

University of Dayton Review

Volume 16
Number 1 *Proceedings of the 10th Annual
Philosophy Colloquium*

Article 16

December 1982

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Recommended Citation

Morgan, Michael L. (1982) "The Inquiry into *Aitiai* in Plato's *Phaedo*," *University of Dayton Review*. Vol. 16:
No. 1, Article 16.
Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udr/vol16/iss1/16>

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Morgan: The Inquiry into Aitiai in Plato's *Phaedo*

THE INQUIRY INTO AITIAI IN PLATO'S *PHAEDO*

by Michael L. Morgan

There is a feature of Socrates' intellectual autobiography in the *Phaedo* that has not been sufficiently clarified by commentators on that passage.¹ Most students of the dialogue have taken the text to describe Socrates' disenchantment with mechanical reasons or explanations, his disappointment with Anaxagoras' failure to provide sound teleological explanations, and his eventual turning to explanations involving the separated Forms.² In very rough terms, to be sure, Socrates' tale is thought to be about his switching allegiance from one type of reason or explanation to another. In reality, however, the import of Socrates' autobiographical sketch is different from this. What Plato traces for us is not merely a set of changing convictions about specific reasons or explanations but rather an aborted attempt to come to know what it is to be an *aitia* or reason and an alternative method for arriving at a sufficiently strong belief about what an *aitia* is. Similar in purpose, then, to the familiar definitional projects of the early dialogues, Socrates' inquiry into the nature of an *aitia* reaches an impasse. Unlike those stalled efforts, however, this one proceeds on an alternative course that results in a belief about what an *aitia* is. It is this belief, moreover, that constitutes the starting point for Socrates' subsequent argument in behalf of the soul's immortality.

While commentators generally interpret *Phaedo* 96a6ff. as a description of Socrates' efforts to discover specific reasons or types of reasons, they occasionally show some uncertainty about the goal and result of Socrates' inquiry. Hackforth, for example, says that "...Plato, having reached a point in the dialogue at which it is recognized that the soul's immortality can only be proved by an investigation of the general cause or causes of coming-to-be and perishing, feels the need to explain how he has come to hold a novel conception of causality, resting on his theory of Forms."³ From this passage and others in Hackforth's commentary, it is not clear whether Socrates' new "conception of causality" is a belief about what it is to be an *aitia* or a belief about what sorts of things are *aitiai* or both. Murphy similarly speaks of the new theory as a "conception of causality"⁴ without making it clear whether he has in mind a conception about what it is to be an *aitia* or about what sorts of things count as *aitiai* or both. Notwithstanding such moments of uncertainty or perhaps imprecision, commentators generally assume that Socrates is here said to have tried to discover instances of something for which he had no settled account and no firm knowledge. Given Plato's portrait of Socrates in the early dialogues, such a conclusion is at least worrisome.

Not only would such a situation be inconsistent with Plato's overall portrait of Socrates' typical demeanor, it would also suggest that Socrates engaged in no sustained examination of a matter to which he had surely given some serious

thought. The evidence for such preliminary thinking comes at least from the *Lysis* where Socrates is portrayed as associating the notion of an *aitia* with the answer to the question *dia ti* only to distinguish this from the question *tou heneka*.⁵ It is surely plausible to think that having made such a distinction, Socrates would have wondered whether the answer to the question *tou heneka* too is an *aitia* and perhaps preeminently so. Of course the autobiographical sketch in the *Phaedo* may be a fiction contrived to suit the interests of passages like the one in the *Lysis*. But it may, on the other hand, be more historically reliable than that, not a contrivance but rather an accurate indication of an ongoing Socratic inquiry into the nature of *aitiai*. This is an interpretation that is reasonable, I think, if not desirable, and one worth pursuing.

Eventually I want to focus attention on the concluding section of Socrates' intellectual autobiography,⁶ his account of the goal he had set for himself, how and why the *physiologoi*, including Anaxagoras, had failed to satisfy him, and what his *deuteros plous* amounts to. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to satisfy ourselves that the very project of inquiry into what *x* is, what has been called "definitional inquiry," is at least acknowledged, even if not pursued, in the *Phaedo* prior to the final argument.

Frequently in the *Phaedo* Plato uses language that suggests that knowledge is analogous to a direct visual or perceptual apprehension of an object (e.g., 65b9, 66d6-7, 66e1-2, 67b2, 79d1, 79d6, 82e3-4, 83b3-4), namely of the Forms. Throughout the dialogue he employs a variety of terms for knowing, and the text gives no reason to think that they are used other than interchangeably.⁷ At the same time that knowledge is taken to be a kind of direct mental apprehension of the Forms, however, it is also associated with — and perhaps at times identified with — having a *logos* of the Forms. The language of *logos*, in this sense as part of the content of the knowledge of the Forms,⁸ is plentiful and transparent (e.g., 73a9-10, 76b4-6, 78d1-2, 75c7-d5). If we identify knowing the *logos* of a Form with knowing what it is (*to auto ho estin*, 75c8-9), which is certainly plausible, then the presence of definitional knowledge in the *Phaedo* is unquestionable.

Furthermore, no matter how these two kinds or dimensions of knowledge are related to each other⁹ and no matter how they are related to *knowing the truth*¹⁰ (cf. 65b9, 66a6, 66d6-7, 67b1, 83b3, 84a7-b1), it is clear that in the *Phaedo* Plato not only refers to these two kinds or dimensions of knowledge but also speaks of a process of gaining them. This process is a *Zētēsis* (66d5; cf. *Meno passim*), a transition from perceptual belief to knowledge (cf. 82d9-84b1) that Plato compares or possibly identifies with *anamnesis* (72e5-77a5). In the early dialogues this transition, conceived as the result of a successful definitional inquiry, is a basic Socratic legacy and one that is explored and reaffirmed in the *Meno*.

There is hardly any doubt, then, that definitional knowledge still, in the *Phaedo*, has preeminent status for Plato. The two-world ontology, introduced in that dialogue and coordinated with the dualisms of soul and body and sense experience and reason (*logismos*, cf. 65c2, 66a1, 84a7), can certainly be seen to support that preeminence and thereby to suggest that Plato still adheres to the epistemological priority of definitional knowledge. But preeminence need not be unconditional, and what I want to show is that later in the *Phaedo* Plato shows

us the course of a frustrated definitional inquiry and then seems willing to proceed on the basis of something more like true belief than knowledge.

The final argument for the immortality of the soul has been the subject of extensive, valuable analysis.¹¹ I am not going to propose a new account of that entire stretch of dialogue. Rather I want to show how the latter is founded on a what-is-x question and then develops on the basis of an examination of *aitia* that is undertaken when an initial definitional inquiry fails. In short, the final argument is the outcome of a definitional inquiry into the nature of what it is to be an *aitia*; the results of that inquiry, as it finally develops in the *Phaedo*, are similar in status to the account of justice in *Republic* IV, an account that is useful but provisional, not certified knowledge but rather satisfactory thinking that is true but insufficiently confirmed by a comprehensive and complete definitional inquiry. In the terminology of *Republic* VI-VII, the account of *aitia* — the two-fold account — on which the final argument is based is the product of something like *dianoia* and not *dialektike*, and Plato's satisfaction with it shows a deliberate adjustment of a Socratic commitment to the necessity of definitional knowledge.

Socrates begins his intellectual autobiography by admitting to a youthful interest in that kind of wisdom (*sophia*) called *peri phusēōs historia* (96a7-8). The subject matter of such study is the *aitia* of each thing, its purpose to investigate natural things in order to discover why they came into being, why they perished, and why they are (96a9-10).¹² In the sequel, however, Socrates narrates the failure of various *physiologoi* to achieve these goals, even Anaxagoras, whose introduction of *Nous* initially seemed to Socrates so promising. In the course of this narration Socrates mentions a variety of ways in which the *aitiai* of the *pysiologoi* fail and thereby suggests a variety of criteria that an acceptable account of *aitia* of generation and corruption ought to satisfy.¹³ At the root of the collection of failures, however, is a serious and common error: the *physiologoi* all proceed to identify specific *aitiai* in specific cases before they know the real nature of an *aitia*, i.e., before they know what it is to be an *aitia*. This is Socrates' point as he registers his complaint against Anaxagoras' physical explanation, in fact generalizing and identifying the problem as common to all the *physiologoi*:

“...to call such things ‘reasons’ is quite absurd. It would be quite true to say that without possessing such things as bones and sinews, and whatever else I possess, I shouldn't be able to do what I judged best; but to call these things the reasons for my actions, rather than my choice of what is best, and that too though I act with intelligence, would be a thoroughly loose way of talking. Fancy being unable to distinguish two different things: what is really the reason and that without which the reason would not be a reason.” (99a4-b4)

The problem with *most people*, Plato has Socrates judge, is that they call the latter a “reason;” they apply the wrong name to it. Their error, that is, is a conceptual one. It is one of mistaken identification brought about because they do not

know what it is to be a genuine *aitia* and hence apply the name “*aitia*” to the wrong kind of factors. It is small wonder, then, that such people find the wrong specific *aitiai* or reasons, for they are looking for the wrong kind of thing to begin with.¹⁴

What I am proposing, then, is that Socrates’ narration reveals his emerging realization that he and the *physiologoi* have differing beliefs about what sorts of things would count as genuine *aitiai*. For Socrates, an *aitia* has to do with what is good or best. For them it is some single physical phenomenon or a set of such phenomena. Their error is to confuse “that without which that which is an *aitia* would not be an *aitia*” with “what it is to be a real *aitia*.”¹⁵ Just as the “lovers of sights and sounds” in *Republic* V mistake combinations of color, shape, and so on for what real beauty is, so the *physiologoi* confuse physical factors with what a real *aitia* is. To be sure, the *physiologoi* do also pick out the wrong *aitiai*, as Socrates sees it. What becomes increasingly important, however, is the reason for this mistake, and that is their belief that physical factors are what it means to be a *aitia*. Socrates, on the other hand, comes to see that these factors are but necessary conditions for an event’s or a fact’s occurrence and that what it really means to be an *aitia* has something to do with the good and the best.¹⁶ By looking closely at the itinerary of Socrates’ autobiography, we can see precisely how this distinction emerges.

In order to show that the soul is immortal, Socrates must examine the *aitiai* concerning generation and corruption. But even if *genesis* and *phthora* can be understood to include all change and not only absolute generation and corruption, the *aitia* for each is still one of a more general kind. At 96a9-10 in fact Socrates lists these two together with a third kind of *aitia*.¹⁷ Hence, if one believes in the desirability — if not the necessity — of definitional knowledge and yet wants to know what a genuine reason for generation is, one must first come to know what a reason is *simpliciter* or by itself. Certainly one must come to know the latter before one can identify specific reasons or *aitiai* for specific instances of generation or corruption.

As we approach Socrates’ final autobiographical comments, however, does he or does he not think that he has such knowledge? Clearly he has or recalls having certain beliefs about what a genuine *aitia* is, that it will explain why an event or state or thing is good and necessary or best, i.e., how it is more just, finer, and so on. The question is, does Socrates think that he *knows* this account or *logos*, that a genuine *aitia* is one that explains how x is good or the best? I do not think so.

Notice the stages of Socrates’ education, as he reports them. First, his early interest in the *physiologoi* and their accounts of why things occur is checked when he criticizes their conclusions. But his criticisms are varied, and not one concerns their neglect of the good. Then he discovers Anaxagoras, whose introduction of *Nous* prompts in Socrates the account of an *aitia* that associates it with the best or the good. That is, Anaxagoras’ claim that *Nous* orders and is the *aitios* for all things suggests to Socrates this account of the nature of an *aitia*: if one knows in what way it is best that x comes into being or is destroyed or is (as it is), then one knows the *aitia* for x (97b8-d1). Armed with this new belief —

Morgan: The Inquiry into *Aitia* in Plato's *Phaedo* and it is *only* a belief,¹⁸ Socrates seeks from Anaxagoras actual explanations that will provide some confirmation for this belief about what an *aitia* is. Unfortunately, however, Anaxagoras gives none; he does not show why it is better that the earth is the shape it is or why it is better that its position is what it is. Ultimately he fails to explain “what is best for each individual and the good that is common to all” (98b2-3). Furthermore, the typical explanation of the other *physiologoi*, already rejected for other reasons, also fails to confirm Socrates’ new belief about what an *aitia* is. Yet he seems to cling to it, even without confirmation, and this brings us to the very end of his autobiographical statement and his crucial declaration. Does he give up this belief that a genuine *aitia* concerns the good? Does he seek confirmation for it elsewhere? Does he think that he has sufficient knowledge of what an *aitia* is and, given that knowledge, set out to employ it? Or does he adopt and seek to test a new belief about what an *aitia* is?

Socrates admits that he would have studied with anyone in order to “learn the truth about a reason of *this sort*” (99c6-8, my italics), i.e., in order to confirm his belief that a real *aitia* explained how any event or thing is best.¹⁹ But, unsuccessful in this regard, Socrates turns to an alternative method, *ton deutron ploun epi tēn tēs aitias zētēsin* (99c9-d1), “a second voyage in quest of the reason” (Gallop, 51). Controversy has raged about this *deuteros plous*, regarding its nature and its relation to an abandoned *prōtos plous*.²⁰ My interpretation is this. Socrates needs some account of what an *aitia* is that is at least acceptable and useful as a foundation for the subsequent argument for the soul’s immortality. His current account, that being an *aitia* is somehow tied to what is good, lacks any confirmation. Without an account of the nature of the good and the relation of the Forms to it, Socrates cannot provide that confirmation. Hence, he sets out on an alternative journey to arrive at an acceptable account of what an *aitia* is. As many have noted, the *deuteron plous* is another way of arriving at the same destination as the *prōtos plous*,²¹ and the present account nicely preserves the identity of goal. The *deuteros plous*, then, is a *method* for arriving at an account of what an *aitia* is that is acceptable or satisfactory. Socrates, at least temporarily, abandons the effort to confirm his earlier belief and sets out to discover and confirm to his satisfaction — and Cebes’ — another account.²² Against the background of this interpretation of the alternative “voyage,” we can answer the questions we put a short time ago. First, Socrates does not know what an *aitia* is. Secondly, he gives up, at least temporarily, his unconfirmed belief that it concerns the good.²³ Thirdly, he enlists a new method for discovering what an *aitia* is and for confirming it to his satisfaction.

What is this new method and how does it work? Earlier, as Socrates tells us, he had tried to learn what an *aitia* is by examining physical things or, to be more precise, by studying the explanations or reasons of the *physiologoi* about why events and so on occur. This method is the *protos plous*, first in time but not pre-eminent in status. His new method, in contrast, requires that he turn away from the physical world and the views of the *physiologoi* and instead *eis tous logous kataphugonta en ekeinois skopein tōn ontōn tēn alētheian* (99e5-6). On each occasion, that is, *hupothemenos...logon* which he judges to be strongest, he would set down those things as true which seem to him to be in accord with it, *kai peri aitias kai peri tōn allōn apatantōn* (100a3-6). Gallop translates *logos*

(99e5; 100a4) as “theory,” but I suggest that we read it as “account” or, in a suitably broad sense, “definition.”²⁴ That is, Socrates’ method is a technique for arriving at acceptable definitions. It has him begin with an account of what *x* is — both about *aitia* and about other things, e.g., justice, beauty, and equality. What follows is a process of employing and testing the proposed definition that works as well to confirm or disconfirm it. The vexing problems concerning the meaning of *sumphōnein* (100a5) and the nature of the *hormēthenta* (101d4), which are tested to determine whether they fit with each other, can be ignored for our purposes.²⁵ What is important is to appreciate that Socrates’ method is one for proposing and testing beliefs about what *x* is and that its goal is not complete certitude but something less than that, *ti hikanon* (101e1). The method involves proposing a *logos*, employing it, testing it — if it is contested, perhaps giving a further *logos* of it, and hopefully arriving at something sufficiently strong with which to proceed.

At this point Socrates’ autobiographical remarks blend into his response to Cebes. The stage is set. Socrates needs an account of what an *aitia* is that is sufficiently firm so that his argument for the soul’s immortality can be based on it. He need not know, with complete certainty, what an *aitia* is; something less than such knowledge will do. The account of the presence of Forms in concrete objects as *aitiai* is his proposal.²⁶ It is an account that he strongly believes but does not know to be true. This reservation, however, does not halt Socrates’ progress. Instead it facilitates that progress, enabling him to proceed to prove that the soul is immortal.

It might be objected that on this interpretation Socrates’ hypothesis ought to be the claim that Forms are *aitiai*, whereas in fact, when Socrates offers to demonstrate the method, he sets down the *existence of the Forms* as his hypothesis (100b1-9). There is no denying that at 100b5-7 Socrates does speak about “hypothesizing that there exists a certain beautiful thing by itself and a good and a large and all the others.” Nor can it be denied that Socrates then claims that from this hypothesis he will “display the reason (*aitia*) and find out that the soul is immortal.” All of this does seem to suggest that the *logos* that is being set down or hypothesized is the existence of the Forms and not a provisional account of what an *aitia* is.

But we need not draw this conclusion from reading these passages. First, when Socrates introduces the procedure of hypothesizing a *logos*, he distinguishes between hypothesizing a *logos* (*hupothemenos*, 100a2) and setting down what seems to him to accord with it (*tithēmi*, 100a5). It is not impossible, however, to conceive of him subsequently referring to these processes collectively under either term, since neither seems to be used in a technical sense. In fact, at the conclusion of the final argument (107b4-10), he does just that, charging Simmias to examine more clearly “the initial hypotheses” (*tas ge hupotheseis tas prōtas*, 107b5). To be sure, the plural here might be taken to refer to the plurality of Forms, with the claim of existence for each Form being treated as a single hypothesis. But Socrates’ original statement seems to take the Forms collectively. It is more natural, I think, to read this plural as referring to both the claim of existence and that about Forms as *aitiai*.²⁷ Secondly, at 101d3-e1, when

Morgan: The Inquiry into *Aitiai* in Plato's *Phaedo*

Socrates elaborates the procedure for testing hypotheses, he mentions the possibility of further hypotheses that could be introduced to support those being questioned. Hence, at a certain point in the testing of an original hypothesis, one might have at once several contemporary hypotheses, interrelated in various ways. Much depends of course on what types of relations between hypotheses Plato had in mind; but one can easily imagine that the claim that Forms are *aitiai*, if introduced first, might be supported, if contested, by the claim that Forms exist. My interpretation does not require that Forms-as-*aitiai* be Plato's only hypothesis; all that is necessary is that the new method be aimed at arriving at some belief about what an *aitia* is and that this new belief be one that is accepted as satisfactory. This seems to be the case with the claim that real *aitiai* are Forms.²⁸

Surely Socrates never claims in the *Phaedo* to know without doubt that Forms are *aitiai*; he never claims to know what it is to be an *aitia*. But, as I have tried to show, he does ask the definitional question and seek to answer it, no matter how inconclusive the results. Indeed, at one point Socrates does encourage Simmias to pursue the argument, to examine the hypotheses, to "follow the argument to the furthest point to which man can follow it up" (107b7-8). But this recommendation is an epilogue to Socrates' search for an acceptable account of what an *aitia* is and the argument for the soul's immortality that is founded on it. It is not an obstacle to either that search or that argument. Plato is by no means Socrates' intellectual slave, but he is a loyal and devoted student, respectful enough to paint a consistent portrait of Socrates' quest for wisdom and definitional knowledge. In this case, that portrait exhibits Socrates' search for wisdom "about an *aitia* and everything else" (100a3-6).²⁹

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NOTES

¹I have especially benefited from the following discussions: John Burnet, ed. *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1911); R.S. Bluck, trans. & notes, *Plato's Phaedo* (London, 1955); R. Hackforth, trans. & comm., *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1955); David Gallop, trans. & notes, *Plato Phaedo* (Oxford, 1975); D. O'Brien, "The Last Argument of Plato's *Phaedo*," *Classical Quarterly* (1967), 198-231, (1968), 95-106; Gregory Vlastos, "Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*," *Philosophical Review* 78 (1969), 291-325, reprinted in G. Vlastos, ed., *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Garden City, N.Y., 1970), 132-66, and in G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1973), 76-110; N.R. Murphy, "The *Deuteros Plous* in the *Phaedo*," *Classical Quarterly* XXX, 2 (1936), 40-47; P. Huby, "*Phaedo* 99d-102a," *Phronesis* IV (1959), 12-14; L. Rose, "The *Deuteros Plous* in Plato's *Phaedo*," *Monist* 50 (1966), 464-73; K.M.W. Shipton, "A good second-best; *Phaedo* 99bf.," *Phronesis* XXIV, 1 (1979), 33-53; W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. IV (Cambridge, 1975), 348-53.

²For examples, see Gallop, 169-75; Bluck, 111-12; Guthrie, 350-1.

³Hackforth, 130.

⁴Murphy, 44.

⁵*Lysis* 218b8-220e6, especially 218d7-9, and 221c-d where at 221c2-7 an *aition* is identified with an answer to the question *dia ti*. Cf. *Hippias Major* 299d8-e6.

⁶*Phaedo* 99b8-102a1.

⁷See, for example, *phronēsis* (65a9, 66e3, 68a2, and a7, 68b3, 69c2, 70b1-4); *phronēsai* (66c5); *eidenai* (67a3); *gnōsometha* (67a8-b1); *epistasthai* (73c2); *ennōēsē* and *epistēmē* (73c8); *ennoian* (73c9); *epistametha* (74b2-3); *proeidota* (74e3). This is but a small sample.

⁸In the *Phaedo* *logos* can mean 'argument' (89d1ff., 94a8, 95a7-b4, 95d6-e1), 'account' or 'definition' (76b4-9), and 'theory' (92c9).

⁹This is a central problem for Plato's theory of knowledge in general. See Nicholas White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis, Ind. 1976), *passim*.

¹⁰On the veridical object of knowledge, see Gail Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978), 121-39, followed by T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977), 333-34, n. 41.

¹¹For a recent treatment, see Dorothea Frede, "The Final Proof of the Immortality of the Soul in Plato's *Phaedo* 102a-107a," *Phronesis* 23 (1978), 27-41. In her bibliography, Frede refers to most of the recent discussions.

¹²One might initially think that the verb *esti* must here be predicative, for if *gignetai* is read existentially or absolutely, the two ought not be redundant. I do in fact prefer the predicative rather than the existential reading. It is not unobjectionable, however, for Plato might have intended that the answer to the first question about generation give a mechanical explanation of the existence of natural objects, whereas the final question would leave open the possibility of another type of explanation, e.g., teleological. Such a distinction of types of explanation is one that Plato could easily have had in mind; see the texts cited in note 5 above.

¹³For discussion, see Vlastos, "Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*" and Gallop, 171-74.

¹⁴In the passage I have quoted and in Socrates' subsequent remarks, what is emphasized is that to call physical conditions *aitiai* is "to use extremely careless language" (Hackforth, 127). The inability to distinguish a genuine *aitia* from conditions for its operation is linguistic and conceptual. It is a matter of misnaming something. For Socrates, such

a failure to probe the inquiry into *Aitia* in Plato's *Phaedo*, about what the named thing is — in this case, about what being an *aitia* is. The expression *ti esti to aition tō onti* (99b3) could mean either “what is the real *aition*” or “what the *aition* really is;” commentators have largely ignored the latter option. But the Socratic critique of linguistic and conceptual error recommends it.

¹⁵See note 14. In the translation above I have rendered *ti esti to aition to onti* as “what is really the reason,” in order not to prejudice my case with an already skewed translation. Gallop translated “the reason proper,” Hackforth “the cause of a thing,” and Bluck and Grube “the real cause.” Needless to say, none of these translations takes the expression *ti esti* seriously.

¹⁶Socrates does not *begin* his intellectual career with this belief, that being an *aitia* has to do with the good and the best. Later we discuss his acquisition of this belief.

¹⁷Cf. *Phaedo* 97b5-6, 97c6-d1.

¹⁸Note the use of *ōmēn* at 98a6-b3, especially at 98a7 and 98b2.

¹⁹The expression *tēs toi autēs aitias* (99c6-7) is decisive evidence, I think, that Socrates' failure to learn about “teleological” reasons turns him away from “teleological” explanations altogether. The *deuteros plous*, whatever it turns out to be, *cannot* be an alternative procedure for identifying “teleological” reasons. Nonetheless, as an alternative procedure, it must in some sense have the same goal as Socrates' prior inquiries. The force of the cited expression notwithstanding, some commentators still cling to the notion of teleology in trying to understand the *deuteros plous*. See Shipton, 33, and Gallop, 176-77.

²⁰See the accounts cited in note 1.

²¹E.g., Gallop, 176-77.

²²This conclusion is a bit different from the one Gallop offers, since he fails to notice the what-is-x question that is *prior* to the question of the *aitia* for generation and corruption.

²³It is clear that he does in fact abandon, at least temporarily, the belief that a genuine *aitia* for x explains why x is good or best. For the method he outlines is a method for *arriving at a logos*, and the *logos* he proposes concerns Forms, without any reference to how they might account for x's goodness. Furthermore, while his method does include a procedure for testing a *logos* (or hypothesis), it is not *primarily* a method for testing, and yet *such testing* is *solely* what his belief about *aitiai* and the good requires. And finally, 99c6-9 shows that his effort to arrive at teleological explanations, in order to confirm his belief that an *aitia* involves the good and the best, had reached a dead end (see note 19 above). While my overall interpretation is significantly different from that of Gregory Vlastos, on this point we are in agreement. See Vlastos, in *Platonic Studies*, 82-3, note 15, and Shipton, 51 n. 17.

²⁴As I mentioned above, in note 8, *logos* has a variety of senses in the *Phaedo*. I suggest “account” here for 99e5-6 and throughout this passage. Note Gallop, 179, and his reason for rejecting this reading: “Clearly, neither (i) [‘hypothesizing’ that beautiful, good, large and other Forms exist] nor (ii) [agreeing that particular things are beautiful, large, etc. because they participate in the corresponding Forms], nor the Form-Reason hypothesis as a whole [viz., (i) and (ii) together], amounts to a definition.” Gallop has gone wrong just because he has failed to see that (ii) is indeed a proposed definition, viz., of what an *aitia* is.

²⁵Gallop, 179-81, 188-91, and the commentaries cited there. Doubtless, however, there is a similarity between this process of testing *logoi* and Socrates' elenctic procedure for testing beliefs about what x is.

²⁶*Phaedo* 100b3-9.

²⁷Cf. Gallop, 179, who agrees.

²⁸A more precise statement of the proposed account of *aitia* would be: an *aitia* for x's being F is the presence of the F in x or the participation of x in the Form of the F. This is roughly equivalent to Gallop's (ii); see note 24 above.

²⁹An earlier version of this paper was read at the Plato Colloquium at the University of Dayton. The current version is better, I hope, for the comments and incredulity of the Colloquium's participants.