

Plato's Divided Soul

Plato's tripartite soul has had a long after-life. While Aristotle quarreled with the precise notion of 'parts,' he nonetheless developed a psychological theory according to which the soul had three. Augustine adopted Plato's soul for the most part, adapting it to Pauline Christianity, and thus substituting one part for another: Will (*voluntas*) for Aspiration (*τὸ θυμοειδές*). Aquinas later assumed Augustine's scheme, but returned psychology to the Aristotelian idiom. In the modern period, the tripartite soul seemed for a long time to disappear; that is, until Freud, who referred to 'the Divine Plato,'¹ revived it in his so-called structural theory.² Although psychoanalysts have since qualified this structural theory in many ways, most of them accept its tripartite cast all the same. There is therefore an embattled but nonetheless vigorous tradition of tripartite psychology – practical as well as theoretical – whose distant ancestor is Plato's *Republic*.³

With this tradition in the background, I wish to examine closely Plato's divided soul, not only because of its historical importance, but also because, as David Reeve has written:

Plato's theory of the psyche, largely coherent, supported by subtle argument, and possessed of considerable folk-psychological plausibility, is among the greatest philosophies of mind, and one from which we can still learn.⁴

The primary goal of my dissertation will be to develop a tenable interpretation of the *Republic*'s psychology, particularly its partition of the soul into three. After all, there are many scholarly disputes about Plato's tripartite soul that need to be adjudicated in a monograph. My secondary goal will be to assess the viability of this psychology in the spirit of the above quotation – that is to say, as a philosophy of mind from which we can still learn.

The following four questions about Plato's soul stand out.⁵ Does it have parts? If it does: How many does it have? What are the contents of these parts? And finally, what are the

¹ *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905.

² *The Ego and the Id*, 1923.

³ For connections between Freud and Plato, see Reeve 1988, 169; and Lear 1992, n.2 194, n.26 195, n.76 198, n.99, 199, n.149, 201. David Reeve and Jonathan Lear are among the best commentators on ancient philosophy – and, not coincidentally, students of psychoanalysis. Lear is in fact a practicing analyst. Gerasimos Santas' *Plato and Freud*, 1988, is entirely devoted to such connections, as least with respect to their theories of love. Price 1990 also writes on the subject.

⁴ Reeve 1988, 169. Williams 1973, 166, says of the distinction between the parts of the soul that it "is a large subject of great independent interest."

relationships between them? Scholarly answers to these questions have been tendered by various commentators. In this proposal I canvass the views and arguments of a *representative* few of these commentators: Christopher Shields, Nicholas Smith, David Reeve, Bernard Williams, and Jonathan Lear. I do not mean to imply that my dissertation will focus on them to the exclusion of others. Instead, I believe it is more informative at this point to present a few views in more detail rather than more views in less. In this way the philosophical issues at stake become clearer, at the cost of a more comprehensive survey of the literature – which, after all, can be glimpsed in the bibliography.

As I hope to show in this proposal, I also plan to enrich my discussion of these scholarly issues by drawing generously from the well of recent analytic philosophy. Distinctions and arguments from the following fields help us to clarify, in our own philosophical terms, some of the problems to which Plato addressed his psychology: metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of psychology, and moral psychology. This holistic approach is of course the same as Plato's in the *Republic*, a work which ranges over most of these disciplines, and others besides.

Why divide the soul?

The first such problem is the notion of a psychic part. Most readers of the *Republic* come away confidently believing that Plato, in Book IV especially, has divided the soul into three. This comes as a bit of a surprise, however, to those who have also read the *Phaedo*, which assumes that the soul is simple, or non-composite. Indeed, the *Phaedo* needs a simple soul in order to warrant one of its best arguments for immortality: the soul is non-composite, and therefore indestructible, since destruction is but the separation of a composite's parts (78b-84b).

This apparent move from simple soul in the *Phaedo* to complex soul in the *Republic* is standardly diagnosed as Plato's new effort to accommodate the phenomenon of *akrasia*, or

⁵ I have chosen to speak of Plato's 'soul,' which is the best available translation of *ψυχή*. The connotations of 'mind' are too cognitive, and would occlude the conative and emotional abilities of *ψυχή*. The concept has a long and complicated history in Greek culture before Plato. See Claus 1981 and Bremmer 1983. The seminal book on the subject was Snell 1953.

weakness of will, which he rejected as impossible in the *Protagoras* (e.g. 385e).⁶ In that earlier dialogue, a purely cognitive psychology and a hedonistic theory of motivation precluded anyone from doing anything other than what he thought best. In the later *Republic*, it is thus assumed, Plato revised the purely cognitive psychology, adding appetitive and spirited parts to a reasoning one (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν and τὸ θυμοειδές to τὸ λογιστικόν respectively) in order to account for akrasia.

Christopher Shields calls this the standard developmental account (of Plato's moral psychology, that is) and disputes it. First of all, as he points out, by *Republic* X Plato seems to revert to the notion of a non-composite soul (611b), when he compares the soul in this life to Glaucus, the sea-god, whose true nature we cannot know because he is so encrusted with barnacles. In place of barnacles, read the body and the additional elements – namely Appetite and Aspiration – with which it encrusts the simple soul. This metaphor, and the immortality arguments that accompany it, call into question the apparently tripartite interlude of the *Republic*'s middle books.

According to Shields, moreover, a divided soul is neither necessary nor sufficient to account for the phenomenon of akrasia. There is not space here to examine both claims, nor either in the requisite detail, but we cannot ignore the first: that a divided soul is unnecessary in order to account for akrasia. For it is by adducing instances of conflicted desires (wanting and not-wanting a drink, for example; 439a7-b4) that Plato begins to divide the soul. His assumption seems to be that it is necessary to do so in order to account for the conflict. Shields disagrees, claiming that a simple soul can be akratic:

though I judge that, all things considered, *x* is better than *y*, I nevertheless find myself doing *y* because of the allure *y* holds for me. I later upbraid myself in the normal way; but I never fault one part of myself while promising another to do better next time by letting that part rule.⁷

Faulting and upbraiding are beside the point. What is required of Shields is a psychological explanation of why, after judging that *x* is better than *y*, he would do *y*. He adverts to the “allure” of *y*, but if *y* had an allure to him even though he judged it worse than *x*, something

⁶ The substitution of the transliterated Greek *akrasia* for the more popular ‘weakness of will’ becomes especially appropriate while we are discussing Plato's tripartite soul, which, like other pre-Christian psychologies, did not recognize a separate faculty of will.

⁷ Shields 2001, 139-140.

other than his judgment must have been effective in his soul. And this is the beginning of soul-division. The issues of *akrasia* are complex, at any rate, and fortunately there has been abundant philosophical treatment of the phenomenon since Davidson's famous paper on the subject.⁸ It is at this point, therefore, that I wish to import recent discussions from moral psychology in order to resolve this first question: whether soul-division is necessary in order to account for psychic conflict. Along with Plato, I suspect that it is.

Is the soul simple or complex?

The next question to be addressed in my dissertation is interpretive: does the soul of the *Republic* have parts at all? Most readers assume that it does, based upon the most common translation of 436b8, the principle called by Shields the *part-generating principle* (PGP), but more neutrally by Reeve the *principle of opposites* (PO):⁹

It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time.	Δῆλον ὅτι ταῦτόν τἀναντία ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταῦτόν γε καὶ πρὸς ταῦτόν οὐκ ἐδέλησσει ἅμα.
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While this is an idiomatic English translation, the Greek makes no mention of a part, but uses only the vague neuter-intensifying-adjective (ταῦτόν) as a substantive after the preposition 'according to' (κατὰ). In fact, the Greek behind 'part' is the same as that behind 'thing'; all that differs between the two qualifications is their preposition (κατὰ in the first, πρὸς in the second). 'Part' is therefore an interpretation, albeit one with which I agree.¹⁰ A more accurate translation would therefore be: "It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites *according to the same thing*, in relation to the same thing, at the same time." Whether or not this thing is also a part, especially a part of the soul, is the crux of the dispute between Shields and most other commentators.

⁸ Davidson 1970. Gosling 1990, offers the best overview.

⁹ Translated by G.M.A. Grube, revised by Reeve 1992

¹⁰ Reeve 1988 ably justifies his interpretation in n.1, 301.

A precise translation of PO is important because Shields thinks Plato not only can account for akrasia without dividing the soul, but does. Accordingly, he argues that the soul in the *Republic* is consistent with that of the *Phaedo* because both texts advocate a non-composite soul. In order to assess his claim it is imperative first to clarify the notion of a part, which he does by distinguishing three types of part according to the following criteria:¹¹

Aggregative part: x is an aggregative part of y iff: (i) x is a portion of y ; (ii) x can exist after the dissolution of y .

Organic part: x is an organic part of y iff: (i) x is a portion of y ; (ii) x is a functionally defined entity; and (iii) x is parasitic on y for its identity conditions.

Conceptual part: x is a conceptual part of y iff: (i) x is a portion of y ; (ii) x is not a functionally defined entity; and (iii) x is parasitic on y for its identity conditions.

Assuming that good sense can be made of these criteria, which seem to introduce as much ambiguity as they resolve,¹² Shields argues that Plato in the *Republic* divides the soul into merely *conceptual* parts, a type of part consistent with its simplicity. An example of a conceptual part would be the beauty of Cleopatra. If Reason, Aspiration, and Appetite are parts of the soul only in the same way that Cleopatra's beauty is a part of her, then the simplicity of the soul is safe. Properties, after all, are conceptual parts, and even the paradigm simples, Forms, have properties. The Form of Beauty, for instance, is beautiful. But the simplicity of the soul is not really safe until Shields argues that the abilities of the soul are only parts of it in this attenuated way, the way beauty is a part of Cleopatra or the Form of Beauty.

One initial problem for his view that Shields never considers is that the parts of the soul should be parts in an analogous way that parts of the city – its classes – are parts. Plato takes the analogy between the soul and the city very literally, as a series of critics have noted.¹³ But how

¹¹ Shields 2001, 146.

¹² For instance, does the meaning of 'portion' remain consistent through all three characterizations? Shields claims that it "can be given a precise definition, but that is not necessary for a present purposes." It is not clear that this is true. At the very least, one would like to examine this precise definition in order to ensure that the definiendum is not lurking somewhere in the definiens. Other questions are just as pressing. What is 'a functionally defined entity'? Achieving a workable specification of this notion is one of the tasks of functionalism, especially in the philosophy of psychology. Assessing Shields's argument will therefore require a sampling of this field, to which Putnam, Lewis, Armstrong, and Lycan have made the strongest contributions. Finally, what are the relevant 'identity conditions' of a part within a whole? Answering this question will require more acquaintance with mereology.

¹³ Sachs 1963 and Williams 1973 most notably.

could the inhabitants of the city be its conceptual parts? To review the criteria: they would need to be portions of the city, not functionally-defined, and not survive its dissolution. Perhaps if Shields were to characterize them as ‘citizens’ rather than as ‘inhabitants’ we can agree that they do not survive the dissolution of the city, because they do not survive as such. Furthermore, however, he would need to define them non-functionally, and it is hard to know how else to define them until the notion of ‘functional definition’ is itself better defined. Speaking generally, we may see from this objection how effective the political analogy becomes as a constraint on interpretations of Plato’s psychology. This will become more evident later when we examine Williams’ critique of the *Republic*.

In the meantime, however different psychological abilities are distinguished as parts, Plato distinguishes them using PO. Consequently, Shields must argue that PO generates only conceptual parts, and he does so most persuasively by returning our attention to one of Plato’s own applications of the principle: the spinning top. To someone who thinks that a spinning top refutes PO because it is both spinning and standing still, Plato distinguishes two parts within it: “We would say that there is an axis and a circumference in them” (436e1). Shields points out that these parts are abstract; he assumes that they are therefore merely conceptual.

One way to argue that the circumference, if not also the axis, cannot be a conceptual part is to highlight the fact that this example, like all of Plato’s applications of PO, involves motion (*κίνησις*). Reeve observes the correlation between these kinetic examples and Plato’s dynamical psychology, according to which desires ‘draw back,’ ‘drive,’ and ‘drag’ the soul.¹⁴ About the circumference in particular, we can confidently say that a point on it moves – around the axis. Can a conceptual part move? Shields does not say. It is not at all clear to me what one *should* say. Did the beauty of Cleopatra move when she fled the battle of Actium? Anthony thought so; that’s why he left too. Whether Anthony was right, and whether conceptual parts move, must again depend on a richer notion of parts than Shields supplies.

Should neither the axis nor the circumference be conceptual parts they would then become *organic* parts, for neither would survive the destruction of the top. Thus, if the the top and the soul are analogous, as Shields wants to claim, then the psychic parts would likewise become at least organic. They cannot all become aggregative parts, since not even Plato’s

¹⁴ Reeve 1988, 124. See 439b3-6, 439c9-d2.

immortality argument in *Republic* X allows Appetite and Aspiration to survive the dissolution of the soul, namely death. But Plato does think that Reason survives this dissolution – a subtlety that seems to have escaped Shields – which would make it, at least, an aggregative part. Shields could reply that the survival of *τό λογιστικόν* is not the persistence of a soul-part but instead of the soul itself. Evaluating whether or not such a reply succeeds would depend on further questions of identity and mereology, and the issues of these disciplines are complex – as complex as those of *akrasia*.

Fortunately the literatures on these topics are also just as rich. Simons appears to have offered the most comprehensive summary of the mereological debates to date, while Parfit's work is still the classic in personal identity.¹⁵ It is at this point, therefore, that I wish to import recent discussions from metaphysics in order to resolve this second question: in what way, precisely, does the soul of the *Republic* have parts?

How many parts does the soul have?

Assuming that Plato's soul is genuinely divided into parts, a third major question to be addressed is: into how many is it divided? Most think that Plato answered 'three,' although at least one odd passage can be adduced to support a larger number (443d7). Interpreting such passages will of course be one task of this dissertation; but for the purpose of making clear my proposed project I refrain from doing so here. Instead, let us briefly consider the arguments that would lead one to postulate indefinitely many psychic parts once the process of psychic division has begun.

As we have seen, Plato begins dividing the soul by applying PO to circumstances of inner conflict. Shields concludes that this technique does not generate any real parts; Nicholas Smith, by contrast, argues that it generates as many parts as there are conflicting desires – which is to say, indefinitely many.¹⁶ He begins by noticing an ambiguity in the application of PO to psychological contexts, an ambiguity produced by the phenomenon of intensionality.

In the circumstance of someone wanting to drink *x* but also not-wanting to drink it, there will likely be reasons for both attitudes. He probably wants to drink *x* because it would be thirst-

¹⁵ Simons 1987; Parfit 1984.

¹⁶ Smith 1999.

quenching; he may not-want to drink it because it would be, say, unhealthy. His wanting and not-wanting, then, are intensional: they happen ‘under a description.’¹⁷ He wants the drink under the description ‘thirst-quenching’ but does not want it under the description ‘unhealthy.’ Twentieth-century philosophy of language has trained us all to notice and, it is hoped, more clearly understand this phenomenon.¹⁸ Once we at least recognize it, two versions of PO become available to us whenever we apply it to psychological or intensional contexts. Quoting Smith, and adapting his terminology to our own, these two versions are:¹⁹

Extensional PO: The same part of the soul cannot be responsible for both desiring and also having an aversion to the same object at the same time, even if the object is taken, in the desire and the aversion, under different descriptions.

Intensional PO: The same part of the soul cannot be responsible for both desiring and also having an aversion to the same object at the same time, taken under the same description.

According to Smith, the intensional version of PO is the more plausible of the two. The only counter-example to it that he can imagine is of someone with multiple-personality disorder, a condition of the soul about which Plato’s psychology – unfortunately, but not surprisingly – has nothing to say. The lacuna is not surprising, first of all, because ancient psychology, for all its concern with vice, even the extreme vice of the tyrant, paid no attention to severe pathology. The same lacuna is unfortunate, moreover, because if there are any psychological phenomena that evidence the partition of the soul, they are the symptoms of the dissociative disorders. It is unclear to psychiatry even now what relationship these pathological partitions have to the normal experience of inner conflict, but the philosophy of psychology, no matter what position it adopts towards parts of the soul, needs at least a hypothesis about this relationship.²⁰

¹⁷ An example will help clarify a possible misunderstanding of this claim. Someone may want *x*, which he believes to be a drink, when in fact it is an advertising prop. He really does want *x*; he is not wanting *what he believes to be a drink*. We must distinguish wanting under a description from wanting a description. When we are thirsty – even we philosophers – we want drinks, not propositions.

¹⁸ As with the other modern debates that are relevant to my project, I cannot expect to read more than the most important and comprehensive literature on this subject. In this case, at least, I am better off for having written my Ph.D. exam in the philosophy of language. The works which I cannot escape reviewing here are: Frege 1892; Quine 1956, 1960; Davidson 1967, 1969; Burge 1986.

¹⁹ Smith 1999, 119.

²⁰ The philosopher who does not believe that inner conflict betokens psychic partition in the normal cases needs to explain why it does in the dissociative ones. The philosopher who does believe that inner conflict betokens psychic partition in the normal cases needs to explain what distinguishes dissociative from normal inner conflict. There is a more vivid way of putting these problems: where and how should borders be

Correlatively, Smith finds the extensional version of PO the less plausible. We can imagine an objection claiming that the same part of the soul could both want and not-want something by considering it under different descriptions. In order to constitute a valid objection to PO, this same part cannot be considering the thing *alternately* under different descriptions, remember, since PO stipulates *ἄμα*, ‘at the same time.’ To merit consideration, then, this objection must claim that the same part both wants and does not want the same thing at the same time. Examples are nonetheless abundant. Most famously, Oedipus both wanted and did not want to sleep with his mother: he wanted to do so under the description ‘Jocasta,’ but not under the description ‘mother.’ This is a decisive objection to PO, as stated; is it also decisive against Plato?

Smith thinks so; Reeve does not, noticing that Plato applies it only to indexical cases: where the object desired ambivalently is present to the desirer as *this*.²¹ The thirsty man both wants and does not want *this*, the drink. As a result, the problem of intensionality does not intrude. Everyday life is fraught with such descriptions. You want to stop reading this proposal; you want also, I hope, to continue. Must another part of the soul be fashioned in order to explain every such minor conflict? Smith thinks so; again, Reeve does not. He observes that Plato divides the soul into exactly three parts by first using one principle, PO, to begin the division, and then another one, the *principle of qualification* (PQ), to stop it.²²

Of all things that are such as to be related to something, those that are somehow qualified are related to a thing that is somehow qualified, as it seems to me, while those that are severally just themselves are related to a thing that is just itself.

ὅσα γ' ἐστὶ τοιαῦτα οἶα εἶναί
του, τὰ μὲν ποιά ἅττα ποιοῦ
τινός ἐστιν, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, τὰ
δ' αὐτὰ ἕκαστα αὐτοῦ
ἐκάστου μόνον.

This is a complicated principle, steeped in Platonic-metaphysical significance, and I cannot pretend to interpret it here. Reeve has already done so elsewhere,²³ and in the full dissertation I will recycle his interpretation in detail, under much closer scrutiny. Suffice it here to say that as far as the psychological relation of desire is concerned, according to Reeve's interpretation of PQ each desire has a formal-object, which is: the property that a real object must

drawn between the following cases: the normal person, the neurotic, the dissociative, Siamese twins, and two normal persons?

²¹ Reeve 1988, n.4 301-302.

²² 438a7-b2.

²³ Reeve 1988, 119-121.

have if it is possible for someone to desire it. The formal-object of unqualified thirst, for example, is drink; of hunger, food; of lust, sex. The division of the soul can be stopped at three parts, Reeve claims, because all formal-objects, along with the desires they inform, can be classed into one of three categories: appetitive, spirited, or rational.

The criterion for sorting these desires, following Reeve, is whether their formal-objects can be commensurated whenever they come into conflict. Thus, for instance, when a drink, x , both hot and sweet is available, a thirsty man's desire for x under the description *hot-drink* and his aversion to it under *sweet-drink* can form a compromise formal-object – *hot-sweet-drink* – because judgments of heat and sweetness are oblivious of the good of the thirsty man's soul. Under the description *hot-sweet-drink* he will have either a weakened desire for x or a diminished aversion to it, depending on which was originally stronger. The desire for x as *hot-drink* and the repulsion from it as *sweet-drink* emanate from the same part of the soul, then, because they are equally oblivious of the good of the soul, and can therefore be combined, forming a compromise attitude to a compromise formal-object. The psychic part in this case is the Appetite.

Appetite differs from Reason, following Reeve's interpretation, because another aversion to x under the description *unhealthy-drink* could not be commensurated with the desire for x under the description *hot-drink*. Why not? No compromise formal-object *unhealthy-hot-drink* is possible. And why not? Unlike the judgment *hot*, which we have seen to be oblivious of the good of the thirsty man's soul, the judgment *unhealthy* regards it. Along this axis – regard for the good – the formal-objects of these two desires, and thus the desires themselves, are incommensurable. Accordingly, Reeve concludes, they belong to different parts of the soul: one that judges the complete good of the soul, and another that is oblivious of that good. The former is Reason; the latter, Appetite. As for Aspiration, it stands in between, regarding the good, but only incompletely.

But why should regard for the good of one's own soul be privileged as the criterion according to which desires are sorted? Why not instead sort desires according to their regard, say, for temperature? In this case, *hot-drink* would be no more commensurable with *sweet-drink* than it would be with *unhealthy-drink*. This criterion would thus divide the soul into two parts, by attributing all desires that regard temperature to one part of the soul – the Hot? All others it would ascribe to a grab-bag part that would be insensitive to temperature . . . the Rest? If Greek script is

needed to legitimate these parts: τὸ θερμόν and τὸ λοιπόν. The absurdity of the example emphasizes the arbitrary selection of its criterion – or the selection of any criterion for that matter.

Less fancifully, another criterion would notice a desire's regard for the good of others' souls. In this case, *hot-drink* and *unhealthy-drink* could be assimilated into the same soul-part, or not, depending on whether the thirsty man drinking a drink either hot or unhealthy (for himself) might thereby benefit the soul of another. In this way, we can imagine another tripartite soul: one part, Morality, regards only the good of others' souls; a second, Prudence, regards theirs as well as our own; and a third, Selfishness, heeds only our own. All fancy aside, it will be worth determining whether the privileged status of the good of one's own soul in Plato's argument for psychic partition has any further warrant as a dividing criterion than the widely-acknowledged presupposition of ancient, eudaimonistic ethics: that justice can be defended by presuming as fundamental the pursuit of one's own psychological well-being. If there is no further warrant than this, then the basics of Plato's psychology will depend on his ethics and politics, as Jonathan Lear argues, and not be separable from them, as Fred Miller believes.²⁴

What are the contents of the psychic parts?

The third major question to be addressed is this: assuming that the division of the soul can be first started, and then stopped once a principled number of parts have been distinguished, what are the contents of these parts? We have already named the three parts Reason, Aspiration, and Appetite; and we have examined very briefly the criterion Reeve offers for distinguishing them; but much more remains to be said. For instance, is each part a locus only of desires of a certain sort, or does it also have characteristic beliefs?

Reeve thinks the latter. This should come as no surprise, however, since we have already seen Appetite, according to his interpretation, making judgments about the hotness or sweetness of a drink. Furthermore, as Reeve develops this interpretation, Appetite and the other two psychic parts turn out to have characteristic beliefs about pleasure and the good – even to the point of exercising characteristic epistemic resources about characteristic metaphysical objects, all in

²⁴ Miller 1999, 100-101.

order to acquire these beliefs. An apparent inconsistency in the account now arises. What is the relationship of Appetite to the good? Earlier, in the application of PQ, it was said that appetitive desires were altogether heedless of the good. But now it is said that the part of the soul which houses them has characteristic beliefs about the good. Can it be both?

It can, but only because Plato's soul is actually more fine-grained than initially thought. As Reeve is well aware, the apparent inconsistency arises because Appetite houses both lawful and lawless desires. The lawful, by definition, heed the good of Appetite; the lawless heed no good at all beyond their own immediate satisfaction. The good of Appetite turns out to be money, since only it can serve to unify lawful desires, yoking them together in a common project that may be beneficial to all. The lawless, by contrast, are too wild to be yoked. Each is its own master. The political implications are obvious; more to our point, however: Plato's soul turns out to be more populous than it first appeared. There are really more than three psychic parts, since there are more than three ways that desires can be related to the good. Whether this fact creates problems for the rest of the *Republic* needs to be further investigated.

Assuming with Reeve, then, that the three major psychic parts have characteristic beliefs about the good, each reasons practically, keeping its eye, so to speak, on these separate goods as ends. Thus, Appetite has reasoning, just as Reason has desires. Aspiration has both, but whether either has aspirations is difficult to say. At any rate, Reeve suspects that "the parts of the psyche are akin to primitive psyches. Each is equipped with the appropriate desires, and with intelligence."²⁵ There are several directions in which I could take this thought.

Here is a first: towards infinitesimally 'small,' and infinitely many psychic parts. Following Reeve's suspicion, and taking just one part of the tripartite soul – Aspiration, say – we would find within it miniature versions of the other two parts, as well as a miniature of itself. Since the homunculi would themselves be psychic parts, they too would be akin to primitive psyches, or homunculi. Taking any one of these homunculi, we would be able to do the same, opening it in order to find concealed within three micro-miniature parts, and so on, like Russian dolls, or fractals, *ad infinitum*. Inasmuch as Plato was aware of the absurd regress of Anaxagorean metaphysics, however, we should expect him to avoid replicating the precise form

²⁵ Reeve 1988, 139.

of its absurdity within the soul. Neither, I believe, does Reeve's suspicion set Plato inevitably on this course.

We may disregard his claim that each part is akin to a primitive psyche – a full-fledged homunculus – and notice how next in the quoted passage he states that each soul-part is equipped both with *appropriate* desires and with *intelligence*. So long as these appropriate desires are not a little Appetite, and this intelligence a little Reason, he stops the regress with a *limited* homunculism. After all, intelligence here is presumably only means-end calculation of the Humean sort.²⁶ But calculation is not the same as Reason, the Platonic soul-part. Reason, remember, has its own characteristic beliefs and desires, with both informed by its characteristic epistemic resources attending to characteristic metaphysical objects. Therefore, Appetite does not have within it a miniature version of Reason, but instead only an image of it, namely calculation. Likewise, Reason has within it not a miniature Appetite but merely its own characteristic desires. Appetite has desires for a particular sort of pleasure, particular beliefs about the good, and particularly primitive epistemic resources that attend to shadowy objects. Reason's desires are no more like Appetite than Appetite's calculation is like Reason itself.

Whether or not this reply succeeds merits further investigation. It relies heavily on views of belief and desire that require further defence. And even if these views can be defended, and with them Plato's tripartite psychology, by keeping Reason and Appetite distinct enough to preclude this regress, once we introduce the famous critique of the *Republic's* analogy of city and soul levelled by Bernard Williams, another looms.²⁷ As Williams argues, Plato subscribes to a mereological rule according to which the just city is just if and only if its individual members are themselves just: in the same way a crowd of sailors is angry if and only if its individual sailors are angry (unlike a large crowd of sailors, who need not themselves be large as individuals).

If Plato subscribes to this mereological rule, a serious objection to his political philosophy arises long before the one Williams advances. For if the just city is just only if its individual members are just, and justice is the obedience of each part to its role, any individual member will be just only if the parts of his soul are all obedient to their roles. It is the role of Reason to rule, we learn, and of Appetite to obey. In the just city, then, every individual member will have the same sort of soul: a soul in which Reason rules and Appetite obeys. But this is the

²⁶ Reeve 1988 compares Platonic and Humean rationality in detail, 167-169.

²⁷ The analogy begins at 435e.

psychological profile of a Philosopher-King. Consequently, in the just city all citizens will be Philosophers. Similarly, in the spirited city all citizens will be Guardians. Likewise for the appetitive city and Producers. In no city will there ever be different classes. And yet, without classes, there will be no parts to play roles, obediently or otherwise. As a result, there will be no way to characterize different cities: as either just, spirited, or appetitive. Using Williams's mereological rule the *Republic* becomes hopelessly muddled.

His own critique is comparatively tamer. According to it, the Producers of a just city must produce according to the direction of their Philosopher-kings, since this is their role. Their accord must additionally be voluntary, since justice requires all members to stick obediently to these roles. For the Producers to be so obedient, Williams intjects, they must individually exercise their Reason; how else will they know the value of their obedience and be motivated to demonstrate it? But if the analogy between soul and state holds firmly, as Plato seems to think it does, then so too will Appetite – the psychological correlate of the producing class – need to exercise reason in order to obey Reason willingly.

We have again the makings of an infinite regress. In order to obey Reason, Appetite requires an intermediate Reason – one that not only calculates means to ends, but also recognizes the value of rule by the primary Reason. But in order to obey this intermediate Reason, Appetite will need another, tertiary Reason in between itself and the intermediate. After all, there is no obvious way in which the intermediate Reason differs from the primary; consequently, it too will need another intermediary. And so on *ad infinitum*. Williams did not describe his argument as a regress, but only as an “absurdity” in Plato's analogy of city and soul: the absurdity that Appetite would have its own little Reason.²⁸ Nevertheless, his objection acquires more force as a regress – even if it can be stopped, in the manner already suggested, by a limited homunculism.

Neither did Williams notice an additional complication for Plato's analogy. Take as an example Aspiration. All the individual members of the city, including the Producers, will experience aspirations; indeed, they will all have an aspiring part in their souls. Provided that the same mereological rule which applied to cities and their individuals applies likewise to social classes and their individuals, another regress looms. The Producers will have Aspiration in their souls, meaning their class will likewise have an aspiring part. Applying the analogy of city to

²⁸ Williams 1973, 160.

soul, now, the Appetite of the individual soul should have qualities analogous to those of the Producers. Since they have an aspiring part, so too should Appetite. But the same trick can be performed with the other classes and parts. The soul thus fragments *ad infinitum* once again.

The flaw of these arguments, as should by now be evident, is Williams's mereological rule from which they draw their poison. As Lear argues in his reply to Williams, Plato advanced no such rule. Instead of believing that the just city is just if and only if (all) its individual members are just, Plato believed that it was so if and only if (i) some of its members were just, and (ii) these members were successful in shaping it in their image. The same goes for a spirited city: it is spirited because its spirited citizens have shaped it. Similarly for the appetitive city and its citizens. Lear calls this phenomenon 'externalization' and finds ample support for it in the *Republic*.²⁹

A circularity seems to threaten, however, when we wonder how citizens become just, spirited, or appetitive in the first place. We are told, after all, that cities make them so. This phenomenon, which Lear dubs 'internalization,' is also recognized by many passages in Plato's text.³⁰ Most of these passages come from Book III, wherein Plato notoriously censors the poets. Lear notices that the anxieties he evinces toward poetry stem from its influence over the formation of character, especially in the young, by means of internalization. The circularity of influence between city and soul is not vicious, however, because the analogy between city and soul recognizes the developmental difference between internalization and externalization.

"Internalization is primarily going on in unformed youths," writes Lear; "externalization is going on primarily in adults who have already formed themselves through prior cultural internalizations."³¹ And it is here where acquaintance with psychoanalysis helped Lear rescue Plato from a difficult objection. Psychoanalysts always think developmentally, and the phenomenon of internalization, under the name 'introjection,' has been a staple of their technique since Freud.³²

²⁹ Cf. 544d-e, 435e-436a, 441c.

³⁰ Cf. 358b, 366e, 377b, 378d-e, 380b-c, 386a, 424e. Lear 1992 supplies many more, 171-173.

³¹ Lear 1992, 175-176.

³² *The Ego and the Id*, 1923, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XIX 29. *Das Ich und das Es*, 1923, in *Gesammelte Werke*, XIII, 257

At any rate the process, especially in the early phases of development, is a very frequent one, and it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices.

Jedenfalls ist der Vorgang zumal in frühen Entwicklungsphasen ein sehr häufiger und kann die Auffassung ermöglichen, daß der Charakter des Ichs ein Niederschlag der aufgegebenen Objektsbesetzungen ist, die Geschichte dieser Objektwahlen enthält.

This observation inaugurated the analytic school known as Object-relations, and Lear makes sure to include a bibliography of its major writers: Klein, Winnicott, and Kernberg most notably.

Distinctions and arguments from these writers should prove as helpful as techniques from conventional philosophy in assessing the viability of Plato's psychology, on this score at least.

Closer to home, the virtuous circularity of internalization and externalization experienced by Platonic souls and cities equally resembles the acquisition of one of the soul's sophisticated abilities: language, a phenomenon to which Plato himself paid too little attention. Experienced speakers shape the language spoken in a culture; children internalize the language their forebears have collectively shaped. Linguists and philosophers of language worry about the malleability of this process of acquisition – about the extent to which Chomsky is correct, in other words, and there really is a universal grammar. I do not plan to revisit this debate, although it is apposite to wonder about the similar malleability in the process of Platonic psychological internalization. This apposite wonder can be further analyzed into three subsidiary questions, each one more radical. Since the first of these subsidiary questions concerns the relationships between the psychic parts, they are all best treated in a separate section on this larger question.

What are the relationships between the psychic parts?

Under the rubric of investigating these relationships, we should examine, first of all, the extent to which they can be influenced by the city in which someone is raised. Plato's answer is clearly: a great deal. The story of psychic decline in Books VIII and IX, above all, reports the influence of political and ethical culture over the relative power of the different psychic parts.

In the oligarchic city, for instance, even the son of a self-controlled banker has his appetites empowered by the climate of desperate indulgence that his father has encouraged in his own pursuit of usurious profit. After these appetites have been sufficiently empowered, so the story goes, they usurp the power of repressive Reason in his soul. In the oligarchic father this diminished Reason perceived money as the good; now degraded even further, in the son it perceives no good beyond the tolerance of various conceptions of the good. The son has thus become the new, democratic man. Plato shows in turn how each constitution short of the best is unstable in a correlative way, fostering the supremacy of inferior desires in the soul, and thus ushering in the rule of an inferior psychic part. Once this inferior part rules in a sufficient number of sufficiently powerful men in the city, they next shape the constitution to match their particular image of the good. What was originally internalized thus becomes externalized in a dialectic of degeneration.³³

Provided that political degeneration can happen quickly – and Plato had ample reason in his own lifetime, if not also by reading Herodotus and Thucydides, to believe that it could – there is no reason why a Timocrat cannot become an Oligarch, a Democrat, and a Tyrant within the same year, with all the requisite shifts in power between the three psychic parts. The example of another student of Socrates, Alcibiades, furnishes a colorful illustration of this truth. At any rate, the relationships between the psychic parts are very malleable, admitting of complete inversion very quickly.³⁴

Next, we need to re-examine the contents of the psychic parts, and inquire to what extent they can be influenced by the city in which someone is raised. Whereas the *relationship* between the psychic parts proved to be very malleable, their *contents*, while also malleable, prove less so. Although the contents of the democratic man's Appetite change the most, "yielding day by day to the desire at hand" (561c-d), even these changes are limited by Appetite's characteristic beliefs about the good and its primitive epistemic resources. Indeed, with each part of the soul, its own characteristic beliefs and resources will constrain its contents. So in Plato's psychology "there is

³³ Lear 1992, 183-184.

³⁴ Plato can admit the possibility of the complete inversion of a soul ruled by Reason into one ruled by Appetite. But it is difficult to explain in Platonic terms a 'conversion' of the sinner-to-saint variety: that is, from rule by Appetite to rule by Reason. Like nearly all ancient authors, from Hesiod to Tacitus, Plato was a conservative, in the sense that he saw only moral decline. The Christians were notable exceptions then, marking an ironic contrast with most Christians now.

room to influence the shape and content of the psychic parts,” but only so far.³⁵ As with Chomsky’s linguistics, then, Plato seems to think that there is a ‘universal grammar’ of the soul, one whose ‘rules’ are the three types of epistemic resource, each type attending to one of the three types of metaphysical object. Similarly, this psychological grammar generates as many different contents for Appetite – and perhaps also for Aspiration, if not for Reason – as there are different cities in which people may be raised.

Finally, and most radically, we may wonder to what extent the *number* of psychic parts can be influenced by the city in which someone is raised. To a certain degree this is still a question within orthodox Platonic psychology. There is, after all, a way in which *more* than three parts could develop. As we have seen, once Plato recognizes lawful and lawless unnecessary desires, as well as the necessary ones, and these have been added to the two others, spirited and rational desires, the total comes up to five. These five types of desire could warrant more than the three canonical psychic parts, remember, making Plato’s psychology more fine-grained than at first it appears to be. Indeed, Plato himself acknowledges some indeterminacy in the number of psychic parts (443d7). Could different cities therefore raise children in ways that would foster all five desires in such a way as to fragment the soul even further?

Or could other cities consolidate these desires, producing citizens with *fewer* than three parts? The Tyranny Plato imagines in Book IX already seems to be such a city. This most degraded of constitutions ensures that no child develops Reason, for how could they? In order to do so, following Lear’s very plausible interpretation of the *Republic*, they would need to internalize it from the city. But no models are available there, save perhaps in its clandestine poetry, whose importance should grow as the constitutions fall further from the ideal. The same problem holds, however, for Aspiration. A thoroughgoing Tyranny would preclude it just as decisively. The denizens of a Tyranny, therefore, would seem to have the simple souls sought by Shields, bringing us back to the debate with which we began: akrasia.

With Appetite alone, how could the Tyrant experience inner conflict? Plato’s story shows him frantically torn between competing lawless, unnecessary desires (574a). Must a different part of the soul be posited for each of these desires? According to Reeve’s interpretation, canvassed earlier, a separate psychic part is required only if these lawless, unnecessary desires cannot form a

³⁵ Lear 1992, 187.

compromise formal-object. Can there be a compromise formal-object between the desire to sleep with mother and the aversion to do so – an aversion based solely on the impetuous desire to lose no time in killing father? There must be, lest the soul of the Tyrant fragment indefinitely according to the effervescence of each new criminal impulse. What this formal-object is, however, and whether Plato's psychology remains coherent at this extreme, is not easy to say. It would not be surprising, however, if it were to fall silent here.

Concluding Remarks

To repeat, my dissertation will aim, first, to answer four questions about Plato's soul. These questions are: Does it have parts? If it does: How many does it have? What are the contents of these parts? And finally, what are the relationships between them? I believe that these questions invite a focused but nonetheless revealing interpretation of Plato's psychology.

While my interpretation dwells necessarily on the *Republic*, the most sustained discussion of these four questions, I will move into a few other dialogues as required by my argument. Principal among these will be: the *Protagoras*, for its discussion of akrasia; the *Phaedo*, for its simple soul; the *Phaedrus*, for its charioteer metaphor of the three parts; the *Timaeus*, for its renewed, albeit obscure physiological account of the tripartite soul; and finally the *Laws*, for its return to the problem of akrasia.³⁶ Any references to later tripartite psychologies, especially Aristotle's, will serve the purposes of clarification alone. Although I am convinced that a very similar set of problems arises for each of the later psychologies, treatment of them will have to wait for another book.

My secondary goal – whose utility to the achievement of the first I hope already to have demonstrated – is to assess the viability of Plato's answers to these four questions. They all profit by additional clarifications, as we have seen, from various fields of recent philosophy. Now, of course, I cannot pretend to master any one of them, nor even gain more than a passing acquaintance, but neither do I think my project would be better contained by neglecting them

³⁶ Bobonich 1994. The *Laws* becomes additionally appealing upon the publication of Christopher Bobonich's recent book on Plato's later ethics and politics.

altogether. To do so would court mistakes about a past philosopher that could easily be avoided by acquaintance with the work of present philosophers.

To return, finally, to the quotation of David Reeve with which this proposal began, I too am confident that Plato supports his psychological theory “by subtle argument.” Indeed, we have made our way through a representative sample of such arguments here, albeit superficially. Whether or not Plato’s psychology is “largely coherent,” however, I do not yet know. Considering the difficulties already encountered, we have good reason to suspect that it is not. Then again, considering the resourcefulness of Platonic philosophy for meeting these difficulties, we also have some reason to expect that it may. But especially if Plato’s psychology proves ultimately incoherent, I would like to conclude with a third goal.

For it is the onus of the historian of philosophy not only to interpret the view of a past philosopher, and not only to assess this view’s viability, but ideally to explain why such a view would have been appealing to both the philosopher and his posterity. This was Aristotle’s approach to this history of philosophy, evident from the beginning of nearly all his treatises; and in a way it was Plato’s. The *Republic* not only presents the view of Thrasymachus, for instance, and not only assesses its viability – it ultimately deploys an elaborate politics, psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics to explain why someone as clever as him would have found his particular false view appealing. Should Plato’s psychology appear false after scrutiny, then, I would like to approach its appeal in this Platonic way.

In short, I would like to articulate a reason why Plato’s theory, despite its flaws, “has considerable folk-psychological appeal.” We recognize ourselves in Plato’s metaphors of the divided soul. Who can read the *Phaedrus* and never think of his own recalcitrant desires as the dark stallions of the soul? Who can read of the Philosopher-King’s equanimity and not feel sometimes as if peace of mind really is something like a harmony of parts? The status of folk-psychology within the philosophy of psychology is debatable, and I have included in the bibliography some of the best contributions to this debate. Presuming that the intuitive plausibility of Platonic psychology, despite its weaknesses, requires an explanation, I would outline the embodied-metaphor theory of the linguist George Lakoff.³⁷

³⁷ Lakoff, 1999. See especially Chapter 13, “The Self,” 267-289.

This is not the place to do so. But minimally, according to him, our folk-ways of both talking and thinking about the self, among other central philosophical notions, are metaphorical (in the special sense of that term he has developed). Lakoff argues, by a persuasive set of linguistic examples, that beneath the multiplicity of our everyday metaphors of the self lies a fundamental split between a subject, or experiencing consciousness, and one or more selves – a metaphor developed early in life by each of us upon the analogy of our interactions with physical objects and parents, as well as our own bodies.

Thus, criticizing oneself, much as Shields described in his simple account of *akrasia*, internalizes the criticism of another person. Moreover, our internal critical agencies adopt the character of our early, external critics. Freud called this agency the *Über-Ich*, *Ichideal*, or *superego*, and charted its internalization from parental criticism. Both Lakoff and Object-relations theorists can thereby explain why Plato wants to think of psychic parts as if they were primitive psyches, just as Reeve noticed. In a similar fashion, they can explain the phenomenon of restraining oneself from doing something, as internalized physical manipulations of objects or persons. This would explain why Plato imagines Reason or Aspiration *restraining* Appetite, along with all his other kinetic metaphors for the interplay of desires.

Psychic metaphors of the *Republic* such as these beg to be analyzed according to Lakoff's scheme of metaphorical internalizations. Without advertising the fact, I have already begun to do so by noticing earlier the anthropomorphism of Plato's psychic parts. This technique, never to my knowledge applied to ancient psychology, promises a novel and trenchant diagnosis of the temptation to which Plato pre-eminently surrenders, the temptation to think of the soul as divided.

Bibliography

My bibliography is organized according to the following ten categories. The first three comprise works of Platonic and Classical scholarship; the latter seven, works of modern philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics. Mostly omitted for reasons of brevity are works on other Platonic dialogues, especially the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*. The bibliography in Wagner 2001 has all these references, should they become important to my project. I welcome any further bibliographical suggestions (email would be most convenient: plmiller@email.unc.edu), especially on the subjects of recent philosophy in which this department is so strong.

1. Platonic Dialogues and General Commentaries
2. The *Republic*
3. Ancient and Platonic Psychology
4. Akrasia
5. Functionalism and Philosophy of Psychology
6. Mereology
7. Personal Identity
8. Intensionality
9. Object-Relations and Internalization
10. Embodied Metaphor

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