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DOES DEATH DO US APART?
ETHICAL AND METAPHYSICAL INSIGHTS FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA, APOLOGY AND PHAEDO.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines death and its connotations in Indian philosophy, with an emphasis on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, alongside Platonic early dialogues, *Apology* and *Phaedo*. Employing a hermeneutic and comparative philosophical methodology, the study delves into the metaphysical and ethical dimensions of death in these traditions. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* presents it as a mere transition in the eternal journey of the *ātman* (soul), advocating for *niṣkāma karma* (desireless action) and unwavering adherence to *dharma* (duty) as means to attain liberation (*mokṣa*). In contrast, *Plato*, through *Socratic* dialogues, interprets death as a passage to ultimate truth, proposing that a life of philosophical inquiry leads to the soul's release from the corporeal prison. By exploring how these texts conceptualize the soul's immortality, the nature of human existence and the ethical responses to mortality, this paper aims to reveal both convergences and divergences in how Eastern and Western traditions counsel us to face death with wisdom, courage, and equanimity. The study also evaluates the broader implications of these philosophies on contemporary discussions around death, dying, and the meaning of life.

Keywords: Apology, Death, Phaedo, Socrates, Gita, Immortality, Soul.

1. INTRODUCTION

Death, a universal phenomenon, reverberates across cultures and philosophies, often shrouded in solemnity and contrasted with the celebration of life. Is death to be perceived as a force of good or evil? While it is a brief occurrence at the end of life, its aftermath resonates with sorrow and mourning, reflecting humanity's enduring attachment to the corporeal form. In contemporary society, where medical advancements prolong life and materialism dominates, the notion of a natural death has become increasingly unfamiliar (Coelho, 2016). In cultures preoccupied with wealth and status, deeper existential questions about life and death often remain unexplored (Lobar et al., 2006).

1.1 Death at the cellular level

At a fundamental level, death is an integral part of life. In humans, as many as 10^11 cells die and are replaced daily, a process essential for maintaining bodily functions (Gilbert, 2010). Life and death occur simultaneously at the cellular level. The human body is in a

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constant state of regeneration, with old cells dying and new ones being formed (National Institute of General Medical Sciences, n.d.). Additionally, the molecules within these cells change even more frequently. For instance, when we breathe, oxygen molecules enter our cells through metabolic processes, while carbon dioxide, a waste product, is expelled. Over time, nearly all cells in the body are replaced, with estimates suggesting that 98% of bodily molecules are renewed annually (Scientific American, 2023). This constant cycle of cellular death and regeneration underscores the interplay between life and death, even at the microscopic level.

1.2 Parallels between Sleep and Death

Sleep, a transient state of unconsciousness, offers a compelling analogy for death. During deep sleep, brain wave frequencies resemble those found in comatose states, suggesting a potential for healing and rejuvenation (Borjigin et al., 2023). Both sleep and death involve reduced metabolic activity, stabilized breathing, and a fading of consciousness, though sleep is reversible while death is permanent (Zhang et al., 2009).

William Shakespeare's, ***"To be or not to be"*** soliloquy from *Hamlet* draws a connection between sleep, dreams and death, reflecting the struggles of the human psyche with morality and the unknown (death). In *Act 3 Scene 1* Hamlet contemplates :

"To be or not to be that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer…
Or…, by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep—
To sleep, perchance to dream. At, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause…" (Shakespeare, n.d.)

In this soliloquy, the Prince of Denmark grapples with his indecision– 'avenging his father's murder or succumbing to despair'. Hamlet's internal conflict– 'Is it noble to endure life's suffering or seeks an end to it through death' is a reflection on human vulnerability and the quest for meaning in the face of uncertainty (College Transitions, n.d.). The phrase "To die, to sleep" captures how life and death are intertwined in human thought. Hamlet's contemplation of death as a form of sleep suggests a desire for peace and escape from suffering, yet he is also haunted by the fear of the unknown that death represents (NYU, n.d.). "To sleep, perchance to dream" suggests experiencing dreams after falling asleep. Here, Shakespeare employs sleep as a metaphor for death i.e., our collective experience of surrendering consciousness each night. The contemplation of "what dreams may come in that sleep of death" questions one about the experiences awaiting after death (Neurolaunch, n.d.).

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This existential inquiry resonates deeply within the human experience, as individuals often ponder their legacy and what lies beyond life.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* explains that deep sleep represents a blissful state where consciousness is undivided and free from desires. This experience is akin to a temporary death, where individuality fades away (Krishnananda, n.d.). According to yogic philosophy, awareness during sleep can lead to a transcendence of mortality, allowing individuals to move beyond the cycle of life and death. This state is referred to as ***Turiya Avastha*** in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, which signifies a level of consciousness that transcends the usual states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep (Raju, 2022). Additionally, yogic teachings emphasize that mastering the process of sleep can also prepare one for the dying process. As noted by Swami Rama, who demonstrated conscious sleep techniques, those who can observe their mind during sleep can similarly witness the dying process (Yoga Chicago, 2023).

2. MRITYU (DEATH) IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

In Hindu philosophy, death (*mṛtyu*) is not perceived as an absolute end but as a necessary transition in the continuous cycle of existence (*saṁsāra*) (Ramakrishna Order, n.d.). Indian Philosopher, *Krishnananda* captures the classical understanding, viewing death as not the destruction of life itself but merely the departure of the soul from one form to another, rooted in the Sanskrit dictum:

'Na jivo mriyata'

(life itself does not die)

The vitality is transferred from one location to another. It is withdrawn from a particular formation (Krishnananda, 1977, p. 147).

According to most schools of Indian thought, death is not the end of life, but rather a moment of transition where the 'self', the soul of the person leaves the body behind. *Adi* Śaṅkarācārya further emphasizes this point, describing death as the merging of the individual soul with the divine, akin to a spark returning to the flame (Chattopadhyaya, 2000).

The Bhagavad Gītā, *the Upanishads* and *the Brahma Sūtras* form the triple cannon (*prasthāna-traya)* of Indian Philosophy (Radhakrishnan, 1948). *The Upaniṣads* are regarded as the foundation head of all Indian Philosophy (Sharma, 2021). Bloomfield remarks: 'There is no important form of Hindu thought, heterodox Buddhism included, which is not rooted in the Upanishads.' They form the concluding portion of the *Vedas* and are therefore called *'Vedānta'* . The *Brahma-sūtra* claims to be an aphoristic summary of the *Upaniṣads*. The *Gītā* is the milk milked out of the *Upaniṣad*-cows, particularly influenced by the *Kaṭha* and the *Īsha* (Sharma, 2021) and is both a metaphysics and an ethics, *a brahmavidyā and a yogaśāstra,* the science of reality and the art of union with reality (Radhakrishnan, 1948). Contained in the *Bhīṣma-Parva* of the greatest Sanskrit epic, The *Mahābhārata* (Sharma, 2021), *The Bhagavad-Gītā* literally means 'The Lord's Song', i.e., the discourse of Lord *Kṛṣṇa* to persuade the reluctant *Arjuna* to do his duty (*dharma)*.

The *Gītā* offers a discourse on the impermanence of the body and the immortality of the soul (*ātman*), framing death as a passage rather than annihilation. In Chapter 2, *Arjuna*,

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overwhelmed by grief at the thought of killing his own relatives and teachers, lays down his weapon and refuses to fight. In response, *Kṛṣṇa* provides an ontological explanation of death, asserting that the physical body dies while the soul (*ātman)* remains untouched. At the heart of the teachings on death, is the fundamental distinction between the body (*deha)* and the soul (ātman).

He states:

"dehinosmin yathā dehe kaumāraṁ yauvanaṁ jarā,

tathā dehāntara-prāptir dhīras tatra na muhyati."

"Just as the embodied self passes through childhood, youth, and old age in this body, so too does it pass into another body. The wise are not deluded by this." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 104)

This verse explains the cyclical nature of life and death, portraying the body as a temporary vessel for the soul, which endures beyond bodily dissolution. It aligns with the *Upaniṣadic* notion that the *ātman* transcends all temporal changes and is not subject to creation or destruction (Sharma, 2021).

Equanimity in Life and Death: The *Gītā* teaches that true wisdom lies in maintaining equanimity toward life and death, pleasure and pain, good and bad, etc. *Kṛṣṇa* declares:

"sama-duḥkha-sukhaṁ dhīraṁ, so'mṛtatvāya kalpate."

"One who remains undisturbed in pleasure and pain, he alone is fit for immortality."
(Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 105)

Elaborating on the nature of life, Kṛṣṇa asserts that death is universal and hence should not be feared:

"jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur, dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca,

tasmād aparihārye'rthe, na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi."

"For one who is born, death is certain; and certain is birth for the one who has died. Therefore, you should not grieve over what is inevitable." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 110)

The Immortality of the Soul (*Ātman*): There is deep-rooted faith in the existence of and transmigration of the *atman* (soul or spirit). There can be death of the physical body-physical life but no death of the *atman*, which can neither die nor be killed (Crawford, 2003; Deshpande et al., 2005; Pandya 2005). Kṛṣṇa encourages Arjuna to transcend sorrow and embrace his duty (*dharma*) for the soul is immortal: He says:

"na jāyate mriyate vā kadācit nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ |

ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre ||" (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 2.20)

"The self is never born, nor does it ever die, nor having once existed does it cease to be. It is unborn, eternal, everlasting, and ancient; it is not slain when the body is slain." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 106)

Śaṅkarācārya, in his commentary, explains that the *ātman* is beyond all modifications (*vikāra*). Unlike the body, which undergoes transformation, decay, and death, the self is nitya

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(eternal) and avikāra (unchanging) (Śaṅkara, 1983). He argues that ignorance (*avidyā*) makes people identify with the perishable body, leading to attachment, fear of death, and suffering. However, the wise recognize the distinction between the self and the body and are not deluded by its transitory nature (Śaṅkara, 1983).

The omniscient *Atman* is not born, nor does it die. It has not come from anywhere and it has not become anything. Unborn, eternal, perpetual and ancient, this *Atman* is not killed when the body is killed. Birth is the process of production of an effect from a cause, and, hence, it is the process of transient being. For the same reason death is also a process. Life, birth and death are impermanent (Krishnananda, 1977, pg 74)

To further illustrate this idea, *Kṛṣṇa* compares the process of death and rebirth to the changing of clothes:

"vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya, navāni gṛhṇāti naro'parāṇi,
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny, anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī."

"Just as a person discards worn-out garments and puts on new ones, so too does the soul discard old bodies and take on new ones." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 108)

This metaphor shows the impermanence of the body and the continuity of the self beyond physical dissolution.

Furthermore, Kṛṣṇa describes himself as *mṛtyuḥ sarva-haraś cāham*—"I am death, the great destroyer of all" (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 10.34), indicating that death is an aspect of divine order and should be accepted as part of the cosmic process (Sharma, 2021).

Death as a Part of Dharma: Beyond metaphysical discussions, the Gītā presents death as integral to one's duty (dharma). Arjuna, as a warrior, is bound by his kṣatriya dharma to fight in battle. Kṛṣṇa reminds him that avoiding duty out of fear of death is an illusion, as life and death are merely phases within the cosmic order:

"hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṁ jitvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm |
tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛta-niścayaḥ ||" (Sankara, 2000, 2.37)

"If you are slain, you will attain heaven; if you conquer, you will enjoy the earth. Therefore, arise, O Arjuna, and resolve to fight." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 114). The verse highlights that righteous action (*karma yoga*) is more important than fear of death. Since the self is eternal, death should not be a deterrent to fulfilling one's moral and social obligations.

The Destination Beyond Death

The *Gītā* suggests that one's state of mind at the moment of death influences the nature of one's next birth. *Kṛṣṇa* states:

"anta-kāle ca mām eva, smaran muktvā kalevaram,
yaḥ prayāti sa mad-bhāvaṁ, yāti nāsty atra saṁśayaḥ." (Sankara, 1948, 8.5)

"Whoever, at the time of death, remembers Me alone and leaves the body, attains My being; of this, there is no doubt." (Radhakrishnan, 1948)

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The verse reinforces the importance of spiritual consciousness at the moment of death, as it determines the soul's ultimate destination. *Kṛiṣṇa* further promises that those who dedicate themselves to divine contemplation (*bhakti*) will be freed from the cycle of birth and death:

"mām upetya punar janma, duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam,

nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ, saṁsiddhiṁ paramāṁ gatāḥ." (Sankara, 1948, 8.15)

"Having attained me, the great souls are no longer subject to rebirth in this transient and sorrowful world, for they have reached the highest perfection." (Radhakrishnan, 1948)

This aligns with the broader *Vedantic* goal of mokṣa, the ultimate liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Immortality is attained through the knowledge of the fact that the Self is the independent existence. Death is the process of reshuffling oneself from one condition to another condition. This process is the result of unfulfilled desires. Nothing is lost when the body is lost, because death is casting off what is not needed and the way of entering into what is needed (Krishnananda, 1977, pg42). Deathlessness is the result of desirelessness, of resting in the condition of wanting nothing at all, nothing of this world, or the body and mind, etc (Krishnananda, 1977, pg 44).

Once, *Gautama the Buddha* consoled a mother who lost her only child by asking her to go into town and bring him "a little mustard seed from any house where no human had died". To her surprise there were no such households. She realised that it is the law, all living beings come and go.

Swami Vivekananda, a nineteenth century philosopher of the Vedanta school, remarks that the death of a human being brings the experience of joy to the soul:

"*The final transcendence of the process of birth, and hence a freedom from body-bondage… does not merely provide a negative happiness of freedom from miseries, it is a state of positive joy"* (Lal, 1978, 29–30).

Liberation from the bondage of the embodied and self and the union with the divine mark the ultimate purpose of human life, *Swami Vivekananda* regards death as liberation from attachment to the body where the soul merges with and becomes one with its true self.

3. DEATH IN PLATONIC EARLY DIALOGUES:

Revered as the progenitor of Western philosophy, *Socrates' (470-399 BCE)* influence resonates across millennia, shaping the very fabric of philosophical inquiry, ethics, and human thought (Brickhouse & Smith, 2000). He walked the streets of Athens, engaging citizens in dialogues with a singular mission: to seek wisdom through relentless questioning. Socrates' commitment to truth and virtue often collided with the prevailing norms of Athenian society. His dedication to ethical inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge led to introspection, challenging the status quo and inviting the ire of those threatened by his relentless pursuit of intellectual integrity (Brickhouse & Smith, 2000).

Apology is a dialogue by Plato that presents Socrates' defense during his trial in 399 BCE, where he was charged with impiety and corrupting the youth (Plato, 2000, Apology). The word *Apology* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning "defense" or "justification" (Plato, 2000).

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Athenian juries were very large, in this case 501, the problem was resolved neatly, by having the prosecutor, after conviction, assess the penalty he thought appropriate, followed by a counter-assessment by the defendant. The jury would then decide between the two. The dialogue provides *Plato's* version of three speeches *Socrates* makes: his defence (the main speech) (2000, Apology, 17a–35d), a counter-penalty proposal (35e–38b) following the conviction and last words to the jury (38c–42a), both to those who voted for the death sentence & his acquittal. It professes to be a record of the actual speech that *Socrates* delivered in his own defence at the trial (Plato, 2000). Towards the conclusion of his speech, *Socrates* addresses the jury's concerns about his impending execution. He asserts that the primary concern of a virtuous individual should not be the length of their life but whether they act justly. As he explains, "A man who is worth anything ought not to consider the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether he is doing right or wrong" (Plato, 2000, Apology, 28b4–b8).

Socrates draws a parallel between his philosophical mission and his past military service. He recalls his duty as a soldier at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium, where he stood his ground in battle despite the risk of death. He argues that abandoning his philosophical inquiry out of fear would be as dishonourable as deserting his military post:

"If now, when, as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfil the philosopher's mission of searching into myself and other men, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear, that would indeed be strange" (Plato, 2000, Apology, 29a6–b2).

Socrates' firmly believes that philosophy is a divine calling, one that he cannot forsake even when faced with execution. His refusal to betray this mission exemplifies his unwavering commitment to truth and virtue.

Fear of Death as False Wisdom: *Socrates* further critiques the fear of death, arguing that it stems from ignorance. He states that fearing death presumes knowledge that no one actually possesses—namely, that death is an evil. He describes this fear as a "*pretense of wisdom,"* since it assumes certainty about the unknown (Plato, 2000, Apology, 29a6–b2). This critique highlights his philosophical stance that true wisdom lies in acknowledging one's ignorance rather than clinging to unfounded beliefs. As Socrates continues his defense, he explains that his philosophical practice–engaging in discussions about virtue and self-examination is the highest good. He proclaims:

"If I tell you that to do as you say would be disobedience to God, and that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe me. And if I say again that daily discussion about virtue, and 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. Yet I say what is true" (Plato, 2000, Apology, 37e6–38a8).

He refuses to abandon his search for wisdom even if it means death. His conviction that the "unexamined life is not worth living" reflects the belief that intellectual and moral inquiry hold greater value than physical survival.

Socrates' Divine Sign and the Rejection of Politics: Another crucial aspect of Socrates' perspective on death is his claim to possess a divine inner voice, which he calls his dominion.

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He describes it as a guiding force that warns him against certain actions but never commands him to do anything. He notes that this voice has never opposed any of his words or actions during the trial, leading him to conclude that his impending death is not a misfortune:

"This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child; it always forbids but never commands me to do anything I am going to do. This is what deters me from being a politician" (Plato, 2000, Apology, 31d2–d7).

Socrates' Final Words on Death and Justice:

After being found guilty, Socrates is given the opportunity to propose an alternative punishment. Instead of pleading for leniency, he reaffirms his innocence:

"I am convinced that I never willingly wronged anyone" (Plato, 2000, Apology, 37b).

His refusal to escape death through compromise demonstrates his steadfast commitment to justice. He further argues that avoiding death should never come at the cost of one's moral integrity:

"I would rather die having spoken after my manner than speak in your manner and live. For neither in war nor yet at law ought I or any man use every way of escaping death… The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death" (Plato, 2000, Apology, 38e5–39b1).

His belief that moral corruption is a greater evil than death itself and many people prioritize self-preservation over righteousness, but he refuses to do so.

Socrates' Prophetic Vision of Death:

As his trial concludes, *Socrates* adopts a prophetic tone, addressing both his accusers and his supporters. He reassures the jury that death should not be feared, as a good person cannot be truly harmed in life or in death. He declares:

"You too must be of good hope as regards death, gentlemen of the jury, and keep this one truth in mind—that a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death, and that his affairs are not neglected by the gods" (Plato, 2000, Apology).

The final words convey a sense of acceptance and philosophical detachment:

"Now the hour to part has come. I go to die, you go to live. Which of us goes to the better lot is known to no one except God" (Plato, 2000, Apology).

The concluding remark encapsulates his central argument: the uncertainty of death renders it neither inherently good nor bad. By maintaining this philosophical stance until the very end, *Socrates* embodies the idea that death is not to be feared if one has lived a just life.

In *Plato's Phaedo*, *Socrates'* final conversation with his friends unfolds in his prison cell on the day of his execution. As the sun prepares to set, marking the moment he must drink the hemlock, *Socrates* engages in a philosophical discussion on death and the immortality of the soul (Plato, 2000, Phaedo). The dialogue explores an essential question: How should mortals embrace death? *Socrates*, rather than fearing his imminent fate, perceives it as the culmination of a philosopher's journey–a transition from the constraints of the body to the freedom of the soul. He portrays the human soul as imprisoned within the physical

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body, an idea he had earlier explored in Crito. He sardonically remarks that an elderly man should not resent the approach of death (Plato, 2000, Crito, 43b), suggesting that death is not a tragedy but a natural passage. He views it as an opportunity to sever earthly ties and embark on an unknown journey—one that, instead of leading to oblivion, offers a path to enlightenment (Kaplan, 2001). Philosophy, he argues, is the "noblest and best of music" (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 61a), guiding the soul toward its ultimate purpose: the pursuit of truth and virtue.

The Soul and the Body: The Central Dichotomy

His conception of death is deeply rooted in his dualistic understanding of the soul and the body. He argues that the senses are unreliable and deceive individuals, obstructing the soul's quest for true knowledge. He asserts that the greatest hindrance to wisdom is not death but life itself (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 81e). In his view, only when freed from the body's distractions can the soul attain pure knowledge (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 64c). He refers to this detachment as "purification" (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 67c7), emphasizing that the philosopher, through a lifetime of intellectual and moral discipline, prepares the soul for its eventual separation from the physical world. *Socrates* compares the soul to the divine, describing it as "immortal, intellectual, and uniform," while the body is "mortal, unintellectual, multiform, and dissoluble" (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 80b). This contrast underscores his belief that death is not an end but a release from corporeal limitations. According to this view, a soul that has lived a virtuous life will ascend to a divine realm, joining the gods (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 82c). Conversely, souls corrupted by worldly desires will be trapped in a cycle of reincarnation, destined to inhabit lower forms of life.

The Consequences of a Life Tied to the Body

For *Socrates*, the fate of the soul after death is determined by its earthly pursuits. Those who have indulged in material pleasures—gluttony, drunkenness, and wantonness—are doomed to return as lesser beings, such as donkeys or other ignoble animals (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 82a). He warns that individuals who prioritize bodily pleasures over intellectual and moral development will remain ensnared in the cycle of rebirth. In contrast, the philosopher, devoted to wisdom and virtue, stands a chance of breaking free from this cycle and attaining eternal liberation (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 82b10) (Smith, 2004). In the concluding section of the dialogue, *Socrates* reaffirms the soul's immortality, urging his friends to embrace this truth:

"…the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation,…That is the reason why a man should be of good cheer about his own soul, if during life he has ignored the pleasures of the body and its ornamentation as of no concern to him and doing him more harm than good, but has seriously concerned himself with the pleasures of learning, and adorned his soul not with alien but with its own ornaments, namely, moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom, and truth, and in that state awaits his journey to the underworld" (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 115).

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Here, he emphasizes that true happiness comes not from bodily indulgence but from the cultivation of virtue and wisdom. The philosopher, through lifelong dedication to these ideals, prepares his soul for its final journey.

Accepting the Inevitable: *Socrates'* Last Words

As the moment of his execution approaches, *Socrates* tells his friends that there is no point in postponing the inevitable, for the "fated day calls him now." Crito, his devoted follower, asks if he has any final instructions. Socrates responds with wisdom:

"Nothing new, Crito, but what I am always saying, that you will please me and mine and yourselves by taking good care of your own selves in whatever you do, even if you do not agree with me now, but if you neglect your own selves, and are unwilling to live following the tracks, as it were, of what we have said now and on previous occasions, you will achieve nothing even if you strongly agree with me at this moment" (Plato, 2000, Phaedo).

He firmly believed that self-examination and the pursuit of wisdom are lifelong endeavours. True honour is not found in mere agreement with his teachings but in their application. Crito, accepting his mentor's advice, then asks how they should bury him. Socrates responds with characteristic irony:

"In any way that you like, if you can catch me and I do not escape you… after I have drunk the poison I shall no longer be with you but will leave you to go and enjoy some good fortunes of the blessed…" (Plato, 2000, Phaedo).

With this final remark, Socrates reinforces his belief in the soul's journey beyond the physical realm. His calm acceptance of death, his refusal to mourn or fear it, and his confidence in the immortality of the soul serve as a testament to his philosophical convictions.

4. COMPARISON

Death in *The Gītā, Apology, and Phaedo* is centered around the immortality of the soul, detachment from bodily concerns, and the pursuit of wisdom as a path to transcendence. They share a fundamental conviction: death is not the end of existence but a transition.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* instructs *Arjuna* that death is a mere passage for the *ātman* (self), which is eternal and unchanging (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 2.20). He encourages *Arjuna* to transcend grief and fear, emphasizing that the wise understand death as a necessary transition within the cosmic order (*saṁsāra*) (Radhakrishnan, 1948). The *Gītā* promotes equanimity in life and death, urging individuals to act in accordance with dharma without attachment to results (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 2.47). Furthermore, it introduces the idea that one's state of mind at the moment of death determines the nature of one's rebirth or ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*) (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 8.5) (Sharma, 2021).

Similarly, in *Apology*, *Socrates*, facing his imminent execution, argues that death should not be feared. He suggests that either death leads to annihilation, a state of dreamless sleep, or it grants an opportunity for the soul to continue its philosophical quest in another realm (Plato, 2000, Apology, 40c-41d). His detachment from bodily concerns mirrors *Gītā's* call for renouncing attachment to the physical self. His unwavering commitment to

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philosophy as a preparation for death aligns with *Kṛṣṇa's* assertion that knowledge and self-realization free one from the cycle of rebirth (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 4.39).

In *Phaedo*, *Plato* deepens *Socrates'* perspective on death, framing it as a liberation of the soul from the body's limitations. *Socrates* posits that the senses deceive and hinder true knowledge (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 81e) and argues that only through death can the soul attain pure wisdom (Plato, 2000, Phaedo, 64c). This aligns with the *Gītā's* assertion that the body is transient and the soul must transcend material existence to attain higher knowledge (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 2.22). Moreover, *Phaedo* presents the doctrine of reincarnation, where impure souls remain bound to the cycle of rebirth, akin to the *Gītā's* distinction between those who attain liberation and those who return to worldly existence due to attachments (Radhakrishnan, 1948, 8.15) (Sharma, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The heart of man is the abode of all sorts of desires for earthly and heavenly pleasures and this makes his mind outgoing in its disposition. The feeling of want within is the driving force behind this disposition and all activities that it gives rise to. When such a person is living and moving in the sphere of the not-Self, of the perishable, man is within the jurisdiction of death. For death, when closely looked at, is not so much the final fall of the body as the ever present spiritual blindness in which men live and conduct their lives? Mortal man is mortal only because he considers himself to be the finite ego conditioned by the body, the senses and the mind. In his true nature, he is the *Atman*, immortal, unconditioned and infinite.

In *Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi* words:

"I died out of the stone and I became a plant;
I died out of the plant and became an animal;
I died out of the animal and became a man.
Why then should I fear to die?
When did I grow less by dying?
I shall die out of man and shall become an angel!"

(Rumi, n.d.)

Death as a Creative Crisis

Death is not the end of all existence, as held in secular thought, in which man is essentially a body. Indian spiritual thought holds that it is the beginning, under fortunate circumstances, of a steady march to spiritual awareness in a disembodied state, or under normal circumstances, the beginning of another bodily existence to continue the evolutionary march of the soul. This makes the moment of death a moment of creative crisis, it is the time to concentrate the mind on positive thoughts, on the thoughts of virtue or as the *Gita* proclaims: the last thoughts of a person have much to do with the new life that he is to have after death (7.6).

This introspective odyssey through the final hours of Socrates, as captured in Plato's early dialogues, beckons us to confront our own mortality and contemplate the meaning of life in

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the face of its inevitable end. Socrates' unwavering belief in the soul's immortality and the power of philosophical inquiry offers a message: true liberation lies not in the ephemeral pleasures of the flesh, but in the steadfast pursuit of knowledge and virtue, a journey that continues even as the curtain falls on our earthly existence. Socrates' death becomes the great paradigm of glorious death (Gill 1973), for death is not the end.

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