

# The Concept of Death as the Liberation of Thought: A Brief Introduction to the Study on the Phaedo

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## ABSTRACT

The present work, entitled **THE CONCEPT OF DEATH AS LIBERATION OF THOUGHT: A Brief Study on the Phaedo and the Thought of Seneca**, aims at understanding the question of death in Plato's Phaedo and in some shades of Seneca's thought. For this we will make a brief introductory study of Plato's thought with a brief analysis of the Phaedo, in a little sequence of the historical context of Seneca, which belonged to Stoicism. This work is divided into three parts: The concept of death as the liberation of thought; senecian historical context and the concept of death in the vision of Seneca. In order to understand the philosophical point of view of the question, it is a relevant subject that has not been exhausted enough and will still be the subject of numerous researches, given the importance and relevance of its thinking. We adopted the bibliographic query for this research. It is of interest to identify, discuss and compare such issues, since the main objective of this work is to understand the concept of death as the liberation of thought, a study of the Phaedo and the thought of Seneca.

**Keywords:** Death, Liberation, Thought.

## INTRODUCTION

Death is a subject of great importance to be studied, however, in philosophy it is still necessary to spend time in its understanding. Because it is feared, even in the universe of some scholars, the theme of death is neglected. What should not happen, since it is a reality to which all humanity and living beings are subject. The first sentence of the Phaedo about death is that if indeed "Eveno (the poet) and sage should follow in the footsteps of Socrates, as fast as he can." Which leaves Cebes in doubt that the philosopher should not commit violence against himself, at the same time that the philosopher should aim for the one who dies as quickly as possible.

According to the reading of the Phaedo, we observe that the philosopher should not fear death, nor should he commit suicide; however, if he does not learn to die, he will not be able to philosophize. From this point on, we will try to find ways to understand the meaning of dying as the liberation of thought in the light of the readings of the Phaedo and other texts of both Plato and other authors dealing with the subject of death.

We find in the Phaedo that seeking death is not a suicidal exercise in 61c, d in the dialogue of Socrates and Simias about Eveno's concern for violence against himself. We will make a brief inquiry about this step, in the attempt to understand death as freedom.

For a better understanding of the difference of the sense of death in some works of Seneca and the Platonic thought in the Phaedo, even though both (Plato and Seneca) lived in completely different times the theme of death is treated by them.

The attachment too much to life and the fear of dying is what can make a man a slave, choose death before a life of torture, before impending death at the hands of the tormentor, old age without honor is better facilitated and abbreviated pain through the quickest and most dignified means of death.

## 1. THE CONCEPT OF DEATH AS LIBERATION OF THOUGHT

To desire death for the philosopher, is not to commit violence against oneself, according to Phaedon 61.d. From this premise, we intend to understand the concept of death as learning for philosophy, not only in the Phaedo, but in the light of some texts of Seneca and some philosophers belonging to Stoicism.

There is a possibility in the Phaedo 65b of understanding the body as an obstacle to knowledge, through sensuous inquiry men are led to deceit, for bodily sensations are inaccurate and uncertain, according to the text:

And now, tell me: when it comes to truly acquire wisdom, is the body an obstacle if in the investigation we ask for help? I mean, more or less, the following: perhaps some truth is transmitted to men through sight or hearing, or perhaps, at least in relation to these things do not happen as poets do not get tired of in Do you repeat it incessantly, and which we do not see or hear clearly? And if from the bodily sensations these are not exact and uncertain, it follows that we can expect no better thing from the others than, I believe, they are inferior to those[...][2].

Any inquiry into knowledge, if searched through the senses, will be inaccurate and unreliable, so the body and its sensations function as a sort of imprisonment of thought. From the sixty-sixth we shall see Socrates's argument about death, saying that it should not be a cause for concern or irritation.

Philosophy as a preparation for dying, the philosopher can understand it as a liberation from thought, because he is no longer incarcerated in a body full of passions and instincts that overwhelm his capacity to reason.

Man, according to Plato in the Apologia of Socrates 35 a, should not fear if he is judged and condemned to death, since, in his defense, Socrates affirms that some men of prestige lose all their dignity when confronted with reality of a death sentence. To illustrate this, let's look at the text:

[...] men of great prestige who, when judged, adopt unconceivable attitudes: it seems that a terrible evil falls upon them, if they are to die. It is as if they were convinced that they would be immortal if you did not condemn them to death. In my opinion, these men are ashamed of the city and even authorize a foreigner to think that the Athenians who are distinguished by merit, those whom their fellow citizens choose among all to elevate them to magistrates and other honors, are no more brave than women. (Apologia of Socrates, 35 a).

In view of this, it is observed that what we have exacerbated from death is not virtuous, man should not see death as a terrible event, nor live as if he were a being endowed with immortality. Throughout life,

anyone, including those with projection and honors before society, is liable to face misfortunes, culminating in a death sentence (as was the case in the time of Socrates), because of the ideals of virtue he espoused and taught to the younger ones. The condemnation to death does not make a poor man condemned, nor squander the brilliance of the moral and ethical values defended. Death is only a temporal event which does not diminish the force of its argument, nor does it make it bitter and fearful to the point of being inconsistent with its principles.

In Plato's text, *Apologia de Socrates*, after the condemnation, Socrates himself suggests the penalty itself. Death to him does not sound like a disgrace, he is aware that the service he provided during his life, his ideas, his methods of approach influenced positively and would not end with his death, however, if he acted as a man who was fearful and attached to life, could be incoherent with the ideas he defended. In 40 d[3] Socrates says that:

If all feeling ceases and what there is is like sleep, in which nothing is seen, nor dream, then death will be a wonderful benefit. [...] If death is such a thing then I say that it is a real profit, because then all along it seems to be more than one night.

At the same time that Socrates reflects whether death is like sleep, he thinks it is also a match where those who die gather there and in any form of death, he regards it as profitable. For Socrates, "no evil can happen to a man of good, neither in life nor after dying." Death, according to Socrates, is not a reason for resentment toward those who condemned it, but a liberation from care of life.[5]

As this brief analysis of the concept of death as a liberation of thought is made, we shall now see a brief historical context on Seneca and an analysis of the concept of death in Seneca, then some considerations will be made about Epictetus and will end with a brief analysis of the stoic concept of death.

## 2. SENEQUIAN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lucius Annaeus Sêneca belongs to the Hellenistic school denominated stoicism, founded by, Zeno of Cício born around the year 334 a.C.[6] It is possible to characterize Stoicism as a spiritual and moral movement, Seneca can be inserted with what is known as the new Portico, which was notable in Rome and then also found Marcus Aurelius.

Citi or Cittium, located in Cyprus, was a region known for the Phoenician legends and theological myths of the people, in addition to the practice of "Canaanite cults[7]". From the Canaanite people descend the Phoenicians, so the thought of these two peoples is contained in the Zenonian thought. An interesting mark of the Canaanite people, probably known to Zeno, is that they do not establish much distance between man and divinity. This problem is strongly opposed by the prophets of Israel in the worship of Baal, a god mixed with man and divinity. In Stoic thought there are remnants of this mixture, when it comes to the "sage equals God.[8]"

Seneca was born in Cordoba, Spain, about the year of his birth there are differences, there are those who point out that it was the year 4 AD and others the year 2 or 1 a.C. his parents were Spanish. Seneca was passionate about Philosophy, especially regarding the moral aspect, considered as salutary for the inner life, the moral life for the philosopher consisted primarily in the center of his interest. Let's see what Ullman says:

In Philosophy he saw the art of living and dying. He considered her the pedagogue of humanity. His philosophy is to reach the concrete man, to determine his practical conduct, to govern the inner and outer activity of the human being, conforming it with truth. It is not lost in brooding and logomania. He did not write a systematic treatise on Philosophy.[\[9\]](#)

As far as we know, Philosophy had a prominent place in Seneca's life, he has three titles that adorn him: philosopher, politician and literary. According to UI[\[10\]](#)Iman, Seneca "was of average intelligence and did not become a philosophical genius. What charms us about him is his greatness of soul. "

About the Senegalese writings, they present themselves in a form of dialogue in which Seneca himself embodies the interlocutors, this is very evident in *the universally famous Letters*. His writings are fascinating and preach a way of life and pursuit of ethical and spiritual growth that can be roughly compared to an apostle seeking the conversion of his watchers.

The works of Seneca are abundant and striking. Now let's look at his main works:

There are three *Consolations*: Ad Heliven Matren, Ad Polybium, Ad Marciam. We have, in addition, the treatises *on De Providentia, De brevitae vitae, De vita beata, De otio sapientis, De tranquillitate animae, De otio, De ira, Dialogi*, etc. There are still seven books entitled De beneficiis; two books on De clementia. From the famous Epistulae and the Lucilium they are preserved 124. Probably more. They represent his last production, between 63 and 64. [\[11\]](#)

Seneca's style captivates by the delicate form of his analyzes, the choice appropriate to each situation, his accuracy adapted to each situation or circumstance to people. Your comparisons.

As regards his thought, it is necessary to remember the influence which his masters exerted on him, namely: Sótio, Atalus, and Fabian Papyrio, but Seneca remained faithful to the essential ideas of the ancient Portico while still maintaining the independence of his thought. This is an interesting point, since he himself writes in one of his letters: "I will not give myself to a man as a slave; I take no master's name. I give much value to the judgment of enlightened men, but I also ask that my judgment be taken into account. " (Letter 45).

After knowing a little of the historical context of Seneca and Stoicism, will be worked from the next points, the concept of death in the philosopher's thinking.

### **3. THE CONCEPT OF DEATH IN THE VISION OF SENCECA**

According to the proposal, we will talk about the concept of death in Seneca, we will not initially begin to describe or mean a concept of death itself, but it is necessary to analyze the value that Seneca attributed life to understand the meaning of death.

According to the Senegalese thought, life without virtue, without health just by being breathed, is not a desirable life. To live badly is better to die and death should not be feared but sought. In view of the above quotation, the present man with so many techniques of prolonging life, is astonished. Although, we do not pretend to make any bridge with contemporaneity, at that moment.

Seneca defends death as an escape from an imminent threat to life. If a person can choose between being killed and tortured in the hands of a tormentor, to die simply and easily, it is best to choose what causes less suffering. For Seneca, "as I choose the vessel with which I will sail, and the house where I shall dwell, so may I choose the means by which I shall get out of life." [12] Defending death in the most agreeable manner to the person is a relief and an act of freedom, especially in the time in which Seneca lived, a period marked by tyranny, with torture and torture as common penalties for many condemned.

Thinking death as an option and something to be sought is a great step towards freedom, according to Seneca, life can be approved by others, death is the very subject that chooses the one that best pleases him. Advising suicide and defending the right to die, as it is the one who chooses to leave, is not a very acceptable thing, Seneca himself is aware of this: "You must not leave to others this decision that does not belong to public opinion. Think of one thing: escape as fast as possible from the blows of luck. Anyway, there will always be those who think badly [13] of your decision. "Death is the way to return home from where man came, to return home, for him man has a single entrance to life but has many exits to leave it. In the face of such statements it is possible to reflect that Seneca taught a detachment from the material plane, especially life in any circumstance, it is no use living in any way, but living in a dignified manner and without so much suffering.

The idea of life and death of Seneca is something that does not only cover great men or only the wise. He shows that not only great men can choose by their agency, how to evade life; as miserable men can and have done so in the past. Using instruments that by nature were not harmful to take life in moments of despair, no matter the conditions, there is only one thing that prevents death: the lack of will. For the philosopher "it is preferable to the most filthy death, the cleanest servitude [14]."

In the face of the Senegalese thought about death, it is possible to perceive that there are some similarities, in regard to detachment from the care of life, virtue, as well as several differences, among them the escape from suffering in the face of despair and the imminence of perishing in the hands of the tormentor. Unlike Socrates who does not advise man to do violence against himself, but at the same time affirms that death must be the way to be sought by the philosopher, since dying is a way to free the thought.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Death is the way that the philosopher must go and without fear, from what we get in the readings of the *Phaedo*, "philosophizing is nothing more than to surrender to die" [15] and death is a way to get rid of the care of the life, the ones that so much enter into the reflection, because the body with its number of passions does not always allow man a more substantial deepening in the reflection.

The virtuous man should not care too much for his life, since the body is a prison of the soul and when he dies he frees himself from the imprisonment that imprisons him, this is Seneca's version of death. We understand in this way that the subject of death is something that has much to study, this brief study is only a spark of what can still be investigated.

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[2] PLATO. Dialogues; (Pheon, 65 b).

[3] PLATO, (Apologia of Socrates, 40 d).

[4] PLATO, (Apologia of Socrates, 41 d).

[5] PLATO, (Apologia of Socrates, 41 d).

[6] SEDLEY, David. (2006, p.9). In: *The Stoics*. Translation by Raul Ficker and Paulo Fernando Tadeu Ferreira.

[7] ULLMAN, Reinholdo. (1996, p.17).

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