

## THE CONCEPT OF DEATH. FROM SOCRATES TO ELLIS

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**ABSTRACT.** Death is a concept studied from ancient times by all major areas, from literature and art, to philosophy and psychology. In this research, we analyze the way Socrates, the famous Greek philosopher, negotiates the idea of death, through his own death. We approached this, because the ancient philosopher was put in this situation when he was sentenced to death, unjustly, following a democratic decision. His way of seeing death reveals a formula that does not match the expectation of his contemporaries, nor the classical typology of the imminence of his own death, belonging to psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. And the explanation of this non-coincidence is based on the philosophical idea of man and world and the specifics of his philosophical practice. It is precisely this philosophical conception and practice that will make Socrates' attitude become repeatable and not unrepeatable, as one might expect, since this attitude appears so conditioned by specific elements. In fact, the rational research on the grounds of beliefs and personal knowledge that stands at the basis of his philosophical practice, is deeply rooted in the foundations of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT).

Therefore, what lays at the basis of Socrates' view on death goes far beyond the ancient cultural framework. To fill in the phenomenal dimension with the one of organic layer, the analysis will also include an interpretation of Socrates' behavior, from the dopamine mechanism approach.

**Keywords:** *death, Socrates, method, concept, analysis, beliefs.*

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**ABSTRAKT.** Der Tod ist ein Konzept, das seit der Antike in allen wichtigen Bereichen von Literatur und Kunst bis hin zu Philosophie und Psychologie untersucht wurde. In dieser Studie analysieren wir, wie Sokrates, der berühmte griechische Philosoph, die Idee des Todes, durch seines eigenen Todes, behandelt. Wir näherten uns dem, weil der alte Philosoph in diese Situation geraten war, als er nach einer demokratischen Entscheidung zu Unrecht zum Tode verurteilt wurde. Seine Art, den Tod zu sehen, offenbart eine Formel, die weder den Erwartungen seiner Zeitgenossen noch der klassischen Typologie des bevorstehenden Todes entspricht, die der Psychiaterin Elizabeth Kübler-Ross gehört. Und die Erklärung dieses Nicht-Zufalls basiert auf der philosophischen Idee von Mensch und Welt und den Besonderheiten seiner philosophischen Praxis. Es ist genau diese philosophische Konzeption und Praxis, die die Haltung von Socrate wiederholbar und nicht unwiederholbar macht, wie man erwarten könnte, da diese Haltung durch bestimmte Elemente so bedingt erscheint. Tatsächlich ist die rationale Forschung auf der Grundlage von Überzeugungen und persönlichem Wissen, die seiner philosophischen Praxis zugrunde liegt, tief in den Grundlagen der Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) verwurzelt.

Daher geht das, was Sokrates Sicht auf den Tod zugrunde liegt, weit über den alten kulturellen Rahmen hinaus. Um die phänomenale Dimension mit der der organischen Schicht zu füllen, wird die Analyse auch eine Interpretation des Verhaltens von Socrate aus dem Ansatz des Dopaminmechanismus beinhalten.

**Schlüsselworte:** *Tod, Sokrates, Methode, Konzept, Analyse, Überzeugungen.*

## INTRODUCTION

Talking about death, we inevitably must consider the experience of death, meaning the meeting with the phenomenon of death. We call it like this, because death is being revealed only as a phenomenon, through a series of perceptible elements. Later, it is processed by our own mind, whether it is about others or while waiting and experiencing our own imminent death.

In other words, our relation to death is mediated by the phenomenon and our own reflection, it is individual and intimate, and at the same time, it is shaped by our condition of a social being. That is why, before trying to unveil in which way philosophy can help us in understanding death, it is desirable to start from a common place, belonging to the present, in the attempt to answer this question: "How is social shaping today the way we perceive death?". The question is not about the semantics of the word "death", but it is rather trying to highlight a few phenomena that express ways to address death as social beings.

A first class of phenomena is expressed by *the report of delaying death*, which includes: a series of medical actions, from the ones that prevent body wear to replacing organs; a series of therapies that address the mind or soul.

A second class is expressed by *the report of a dignified expression of death*, which includes: actions specific to palliative medicine, addressed to people in terminal illness stages; actions specific to the spiritual realm, addressed to dying people; actions specific to the field of euthanasia.

A third class can be represented by the phenomena expressed by *the report of preventing accidental death*, which includes: any action pursued by organizations such as police, medicine, or employers.

A fourth class, characterized by subtlety and insight, is the one expressed by *the report of dissipating the phenomenon of death*. This dissipation is achieved in two ways. Either through desensitization, through repeated exposures in formulas that distance people from death or by packing the concept in fictional layers, often seen in entertainment productions. Or through the circumventing death, by considering it an intimate phenomenon, addressed only to adults or elderly. This dissipation predisposes us to avoid becoming the agent that can cause someone else's death or the being that will inevitably die.

All these socially mediated ways to address death, define and strengthen the idea that we benefit from a protection from death and its consequences. Perhaps a last level of this protection is the possibility to secure our lives, for the benefit of those that will survive after we die. In a context with such thaumaturgical valences, endorsed by the social condition of each individual, the meeting with someone else's death or the imminence of death, can produce for some persons an inner shock, anxious feelings or even behavioral and emotional disorders. Therefore,

although society intervenes and protectively mediates the process, this meeting with death remains a private and intimate one, where personal cognitive resources (beliefs, wisdom, judgment, reason) will play a decisive role. This is precisely why the concept of dying as an intimate reflexive effort, must be integrated with necessity with a concept about the world, and this must be sufficiently coherent and believable. This concept about the world can be subordinated to religious, spiritual, philosophical, or scientific patterns that are already known, or can represent a syncretic individual product that sometimes reaches the rigor of a philosophical system of beliefs. The existence of a concept of the world is a condition for understanding life and death as contiguous sequences, subtended to an existential meaning, even if it is vaguely represented.

We have begun from the typical ways of making contact with death, as a phenomena perceived and processed by our own minds, and eventually got to the condition of reflecting upon death, considering its' continuity with life and integrating it in our own design of the world. Doing such an act of reflection means having a comprehensive and stable perspective on the world, a capacity of reasoning properly and self-control. Chronologically, the spiritual-religious context was the first to make possible such an act of reflection, offering a concept on the world centered on transcendent factors and maintained through ritualistic acts. The reflection upon death in this spiritual-religious context is more the act of assuming the effort of collective understanding, maintained by a religious institution, rather than an individual reflection upon death. It was only through the birth of ancient Greece, through its opposition towards mythology and ritual (Vernant, 1984, 1990) and through the effort of revealing conceptions about the world that are comfortable with the reason rigor (Cornfort, 2009), generated the proper context for an individual reflection upon death. In this line, we will also discuss about the psycho therapeutical approaches such as psychoanalysis and existential psychotherapy.

## **SOCRATES AND DEATH**

In the year 399, at the age of 70, Socrates was convicted to death in a public process, by a gather of 500 judges, Athenian citizens. The works of Plato (1997) and Xenofon (1997) are the major sources regarding

the way Socrates, as a philosopher, addressed the issue of his own death. The two authors are trustworthy, who have directly met the famous philosopher and whose ideas had a significant impact. Our analysis will be based on the philosopher's formulations and the clarifications regarding Socrates' philosophical conception will serve, on one side, as a corollary of the research, where ideas will be transparent enough and, on the other side, from critical sources.

### **SOCRATES' OPINIONS ABOUT DEATH (IN PLATO'S VIEW)**

The platonic source of Socrates' statements about his encounter with death can be found in the following dialogs: *The Defense of Socrates*, *Criton*<sup>i</sup> and *Phaidon*<sup>ii</sup>. We will limit to these sources, because starting with the work *Gorgias*<sup>iii</sup>, the sayings of Socrates are imprinted in Plato's (1997) conceptions and are less coherent with the position presented in Socrates' Apology (29a, 40c).

The following texts summarize the statements made by Socrates during the process filed against him in 399 B.C., by Antyos (politician), Meletos (obscure poet) and Lycon (orator with a certain reputation). In this trial, Socrates was accused of not acknowledging the gods of Athens, of preaching about new gods, and corrupting the youth. The texts have been selected and reproduced to reveal the disputation and argumentation methods used by Socrates, on the one hand, and his philosophical ideas, integrated within the arguments, on the other hand.

According to the legal procedure for public trials, the accused had the right to speak twice, when defending the allegations, and when he would suggest a different punishment than the one demanding by the prosecution party. Since the dialogue was written three years after the trial, Plato cannot be compared to a registrar, but the ideas presented in the trial certainly have not been ignored.

Socrates refers to the imminence of death before the prosecutors asked the death penalty, either because he anticipated this punishment, according to the allegations, or because of a contamination in the ideas exposed by Plato (1997). It is certain that, before the ending of his defense, Socrates stated that his doom will come not so much from the allegations, but from the envy of the mob. Which is why he replied to the mob with the following statement:

*“Are you then not ashamed, Socrates, of having followed such a pursuit, that you are now in danger of being put to death as a result?” But I should make to him a just reply: “You do not speak well, Sir, if you think a man in whom there is even a little merit ought to consider danger of life or death, and not rather regard this only, when he does things, whether the things he does are right or wrong and the acts of a good or a bad man. For according to your argument all the demigods would be bad who died at Troy, including the son of Thetis, who so despised danger, in comparison with enduring any disgrace, that when his mother (and she was a goddess) said to him, as he was eager to slay Hector, something like this, I believe, My son, if you avenge the death of your friend Patroclus and kill Hector, you yourself shall die; for straightway, after Hector, is death appointed unto you; he, when he heard this, made light of death and danger, and feared much more to live as a coward and not to avenge his friends, and said, Straightway may I die, after doing vengeance upon the wrongdoer, that I may not stay here, jeered at beside the curved ships, a burden of the earth. Do you think he considered death and danger?*

*For thus it is, men of Athens, in truth; wherever a man stations himself, thinking it is best to be there, or is stationed by his commander, there he must, as it seems to me, remain and run his risks, considering neither death nor any other thing more than disgrace.*

*So I should have done a terrible thing, if, when the commanders whom you chose to command me stationed me, both at Potidaea and at Amphipolis and at Delium, I remained where they stationed me, like anybody else, and ran the risk of death, but when the god gave me a station, as I believed and understood, with orders to spend my life in philosophy and in examining myself and others, then I were to desert my post through fear of death or anything else whatsoever. It would be a terrible thing, and truly one might then justly hale me into court, on the charge that I do not believe that there are gods, since I disobey the oracle and fear death and think I am wise when I am not. For to fear death, gentlemen, is nothing else than to think one is wise when one is not; for it is thinking one knows what one does not know. For no one knows whether death be not even the greatest of all blessings to man, but they fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils (28 b-29a).*

Socrates uses a rational reasoning, where the premises are based on the Athenians' beliefs about gods, laws and order, on one side, and on the acts done in his life, in life threatening conditions (the wars of Potideea,

Amphipolis or Delion), or regular situations such as public meetings in the Agora. A first argument shows us that it is unworthy for a human being to willingly do evil acts, out of the fear of death. The generic premises are based on the exemplary gestures of heroes and the lawful order, both belonging to a socially accepted conception of the world. And the particular premises, tied to Socrates' life, are cases subordinated to the generic ones, therefore it would be unbecoming of Socrates to fear death and forget about the Delphi oracle saying, stating that his wisdom is merely human: "that what I do not know I do not think I know either" (21d).

This form of wisdom is publicly declared by Socrates in the statement "This one of you, O human beings, is wisest, who, like Socrates, recognizes that he is in truth of no account in respect to wisdom" (23a). Allegorically, he assigns this saying to the God of Delphi, in which he expressed the belief that our knowledge regarding death and after death is struck by uncertainty.

*For to fear death, gentlemen, is nothing else than to think one is wise when one is not; for it is thinking one knows what one does not know. For no one knows whether death be not even the greatest of all blessings to man, but they fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils.*

*And is not this the most reprehensible form of ignorance, that of thinking one knows what one does not know? Perhaps, gentlemen, in this matter also I differ from other men in this way, and if I were to say that I am wiser in anything, it would be in this, that not knowing very much about the other world, I do not think I know. But I do know that it is evil and disgraceful to do wrong and to disobey him who is better than I, whether he be god or man. So, I shall never fear or avoid those things concerning which I do not know whether they are good or bad rather than those which I know are bad. (29a-b)*

Therefore, to base your fear of death on something you do not know with certainty, it is not desirable. Furthermore, to think that you possess clear knowledge about things or phenomena that have not been confirmed with facts, represents a "stupidity worthy of contempt", a situation that undermines virtue<sup>iv</sup>.

Opposed to this situation, admitting what you do not certainly know is a copycat of the famous saying coined by Socrates, "I know that I know nothing". Taking on such an uncertainty in a rational act delivers

us from the fear of death, quenches our emotions and allows us to understand the things that depend on us, because we know them with certainty and can achieve them. Such a rational approach of the fear of death comes significantly close to the ABC model developed by Ellis (1979). The personal belief that death is something frightening has no basis in experience, and reevaluating the belief can lead to a freedom of the dysfunctional consequences<sup>v</sup>.

We must once more emphasize that for Socrates, the reconsideration of beliefs is based on the ability to be aware that we can possess erroneous knowledge or unexplored preconceptions. And therefore, the possibility to become free of those knowledge or preconceptions is given by the ability to become aware that you lack strong knowledge, stated in the famous saying “I know that I know nothing!”. Following this act of liberation, one can begin to research, to achieve clear and factful knowledge. The two moments constitute the basis for self-knowledge, so plainly stated by the Delphi quote „Γνωθι Σεαυτον” (“Know Thyself”). This quote is interpreted by Socrates in Alcibiades dialogue like this: “Then he who enjoins a knowledge of oneself bids us become acquainted with the soul. ... And anyone who gets to know something belonging to the body knows the things that are his, but not himself.” (130e-131a).

This is the approach that Socrates used to know his self in his daily acts, as he admits during the process, even if the confession provoked the judges and cost him his life.

*“Most excellent man, are you who are a citizen of Athens, the greatest of cities and the most famous for wisdom and power, not ashamed to care for the acquisition of wealth and for reputation and honor, when you neither care nor take thought for wisdom and truth and the perfection of your soul?” And if any of you argues the point, and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once, nor shall I go away, but I shall question and examine and cross-examine him, and if I find that he does not possess virtue, but says he does, I shall rebuke him for scorning the things that are of most importance and caring more for what is of less worth. This I shall do to whomever I meet, young and old, foreigner and citizen, but most to the citizens, in as much as you are more nearly related to me. For know that the god commands me to do this, and I believe that no greater good ever came to pass in the city than my service to the god. For I go about doing*

*nothing else than urging you, young and old, not to care for your persons or your property more than for the perfection of your souls, or even so much; and I tell you that virtue does not come from money, but from virtue comes money and all other good things to man, both to the individual and to the state.” (29d-30b)*

Therefore, in his view about the world, the human being is characterized by reason, the ability to shape knowledge and attitudes, reason, and soul. In a contemporary approach, Socrates’ obstinacy, and his way of questioning the convictions of others, might be perceived as negative – harassment, attack on someone’s rights, even defamation and slander. Still, such an assessment is refutable since the purpose is always beneficial to the interrogated person, like someone seeking education. This purpose can be achieved only by dialogue, if the two participating parts are voluntarily involved.

Socrates’ belief about man is the reason for his actions, and the result of these public acts become reason for his attitude before death:

*“and if again I say that to talk every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me talking and examining myself and others is the greatest good to man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you will believe me still less.” (38a)*

This shows a practical approach based on Socrates’ view of the world and man, which can be placed in the context of contemporary psychological knowledge, and we can be certain that it serves as ground for those statements:

*“But, gentlemen, it is not hard to escape death; it is much harder to escape wickedness, for that runs faster than death...” (39a).*

“... there he must, as it seems to me, remain and run his risks, considering neither death nor any other thing more than disgrace” (28d).

*“But you also, judges, must regard death hopefully and must bear in mind this one truth, that no evil can come to a good man either in life or after death...” (41d).*

Discussing and researching in a Socratic manner about virtue<sup>vi</sup> (ἀρετή), using heuristic conversation, means using cognitive, attitude and behavior mechanisms that are being discussed and confirmed by contemporary research as well. Practically, it means making a deeper processing of the problem that involves generating multiple connections<sup>vii</sup>, with already existing cognitive elements (Miclea 2003). Also, it means creating synaptic new links and increasing their strength (Spitzer, 2020). Direct involvement in conversation and analysis, and not the simple exposure to an argumentative speech, will consolidate the attitude regarding virtue and will facilitate practicing a specific behavior (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2013). And manifesting and beliefs according to virtues will give birth to positive experiences<sup>viii</sup> which, in turn, will maintain the feeling of self-efficacy, an essential component in the motivation process (Lieberman & Long, 2019).

Doing behaviors according to virtue can be even more motivating in Greek culture and in particular for Socrates<sup>ix</sup>, because celebrating them can be a current practice, yet not drastically fined by the imperative of humbleness, that comes from the fear of sinning before the divine, through self-glorification, conceit, pride and praise. The limitations of celebrating virtue come from the concept of temperance (sophrosyne), which aims to balance extremes, a sort of limitation fit for humans.

## **CELEBRATING VIRTUE AND THE DOPAMINE OF CONTROL**

If we regard the research and manifestation of virtue from the mechanisms of dopamine, we can assert that virtue fits in this mechanism as an object of desire. This is because virtue intends for us to transform our future in a safer and better place, through an effort to envision the future and dominate the elements of the present (Lieberman & Long, 2019). Following virtue involves actions that represent a means to temper the dominance of desire dopamine and its' excess, as well as the emotions that demobilize us (fear, doubt, lack of trust). The practice of celebrating virtue, previously presented, will temper the excess of control dopamine (Lieberman & Long, 2019), which is mandatory if we are to consider that this type of dopamine associated to practicing virtue, satisfies the desire for more, characteristic to dopamine (Lieberman & Long, 2019).

The consequence of uniting control dopamine and the experience of the satisfaction of practicing virtue will consolidate one's self image<sup>xi</sup>, to such an extent that the doubt of reaching or not achieving the condition of a good person will diminish significantly. This way, we can no longer doubt the statement "there is nothing bad in life or death, for a good person" and we have no more reasons to fear death, should it be a mere passing in an existential register, where the deeds from this life will matter. Although this idea is mostly built on considerations that deal with biology and psychology, this approach is another way to explain Socrates' attitude towards death.

### **SOCRATES WAITING FOR THE VERDICT TO BE EXECUTED**

We can now understand better why the calm attitude of Socrates concerning death and the absence of fear is based on his conception of world and man, which is a philosophical personal view, practiced daily, with honesty and without restraint.

Starting from these hermeneutical landmarks, we will continue our analysis regarding the concept of death from the dialogues called *Criton*, for a better understanding of the views of Socrates. In *Criton*, the reader sees the use of virtue driven reasoning, which allows Socrates to keep a rational attitude, free of any disturbing emotions. The dialogue becomes possible when Criton suggests Socrates to help him escape from prison. Criton is an old friend of Socrates and a philosopher and he justifies this proposal stating that the death penalty is unfair.

To this proposal, Socrates replies with a dialectic approach, which proves eventually that following such an attempt would mean doing something unjust, and proving to lack virtue, after a life dedicated to educating others. In a short format, Socrates' demonstration would include the following dialectic approach.

Since Socrates has "always" not let himself convinced only by the reasonings that, after a close examination, proved to be the best, he cannot deny the principles that he once invoked (46b). On the contrary, these principles have remained unchanged and are as valuable as before his sentencing. And considering the same principles, we conclude that

“we must not consider at all what the many will say of us, but what he who knows about right and wrong, the one man, and truth herself will say” (48a). Doing the right thing and avoiding injustice means living according to good, and that is above simply living, so “...living well and living rightly are the same thing”, which is virtuously (48b). Therefore, one must avoid doing wrong on purpose and this way will not have to consider death nor any other suffering, because “Or is not what we used to say most certainly true, whether the world agree or not? And whether we must endure still more grievous sufferings than these, or lighter ones, is not wrongdoing inevitably an evil and a disgrace to the wrongdoer?” (49 b). And to avoid what is wrong and degrading, and therefore inconsistent with virtue, injustice must not be done at all. Therefore, who takes on such a principle must admit if someone has been wronged and must not reply with injustice, as many might believe. Also, you should not do wrong to those you wronged you, “For doing evil to people is the same thing as wronging them” (49c).

And once Socrates and Crito agree on respecting the principle of not doing any injustice nor evil, actions that would contradict virtue. Using an allegory, they invoke the laws of Athens, and in the last part of the dialogue, they reveal that the escape of Socrates and bribing the guards would be an act of injustice done to the city that has protected and guided him so far. With this analysis in mind, we can now understand why the serenity he manifests while waiting to be executed is a consequence of his philosophical reflection and following principles, which he has not abandoned throughout his life and on the brink of death.

## **DEATH WITHOUT FEAR**

*Phaidon* is the platonic source that reveals the moments before Socrates' death. Since the dialogue is more Plato's (1997) view than Socrates', and because we know that Plato was not present at the death of his master, this source is rather fictional and creative. That is why we can only focus on the reconciliation and peace that Socrates experiences in front of death, since his firm conviction contradicts the thoughts expressed during the trial. What remains here is Socrates life wish that we must do whatever it is humanly possible to share, while alive, the

virtue and wisdom. And this way to achieve, for the soul, the true jewelry: temperance, justice, courage, freedom, and truth. Since Socrates has followed these closely, the pious description made by Plato (1997) is more than fitted:

*“As he spoke he handed the cup to Socrates, who received it quite cheerfully, Echecrates, without a tremor, without any change of color or expression, and said, looking up under his brows with his usual steady gaze” (117b-c)*

Regarding the trustworthiness of this description, Vlastos (1991), concluding his book about Socrates, which is a rigorous scientific analysis of the moral concepts, especially virtue and happiness, stated that such an attitude should not come as a surprise. Because, if virtue matters more for your own happiness than everything else combined, it is not a surprise that you can remain happy and lighthearted if you lose all, for the sake of virtue. Therefore, nothing in this world can lead you to unhappiness.

In summary, we can assert that the Socratic formula for virtue reveals that the way of living life conditions the manner you confront death, especially when your knowledge about death is limited. The way Socrates sees death is the result of the recommendations he makes and follows throughout his life. These recommendations are the result of a long philosophical reflection about the world and man. According to this conception, man is a rational being, capable of knowing the world and itself, of choosing and behaving wisely, of accepting that it can be wrong.

We can find a similar conclusion in Jaspers (1996), with different accents and nuances. In his opinion, Socrates can face death without indignation, because he lacks the indignation against his city, world, or divinity, because he does not experience the disappointment about the issue of evil. Instead, he lived a certainty without circumstances regarding justice because the only life worth living is the one lived according to the truth, which clears your thinking process. In his view, the purpose of man is to dare on the idea that good exists, where one recognizes good as being the truth, and knows when it depends on him/her to do good.

## **SOCRATES' VIEWS ABOUT DEATH ACCORDING TO XENOFON**

During the trial, Xenophon was not in Athens, which is why his text is based on the confessions of a direct participant, Hermogenes, son of Hipponikos, friend of Socrates. Socrates' attitude is characterized by a serene acceptance, reconciliation, and wisdom about death, based on the fact that he is already old and the days to be lived could be worse than death<sup>xii</sup>. Another reason is that the time and way of death, although decided by his enemies, could rather be a gift from the gods<sup>xiii</sup>. Even if the reason presented by Xenophon (1990) invoke a rather biological and practical level, rather than a moral one, the conclusion formulated by his disciple at the end of the text, points again the rapport between the moral approach to life and death.

The details are closely presented in the book *Conversations of Socrates*, a complex testimony regarding the view of the world and man, far more descriptive than the one written by Plato (1997), and less speculative. In these accounts, as well as in the writings of Plato (1997), the duty of cultivating your soul<sup>xiv</sup> through reason, knowledge<sup>xv</sup> and wisdom<sup>xvi</sup> is at the center of Socrates' interests, as well as seeking virtue<sup>xvii</sup> through actions<sup>xviii</sup>, manifesting temperance<sup>xix</sup> and honestly researching own beliefs and knowledge<sup>xx</sup>. All these represent the essence of a practical life<sup>xxi</sup>, life which he shares with his fellow citizens<sup>xxii</sup> that are willing to follow his as friends in philosophy.

## **FROM VIRTUE...**

What is truly extraordinary about Socrates the person is his ability to preserve the moral dimension of the self, against the life preservation instinct, in a context where he does not possess a certainty regarding death. He endures the death penalty not to lose his ideas, belief, or convictions, as later will happen with Christian martyrs or scientists, but to preserve his moral being condition. This element is specific to man and differentiates him from animals, and this condition is accessible to every being, including those that decided in the Agora to convict him, or to harm him, some from ignorance, others from envy.

But to be and remain a moral being means to think about your convictions and act within the limits of virtue, respecting and cultivating good, truth and beauty, not only for yourself, but for those around you as well. Therefore, to remain a moral being means to constantly make a conscious effort to stay within the limits of virtue, to respect the *principle of virtue sovereignty*<sup>xxiii</sup>, formulated by Vlastos (1991). According to this principle, following virtue means choosing virtuosity over vice, and not accepting the non-moral or put them first, regardless of the benefits. Now it is clear why living and saving yourself by breaking the principle of virtue is inadmissible for Socrates. To him, regardless how great would be the good done by staying alive, this good cannot justify the deliberate action of breaking virtue. For Socrates, virtue is maintaining a continuum of moral life. Paying with your life or a lack of well-being for this continuum of virtue might seem exaggerated today, although this continuum can remain, hypothetically, desirable.

### **...OR FROM A CONTROL DOPAMINE EXCESS?**

In relation to time, virtue is a purpose we can follow or reach through our actions, but never own. Still, we can maintain it by doing, again and again, the actions that describe virtue. What we can own is the desire to follow virtue. Maintaining the desire to follow virtue corresponds with the specificity of following a purpose in those that have an excess in dopamine control. They aim to identify the next purpose where control dopamine can manifest, right after they reach the previous one, while celebrating the success is low in meaning and importance (Lieberman & Long, 2019).

Hence, evaluating Socrates' behavior considering the dopamine control dimension, we can formulate a conclusion that highlights the existence of a dopamine control excess for this philosopher. To support this idea, we can invoke the situation when Socrates stood still for one day and one night, following his thought<sup>xxiv</sup>, example used by Lieberman & Long (2019) to illustrate the force of dopamine control for creative people. To this example, we can use the ability to control the desire dopamine, illustrated by the formula "How many things I can do without!" (Laertios,

2018, p. 74), which he used to say while passing through the merchant's stalls. Also, we can see this in the ability to control his emotions in extreme conditions, illustrated by controlling fear in battle, when all the Athenians ran for their lives, Socrates withdrew without haste, or the ability to endure bad weather without complaint<sup>xv</sup>. Also, we could quote the tenacity he proved in pursuing virtue, connecting this tenacity with his personal Daimon, a divine voice (θεοῦ φωνή) which only opposed to Socrates doing certain actions. We could use the analogy between the temporal dynamic of virtue and the typology of purpose succession, specific to dopamine control excess.

The remaining question is whether we are truly experiencing an excess or should we accept that the life of a person that follows virtue can be done only using the way of dopamine control? In other words, following virtue means, in terms of dopamine control, to go from state to trait.

### **SOCRATES DOES NOT DECIDE TO DIE**

Apparently, Socrates does decide to die, since he does not do anything to avoid death, neither during the trial, nor during the three following days. Still, this is not true. Jaspers (1996) thinks that such an approach disregards the fact that Socrates never accepted to lose his divine call to work for the truth. In fact, the life he lived according to virtue is the chronic of an announced death. Socrates decided to live by following the principle of virtue supremacy, and we cannot say that the price for this is death, but rather happiness. Socrates lives and dies happy because he can follow his virtue.

### **SOCRATES DIES LIKE A MAN**

After going through the sources that reveal the way Socrates sees his own death, based on reliable references, we highlighted the mechanisms that can lead to virtue. After concluding about the role of virtue in the concept of death, using arguments from renowned contemporary authors, we can still ask the question whether Socrates dies like a man. This

question hides the restlessness generated by the meeting with the man whose' death and uncertainty regarding death do not cause predictable consequences.

Perhaps that those who left testimonials about Socrates' relation to death talked about a character that embodies a moral ideal, perhaps about a spectrum of their minds which portrayed a real Socrates, or perhaps they overlooked the tears, trembling, disappointment, mourning or refusal to meet with family and disciples.

Without rejecting any of those possibilities, we will attempt to show that Socrates deals with the imminence of his own death as a person, an ordinary man, in which lives *the mind of Socrates the philosopher*. For the next analysis, we will look at the five states that a man goes through (Kübler-Ross, 1969), while facing death. We will discuss them as a conglomerate of potential states experienced by someone confronted with the imminence of death, a model proposed by Shneidman (apud Corr, Clyde & Corr, 2009) and called hive of affect. Within this model, the elements interact and become important, either successively or simultaneously, in shorter or longer periods of time (Corr, Nabe & Corr, 2009).

Shneidman's model has less criticism than the model of Kübler-Ross (1969) regarding the rigidity of the stages, timeline dependency, the dogmatism of succession and ignoring the nuanced states that characterize the act of confronting one's death (Friedman & James, 2008). Working with this hybrid model, we have a set of at least five landmarks for classifying the states of confronting one's death: denial, anger, negotiation, reactive or preparatory depression, and acceptance. The individual model of going through the death itinerary assumes a psychological coping style, and in this case is the result of Socrates' mind.

Socrates sees the imminence of his own death in a rational framework, where acts and a logical judgment are the core, an approach identified in REBT as a Socratic reasoning. Reported to the typology suggested by Moos & Schaefer<sup>xxvi</sup> (1986) (apud Corr, Nabe & Corr, 2009), the Socratic approach is characterized by focusing on evaluation through a logic analysis and mental preparation, cognitive restructuring, avoidance or denial, by focusing on the problem through identifying alternative rewards, and in focusing on emotion through a resigned acceptance and emotional relief. Socrates, as we will see during the trial and his meeting

in *Criton*, reaches the five stages of a person that meets death, and what we can identify is rather the coping, than the specific descriptors of those stages:

*Denial* (a mix of refusal and isolation), is characterized by Kübler-Ross as a total or partial denial of the imminence of death, using expressions such as: “It is not happening to me, it cannot be true” (35). Denial is unhealthy and works as a buffer against the brutality of the situation, giving a respite and a chance to bounce back (36), but it is ultimately a temporary defense and will be replaced by a partial acceptance (37). The alternative of refusal is separation through an orientation towards acceptable elements (37). The manifestation of denial and the defense mechanisms depend on how one has been prepared throughout life to cope with stressful situations (38).

*Anger* has states like rage, envy, resentment, and is expressed in sayings like: “Why me? Why not someone else?”, and can be directed in many ways – towards people, environment, transcendence, or self, and sometimes almost randomly (45). Whether it is a rational or irrational anger, it generally represents a request for recognition, for reasserting the fact that the person has not been forgotten (47).

*Negotiation* is characterized by moving from the vindictive style of anger to asking a favor of an exchange that will persuade otherness, a formula often practiced throughout life to achieve what has been refused to us, or an acceptable alternative (73). It is an attempt to delay (74) and set some boundaries, where the complainant, despite a successful lament, is tempted to push on (75). The negotiations with transcendence include experiencing guilt and irrational fears caused by passed behaviors, where the complainant promises to correct them, in exchange of a relief, delay or deliverance from suffering (75).

*Depression* comes from the feeling of loss, which can be widely represented (76), from the sadness and guilt experienced in report with the consequences generated to others (76), and especially from the suffering generated by the loss of one’s own life (77). The first two types of triggers would generate a *reactive* depression, in report with what has already been lost, and the latter will generate a *preparatory* depression for what

comes next, the loss of one's own life (77). The preparatory is characterized by experiencing fear, sadness, agony, anxiety (79). Other behaviors and feelings expressed are cry, reactive or avoidance sleep, envy towards the healthy ones and anger that others should not be confronted with that drama (100).

*Acceptance* is the situation when the person is neither depressed, nor upset with "fate" (100), it is a period of emotional void, as if pain has gone, the fight ends and comes a moment for the "final rest" (101). Then comes the need for sleep (100), the duration of interactions with others decreases, communication changes predominantly to non-verbal and the gesture has a greater significance (102).

*Hope* is a recurrent element in the mind of a person that heard about the imminence of own death, is oriented towards avoiding death, gives people "a feeling of special mission in life", "helps them maintain their spirit and energy", is a way "rationalize their suffering", but it can also be "a form of temporary, yet necessary, denial" (124).

For Socrates, hope is not oriented towards avoiding death, but to avoid breaking the principle of virtue supremacy, therefore the locus of control is an internal one, depending on the philosopher's will. His hope is not anchored in the good that comes after death, since he has no certain knowledge about that. He can only deduct from reasoning that the one who followed good cannot be bad in life, nor in death (41d). This deduction is not a hope, but rather a certainty in a context of deep uncertainty regarding death. Jaspers (1996) will conclude with a much-elevated formula that the death of Socrates gives us the image of a serene detachment, on the base of an ignorance full of certainty. The ignorance is the base ground and the end of any discussion about death.

To use Schneidman's (1973) model, we will have to identify the five specific stages, by analyzing the various statements done by Socrates during his trial or while meeting Criton. The analysis will highlight the type of coping used and the specific state he confronted.

First, we will analyze a set of fragments that are a precursory for voting the guilt of Socrates and the acceptance of his death conviction. In each fragment, we notice that Socrates prepares mentally for the imminence of his death sentence.

*Fragment 28b-29a*, where Socrates states that people in general, and himself in particular, should not avoid death, and instead of doing something unjust or evil, should see life as a mental preparation for accepting the imminence of death and avoiding denial.

*Fragment 29a-b*, where he argues that the fear of death has no reason, since we do not know for certain whether it is good or bad for man, represents a point of view on focusing on a logic analysis, followed by a cognitive restructuring that allows to overcome the preparatory depression accompanied by fear.

*Fragment 29d-30b*, where he declares that he would rather die than be stopped to philosophize in public, represents a special form of identifying alternative rewards, that prepares him for unconditionally accepting death and by precluding the negotiating state.

*Fragment 30c-31c*, where he asserts that sending him to death is not bad for him, but rather bad for the ones that sentence him unjustly, since they do evil. Also, this can be bad for the Athenians since they lose the man that did good for them, and with these views, Socrates makes a cognitive restructuring that allows him to avoid the state of anger.

*Fragment 34b-35d*, where he rejects as unworthy the action of persuading the judges by appealing to their emotions and mercy, represents another cognitive restructuring meant to prevent the state of negotiation and self-addressed anger.

We can conclude that Socrates does actions of mental preparation for coping with the states that are precursors of his own imminent death, and therefore he anticipates the states he will experience and thus find coping ways for that.

Next, we will analyze from the same perspective the fragments that come after establishing his death and accepting the punishment, followed by an alternative sentence from the accused, where there was the possibility to avoid death.

The following analysis add to the former one, using the same theoretical background and researching the phenomena recorded after his death sentence, which will be executed 30 days later, due to worship circumstances.

*Fragment 38c-39b*, where Socrates argues why he did not appeal to positively persuade the audience, by using avoidance and cognitive denial. Through a cognitive restructuring, he reveals to those present that they are guilty and blameworthy, which is an interlacing between the state of denial, anger, and refusal to negotiate.

*Fragment 39c-d*, where he prophesies those who sentenced him a “far heavier punishment”, and shows an authentic state of anger, and here again he uses cognitive restructuring.

*Fragment 39a*, where he asks those who sentenced him to talk to him until he would be taken to the dungeon, by promising to share with them something of significance. This is Socrates’ way to identify an alternative reward and offer himself a compensatory state of negotiation.

*Fragment 40a-41d*, where he shares those that stayed with him that the interpretation of the signs of his Daimon convince him that death is not a bad omen, just as it will not be to anyone that does good in life. This represents a great combination between the logical analysis and mental preparation, cognitive restructuring and identifying alternative rewards as coping mechanisms that support Socrates in overcoming any negotiation with the transcendent, in overcoming preparatory depression and preparing for a serene acceptance. This fragment might seem improbable should we not consider the testimonials about his life.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on these analyses, we discover that Socrates seen by Plato and Xenophon, dies as an ordinary man, and that the force of his philosophical thinking makes him repeatedly to use efficient coping strategies while facing his own death.

We can conclude that the report with the imminence of his own death left by Socrates to posterity, represents a particular unrepeatable form, conditioned by the space-time context, the philosophical thinking about man and world and the specificity of the soul and body. Also, it can be seen as an assumed individual model, therefore repeatable for everyone, based on identifying the landmarks for a rational approach on existential

problems, guiding life towards cultivating the soul and virtue, and making an ongoing effort to evaluate one's knowledge and beliefs, that can be (come) the base for one's actions and behaviors.

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- <sup>i</sup> These two dialogs are part of Socrates' youth, and are characterized by the tendency to show conservatively his thinking and approach. They were written shortly after Socrates died, and Plato was not present there.
- <sup>ii</sup> Phaidon is a dialogue about maturity, where the philosophical ideas of Plato come before the philosophical considerations of Socrates. We take this dialogue into account only to paint the affective atmosphere that Socrates experiences before death.
- <sup>iii</sup> It is a dialogue that belongs to the second creation period of Plato, which makes the transition towards consolidating his philosophical conception.
- <sup>iv</sup> Socrates imprints an intellectual nuance to virtue, supporting an identity between virtue and knowledge, which is then widely known among his successors (Peters, 1997, p. 46). For Socrates, virtue is a way of being for the soul, which makes its semantics to include the morale and the ontological. Virtue also has the positive meaning of valuing the soul as happiness, justice, piety, it is the very condition of soul, the first component of our being and a means of assuming the being as a whole. In Socrates' view, virtue is the distinctive sign of the human (Vlăduțescu, 2001). Considering to the declarations in Laches dialogue, Socrates considers virtue to be not only courage, but also wisdom, justice. Virtue proves to be a way of being everything that makes simultaneously possible courage, wisdom, justice and all the behaviors that unveil them.
- <sup>v</sup> The reasoning that is at the base of the lack of fear of death is called *modus tollens*. "If I fear death, then it is certainly something bad. But we do not know for sure that death is bad, therefore there is no reason to fear it."
- <sup>vi</sup> Reflecting upon the following statements of the philosopher:  
SOCRATES: And if the soul too, my dear Alcibiades, is to know herself, she must surely look at a soul, and especially at that region of it in which occurs the virtue of a soul—wisdom, and at any other part of a soul which resembles this? (133b);

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SOCRATES: Then this part of her resembles God, and whoever looks at this, and comes to know all that is divine, will gain thereby the best knowledge of himself. (133c), we can conclude that discussing virtue means acting on the Delphi incentive regarding the highest aspect of the human and, at the same time, to fulfill its' role.

- vii As one can see from the dialogues content, the discussion about virtue is an analysis regarding the human soul, that intends to know and follow good and justice, by using wisdom. Therefore, talking about virtue means developing connections with a large diversity of psychological content and deepen self knowledge. We have an eloquent example: "SOCRATES: Now do you think, my excellent friend, there could be anything wanting to the virtue of a man who knew all good things, and all about their production in the present, the future, and the past, and all about evil things likewise? Do you suppose that such a man could be lacking in temperance, or justice, and holiness, when he alone has the gift of taking due precaution, in his dealings with gods and men, as regards what is to be dreaded and what is not, and of procuring good things, owing to his knowledge of the right behaviour towards them?" (199 d-e).
- viii "So let's use the account that has now been disclosed to us as our guide, one that indicates to us that this way of life is the best, to practice justice and the rest of excellence both in life and in death. Let us follow it, then, and call on others to do so, too, and let's not follow the one that you believe in and call on me to follow. For that one is worthless, Callicles". (*Gorgias*, 527e).
- ix Diogene Laertios claimed that Socrates would take pride in his sober life and never asked for money from anyone (100). He easily disregarded even those who mocked him. He prided himself on the simplicity of his life, and never took a fee.
- x "For my part, Callicles, I'm convinced by these accounts, and I think about how I'll reveal to the judge a soul that's as healthy as it can be. So I disregard the things held in honor by the majority of people, and by practicing truth I really try, to the best of my ability, to be and to live as e a very good man, and when I die, to die like that. And I call on all other people as well, as far as I can—and you especially I call on in response to your call—to this way of life, this contest, that I hold to be worth all the other contests in this life." (*Gorgias* 526e).
- xi So, listen to me and follow me to where I am, and when you've come here you'll be happy both during life and at its end, as the account indicates. Let someone despise you as a fool and throw dirt on you, if he likes. And, yes, by Zeus, confidently let him deal you that demeaning blow. Nothing terrible will happen to you if you really are an admirable and good man, one who practices excellence. (*Gorgias* 527d).
- xii "...I shall prefer death to begging meanly for longer life and thus gaining a life far less worthy in exchange for death." (Xenofon, 1997, p. 647).
- xiii "God in his kindness is taking my part and securing me the opportunity of ending my life not only in season but also in the way that is easiest. For if I am condemned now, it will clearly be my privilege to suffer a death that is adjudged by those who have superintended this matter to be not only the easiest but also the least irksome to one's friends and one that implants in them the deepest feeling of loss for the dead." (Xenofon, 1997, p. 645)

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- xiv "It is the same with human beings. The most highly gifted, the youths of ardent soul, capable of doing whatever they attempt, if educated and taught their duty grow into excellent and useful men; for manifold and great are their good deeds. But untrained and untaught, these become the same utterly evil and mischievous; for without knowledge to discern their duty, they often put their hand to vile deeds, and through the very grandeur and vehemence of their nature, they are uncontrollable and intractable: therefore manifold and great are their evil deeds." (Xenofon, 1997, p. 267)
- xv "Between Wisdom and Prudence, he drew no distinction; but if a man knows and practises what is beautiful and good, knows and avoids what is base, that man he judged to be both wise and prudent." (Xenofon, 1997, p. 225). "...the wise, then, are wise by knowledge (119) it follows that Wisdom is Knowledge. Consequently, everyone is wise just in so far as he knows (Xenofon, 1997, p. 339). Knowing is different from believing, and Knowledge is, among other things, the making of an honest examination of one's own convictions and knowledge, to their validation."
- xvi "But I hold that they who cultivate wisdom and think they will be able to guide the people in prudent policy never lapse into violence: they know that enmities and dangers are inseparable from violence, but persuasion produces the same results safely and amicably. For violence, by making its victims sensible of loss, rouses their hatred: but persuasion, by seeming to confer a favour, wins goodwill. It is not, then, cultivation of wisdom that leads to violent methods, but the possession of power without prudence." (Xenofon, 2018, p. 17).
- xvii "And I know that it was so with Socrates: he showed his companions that he was a gentleman himself and talked most excellently of goodness and of all things that concern man." (Xenofon, 1997, p. 19).
- "Moreover, indolence and present enjoyment can never bring the body into good condition, as trainers say, neither do they put into the soul knowledge of any value, but strenuous effort leads up to good and noble deeds, as good men say." (Xenofon, 1997, p. 93).
- "Nevertheless, through all these barriers friendship slips, and unites the gentle natures. For thanks to their virtue these prize the untroubled security of moderate possessions above sovereignty won by war ; despite hunger and thirst, they can share their food and drink without a pang ; and although they delight in the charms of beauty they can resist the lure and avoid offending those whom they should respect ; they can not only share wealth lawfully and keep from covetousness, but also supply one another's wants." (Xenofon, 1997, p.137).
- xviii He said that Justice and every other form of Virtue is Wisdom. "For just actions and all forms of virtuous activity are beautiful and good. He who knows the beautiful and good will never choose anything else, he who is ignorant of them cannot do them, and even if he tries, will fail. Hence the wise do what is beautiful and good, the unwise cannot and fail if they try. Therefore since just actions and all other forms of beautiful and good activity are virtuous actions, it is clear that Justice and every other form of Virtue is Wisdom." (Xenofon, 1997, p. 225).

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- <sup>xix</sup> “Or for this, that during the siege, while others were commiserating their lot, I got along without feeling the pinch of poverty any worse than when the city's prosperity was at its height? Or for this, that while other men get their delicacies in the markets and pay a high price for them, I devise more pleasurable ones from the resources of my soul, with no expenditure of money?” (Xenofon, 1997, p.653)
- <sup>xx</sup> “And would not a person with good reason call me a wise man, who from the time when I began to understand spoken words have never left off seeking after and learning every good thing that I could? And that my labour has not been in vain do you not think is attested by this fact, that many of my fellow-citizens who strive for virtue and many from abroad choose to associate with me above all other men?” (Xenofon, 1997, p. 651)
- <sup>xxi</sup> “Thus, he would often say he was “in love”; but 2 clearly his heart was set not on those who were fair to outward view, but on those whose souls excelled in goodness.” (Xenofon, 1997, p. 265).
- <sup>xxii</sup> “For holding that it is good for anyone who means to do honourable work to have self-control, he made it clear to his companions, in the first place, that he had been assiduous in self-discipline; I moreover, in his conversation he exhorted his companions to cultivate self-control above all things. Thus, he bears in mind continually the aids to virtue, and put all his companions in mind of them.” (Xenofon, 1997, p. 325).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> The principle of virtue sovereignty is based on three statements made by Socrates, two from *Socrate's defense* (28b5-9 and 28d6-10) and one from *Criton* (48c6-d5). The principle mentioned in those three texts can be subsumed to these ideas: whenever we must choose between two alternative found in an exclusive and exhaustive alternative, and we consider one to be just and virtuous, and the other one vicious, the mere perception of this difference should help us make the right decision. Any other deliberation will be useless, because none of the non-moral goods that we could hope to achieve, could not compensate the loss of a moral good. (Vlastos, 1991, p. 175).
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Platon, *Banchetul*, 220c-d. Plato, *Symposium*, 220 c-d.
- <sup>xxv</sup> “Now did you ever know me to stay indoors more than others on account of the cold, or to fight with any man for the shade because of the heat, or to be prevented from walking anywhere by sore feet?” (Xenofon 1997, p. 69). “He also served in the expedition to Potidaea, which was made by sea; for one could not get there on foot, as the war made the land route impassable. It was there that he is said to have stayed in the same position for an entire night.” (Laertios, 2018, p.72).
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Coping: Three Focal Domains and Nine Types of Skills Appraisal-Focused Coping
1. Logical analysis and mental preparation: Paying attention to one aspect of the crisis at a time, breaking a seemingly overwhelming problem into small, potentially manageable bits, drawing on past experiences, and mentally rehearsing alternative actions and their probable consequences
  2. Cognitive redefinition: Using cognitive strategies to accept the basic reality of a situation but restructure it to find something favorable
  3. Cognitive avoidance or denial: Denying or minimizing the seriousness of a crisis

Problem-Focused Coping

4. Seeking information and support: Obtaining information about the crisis and alternate courses of action and their probable outcome

5. Taking problem-solving action: Taking concrete action to deal directly with a crisis or its aftermath

6. Identifying alternative rewards: Attempting to replace the losses involved in certain transitions and crises by changing one's activities and creating new sources of satisfaction

Emotion-Focused Coping

7. Affective regulation: Trying to maintain hope and control one's emotions when dealing with a distressing situation

8. Emotional discharge: Openly venting one's feelings and using jokes and gallows humor to help allay constant strain

9. Resigned acceptance: Coming to terms with a situation and accepting it as it is, deciding that the basic circumstances cannot be altered and submitting to "certain" fate.

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