

Freedom and Resentment in Plato's Phaedo

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Abstract : This paper discusses Socrates' fundamental views of morality and freedom in Plato's Phaedo through examining the fittingness of resentment and related emotional responses. In different parts of the dialogue there seems to be two kinds of emotional justification, which seem to explain different types of appeal that Socrates makes in order to defend his own emotional responses and make recommendations to others. The upshot of this paper is to bring out the connection between different emotional responses and beliefs. In particular, it focuses on the unfittingness of the Strawsonian resentment. If one, taking a rationalistic approach, agrees that some emotions, such as resentment, have a cognitive or belief-like component, then people reacting differently to the same situation suggests differences in their judgments and beliefs. However, at times, including in Socrates's direction to his friends in the Phaedo, emotions are justified by pragmatic appeal, independent of the beliefs associated with the emotion. In any case, there are both fittingness-based and pragmatic factors that determine and condition the warrant of an emotional response. Overall, an emotion is fitting when the agent's beliefs indicate that the conditions of appropriatedness are met. Socrates views resentment and sorrow as unfitting due to the mismatch with his own moral beliefs and his teaching to others. At the same time, Socrates argues that his friends' expression of sorrow at his last moments is unseemly because it is not included in the widely accepted social practices, though the emotion itself is not necessarily unfitting. Socrates's unexpected emotional response to his death, namely his lack of resentment and sorrow, implies a different belief system and indicates his students' lack of understanding of the actual implications of his views. Thus, the paper will bring out how complicated Socrates's ideas were even for people who had a sustained engagement with his ideas. Overall, the paper will illuminate how these two parties (Socrates - friends) view different moral duties, namely the individual duty to philosophy, which signifies a meaningful life, and the civic duty to obey the law, which signals Socrates' death.

Keywords : Emotions, freedom, morality, Plato

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