

Misology and the Method of Hypothesis in the *Phaedo* (by David Ebrey)

I am planning to lead something that's between a talk and a seminar. I'll briefly introduce my main ideas and then turn to a couple of relevant passages. We'll stop and discuss these passages for a little while, and then move on to the next set of passages, stop and discuss, and so on.

Abstract: I argue that the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* is meant to be a method not just for acquiring knowledge, but also for avoiding the state of misology, i.e., the state of hating and distrusting arguments. Socrates is happy that early in the *Phaedo* Simmias and Cebes press him on his claims (e.g., 63a). But their rapid-fire arguments and objections leads to the threat of misology, which Socrates describes in the middle of the dialogue (89c-91c). I think that throughout the second half of the *Phaedo* Socrates is showing us how to avoid misology. He says that the main cause of misology is a lack of skill in arguments (*technê peri tous logous*), which leads one to too quickly change one's mind, and then come to distrust arguments entirely (90d). After discussing the threat of misology, Socrates responds to Simmias' *harmonia* objection (91c-95a). On my account, his response displays the skill they should cultivate. Rather than stopping as soon as Simmias abandons his objection (92a), Socrates thoroughly argues against his position (all the way to 95a), so that Simmias will not quickly switch back to the position later. After arguing against Simmias' objection, Socrates turns to Cebes' objection, and in doing so develops his final immortality argument. Along the way he describes his famous method of hypothesis (99e-101e). He says that he introduces this method in order to use it in his final demonstration of the immortality of the soul (100b). I argue that the method of hypothesis is meant to be part of the skill in argumentation that allow us to avoid misology. Rather than quickly switching your allegiance between views, the method gives us a way to thoroughly evaluating a view before accepting or rejecting it.

I recently published a review of Hugh Benson's recent book. In it, I briefly describe how I think the method of hypothesis works in the *Phaedo* – and how it differs from the methods in the *Meno* and *Republic*. Not required reading, but you might find it useful or interesting:

<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/clitophons-challenge-dialectic-in-platos-meno-phaedo-and-republic/>

For anyone interested in the ethics or Pythagoreanism in the *Phaedo*, I have a paper that was just published in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*: “The Asceticism of the *Phaedo*: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul's Proper Activity.” You can find it on my website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/davidebrey/>

Or on *Archiv*'s site:

<https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/agph.2017.99.issue-1/issue-files/agph.2017.99.issue-1.xml>