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**On the Pythagorean Youths in the *Phaedo***

Little is known about Simmias and Cebes, the interlocutors of Socrates in the *Phaedo*, from other sources than this Platonic dialogue itself. Yet, Plato introduces the two "pythagorean" youths and alleged "disciples" of the famous Philolaos in a way that in language and drawing of character tells the (at least, Ancient Greek) reader of the *Phaedo* quite a lot about their philosophical background and upbringing, the "biographical crisis" they must have reached at the time of Socrates' death, and why they must play the role the dialogue forces upon them for different reasons, dramaturgical and other.

My interpretation of Simmias' and Cebes' characters and philosophical standing within the dialogue's development is based upon a close reading of Phd 60e-62a and of the pythagorean motifs of the myth at the writing's end. From this I gather that we must consider Simmias and Cebes as being depicted by Plato as typical *akousmatikoi*, or pythagorean "probationers" (which is the translation LSJ offers), who so far had been taught simple *akousmata* or philosophical apothegms according to the pythagorean school discipline, but have already left this stage of being mere passive auditors of philosophy at the time they visit Socrates in prison. As opposed to Philolaos' method, Socrates encourages the two youths to speak up their mind and to ask for understanding and reasons. This is one of the reasons why, for instance, Cebes is so "aggressively" inquisitive and more than once almost destroys the entire dialogue's argument.

My interpretation tries to offer a clearer image of Simmias and Cebes by shedding some light on their characterisation in the Platonic dialogue from what we historically know of the pythagorean *akousmatikoi*. At the same time, perhaps some of our knowledge of the pythagorean school discipline in the fourth century can be reassessed by looking at it through the eyes of the author of the *Phaedo*. In particular, with this interpretation, I hope to show at least three things:

1. That in the *Phaedo*, we find the only "early" (i.e. before Iamblichus and Porphyry) historical evidence of pythagorean *akousmatikoi* and a confirmation of a dichotomic school discipline (of apprentice *akousmatikoi* and advanced *mathematikoi*) in the most traditional pythagorean circles.
2. Why Simmias and Cebes are so obviously introduced as pythagoreans in the *Phaedo*, and why they know of the metempsychosis, among other typical pythagorean doctrines, but strangely are not themselves able to put forth and defend such doctrines: as *akousmatikoi*, they had learned them by heart, but never understood them or tried to give reasons for them. What they learn in the dialogue is the *logon didonai* in a free exchange of ideas.
3. That therefore the pythagorean youths experience some kind of initiation into philosophy, an initiation akin to the mystagogical initiations Plato alludes to frequently throughout the *Phaedo* in different ways, and that implies a symbolic death and rebirth to a new and better live. I claim that Simmias and Cebes can be better understood as "Platonic characters" if we take into consideration that throughout the dialogue they make their way from acusmatic school discipline to

philosophical understanding in a free exchange of argument. In that "mystagogical" perspective, the way to knowledge of Simmias and Cebes through the development of the dialogue, on a lesser level parallels the path to true philosophical fulfilment Socrates hopes to go as he dies.