

## On Why *Thumos* will Rule by Force

Nathan Rothschild, University of Florida

### Abstract

I argue that *Republic* presents *thumos* as a limited, or flawed, principle of psychic unity. My central claim is that Plato both makes this assertion about the necessary limitations of *thumos*, and can defend it, because he understands *thumos* as the pursuit of to *oikeion*, or one's own. So understood, the *thumoetic* part divides the world into self and other and pursues the defense of the former from the latter. As a result, when confronted with a conflicting desire, the *thumoetic* part makes sense of that desire as an irredeemable opponent. That, in turn, precludes the persuasion of desires that Plato sees as necessary for psychic harmony.

*Republic* is an argument for the rational life. It is an attempt to maintain that a life guided by, and organized around, the pursuit of knowledge is the happiest life for a human being. Plato's argument for this conclusion takes the form of an attempt to cash out the superiority of the rational life in terms of goods more readily associated with human happiness. We are told that the life of reason is the most pleasant, the most free, the most powerful and the most *unified* a human being can hope for.

It is this last claim that I will focus on, namely, that psychic unity is only possible in a soul guided by reason.

Casting this in terms of the tri-partite theory articulated by *Republic*, Plato's claim is that only when the rational part rules can the complex that is the human soul be unified such that its three parts are made "friends" and do not "fight with one another" (*Republic*, 589b).<sup>1</sup> Since the appetitive, *thumoetic* and rational parts are independent sources of action, each characterized by distinctive desires, unity is a matter of these parts working together to pursue the same, or coherent, ends. Importantly, Plato is quite clear that this unity is, to borrow another metaphor from *Republic*, an "inner harmony" (*Republic*, 443e). In fact, it is the robust nature of the unity that makes it so appealing. The life held out here as made possible by reason is not one of managed conflict, a life wherein the individual wills himself to pursue a coherent set of ends in the face of conflicting urges. Such a life is continence on a global scale. By contrast, for Plato, true unity is the coherence of desire. It is not just acting in such a way that one's actions or projects fit together, but acting in such a way because those actions flow from a hierarchy of wants and values that hang together as a coherent whole. Realizing this unity, and therefore living free from the pain, self-frustration and confusion of psychic conflict is, transparently, a life many of us would call happy.

So if Plato is right, and only the fully rational man is unified, it would be grounds for thinking that his life, the life of philosophy, really is best.

But why think it is impossible for an exemplary oligarch or timocrat to keep it together? Introduced in Book VIII, these two character types are ruled by their appetitive and

---

<sup>1</sup> See also *Republic* 442c, 463b, 547c and 590d.

thumoetic parts respectively. Each lives a life organized around the ends set by one of their non-rational parts, and the result is a soul, and life, that exhibits a measure of coherence.<sup>2</sup> Plato is adamant, however, that whatever unity these two vicious character types have won for themselves, it is both merely apparent and unstable. But why?

Plato's response is that psychic unity is not possible for these degenerate types because they maintain, and are only able to maintain, their psychic structure by *force* as opposed to *persuasion* (*Republic*, 548b–c and 554c–d). This creates at least two problems that stand in need of explanation. [1] What does Plato mean by intra-psychic force and persuasion? And [2], introducing these two mechanisms of psychic order only shifts the challenge, for, why think that a very careful and psychologically astute oligarch must be doomed to keeping his wayward desires in line by force?

Starting from a certain assumptions about the nature of persuasion, someone might attempt to respond to both these problems as follows: “persuasion is an attempt to change the beliefs and desires of another by way of argument, or more loosely, by bringing to bear a concern for the truth, and activity constituted by a concern for the truth is surely the sole province of reason.” However, there are two good reasons to think that this explanation of the rational part's monopoly on persuasion will not work. The first is that since some of the possible targets of persuasion in this case are non-rational desires, or the non-rational parts of the soul, it is clear that Plato is operating with a broader notion of persuasion. It must be broad enough to apply to the redirecting of psychic elements which, being non-rational, are unresponsive to *logos* and truth (see, for example, *Republic* 439d where Plato makes this claim about appetite and 441b–c where he makes a parallel claim about *thumos*).<sup>3</sup> Second, the timocrat and oligarch may not be fully rational, but, like all human beings, they do possess a rational part, albeit one that has been limited due to its domination by a non-rational ruler. Thus they, too, have the ability to pursue knowledge, and deploy truth, albeit only in ways that further the ends set by their dominant part.

Since the timocrat and oligarch possess a rational part, yet maintain psychic order by force, it is the influence of the non-rational parts which need explanation. What Plato must explain is why the rational part can, and the non-rational parts cannot, serve as a principle

<sup>2</sup> In Books VIII and IX Plato identifies four vicious character types: the timocrat, oligarch, democrat and tyrant. Each, *qua* type of personality, possesses some form of psychic structure and, therefore, some measure of psychic unity. Importantly, the relative unity of the character types is not equivalent. The four personality types are ranked (*Republic*, 580a–c) according to the extent to which they share in virtue and happiness, and thus, according to the extent to which they are unified.

I focus here on the timocrat and oligarch, omitting mention of the democrat and tyrant, for several reasons. First, the organizing principle of the timocrat and oligarch is more readily identifiable and less contentious. Second, the timocrat and oligarch embody more of a challenge to Plato's claim about rational rule because, by Plato's own lights, they live more unified lives. Moreover, the timocrat and oligarch are themselves types who must make their own unity a goal. Although all the vicious types are concerned to maintain their internal constitution, the timocrat and oligarch actively seek to unify their desires around a particular end (wealth in the case of the oligarch, honor and victory in the case of the timocrat). By contrast, the democrat and tyrant structure their lives so as to *allow* for the satisfaction of certain kinds of appetites. See Hitz 2009 for an extended account of the degenerate personality types that brings into view this distinction between the timocrat and oligarch on the one hand, and the democrat and tyrant on the other.

<sup>3</sup> That Plato would deploy such a broader notion is in keeping with contemporary Greek understandings of persuasion. For some indication of the breadth of meaning of *πειθω* and *πειθομαι* see Morrow (Morrow 1953, 235–36).

of psychic unity. Absent such an explanation, Plato is open to the objection that he is simply stipulating the rationalized psychology he takes himself to be defending.<sup>4</sup>

My aim in this paper is to go part of the way to answering this objection by arguing that Plato provides good reason for believing that the thumoetic part cannot function as a principle of psychic unity. Need for such an explanation of spirit's limitations is particularly pressing given recent scholarly work that has rightly emphasized the role of the thumoetic part as the "natural ally" of reason.<sup>5</sup> This work has stressed the ability of the thumoetic part to aid reason in its task of keeping appetite in line, thereby making it seem all the more mysterious that the thumoetic part is limited in its capacity to control wayward desires.

I will argue that *Republic* presents *thumos* as a limited, or flawed, principle of psychic unity. My central claim is that Plato both makes this assertion about the necessary limitations of *thumos* and can defend it, because he understands *thumos* as the pursuit of *oikeion*, or one's own. So understood, the thumoetic part divides the world into self and other and pursues the defense of the former from the latter. As a result, when confronted with a conflicting desire, the thumoetic part makes sense of that desire as an irredeemable opponent. That, in turn, precludes the persuasion of desires that Plato sees as necessary for psychic harmony.

## I

Since the notion of intra-psychic control by force figures prominently in my analysis of the limitations of *thumos*, I want to first briefly chart this notion as it appears in *Republic*. The place to begin is Plato's description of the oligarch's attempt to maintain order in his money-making life.

But consider this. Wouldn't we say that though the dronish appetites exist in him [the oligarch] because of his lack of education, some of them beggars and others evildoers, they are forcibly kept in check by his general cautiousness?

...

So, doesn't that make it clear that in other contractual matters, where someone like that has a good reputation and is thought to be just, something good of his is forcibly holding in check the other bad appetites within; not persuading them that they had better not, nor taming them by a word, but using compulsion and fear, because he is terrified of losing his other possessions? (*Republic*, 554b–d)

Here, to keep a desire down by force is to prevent its expression in action. And what prevents the agent from acting is another, stronger and conflicting desire. This is what we see with the oligarch: his love of his monies, bolstered by fear, overwhelms his desire to steal. And it is also what we see in the related description of the timocrats' attitude towards their destabilizing desires for wealth.

<sup>4</sup> The use of "rationalized" here is a reference to Williams's objection that Plato offers a "moralized," not moral, psychology (Williams 1995, 202). The objection imagined above, namely that Plato merely asserts the uniqueness of reason's capacity to unify the soul, should be read as a version of Williams's more general complaint about the insufficiency of Plato's account of the soul.

<sup>5</sup> For example Singpurwalla (Singpurwalla 2013), Wilburn (Wilburn 2014, "The Spirited Part of the Soul in Plato's *Timaeus*") and Brennan (Brennan 2014).

They [timocrats] will be stingy with money, since they honor it and do not possess it openly, but they will love to spend other people's money because of their appetites. They will enjoy their pleasures in secret, running away from the law like boys from their father, since they have not been educated by persuasion but by force. This is because they have neglected the true Muse, the companion of discussion and philosophy, and honored physical training more than musical training. (*Republic*, 548b)

Here, it is a concern for reputation, or fear of punishment, which overpowers the timocrats' desire for wealth when they are in public.<sup>6</sup>

For both the timocrat and oligarch, the desires they are seeking to keep in check are threats to their respective constitutions, the psychic structure that each has established. Given that Plato conceives of the best psychic order as a unity, and unity as the harmony of desire, the control of desire by force is a failure. It establishes a state of managed conflict and not the psychic harmony that constitutes true unity. Thus, keeping desires down by force is an activity aimed at the maintenance of an already flawed psychic structure. Bridled by fear and shame, the timocrat may not pursue wealth, but he wants to and thus remains conflicted. Worse still, Plato contends that intra-psychic force is doomed to failure in its attempt to maintain the flawed psychic structure that it constitutes. In the case of the timocrat it will be the dominated desire for money that returns and overthrows his psychic constitution, transforming him into an oligarch (*Republic*, 550d–e). For the oligarch, it will be precisely his forcibly resisted unnecessary appetites that play the pivotal role in his degeneration into a democrat (*Republic*, 559d–e).

Force may have decisive limitations as a form of self-control according to Plato, but it still has a place in the maintenance of psychic order. Even the best city will have soldiers who guard against outbreaks of internal disorder (*Republic*, 415d), a fact equivalent to Plato's endorsement that sometimes, even the best of us will have to forcibly resist destabilizing desires. This seems to be primarily the case with threats from the appetitive part. Plato seems to think this part has a kind of cancerous fecundity, such that it will consistently generate new, often problematic, appetites, or at least that is the impression one gets from *Republic* 442a–b. There the job of the rational and thumoetic part is described as “watching over” the appetitive part in order to prevent it from getting out of control, because this is always a risk, even for an individual who has received the right kind of education in music and gymnastics. To put this point another way, Plato's rational man is no saint, or perhaps better, no perfectly tranquil machine. Even for the unified individual there will be outbreaks of desire and instances of psychic conflict.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In *Republic* Plato also discusses the use of physical punishment as a means of self-control, and appears to class this mechanism as the keeping of desires down by force. This is implied in the description of the timocrat already referenced (*Republic*, 548b) and, for example, at *Republic* 591b where Socrates describes punishment as taming the non-rational (or perhaps merely the appetitive) part of the soul. I do not believe that this undercuts the account of intra-psychic force offered above, since the use and threat of punishment to shape an individual's desires is also a case of a stronger desire preventing the expression of another in action. Punishment “keeps the offending desire down” because it inculcates an aversion to the pain of punishment that prevents the expression of the offending desire in action.

<sup>7</sup> For further support for the claim that the virtuous man will manifest local instances of psychic conflict and destabilizing desires see: [1] Plato's account of lawless appetite (*Republic*, 571b–572b) where even the best men are described as possessing “a few” of these appetites (though they never act upon them). [2] Socrates' outbreak of anger, and subsequent self-chastisement (*Republic*, 536c), though this does depend on the assumption that

The limited internal conflicts of even the virtuous individual bring into focus the fact that Plato is not concerned about inappropriate one-off desires such as to eat this piece of cake or take this drink of water. Rather, what Plato is focused on is enduring psychic conflict – a case such as my having an appetite, an enduring disposition to stuff myself with sweets that again and again threatens or interferes with my other goals. It is this kind of psychic conflict, conflict that rises to the level of an individual’s personality, that Plato believes cannot be effectively dealt with by force. He does think the use of force will have a positive role to play in these conflicts, at the very least, a local role in preventing the expression in action of disordering desires and a somewhat more strategic role in eliminating such desires. However, if there is to be unity, force cannot be the sole or guiding mechanism of self-control. Something else is needed.

This something else I will call intra-psychic persuasion, following the passages already referenced, and, I take it, in keeping with the rhetoric of enslavement and friendship that Plato uses to describe intra-psychic relations throughout *Republic*. The content of this notion, its implications for the tri-partite theory of the soul,<sup>8</sup> and the extent to which the non-rational soul is responsive to persuasion<sup>9</sup> are just some of the contested issues surrounding Plato’s views about intra-psychic persuasion.<sup>10</sup>

Admittedly, that thought that there is persuasion that takes place “within the soul” can seem a queer notion. One reason, is that accepting at face value Plato’s talk of intra-psychic persuasion makes it seem that Plato thinks of the parts of the soul as akin to little agents having a conversation within the individual human being. If persuasion involves one party attempting to persuade another to choose one course of action over another, then, arguably, the party being persuaded must be able to make judgments of “comparative goodness,” and deploy a conception of its own overall good.<sup>11</sup> Given that in this case the patient of persuasion is a part of the soul, it seems Plato is attributing such capacities to the parts of the soul and, therefore, thinks of them as akin to little agents, or homunculi.

But this reasoning does not hold. It is possible to maintain, as I believe Plato does, that there exists the possibility of intra-psychic persuasion without attributing an agent-like

---

Socrates is a philosopher and therefore virtuous. [3] The image of the soul at *Republic* 589a–b, for when the soul is in its best condition reason is described as “preventing the savage [heads]” of the many-headed beast, i. e. appetite, from growing. This implies that even in the unified soul, reason and spirit will have to deal with the manifestation of destabilizing appetites.

<sup>8</sup> A driving concern in recent scholarly attempts to understand this particular form of intra-psychic interaction is whether Plato’s conception of intra-psychic persuasion commits him to an understanding of the parts of the soul as “agent-like,” and whether that, in turn, calls into question the coherence of Plato’s account of the psychic parts. Bobonich notably argues to the effect that Plato’s account of intra-psychic persuasion reflects an understanding of the psychic parts as each having the capacity for means-end reasoning, and as possessing a self-conception coupled with the capacity to make judgments of long-term benefit (Bobonich 2002, 242–5). For the contrasting view, see Lorenz’s extended argument that Plato possesses an account of intra-psychic persuasion that does not conflict with what Lorenz labels the “simple picture” of the psychic parts (Lorenz 2006: for the “simple picture” 41–52, for his corresponding interpretation of persuasion, 108–9).

<sup>9</sup> One point of debate is whether Plato views the appetitive part of the soul as responsive to persuasion, and if so (given the appetitive part’s limited cognitive resources) in what way? For argument that Plato does not take the appetitive part to be responsive to persuasion, see Wilburn 2014 “Is Appetite Ever Persuaded,” especially 201–2.

<sup>10</sup> For my part, I believe that the account of intra-psychic persuasion offered in *Republic* is coherent, does not entail the agent-like status of the psychic parts, and is an activity that governs both the spirited and appetitive parts in a well-ordered soul.

<sup>11</sup> See n. 10 above (Bobonich 2002, 243).

status to the parts of the soul. Or to put this point another way, accepting the reality of intra-psychoic persuasion does not commit one to the view that the parts of the soul are agent-like. Such a position only seems incoherent when one comes to the text with certain assumptions about intra-psychoic persuasion that stem from modeling it on an arguably narrow conception of inter-personal persuasion. What we can, and should, do is treat as an open question what Plato means in talking about a form of persuasion that takes place “within a person.” For someone who holds my view, the challenge is to articulate an account of an activity worthy of the label *persuasion* that could take place between parties not all of whom have agent-like capacities. That meeting such a challenge might be difficult is one thing, that it is impossible, another.

I do not take up this challenge here. Given the focus of this paper on *thumos*, doing so would take the discussion too far afield. Instead, I will limit myself to providing a brief sketch of several un-contentious features of Plato’s understanding of intra-psychoic persuasion, in order to bring into view a condition of the possibility of this persuasion taking place. My hope is that these features would be recognized as necessary features of any viable account of this disputed activity. By making these features the basis of an analysis of the limitations of the spirited part, my aim is to present an argument that will hold regardless of where one comes down on the nature of persuasion within the soul and the deliberative capacities of the psychoic parts.<sup>12</sup>

In *Republic*, intra-psychoic persuasion is an activity aimed at establishing psychoic order. Therefore like the keeping of desires down by force, it is one form that psychoic rule can take in the soul. Importantly, as the description of the oligarch and timocrat bear out, Plato is comfortable moving between persuasion being an activity that brings about (the timocrat is described as not having been *educated* by persuasion) and maintains (the adult oligarch as not using persuasion to address his disordering desires) psychoic order.<sup>13</sup> As a result, we should view intra-psychoic persuasion as the self-unifying activity of the well-ordered soul. Now, if Plato considers this activity persuasion, even in an extended sense, it is safe to think that he understands it as possessing the following three features.

Intra-psychoic persuasion is an activity that:

- 1) Brings about change in a patient
- 2) Through communication (i. e., by means of representational content)
- 3) So as to bring about agreement between the agent and patient

I want to set aside the second of these features and focus on the first and third, for I believe that these alone are enough to bring into view Plato’s reasons for thinking that the spirited part is limited in its capacity to maintain psychoic order.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Therefore it is my contention that none of the claims made in this paper need entail a view of the non-rational parts as agent-like in way Bobonich argues they are.

<sup>13</sup> And, I should add, the same can be said about rule by force and psychoic conflict. As Plato repeatedly stresses (*Republic*, 548b, 549b, 552e, 554b, 560a–b), it is because the degenerate types have been badly educated, i. e. by force, or without sufficient attention to persuasion, that they are conflicted and attempt to manage their disunity by force.

<sup>14</sup> Lorenz offers an extended, and to my mind persuasive, argument for thinking that Plato views intra-psychoic persuasion as a form of communication thin enough to viably engage the non-rational parts, and thick enough to count as bringing about change through representational content. I endorse both this broad outline of intra-psychoic communication with the non-rational and Lorenz’s further claim that Plato has not yet worked out the

Although Plato does not explicitly endorse something like 1), it is almost certainly a feature of his conception of intra-psychoic persuasion. If, for example, by some lucky coincidence, the appetitive part came to desire an end that harmonized with the ends of reason, this would not be a case of intra-psychoic persuasion – or rule. Clearly, for the activity to count as persuasion, the condition of the persuaded must be brought about by the activity of the persuader.

Turning to 3), evidence that Plato is operating with such an understanding of intra-psychoic persuasion might be read off his account of moderation, which is characterized as the ruler and ruled coming to share the same belief as to which part should rule (*Republic*, 442b–c). More straightforwardly, the thought that intra-psychoic persuasion aims at agreement can be found in Plato’s account of the ideal relationship of the parts of the soul. If intra-psychoic persuasion is that activity which brings about psychoic unity, and this unity is the harmony of desires of the different parts, then this activity aims to bring about the harmony or *agreement* of the desires of the various parts.<sup>15</sup> Critically, Plato claims that the desires of the different parts are harmonizable. This is the upshot of Socrates’ claim at *Republic* 586d–e that in a soul ruled by reason and organized by persuasion, the lower parts will also attain “the most pleasure,” i. e. be most fully satisfied – *by their own standards*.

Drawing on 1) and 3) above we can formulate the following condition on the possibility of an agent, A, engaging in persuasion.

It is a condition of A being able to persuade P that A take P to be *persuadable* in the following sense: A must recognize P as capable of being altered by A so as for there to be harmony (or agreement) between the goals of A and P.

It is this condition that will figure prominently in what follows, for, as I will argue, it is precisely this stance towards conflicting desires that the thumoetic part cannot adopt, and that is why the thumoetic part maintains order by force.

## II

The question guiding this paper is whether Plato can justify his claim that *thumos* is doomed to maintain psychoic order by force. I believe he can, but before turning to my account (in sections III and IV), I want to introduce a feature of Plato’s understanding of *thumos* that appears to cut against his claim concerning the thumoetic part’s limitations as a principle of unity.

Unlike appetite, which when ungoverned is represented as a principle of psychoic *disorder*,<sup>16</sup> *thumos* is cast as playing a positive role in the maintenance of psychoic structure. Specifically, Plato insists that the thumoetic part tends to join with the rational in the work

details of the view in *Republic*, but does go some distance towards doing so in *Timaeus* and *Philebus* (Lorenz 2006, 95–110).

<sup>15</sup> See Lear’s claim that the concord and harmony mentioned in *Republic* are more accurately translated and understood as a “speaking in the same voice,” i. e. as agreement (Lear 2014, 77–79).

<sup>16</sup> For each of the degenerate orders it is appetite, that causes their eventual collapse. In the case of the timocrat, the cause is his appetite for money (*Republic*, 550d), in the case of the oligarch, it is his unnecessary appetites (*Republic*, 556c, 560a–b) and in the transition from democrat to tyrant, it is the influence of the democrat’s lawless appetites that bring down his psychoic structure (*Republic*, 572d–573a).

of maintaining order by keeping appetite in line. This feature of Plato's view can make it seem not just that Plato *does not* possess an account of why spirit must rule by force, but that he may not *be able to* provide such an account without calling into question the coherence of his understanding of *thumos*.

The claim that *thumos* tends to aid reason in controlling appetite appears in the argument for tri-partition almost immediately after the introduction of the thumoetic part (*Republic*, 440a–b) and crystalizes in Socrates' claim that *thumos* is the "natural ally" of reason (*Republic*, 441a).<sup>17</sup> According to Plato, it is the function of the rational part to rule (*Republic*, 441e), namely to establish and maintain psychic structure. Moreover, Plato is adamant that reason can establish harmony in the soul, and strives to do so unless something interferes (*Republic*, 441e, 442c). Now if spirit tends to align with reason in reason's work of ordering the soul, then it looks as if spirit, too, aims at psychic harmony, although perhaps on the basis of different motivations.<sup>18</sup> And if this is the case, why can't the thumoetic part function as a principle of psychic harmony, or a timocratic person live a unified life?

One way to dissolve this apparent tension in Plato's account of *thumos* is to argue that the claim about the thumoetic part being a natural ally only describes this part in its ideal condition, educated and functioning within the context of a fully rational soul. If that were the case it would leave space for Plato to claim that spirit typically maintains order by force, but that it can be shaped so as to function as an ally of reason in the work of establishing psychic unity. But this response won't do, for it depends on a misreading of the notion of nature at play in Plato's description. Although Plato does use "natural" to mean best (the best city is, after all, the city founded according to nature, *Republic*, 428e–429a), here, at least, he uses "natural" in a descriptive sense to mean something like, "what is typically the case." Two quick reasons for thinking that in this case "natural" describes how the thumoetic part usually behaves irrespective of its context: first, if Plato's claim is solely that the spirited part is an ally in an ideal context, the same could be said for the appetitive part. In the best city, the appetitive part will be well educated. Thus it, too, will be a helpmate of reason by, at the very least, providing for the body through the pursuit of necessary appetites. Second, Socrates' statement about spirit's tendency to align with reason is prompted by his examination of the vignette concerning Leontius' public rebuke of his appetite for corpse gazing (*Republic*, 439e–440a). If "natural" means ideal here, that would mean that Leontius' spirit is in an ideal condition. And it seems very unlikely, given his failure to control his appetites, that Plato intends Leontius as an exemplar of a well-ordered soul.<sup>19</sup>

We should accept that Plato believes the thumoetic part has a predilection to align with the rational part regardless of the former's condition. And again, this can seem to put pressure on Plato being able to offer an explanation of why the spirited part can only

<sup>17</sup> This claim is repeated at the close of book IX (*Republic*, 589b). Admittedly, this later passage makes it seem as if the thumoetic part's allying with reason only happens in a virtuous, well-ordered soul. However for the reasons cited below, I take this implication to be accidental on Plato's part.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps spirit pursues self-control, and reason pursues what is in truth good for the whole soul and the parts independently, and the result of both pursuits is psychic harmony (*Republic*, 441e).

<sup>19</sup> See Singpurwalla (Singpurwalla 2012, 48–9) for a more developed version of the argument offered that "natural" has a normative and descriptive sense.



maintain order by force.<sup>20</sup> Strictly speaking, however, Plato's claim that spirit is the natural ally of reason does not contradict his claim that spirit is doomed to establish order by force.<sup>21</sup> It is open to Plato to maintain that reason strives for unity, with spirit aiding in a limited capacity through its use of force – and this is exactly what we find Plato asserting (*Republic*, 442b). The question now is whether Plato possesses an account of *thumos* that can reconcile these seemingly conflicting intuitions. It will be my argument in the remainder of the paper that he does.

### III

The line I have been taking in this paper is that Plato does have good reason to think that the thumoetic part cannot function as a principle of psychic unity. What we have also come to see is that he simultaneously thinks that the thumoetic part typically aligns with the rational to control an individual's disruptive appetites. This complicates the issue, for it means that if Plato is to make good on his assertions, he must justify both his view that *thumos* is the natural ally of reason and his belief that it cannot unify the soul.<sup>22</sup>

Making sense of the ways in which the thumoetic part (and man) can and cannot bring order to the soul turns, naturally, on what one views as the characteristic desire or end that distinguishes the spirited part. Central to Plato's notion of a psychic part is the view that each part is differentiated, one from the next, by its being the subject of a distinct kind of

<sup>20</sup> As opposed to say, engaging in some activity that can bring about psychic unity, an activity that perhaps might fall under some broad notion of persuasion.

<sup>21</sup> This "pressure" to explain spirit's role as the helpmate of reason has produced interpretations of *thumos* that do make Plato out to be contradicting himself. One sees this in the approach that seeks to bring together *thumos* as desire for self-worth and helpmate of reason under the heading of the *kalon*, more specifically, a particular understanding of the *kalon*. According to this interpretation, Plato understands *thumos* as the desire for the *kalon*, where what it is for something to be *kalon* is for a thing's parts to be harmoniously ordered such that it is able to excellently perform its function (Lear 2006, 107–109 and following her, Singpurwalla 2012, 53 n11). The thumoetic part is then read as attracted to *kalon* things and to those actions that make an agent *kalon*. Thus the thumoetic part will strive to perform those actions that harmoniously order the individual so that he is able to excellently perform his function.

One can clearly see here the influence of the thought that the thumoetic part is the ally of reason. For so understood, *thumos* would straightforwardly be attracted to actions that established and maintained an agent's unity. The problem is that on this reading we are left with no explanation as to why the thumoetic part is fated to respond to psychic conflict by force, thereby *exacerbating* the agent's conflict. In fact, it does not even seem *possible* that the thumoetic part would meet psychic conflict with the use of force.

In fairness to Lear, her account is not as vulnerable to the preceding objection since she sees the desire for the *kalon* as a central thumoetic end alongside the desire for self-esteem and victory (Lear 2006, 118). Lear's concern is to explain the role that the love of beauty plays in moral education, and in doing so she attributes the sensitivity to beauty to the thumoetic part of the soul. Thus in her case it is not the influence of the "natural ally" claim that obscures the limitations of *thumos qua* principle of psychic order, but rather the attempt to understand the substantive role Plato attributes to *thumos* in moral education. This I would maintain is part of a larger trend in the literature. For by focusing on the way in which *thumoetic* motivations might constitute a kind of proto-virtue it is easy to overlook the shortcomings of these self-same desires and evaluations.

<sup>22</sup> Moreover, if Plato is to be persuasive, he must be able to ground these limitations while doing justice to the set of motivations he calls thumoetic. For if we minimize the evaluative complexity of our non-rational motivations, then of course it will seem that only reason can save us. In short, adequately justifying the rational life depends on a robust understanding of, and respect for, our non-rational psychology.

desire (*Republic*, 580d). The rational part is characterized by its desire for knowledge of the forms, the appetitive by its desire for bodily pleasures or satisfactions.<sup>23</sup>

As for the thumoetic part, the two locations in the text typically turned to first to determine the characteristic desire of *thumos* are: the Book IV argument for tri-partition (*Republic*, 439e–441c) and the catalogue of degenerate regimes in Books VIII and IX. In Book IV, through a series of vignettes aimed at distinguishing the thumoetic from the rational and appetitive parts, Plato casts anger and the desire to persevere as the archetypal manifestations of *thumos*. In Books VIII and IX, Plato emphasizes the spirited part's love of victory and honor (*Republic*, 548c, 581a).

These texts are central to understanding what Plato means by *thumos*. However, I argue that Plato lays the foundation for his account elsewhere. The passage I have in mind is that wherein Plato compares the nature of the best city's soldier to that of a well-bred dog (*Republic*, 375a–376c). A close reading of the passage will show that in it, Plato defines spirited activity as the defense of one's own. This speaks to the centrality of one's own for understanding *thumos*, since it is in this discussion of the would-be guardians that Plato first explicitly introduces *thumos* into the *Republic's* conversation.

Socrates is introducing the required traits of *the ideal soldier*, or “guardian” (*Republic*, 374e) when *thumos* enters the discussion. Unsurprisingly, Socrates believes that the best soldiers must be courageous. He then adds that this depends on their being thumoetic, since *thumos* is what makes a man courageous. Leaving aside for the moment how exactly Socrates construes this relationship between courage and *thumos*, it is at least clear that spirit, (more exactly a spirited personality) is being put forward as a necessary condition of courage.<sup>24</sup> And that, as Socrates points out, appears to be a problem. Working off an intuition that *thumos* is tied to violence and anger, Socrates assumes that thumoetic individuals will be savage. They will be just as violent towards their own people (τοὺς οἰκέτους) as towards the city's enemies. Thus there appears to be dilemma. The city needs soldiers, but to be capable these warriors need to be thumoetic, and this will destroy the city from the inside. However, the dilemma disappears when Socrates recognizes that it is possible for a spirited creature to be both harsh towards its enemies and gentle towards its own. His paradigm of such a creature is a well-bred dog.

... when a dog sees someone it does not know, it gets angry even before something bad happens to it. But when it knows (γνώριμον) someone, it welcomes him, even if it has never received anything good from him. Have you never wondered at that?

...

Well, that seems to be a naturally refined quality and one that is truly philosophical.

In what way?

<sup>23</sup> A quick caveat about appetite: though Plato takes certain desires for bodily pleasure to be paradigmatic appetites (e. g. *Republic*, 439d, 580e), he also believes we can come to have appetites for ends that do not sate bodily needs but which are found satisfying in a manner akin to bodily pleasure. This view is most readily apparent in Plato's repeated insistence that human beings can, and usually do, have a powerful appetite for money (e. g., *Republic*, 442a, 581a).

<sup>24</sup> By “spirited personality” I do not mean an individual ruled by his or her spirited part. The partition of the soul, and the notion of psychic rule have yet to be introduced into *Republic*. Rather, I take Plato to be making a less technical claim. Everyone has some spirit, but it is those people who are often, or powerfully, moved by spirited motivations who have the ability to be courageous.

In that it judges anything it sees to be either a friend or an enemy on no other basis than that it knows the one and does not know the other. And how could it be anything other than a lover of learning if it *defines* (ὀριζόμενον) *what is its own and what is alien* (τό τε οἰκεῖον καὶ τὸ ἀλλότριον) *to it in terms of knowledge and ignorance?* (*Republic*, 375d–376b) [My italics]

The important sentence here is the last one, wherein a dog is described as “philosophical” because it takes what it knows as its own, and what it does not as alien. At one level this description is playful; however, that need not, and does not, preclude it from being sincere about the nature of well-bred dogs, and ultimately about *thumos*. Socrates does not believe dogs are philosophers, but when he speaks of them “knowing” he is speaking in earnest, for as the Greek bears out, the sense of ‘knowledge’ in play is that of familiarity or acquaintance. Socrates is making a rather pedestrian point about well-trained dogs. They are consistently gentle to those with whom they are familiar and fierce towards those who are unfamiliar. That dogs are capable of this two-faced disposition obviates the dilemma that momentarily impeded the inquiry and garners them the praise of having a “philosophical” nature.

What Socrates also adds in the final sentence of the quoted passage is that the dog’s disposition should be understood as a product of who (or what) it takes as οἰκεῖον and ἀλλότριον. Critically, the dog *defines* its own. The term is worth focusing in on because it implies two important features of Socrates’ understanding: first, that the dog takes (or sees) various entities as its own or alien, and second, that there are alternative possible understandings of what is one’s own or alien. Thus the situation is as follows: a thoroughbred dog is gentle towards (or “welcomes”) whomever it takes as its own, and it is a reputable feature of this creature that it takes those with whom it is familiar as its own.

The fundamental connection between *thumos* and one’s own emerges when one couples the above reading with the further claim that the dog in this context is (also) a stand-in for a particular kind of thumoetic part.<sup>25</sup> The feature of the dog that Plato wants to highlight is that it is domesticable. Similarly, the thumoetic part in us can be educated such that it harmonizes with the other psychic parts and their desires, in particular, those of reason. Since the description of the dog picks out a particular kind of thumoetic part, the thumoetic part in general is concerned to distinguish what is οἰκεῖον and ἀλλότριον. This is not just the thumoetic part going for what is one’s own or alien, but the thumoetic part *seeing* entities *as* one’s own or alien. Plato’s picture of the thumoetic part is that, like a dog, it marks and guards the boundary between self and other, one’s own and alien. The thumoetic part can be wrong about what is in fact *oikeion* and *alotrion*, but one’s own and alien is the register in which it conceives of things as valuable. Finally, the well-bred dog does not just distinguish between one’s own and alien but acts so as to maintain this distinction. It “welcomes,” and “grows angry.” These actions ought to be seen as two sides of the same coin; both keeping out what’s threatening and welcoming in what is dear are kinds of guarding. Drawing together these claims, if each of the parts of the soul is distinguished

<sup>25</sup> For the representation of the thumoetic part in a good condition as like a dog, see, e. g., *Republic*, 440d; for a parallel representation of the auxiliaries (the political analogue of a well trained thumoetic part) as dogs, see, e. g., *Republic*, 416a.

by a kind of desire, then spirited desire is the desire to defend and protect one's own, and spirited activity just is this defending of one's own.<sup>26</sup>

Before arguing that this view does in fact amount to a conception of the thumoetic part as a limited principle of psychic unity, I want to take the rest of this section to both flesh out my reading and to point out a couple ways in which it aligns with what we see Plato saying about spirit in *Republic*.

What does Plato mean, here, by one's own? The adjective *oikeion* derives from *oikos*, the word for house or home. It was used as a term for one's close family and friends, though it could also apply to one's property, or more specifically the "things of the house." Thus the dog in the passage is, in all likelihood, guarding the *oikos*, only welcoming and allowing in those who belong. In the first person one's own is "mine," and the term often carried with it a connotation of intimacy and possession. Here is how I parse what Plato means by this term in the context of explaining spirited evaluations: for spirit to see something as *oikeion* is for it to see it as "me." Thus in attributing to *thumos* the capacity to distinguish *oikeion* and *allogrion*, he is claiming that spirited behaviors entail some sense of self and a distinction between this self and some other.

It might be objected at this point that distinguishing between self and other and possessing a sense of self are capacities too sophisticated for the thumoetic part of the soul. If this is what is involved in taking things as one's own, then the ability to take things as one's own is a capacity of the rational, and not the thumoetic part. Moreover, there appears to be support for such a reading in the passage quoted above. The dog's tendency to take familiar people as its own is glossed as a "philosophical" quality, which seems to connect taking the right things as one's own and the excellent condition of the rational part of the soul.

There is however, good reason to think that this objection misses the mark. This is not to deny to the rational part the ability to distinguish between self and other and deploy a self-conception.<sup>27</sup> It is only to claim that *thumos* is also an independent source of this distinction. First, there is Plato's aforementioned use of the dog as a stand in for the spirited part in its best condition.<sup>28</sup> If it is a dog that takes things as one's own and alien, this supports thinking that it is the spirited part that possesses this capacity. Moreover, that Plato uses the figure of the dog as a stand-in for the spirited in its *best condition* cuts against seeing the passage as directly linking the rational part with the ability to think things one's own. It is open to take the dog's being "philosophical" as meaning: this is how the spirited part operates, *when governed* by right reason. Second, and more tellingly, if the thumoetic part is the part of the soul responsible for our getting angry, then it seems that the thumoetic part must have access to some sense of self. This seems especially the case, given that the

<sup>26</sup> Two other interpreters who recognize the concern for the *oikeion* to be central to Plato's account of *thumos* are Brennan (Brennan 2014, 115–118) and Ludwig (Ludwig 2007, 222–23). Ludwig advances the views that the concern for one's own is definitive of *thumos*, though *thumos* is not the main focus of his argument and his account remains undeveloped. Brennan by contrast, does not make one's own the unifying concern of spirited motivations, though he does see it as playing a central role in Plato's account of *thumos* and, importantly, seeks to explain the link between one's own and the love of honor.

<sup>27</sup> Given the rational part's desire for knowledge, the rational part, in contrast to the spirited, can grasp what is *truly oikeion*. Furthermore, the rational part knows, and pursues the good of each of the parts and the soul as a whole (*Republic*, 441e, 442c), a capacity which depends on its deploying a self understanding.

<sup>28</sup> See n. 25 above.

angry actions attributed to the thumoetic part in book IV tend to be responses to a perceived slight (*Republic*, 440c–d, 440b–c, see below for further discussion of the latter). In order to take some treatment as a slight, one must think something like, “I do not deserve this.” And we are not talking about some bare conception of oneself as an agent. Rather, feeling slighted and, for example, wanting to retaliate, depends on an articulated sense of oneself as due a particular kind of treatment.

An advocate of the objection might persist and argue that the spirited part’s being the wellspring of anger only shows that the spirited part deploys a sense of self, but leaves open the source of this self-conception. This revised objection grants that spirited behaviors are shaped by a sense of self and a distinction between self and other, but contends that the source of the relevant sense of self is the rational part. According to this gloss, it would be the rational part that possesses a sense of self, with the thumoetic part limited to taking up the views passed on by the rational part.

Again, I believe that this revised objection misrepresents Plato’s view, for two reasons. One stems from Plato’s understanding of what it is for the soul to be divided. The other is textual. It is a central claim of Plato’s psychology that the desires of different parts of the soul can come into direct conflict with one another. The fact that thumoetic desires can come into direct conflict with those stemming from the rational part strongly points to the possibility of the two parts possessing independent senses of self. For example, the fact that the same action can be taken to be a slight by the spirited part but not worthy of outrage by the rational, depends on the two parts having independent senses of, say, what it is to be “a man.”<sup>29</sup> The second reason for thinking that the spirited part possesses an independent sensitivity to what is one’s own can be found in Plato’s description of the sensibility produced by an ideal cultural education (*Republic*, 401e–402a). For Plato, a youth raised on the right kind of cultural products will come to possess an accurate sense of which things are good and beautiful before he is able to understand why they are good and beautiful. He, Plato, then goes on to claim, in language that closely echoes his description of the well-trained dog, that later, when such a youth encounters the explanation behind the content of his sensibilities, she will accept the explanation because she recognizes the account as, in some sense, *oikeion*.<sup>30</sup> Here, Plato distinguishes a sensitivity to one’s own from the ability to understand (i. e., the proper province of reason), and claims that the capacity to be sensitive to one’s own comes into being before understanding is possible. After all, a sensitivity to one’s own must already be active if an account can seem appealing before the individual understands the relevant explanation that the account provides. If this is right, and the ability to think things *oikeion* is operative prior to the ability to understand, it is reasonable to think that Plato is here attributing this capacity to the non-rational soul.<sup>31</sup> Plato does not specify which part of the non-rational soul he is attributing it to, but that is not overly significant for the question at issue. What matters, is that Plato here identifies the

<sup>29</sup> For an example of this kind of conflict in *Republic*, albeit played out in the inter-personal arena, see Plato’s description of the genesis of a spirited personality (*Republic*, 549c–550b).

<sup>30</sup> πρὶν λόγον δυνατὸς εἶναι λαβεῖν, ἐλθόντος δὲ τοῦ λόγου ἀσπάζοιτ’ ἂν αὐτὸν γνωρίζων δι’ οἰκειότητα μάλιστα ὁ οὕτω τραφεῖς;

“And, because he has been so trained, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship (*οἰκεότητα*) with himself (alternately, its being most his own).”

<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, one could read Plato as presenting the capacity to think things *oikeion* as a form of proto-reason, whatever that might mean.

sensitivity to one's own as (at least also) a non-rational capacity. For these reasons, along with those mentioned above, I believe that we need not shy away from understanding the thumoetic part as defined by an independent capacity to distinguish *oikeion* from *alotrion*. Where this amounts to an independent capacity to distinguish self from other on the basis of a contentful sense of self.

Significantly, the spirited part's perception of things as mine and alien is not merely a description. It is an evaluation. *Thumos* does not just distinguish mine from not mine, it necessarily views mine as good and alien as bad. Even speaking this way, I think, can be misleading. As Plato understands it, for *thumos*, the notions of good and one's own collapse into one another. This is exactly what we see in the passage about the dog. The dog welcomes the man with whom it is familiar, "even though it has never received anything good from him." This, I take it, is what it means for "mine" and "alien" to be the content of thumoetic evaluation. One feature of what we might call this "thumoetic perspective" is that if something is taken to be good, it will be considered mine, and if mine then good. Likewise, if something is seen as bad it will be taken to be other, and if other then bad. Therefore as the spirited part sees things, it is my plans, desires, friends, customs, and city which are the good ones, and those others which are bad and to be guarded against.<sup>32</sup>

Just now I switched to talking about the way in which the spirited part might view other objects as *oikeion*, and that might seem at odds with the thought that *thumoetic* desires are centered around a concern for one's self. However, as the passage about the dog already indicates, the thumoetic part's sense of the self, its sense of what is me and mine, is educable. One axis along which it is educable is that the boundary between self and other can be extended so as to include other people and things. To see an everyday example of this kind of phenomena, think of the way we react to an insult to a close family member or friend as if it were a personal insult. By contrast, in Plato's ambitious suggestion about the best city's having children and spouses in common (*Republic*, 457c–461e), we can see a particularly radical attempt to mold a group of human beings' sense of their own (*Republic*, 463e). Thus while Plato believes a person will and must identify some things (*Republic*, 464d), for example, their own body, as *oikeion*, he also believes that this sensibility is quite plastic. Along with attachment to others, a second way in which a spirit's sense of self is shaped is by its coming to include an individual's social position. I would maintain that it is precisely this sort of modification of an individual's sense of his own, of what counts as "me," on display in the book IV cases of spirited behavior. To take the example of the scene from *Odyssey* referenced at *Republic* 441c: Odysseus, in his anger at his maids' dalliances, sees their behavior as a threat to his sense of himself as a king, lord of his own house and their master. His spirited desire to rise up and strike out at them is an attempt to defend this sense of himself as the man he takes himself to be.

The final element of the account of *thumos* we see in the passage about the well-bred dog is that along with evaluating entities as mine and not mine, the thumoetic part engages in a characteristic activity that sheds light on, and is the product of its distinctive way of evaluating. Using the metaphor of marking a boundary that surfaced when discussing the well-bred dog is helpful here. The dog does not just mark this boundary. It acts to

<sup>32</sup> It is this fact that explains the attachment of the spirited part to norms and conventions (Gosling 1973, 49–50).

maintain it.<sup>33</sup> *Thumos* distinguishes between self and other, and then acts to defend the *oikeion* from what it deems *allotriion*. This, in effect, is what it means for the thumoetic part to take the self as good, namely as “to-be defended.” This in turn has consequences for the way in which it conceives of the alien. The alien is that which is a threat to one’s own. Notice that on this thumoetic perspective, what is seen as alien is thus conceived of as intractably a threat. To be other just is to be a threat to one’s own that needs to be defended against.

#### IV

My hope is that by this point I have done enough to broach the possibility that Plato understands *thumos* as the desire to defend one’s own. What I want to do now is argue that it is because Plato understands *thumos* in this way that he views spirit as a limited principle of psychic unity. The challenge, if you will recall, was to on the one hand, develop an account that could explain the spirited part’s status as the natural ally of reason, and on the other, to explain spirit’s limitations as a principle of psychic unity without flattening out this aspect of our psyche.

First, spirit’s tendency to aid reason in its work of establishing order in the soul:

Plato does not claim that the spirited part aids the rational in maintaining psychic unity. He says something more specific than that. What Plato claims is:

We say in that in the faction that takes place in the soul, [the thumoetic part] is far more likely to take up arms on the side of the rationally calculating element (*Republic*, 440e).

This quote comes from the stretch of text following from the anecdote about Leontius. This case, as I read it, is one of conflict between the thumoetic and appetitive parts that takes place in the wake of an explicit conflict between Leontius’ rational and appetitive parts. Leontius reasons that it is bad to gawk at corpses, but his desire to quietly walk past is overcome by his appetite, and it is at this point that spirit’s fury impotently comes to the aid of his rational calculation (*Republic*, 439e–440a). Given this context, I take the point Plato is making about spirit’s predilections is that it typically comes to the aid of reason in cases of explicit conflict between an individual’s rational and appetitive parts. And I maintain that the other book IV cases bear out this reading.

It is imperative to emphasize that Plato is attributing to spirit a tendency in cases of *explicit*, or more precisely self-aware, conflict between reason and appetite. There are, of course other ways in which reason and appetite can come into conflict. I can, for example, happily binge-watch a television series and as a result never get around to finishing the final sections of my paper. Here my appetite is disrupting my rational aspirations, and this is precisely the kind of enduring psychic conflict that wracks the timocrat’s soul. However, that is very different from the times when I queue up the next episode, and then think, “no, I should get to work,” This latter situation is a case of self-aware psychic conflict. Here,

<sup>33</sup> In short, my reading develops the thought that thumoetic desire is a form of self-assertion. As such, it is a development of the view that the thumoetic part is characterized by the desire for self-esteem and victory (Cooper 1999, 130–136).

the agent recognizes the conflict between his rational and appetitive desires, and it is in these kinds of cases that Plato thinks spirit tends to rush to reason's aid.<sup>34</sup>

Admittedly, it is not evident from the text whether Plato believes an agent's spirited part will always, or only usually, side with his rational part in these kinds of cases.<sup>35</sup> Regardless of which it is, Plato still has space to claim that though spirit will aid reason in moments of explicit conflict with appetite, spirit is also perfectly capable of supporting an appetitive personality. Thus, on Plato's picture it can happen every day that an investment banker's spirited part pushes him to persevere and work through the night so that he can close a deal and increase his bonus. That *just is* spirit in the service of appetite, and one can accept this possibility and still think, with Plato, that in cases of explicit conflict an agent's spirited desires will align with his rational.

What explains Plato's belief in this latter pattern of spirited behavior is that he assumes we (typically) identify with our rational desires in cases of explicit conflict between reason and appetite. If spirit is the desire to defend one's sense of self and we typically identify with our rational desire, then spirit will typically align with reason against appetite when the two conflict. Not only do I believe that this is Plato's view, it also tracks our intuitions about these sorts of cases.<sup>36</sup> I may be perfectly content frittering away my afternoon, but when I come to think that it is in truth better for me to get off the couch and finish my paper, and still I find myself with a palpable desire to keep watching, then we do tend to construe the desire for one more episode as something *other*, which is impinging on what *I* really want. In the wake of this self-understanding, spirit sides with reason, because spirit, sensitive to the self/other distinction, is presented with a situation it can grasp. It perceives the rational desire as mine, the appetite as an alien force, and desires that *my* desire win out over the other.

<sup>34</sup> On this interpretation, for spirit to aid reason it need not be the case that reason is in the instance already in conflict with appetite, as in the Leontius case. It will be enough if the appetite is one the individual has come to understand as in conflict with their rational desires. Thus, if I come to conclude that my appetite for sweets hampers my (rational) desire to be a marathon runner, then the night before a race my spirited part might flare up in anger in response to my desire to order dessert.

<sup>35</sup> Irrespective of Plato's view, one reason to think that in truth the thumoetic part does not always align with the rational is due to cases such as the following: I want a cigarette, but thinking it bad for my health, I hesitate. Considering the matter, I think about how stressful my day has been and conclude, "I deserve one." This at least appears to be a case where *thumos* bolsters my appetitive desire for a cigarette in the face of a rational aversion.

<sup>36</sup> First, as some support for the assertion about Plato, consider Socrates' image of the tri-partite soul in book IX (*Republic*, 589b–d). In the image, the rational part is represented as a human being, thereby establishing the identification of the whole human being with the rational part and its aims. It might be objected that Plato is here trying to *convince* the reader to identify with the rational part, and thus that the image shows the opposite of what I am contending, for Plato would only seek to convince us to identify with our rational aspirations if he believed we normally do not. Alternatively, one could, and I would argue should, see Plato as offering the image in an attempt to persuade us to identify more thoroughly with our rational aims by reminding us that we already do tend to identify with our rational aims. The problem being, that for most of us these are rational aims that have been dictated by the non-rational soul.

Second, even if Plato believes that we identify with our rational part in cases of internal conflict, there is a further question as to what justification Plato, or anyone else, might have for this contention. An answer to this latter question would need to be based in sufficiently robust account of the nature of rational and appetitive desire and the difference between them. It is unclear whether Plato possesses such an account, one that could explain why it is that we invariably identify with our rational desires in cases of intra-psychic conflict.



On this picture, the thumoetic part is very much the helpmate of reason, when the stage is set by a certain kind of intra-psychic conflict. Thus if Plato conceives of *thumos* as the desire to defend one's self and one's own, he has grounds for thinking that the spirited part is the natural ally of reason.

Yet, the foregoing account of spirit's inherent tendency to support psychic order is also consonant with a robust explanation of its limitations in this capacity. Plato's claim was that a soul dominated by its thumoetic part was destined to both establish and maintain psychic order by force. If this is true, then the difficulties for *thumos* must stem from its limited capacity to deal with disruptive appetites.<sup>37</sup> We are now, I hope, in a position to see why. In a sense, the very qualities that make the spirited part a good ally in cases of conflict are precisely those that make it unfit as a principle of psychic harmony. The spirited part, I have been arguing, possesses a sense of self, a sense of me and mine. However, essential to this spirited sense of self is an understanding of it as embattled, or under threat. The source of this threat is cognized by spirit as an alien other, the contrary of what is one's own. So keeping with the example of Leontius, Leontius' spirit possesses a sense of self. The tale of his public outburst does not provide us very much insight into what it might be, but we can speculate. Let's imagine that he is a highborn Athenian. According to the logic of *thumos*, to be a highborn Athenian means defending this sense of self from, in a broad sense, threatening others. Thus to be a highborn Athenian might mean to act differently than a member of the masses and to avoid their company. Or it might mean entering the arena of politics and winning office. Or, again, it might mean being physically hardy and able to tolerate the hardships of a military campaign. In all these cases Leontius' spirited part conceives of himself as faced with external opponents and obstacles that must be overcome if he is to be the man he takes himself to be. It is also possible for this embattled sense of self to be transposed into the arena of *intra-psychic* relations, and this is what we see in the Book IV vignette. Leontius' thumoetic part takes his own appetite to gaze at corpses as a threat and acts so as to stave off this threat thereby defending his sense of himself as an Athenian gentleman. This exemplifies the general structure of spirited attempts at self-control. In cases of conflict between an appetitive and spirited desire, the spirited part will cognize the conflicting entity – here, an appetite – as alien.

This has significant consequences, since for something to be seen as alien is for it to be cognized as intractably, or essentially, opposed to one's well being. For support that this is what Plato means by (and how he thinks of) the *allogrion* we can turn to the stretch of text where Socrates argues that current war-making practices should be revised. Currently, Greeks make war against Greeks in the same way they make war against Barbarians, and that is a mistake.

Consider, then, whether this too is correct. I say that the Greek race, in relation to itself, is its own kin, but, in relation to barbarians, is strange and alien.

[ὅρα δὴ καὶ εἰ τόδε πρὸς τρόπου λέγω. φημί γὰρ τὸ μὲν Ἑλληνικὸν γένος αὐτὸ αὐτῷ οἰκείον εἶναι καὶ συγγενές, τῷ δὲ βαρβαρικῷ ὀθνεῖόν τε καὶ ἀλλότριον.] (*Republic*, 470c)

...

<sup>37</sup> I limit myself here to a discussion of disruptive appetites and not disruptive desires in general. I do this following Plato in Books VIII and IX where keeping desires down by force is consistently about keeping *appetites* down by force. What's interesting here is that in a vicious soul, some of the agent's rational and spirited desires should also be disruptive, though potentially disruptive for the better.

They [the Greeks] will discipline their foes [when they are other Greeks] in a friendly spirit, then, and not punish them with enslavement and destruction, since they are discipliners, not enemies. (*Republic*, 471a)

The mistake is that Greeks are *oikeion* to other Greeks, not *alotrion*. Significant for my purposes is what the second excerpt reveals about the notion of the alien. If something is alien there is no possibility of discipline. The implication, I take it, is that disciplining for Plato means the use of force predicated on the possibility of establishing harmony through that use of force. By contrast, when dealing with an enemy (which, recall, is a substitute term for alien) the only course of action is enslavement or destruction, because harmonious interactions are impossible. Thus, to conceive of something as alien is to conceive of it as the kind of thing with which one cannot live in harmony.

I think we now have the pieces in place to see why the thumoetic part cannot function as a principle of psychic unity. A disruptive appetite is by definition a desire that conflicts with the agent's psychic order. Therefore, these appetites will come into conflict with the agent's spirited desires. In the face of this conflict, spirit conceives of the appetite as a threat to me and mine, as alien, and reacts to this threat in the only way that makes sense, with force. Perhaps the individual will respond with anger, or shame, or disgust, but in each case his spirited part's attempt to prevent the expression in action of the appetite will be predicated on the impossibility of the harmonious coexistence of "who I am" with this disruptive desire. For the spirited part, the problematic appetite is not the sort of thing with which one could live in harmony. It is imperative not to be misled by this description and undercut the psychological necessity Plato takes to be at work in this situation. Spirit does not assess opponents, judging this one redeemable and that one irredeemable. It is precisely this kind of assessment which is beyond *thumos*. Here, in the world of spirit, if something is identified as an opponent there can be no harmony with this brute threat to me and mine.

For Plato, our spirited self-understandings are too clumsy, too brutal, to bring about unity in the kind of complex creature that we are. Thus, the limitations of the thumoetic part as a principle of psychic unity are the direct product of a failure of self-understanding. Spirit cannot unify because it cannot cognize the possibility of internal harmony.

In an individual dominated by his spirited part, the entrenchment of spirit's response to psychic conflict must ultimately be destabilizing. In such a person, spirit calls the shots. It sets the ends that organize the person's life, and dictates how the agent pursues those ends. In one sense, the rational part of such a person has the power to persuade his destabilizing desires. However, in its current condition it cannot, because it does not view those desires as persuadable. Whatever intra-psychic persuasion amounts to, a necessary condition of persuasion is that the persuader communicates on the assumption that the audience is persuadable. A spirited individual will come to view his destabilizing appetites as alien, and that precludes persuasion. Persuasion, in the broadest sense, depends on both parties thinking harmony between them is at least possible. If such harmony is impossible, or taken to be impossible, then, since we are considering things from the speaker's perspective, there will not even be an attempt at persuasion. This, I am claiming, is the position the spirited man finds himself in vis-à-vis his disruptive appetites. He treats them as an enemy within, and thus precludes the possibility of psychic harmony.

Such harmony, Plato argues, is only possible when reason, unfettered, governs the soul.

### Bibliography

- Bobonich, Ch. 2002. *Plato's Utopia Recast*. Oxford: OUP.
- Brennan, T. 2014. The Nature of the Spirit Part of the Soul and its Object. In: Barney, R./Brennan, T. (eds). *Plato and the Divided Self*. New York: Cambridge UP.
- Cooper, J. 1999. Plato's Theory of Human Motivation. In: *Reason and Emotion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gosling, J. C. B. 1983. *Plato*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hitz, Z. 2010. Degenerate Regimes in Plato's Republic. In: McPherran, M (ed.). *Plato's Republic a Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Lear, G. 2006. Plato on Learning to Love Beauty. In: Santas, G (ed.). *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lear, J. 2014. Integrating the Non-Rational Soul. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 114 (1). 75–101.
- Lorenz, H. 2006. *The Brute Within*. Oxford: OUP.
- Ludwig, P. 2007. Eros in the Republic. In: Ferrari, G (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morrow, G. 1953. Plato's Concept of Persuasion. *The Philosophical Review*, 62 (2). 234–250.
- Singpurwalla, R. 2013. Why Spirit is the Natural Ally of Reason: Spirit, Reason and the Fine in Plato's Republic. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 44. 41–65.
- Williams, B. 1995. Naturalism and Morality. In Altham J./Harrison, R. (eds). *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilburn, J. 2014. Is Appetite ever "Persuaded?": An alternative reading of Republic 554C-D. *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 31 (3). 195–207.
- Wilburn, J. 2014. The Spirited Part of the Soul in the Timaeus. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52 (4). 627–652.

---

## List of Contributors

## Liste der Autoren

---

Nicholas R. Baima  
Florida Atlantic University, nichbaima@gmail.com

Nathan Bauer  
Rowan University, bauer@rowan.edu

Thomas Brickhouse  
Lynchburg College, brickhouse@lynchburg.edu

Travis Butler  
Iowa State University, tbutler@iastate.edu

Stefan Büttner  
Universität Wien, stefan.buettner@univie.ac.at

Moritz Cordes  
Universität Greifswald, cordesm@uni-greifswald.de

Terence Irwin  
Oxford University, terence.irwin@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

Péter Lautner  
Pázmány Péter Catholic University, lautner.peter@btk.ppke.hu

Nathan Rothschild  
University of Florida, njrothschild@ufl.edu

Petter Sandstad  
Universität Rostock, petter.sandstad@gmail.com

Nicolas Smith  
Lewis & Clark College, ndsmith@lclark.edu

Katja Maria Vogt  
Columbia University, kv2101@columbia.edu

Michael Wreen  
Marquette University, michael.wreen@marquette.edu