degree in that dialogue, but instead describes its content to Echecrates, who is portrayed by Plato as being eager to learn what Socrates said in his last moments and how he met his death.

Simmias and Cebes

These two individuals appear in the fourth and final dialogue, "Phaedo." Like Euthyphro in the dialogues that bear their names, Simmias and Cebes serve as the catalysts/vehicles for both Socrates' philosophical explorations and Plato's narration of those explorations. In terms of how their characters manifest, there is relatively little difference between them - Simmias is portrayed as being somewhat more confrontational and questioning, while Cebes is essentially in agreement with Socrates but has questions about one or two fine points of his (Socrates') philosophical arguments.

Attendant

This individual, essentially Socrates' jailer, appears briefly in "Phaedo." He is portrayed by Plato as being relatively gentle and sympathetic, reluctant to do what he has been ordered to do (supervise Socrates' death) and relieved when Socrates seems not only willing to die, but gracious and peaceful. He can perhaps be seen as a metaphor for the transforming power of grace. Socrates' encounter with him seems to suggest that when grace is as apparent and as alive as it seems to be in Socrates, it can be passed on to others and can therefore transform them into a human being more in touch, at least to a point, with the spiritual awareness sought, and connected to, by the enlightened.

The Gods

The Greek Gods were, in ancient times, perceived as simultaneously omnipotent and flawed, immortal and human (in their emotional intensity and changeability) - ultimately, as the source of all truth and justice. Socrates claims to owe his career as a philosopher to the inspiration of the Oracle at Delphi (see "Objects/Places"), his definitions of justice and right behavior to the rules/guidance imposed by the gods, and his acceptance of his fate to his faith that the will of the gods is always just.

Objects/Places

Athens

Athens (where Socrates lived and worked, and where he was charged, tried and condemned) is one of the most ancient and the most historically significant communities in the classical world. According to legend, it was named after Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and warfare, and over the centuries developed according to her inspiration - it was the home of the first democracy, several of the earliest and most influential philosophers and dramatists, and a powerful military centre.

The Porch of the King Archon

The setting of the first dialogue ("Euthyphro") is what would be called the law courts in contemporary society - Athenian citizens (like Meletus and Euthyphro) come here to seek justice for their various legal claims - or, in the case of Socrates, to defend himself against such claims.

The Oracle at Delphi

In Ancient Greece, Delphi was the place where an oracle (a seer), believed to be inspired by the god Apollo, offered cryptic insight into the wills of the gods and the unseen destiny of man. The prophesies of the Oracle were held in very high regard, and were believed to be manifestations of the will of the gods.

Socrates' Cell in Athens / The Prison in Phlius

The third and fourth dialogues in the sequence, "Crito" and "Phaedo," are set in prisons -the one in "Crito" is in Athens, the one in "Phaedo" in a small town called Phlius. There is the sense in both dialogues that while his body may be confined, his mind and soul are freer than they have ever been.

Socrates' Philosophies

Throughout most of the dialogues ("Euthyphro," "Crito," the majority of "Phaedo"), Socrates' words and philosophies seem to be less about his own beliefs than they are about shaping, defining, and clarifying the beliefs of others. The "Apology" is a defense, and as such incorporates a degree of explanation of what his beliefs are, but only in "Phaedo" is there a relatively explicit portrayal of what Socrates says he believes and understands about existence (always keeping in mind, however, the possibility that Plato is putting his own theories into the mouth of his mentor). Two of his key philosophies explored in "Phaedo," both relating to the question at the forefront of his

mind and the minds of his followers (the nature of death) are briefly explored below. A third key philosophy actually defines one of the central themes explored throughout the "Dialogues" and is discussed in "Themes - The Theory of Absolutes."

The Existence of the Soul

Socrates clearly believes that there is, in every human being, a soul - a manifestation of pure, un-corruptible, spirit that connects, to varying degrees depending on the essential nature of the individual, the physical world of the body to the spiritual world of the absolutes. The soul, he believes, guides and governs the more animalistic body, always striving to bring its activities and hungers under control.

The World Above / The World Below

According to Socrates, there are two realms to which the soul can travel after death, both dependent upon the life lived by the physical body during the soul's time in the physical realm. The first might be described as a heaven, the spiritual world of purity and absolutes to which souls (especially those of the philosophers) who have rejected the physical in favor of the spiritual travel. The second might correspondingly be described as a hell, a place where souls who have succumbed to the desires and lusts (for money, power, sex, food, etc.) of the physical body/world travel in order to be purified (so they can eventually travel to the first realm). In some cases, Socrates claims, souls have become so corrupted by the deeds and needs of the body that they can't be purified, and are sent to the depths of "hell" where they remain for all eternity.

The Poison

Socrates' execution comes about as the result of his taking poison - according to legend, that derived from the hemlock plant. It's interesting to note that the moment of death is the direct result of Socrates' own action. He's not hung or shot or beheaded, he's not injected with the poison - in other words, his death is not actually done to him, but he does it himself. There is perhaps a deliberate irony in this - it's possible that where those who tried and condemned him saw him as creating his own fate by saying what he did, they see justice in him being literally the means to his own end. Yes, they give him the poison, but he takes it himself.

The Socratic Method

This is the term used for Socrates' unique method of philosophical discussion consisted of dialogue rather than lectures. In conversation with those who sought wisdom and/or enlightenment, Socrates posed a series of questions designed to peel away layers of misunderstanding and delusion in order to get to core understandings of fundamental truth.

Themes

The Nature of Wisdom

Essentially, the "Dialogues" exist because of Socrates' theories about the nature of wisdom, theories he acts upon (to varying degrees) in each dialogue and which therefore form a thematic spine for all four. Perhaps the most important of these is his theory about his own personal wisdom, which he claims is in fact ignorance. Through proclaiming that he has no wisdom of his own (in spite of his reputation for being among the wisest of men), and through acting on that belief by examining and questioning the so-called "knowledge" of others, Socrates suggests that true wisdom lies in knowing what one doesn't know - and in knowing that one doesn't know. Then, through his repeated, extremely specific questioning of Euthyphro, Meletus, Simmias and Cebes (among others), he demonstrates that this sort of wisdom can be gained through genuine, honest examination of thought and belief. In other words, the apparently wise subjects of his relentless inquiry become truly wise, once Socrates has made them aware of what they don't truly know.

It's important to note, however, that at times the lines between knowledge, wisdom and faith become blurred. This is particularly true of "Phaedo" in which Socrates speaks with evident certainty of what awaits the soul after death. He cannot possibly know beyond any doubt what happens, but he presents his opinion with the certainty of one who's lived the experience. His self-proclaimed wisdom of ignorance fails him - if he were truly living the moments before his death from what he has previously claimed is the ideal place of enlightened ignorance, surely he would admit that what he's speaking about is essentially hope and/or faith. However, he admits nothing of the sort, advocating for a vision of an afterlife that, in essence, is both a justification and consequence for what transpires in the physical world.

The Nature of Death

Death is a lingering, looming thematic presence throughout all four "Dialogues." It is the trigger for the debate about justice that takes place in "Euthyphro," it is the unspoken fate sensed by Socrates throughout the "Apology", it is the fear-triggering motivation for Crito's urging Socrates to escape in "Crito" and it is the focus of the in-depth discussion (not to mention the emotional climax) of "Phaedo." It's possible to see, in fact, the debate in "Euthyphro" as defining and symbolizing the basic questions about death that permeate all four dialogues - is death justice? Do good, wise souls (such as Socrates is portrayed to be) deserve to die? What justice, if any, is meted out after death? The problem, of course, is that no question about death (other than whether it's inevitable) can ever be answered definitively one way or the other - all the questions raised, all the answers offered or even hinted at, here or anywhere else, are all pure hypothesis. Death is perhaps the greatest mystery of life, and unless one is truly wise in Socratic terms (that is, knowing and gracefully accepting what one doesn't know), there is fear

associated with that mystery (as there arguably is, at least to some degree, in any mystery). Ultimately, this means that any theorizing and/or discussion and/or questioning on the subject, even that of Socrates, is purely, and in a purely human way, an attempt to keep that fear at bay.

The Theory of Absolutes

The Platonic theory of absolutes (see "Objects/Places") is spoken about most clearly in "Phaedo" and specifically in relation to questions about the nature of the human soul. Socrates explicitly argues that the soul belongs to the realm of the absolutes, and as such is, to the degree that it remains uncorrupted by the lusts associated with the physical world, the truest connection that an individual human being can have to that realm. However, the theory is also the foundation, albeit an implied one, of many of the ideas discussed in the other dialogues. This is perhaps easiest to see in "Euthyphro" where the concept is the foundation of Socrates' commentary on the natures of justice and piety, both of which he implies are concepts that emerge from the realm of the absolutes into the life-corruptible conscience of man. The presence of this theory is less easy to see in "Crito," but is nonetheless present - there is the strong sense that when Socrates is speaking of loyalty to the state, he is speaking of an idealized, absolute kind of loyalty as manifest in the particular loyalty he feels towards Athens. The sub-textual presence of the theory is perhaps least easy to discern in "Apology," unless the reader interprets Socrates' words as a manifestation of the absolute of integrity. In other words, Socrates is speaking what he knows, feels, and believes to be a truth, his truth, a particular and individual manifestation of the absolute of self-honor. As previously discussed, however, it must be remembered that this theory is not necessarily Socrates' at all, but that of Plato, who may have placed it into the philosophy of his mentor in order to give it more philosophical weight.

Style

Perspective

As previously discussed (see "Important People - Plato"), Plato was an important philosopher in his own right, a protégé (pupil) of Socrates who, after his mentor's death, went on to formulate and promote his own philosophical theories and experiences. There has been, over the centuries since the "Dialogues" were first written and presented, some question of whether that is in fact what Plato was is with the "Dialogues," promoting his own theories by placing them in the mouth and mind of one of the most respected philosophers to that point in history. In other words, there is some question of whether Plato is writing about himself, or about Socrates. The problem is, again as previously discussed (see "Important People - Socrates"), is that Socrates himself left no written documentation of himself or his theories - all that is known of him is known through the commentary of Plato and others. Most scholars are content to accept the dialogues as a blend of Platonic and Socratic perspective, intended to trigger deeper consideration of philosophical concerns in individuals interested in such consideration and such concerns. Those individuals would undoubtedly have found, and in the present day continue to find, much to both agree with (specifically, the considerations of justice in "Euthyphro" and "Apology") and disagree with (the loyalty to the state in "Crito," the views of death throughout). In all likelihood, however, Socrates would say that agreement, or lack thereof, is not the point - the point is that the questions get asked, the answers are truly and thoughtfully considered, and the resultant admission of a lack of real, provable answers be accepted and honored.

Tone

In many ways, the tone of this book is inseparable from its perspective. Because it is (at least ostensibly) written from the perspective of a loyal, admiring pupil, the tone is likewise loyally admiring and quite subjective. Yes, there are times when the object of that admiration (Socrates) takes on a somewhat sharper, almost angrier tone with those to whom he is speaking, but overall the tone is reverent and respectful. There are also moments, however, when the reader might feel lectured, or talked down to. In spite of Socrates' claims of altruism, of wanting to help and/or to guide those to whom he's speaking, there is occasionally the sense that he is keeping both arrogance and self-righteousness barely in check. Again, the question is whether this is truly Socrates or whether it's Plato's attitudes bleeding into those of the individual he's writing about.

Those questions aside, there is also the sense about this book that arises in many similar books exploring questions of philosophy - the sense that the questions being discussed, and the way in which they're being discussed, are of interest only to those of like mind and interest. In other words, the book's language is highly intellectual, with the brief glimpses of humanity in Socrates and those grieving his fate failing, for the most part, to bring the book's essential purpose into a place where lesser mortals (for lack of

a better phrase) can understand and/or care about how what's being discussed relates to everyday life.

Structure

There are several layers to the sense of structure at work in this collection. On one level, each dialogue is carefully constructed to lead the reader to a simpler understanding of a particular situation - moral ("Euthyphro," "Crito"), personal ("Apology"), philosophical ("Phaedo"), or some combination of all three. Then, three of the dialogues ("Euthyphro," "Crito," and "Phaedo") are structured along the lines of an intellectual journey from idea through question to revised idea. There is also a sense of journey in the structures of "Apology," "Crito," and "Phaedo", but in those instances, the journey is also emotional, with Socrates (and in the latter two dialogues, his listeners) starting in one emotional state of being and ending in another. This structurally and emotionally defined movement, almost novelistic in its sensibility, also manifests throughout the book as a whole, with each dialogue moving the "story" of Socrates' last days along its path. "Euthpyphro" portrays him before his trial, "Apology" during his trial, "Crito" after his trial but before the day of execution, "Phaedo" the day he is to die. In short, there is a clear sense of order, of rightness about the book's structure, which reinforces/is reinforced by what happens spiritually to Socrates, who comes to accept his death as a manifestation of the order/rightness of the universe.

Quotes

"'[Meletus] says he knows how the youth are corrupted and who are their corrupters. I fancy that he must be a wise man, and seeing that I am the reverse of a wise man, he has found me out, and is going to accuse me of corrupting his young friends.'" Euthyphro, Socrates to Euthyphro, p. 12

"'The real question is whether the murdered man has been justly slain. If justly, then your duty is to let the matter alone; but if unjustly, then even if the murderer lives under the same roof with you and eats at the same table, proceed against him.'" Ibid, Euthyphro to Socrates, p. 16

"Is not piety in every action always the same? And Impiety, again - is it not always the opposite of piety, and also the same with itself, having, as impiety, one notion which includes whatever is impious?" Ibid, Socrates to Euthyphro, p.18

"'The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the gods.'" Ibid, Socrates to Euthyphro, p.28

"'...somehow or other our arguments, on whatever ground we rest them, seem to turn round and walk away from us.'" Ibid, Euthyphro to Socrates, p. 33

"'And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make inquiry into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.'" The Apology, Socrates to the men of Athens, p. 72.

" '...the fear of death is indeed the pretence of wisdom, and not real wisdom, being a pretence of knowing the unknown; and no-one knows whether death, which men in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good.'" Ibid, Socrates to the men of Athens, p. 83

"'I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul." Ibid, p. 84

"'...what is my due? What return shall be made to the man who has never had the wit to be idle during his whole life; but has been careless of what the many care for - wealth, and family interests, and military offices, and speaking in the assembly, and magistracies, and plots, and parties." Ibid, p. 93

" '...if I say again that daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you are still less likely to believe me." Ibid, p. 95

"'Why, Crito, when a man has reached my age he ought not to be repining at the approach of death." Crito, Socrates to Crito, p. 112.

"'But why, my dear Crito, should we care about the opinion of the many? Good men, and they are the only persons who are worth considering, will think of these things truly as they occurred." Ibid, Socrates to Crito, p. 115.

"'...I am and always have been one of those natures who must be guided by reason, whatever the reason may be which upon reflection appears to me to be the best ..." Ibid, Socrates to Crito, p. 118.

"'Has a philosopher like you failed to discover that our country is more to be valued and higher and holier far than mother or father or any ancestor, and more to be regarded in the eyes of the gods and of men of understanding? Also to be soothed, and gently and reverently entreated when angry, even more than a father, and either to be persuaded, or if not persuaded, to be obeyed? And when we are punished by her ... the punishment is to be endured in silence; and if she lead us to wounds or death in battle ... [a man] must do what his city and his country order him ..." Ibid, Socrates to Crito, p. 129

"'I thought that in going to the other world he could not be without a divine call, and that he would be happy, if any man ever was, when he arrived there; and therefore I did not pity him as might have seemed natural at such an hour." Phaedo, Phaedo to Echecrates, p. 177

"'...as I am going to another place, it is very meet for me to be thinking and talking of the nature of the pilgrimage which I am about to make." Ibid, Socrates, p. 183

" '...the true votary of philosophy is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do not perceive that he is always pursuing death and dying; and if this be so, and he has had the desire of death all his life long, why when his time comes should he repine at that which he as been always pursuing and desiring?'" Ibid, Socrates, p. 187

" '...thus having got rid of the foolishness of the body we shall be pure and hold converse with the pure, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere, which is no other than the light of truth.'" Ibid, Socrates, p.192

"'... until philosophy revived her, [the soul] could only view real existence through the bars of a prison, not in and through herself; she was wallowing in the mire of every sort of ignorance, and by reason of lust had become the principal accomplice in her own captivity ... philosophy, seeing how terrible was her confinement ... received and gently comforted her and sought to release her, pointing out that the eye and the ear and the other senses are full of deception, and persuading her to retire from them ...'" Ibid, Socrates, p. 219

" '...the difference between [the partisan] and me is ... that whereas he seeks to convince his hearers that what he says is true, I am rather seeking to convince myself; to convince my hearers is a secondary matter with me.'" Ibid, Socrates, p. 232.

" '...O my friends ... if the soul is really immortal, what care should be taken of her, not only in respect of the portion of time which is called life, but of eternity ... if death had only been the end of all, the wicked would have had a good bargain in dying, for they would have been happily quit not only of their body, but of their own evil together with their souls ... but now, inasmuch as the soul is manifestly immortal, there is no release ... from evil except the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom ...'" Ibid, Socrates, p. 259

"...we remained behind, talking and thinking of ... the greatness of our sorrow; he was like a father of whom we were being bereaved, and we were about to pass the rest of our lives as orphans." Ibid, p. 271.

Topics for Discussion

Consider the apparent value, or lack thereof, that Socrates gives to lived, individual experience. Do you agree or disagree that the will and perspective of the individual human being must be (suppressed? denied? downplayed?) in order for life to be lived fully, effectively, and truly? What role do you believe individual experience and/or independence and/or determination DOES play in defining the nature and purpose of existence?

The quote from p. 95 includes one of the most famous sayings in the history of philosophy - "the unexamined life is not worth living." Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Why or why not?

Consider Socrates' perspectives on the authority of the state. What do you think is the role/function of the state (government)? Do you agree or disagree with his opinion, indicated in "Apology" and discussed in detail in "Crito" that the will of the state must be obeyed? Why or why not?

Discuss the ways in which Socrates' perspectives on the relationship between God and the State have manifested in contemporary culture. Consider societal circumstances such as, but not only, the British Empire of the 19th and early-20th Centuries, the Soviet Empire of the mid-20th Century, and the American Empire of the mid- to late-20th Century,

Do you agree or disagree with Socrates' view of death as expressed in the final moments of "The Apology" and throughout the four dialogues? Why or why not? What do you think death is, or might be?

Consider the theory of absolutes as explored and defined in "Phaedo" and in "Objects/Places." Discuss whether you believe the theory is plausible. Identify possible absolutes and their manifestations in the physical world. Discuss the role individual experience plays in understanding and defining both the absolutes and their manifestations.

In referring to the soul as feminine, and therefore implying that the body is masculine, what is Socrates suggesting about the relationship between the two? Consider the negative way in which he speaks of the body and its desires, and of the soul and its function. What, in this context, do you see as his beliefs about men and women?

What is your response to Socrates' theories about the nature of the soul - specifically, about its repeated rebirths? Have you ever had any experiences when you feel / understand an incident and/or a relationship in terms of a feeling/relationship you experienced in a "previous life?"

Apply the Socratic Method (getting at truth and wisdom through question and answer) to a current question of morality and/or philosophic attitude. Working in partners, alternate the process - one questioner, one answerer.