THE DIVIDED SELF EMOTIONS AND SOUL IN ANCIENT THOUGHT

A DEBATE ON THE PSYCHE´S UNITY

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Introduction

The ancient philosophical debate on the psyche's structure has profound implications for understanding human emotions and ethical behavior. While Stoics like Chrysippus advocate for a unified soul governed by rationality, the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition emphasizes a tripartite model of rational, spirited, and appetitive elements. This essay examines the strengths and weaknesses of these competing models, focusing on the contributions of Chrysippus, Plutarch, and Galen, while engaging with modern scholars like Christopher Gill. It argues that a synthesis of these ideas provides a nuanced understanding of internal conflict, emotional regulation, and moral development, all of which remain relevant to contemporary psychology and ethics. (3)

The Debate on The Human Personality

The debate over the structure of the psyche is rooted in the works of ancient philosophers. Chrysippus' unified model posits that emotions arise from erroneous cognitive judgments within a rational core, reflecting the Stoic commitment to `apatheia` a state free from destructive passions. (8) In contrast, the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, further developed by Galen and Plutarch, argues for a tripartite soul that acknowledges the interplay of rational, spirited, and appetitive elements. (18) Galen and Plutarch criticized the Stoics for identifying the self with the rational aspect of the psyche, particularly in a way that resembles Antiochus of Ascalon (130–68 BC)[1] The debate contributes to a broader philosophical view on the nature of the self and emotions. Both philosophers were critical of the Stoic model, which places a heavy emphasis on the rationality of the soul, but their critiques arise from somewhat different perspectives. Galen makes further and more detailed claims. He presents Chrysippus as formulating the Stoic view of emotions in its most extreme and intellectualistic form - rejecting the Platonic tripartite division of the soul - which Galen himself found plausible and in line with empirical studies of human physiology.

Another Stoic thinker, Posidonius[2] a leading figure in the early first century BC, also adopted Plato's tripartite-based model. He believed that the tripartite model offered a more accurate understanding of human psychological conflict. It recognized that different parts of the soul could have competing desires and motivations, which explained the internal struggles people experience between **reason, emotion, and desire**. In doing so, Posidonius also incorporated a more Platonic view of the soul's complexity, diverging from the simpler Stoic view that all psychological conflict could be explained by reason alone. The debate reflects broader philosophical disagreements between Stoicism and Platonism. While the Stoics emphasized rationality and the elimination of emotions (viewing them as disturbances of the rational mind), Platonists, following the tripartite soul model, saw emotions

[1] Antiochus of Ascalon criticized the Stoic view of the rational soul on two main grounds: 1. He rejected the Stoics' belief that the soul is a material, fiery breath, arguing that a material soul cannot account for abstract thought, moral reasoning, or the contemplation of eternal truths. Instead, he emphasized the soul's immaterial and transcendent nature, following Platonic tradition. 2. Antiochus opposed the Stoics' monistic view of the soul as a single, rational entity governing other parts, favoring Plato's tripartite model (rational, spirited, and appetitive) to better explain internal psychological conflict. Overall, Antiochus criticized the Stoics for oversimplifying human psychology and for grounding their ethics in a deterministic, materialist framework that undermined free will and moral responsibility.

[2] Posidonius - New World Encyclopedia

as natural and essential parts of the human experience, albeit ones that needed to be balanced by reason. The ancient debate on whether the psyche should be considered monistic or tree-part reveals the tension between the contrasting approaches to understanding human nature, behavior, and the origins of emotions. Christopher Gill raises the question: ***How credible is the picture of Stoic psychology offered by Plutarch and Galen?*** (3)

Chrysippus` Unified Model of The Psyche

Chrysippus, a leading Stoic philosopher, advanced a monistic understanding of the psyche. He argued that emotions `pathē` were cognitive judgments rooted in false beliefs, such as fear arising from the mistaken belief that external events could cause harm. (8) His framework centers on the hégemonikon, the rational control center that governs thought, emotion, and behavior, aligning with the Stoic ideal of living in accordance with nature. However, critics like Galen contend that this model oversimplifies emotional complexity by neglecting physiological and instinctual elements. (3)(7) While Chrysippus' focus on rational self-governance resonates with modern cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), his monism is often criticized for failing to address the richness of human emotional experience. (15) The Stoic sage, through rational self-mastery, transcends irrational emotions and attains tranquility.

- Chrysippus' emphasis on rationality resonates with modern **cognitive behavioral therapy** CBT[3], which similarly seeks to correct faulty judgments as a path to emotional balance. However, critics argue that this monistic model oversimplifies human emotional complexity, failing to account for the physiological and instinctual aspects of emotions.

- Chrysippus developed the Stoic theory of *determinism* and *compatibilism*, reconciling free will with a causal universe. Although most of his works are lost, his influence endures through later thinkers who preserved his ideas. He developed a nuanced theory of emotions within the framework of Stoic ethics and psychology.

- The perspective is directly tied to his emphasis on rationality and virtue as the means of aligning human life with nature. Where motions arise when a person assents to false impressions about what is good or bad. For example, fear arises from the mistaken belief that something external is harmful, while grief comes from seeing something external as a significant loss.

- Emotions are the result of a failure to apply rationality to one's evaluations. The condition is not passive experiences but rooted in our cognitive processes—specifically, in our judgments

[3] CBT `Cognitive Behavioral Therapy`. It's a modern, evidence-based psychological treatment that focuses on identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors. Like Stoic philosophy, CBT emphasizes the idea that our thoughts, rather than external events, largely determine our emotions and reactions. **Cognitive Restructuring:** Identifying and challenging distorted or unhelpful beliefs (similar to the Stoic practice of questioning false judgments). **Behavioral Techniques:** Encouraging practical changes in behavior to reinforce healthier thought patterns. **Focus on the Present:** Addressing current thoughts and behaviors rather than dwelling on past events. CBT draws heavily from Stoic ideas, such as **Epictetus**' assertion: "It is not things themselves that disturb people, but their judgments about these things."

about events. By correcting these judgments and recognizing that true goods and evils lie only in virtue and vice, one can eliminate destructive emotions - suggesting the ideal Stoic life is one of `apatheia`. Such a condition should not be considered as a lack of feelings but rather as a cultivation of rational feelings (eupatheiai[4]), a good feeling such as joy and caution, which are consistent with reason and virtue.

- Chrysippus' view of emotions is integral to his broader Stoic philosophy, which emphasizes living in accordance with nature. Since nature is rational and ordered, human beings must cultivate rationality to maintain harmony with the cosmos, which includes overcoming irrational emotions. Within his framework of *determinism* and *compatibilism*, he maintained, that even though the universe operates according to a *causal chain*, individuals have the capacity for *rational self-control*. This capacity enables them to reject false judgments that lead to harmful emotions, aligning their will with the rational order of the universe.
- Chrysippus' intellectual rigor laid the foundation for the Stoic approach to emotions, emphasizing the transformative power of reason in achieving emotional balance and virtuous living. His ideas, though preserved only fragmentarily, continue to resonate through later Stoic thinkers like Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.
- Chrysippus` monistic concept of emotions were opposed by the part-based model of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition in which the psyche is divided into three parts: the rational, spirited, and appetitive. Plato's `Republic` outlines this tripartite model, with the rational part tasked with guiding the spirited (associated with ambition and courage) and the appetitive (linked to desires and instincts). Ethical harmony is achieved when these elements align under the rational part's governance.
- Critiques like Galen and Plutarch accused Stoicism for denying the independent role of non-rational elements. Instead, they argued for an ethical development of emotions balanced with reason. This perspective, known as `metriopatheia`[5], highlights the value of moderated emotions like fear or shame in guiding moral behavior. Plutarch's model accommodates the complexities of human psychology, offering a nuanced approach to emotional regulation. Unlike Chrysippus' purely cognitive approach, Galen's holistic model emphasized the interplay of body and soul in shaping behavior. (3)(15)

Galen's Philosophical and Medical Approach

Galen, combining Platonic psychology with empirical medical insights, challenged Chrysippus' monism by arguing for a tripartite soul. He associated the rational, spirited, and appetitive aspects with the brain, heart, and liver, respectively, providing anatomical evidence for psychological complexity. (21)(6) Galen's emphasis on the physiological basis of emotions highlights the

[4] Stoicism - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy

[5] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

interdependence of body and soul, which Chrysippus' purely rational framework overlooks. (10) For Galen, emotional regulation requires both medical and ethical interventions. His approach integrates dietary, physical, and philosophical practices, offering a holistic model for achieving harmony within the psyche. (22) Galen aligned with Plato's tripartite theory of the soul (rational, spirited, and appetitive parts), which he believed better explained the complexity of human emotions. According to Galen, Chrysippus' monistic view of the soul, with focused on rationality, failed to account for the non-rational components of human behavior and emotion.

The Stoic goal of `apatheia` (freedom from harmful emotions) was by Galen, considered as both unrealistic and undesirable. Instead, emotions, even negative ones, could be useful and necessary for human life when properly moderated. Health and ethical living require attending to both the body and the mind. He accused Chrysippus for neglecting this holistic approach by overemphasizing rationality. Rather than elimination emotions, they should be integrated in the physical, psychological, and ethical dimensions of human life. And be moderated through a combination of medical treatment (e.g., diet, exercise) and philosophically. Properly regulated emotions could contribute to moral and physical well-being. Galen's criticisms had a significant influence on later thinkers, particularly in the medieval and early modern periods, when his synthesis of philosophy and medicine became central to intellectual traditions. His holistic view of emotions provided a counterpoint to the Stoic ideal of `apatheia`, emphasizing the complexity of human nature and the value of balancing reason with bodily and emotional health. (6)

Plutarch on The Platonic-Aristotelian Tradition

Plutarch defended the tripartite soul as a more accurate representation of human psychology. In his work `On Ethical Virtue`, he argued that emotions like fear and shame, when properly moderated, serve essential roles in ethical development. Unlike the Stoic ideal of `apatheia`, Plutarch championed `metriopatheia`[6], or the moderation of passions, as key to achieving moral virtue. (18)(22) Plutarch also critiqued the Stoic reduction of emotions to cognitive errors, emphasizing the independent roles of irrational and passionate elements in human behavior.

His framework aligns with the Platonic vision of ethical harmony achieved through the rational governance of spirited and appetitive parts. (4) Following Plato's tripartite theory of the soul (rational, spirited, and appetitive parts), he criticized the Stoic monistic view of the soul as overly simplistic. Emotions arise from the non-rational parts of the soul, such as the spirited `thumos`[7] and appetitive `epithumia`[8] elements. And cannot be reduced to cognitive judgments, as Chrysippus claimed. The Stoic ideal of `apatheia`, was by Plutarch considered as unnatural and unattainable. Instead, properly moderated emotions, like fear and shame, are valuable tools that can serve as

[6] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
[7] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
[8] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

warnings for ethical development guided by reason. The critique also involved the Stoic concept of determinism for undermining human agency and moral responsibility and he defended the Platonic-Aristotelian view on emotions. Emotions must be considered as integral to human relationships and moral action. By embracing Plato's tripartite soul, Plutarch acknowledged the complexity of human psychology and the interplay between rational and non-rational elements of the psyche. (4)

Contrasting Methodologies

The Stoic and Platonic-Aristotelian approaches differ not only in their models of the psyche but also in their methodologies. Chrysippus relied on speculative rationalism, emphasizing internal coherence and simplicity. In contrast, Galen's empirical methods grounded his theories in observable phenomena, such as anatomical studies and the physiological effects of emotions. These methodological differences have practical implications. Stoic monism offers a clear and actionable framework for ethical development, focusing on correcting irrational judgments. However, its lack of attention to the body's role in emotional experience limits its applicability. The tripartite model, with its recognition of distinct psychological and physiological elements, provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding and managing emotions.

Defense of the Stoic Monistic Model of the Self

The Stoic monistic model of the self, as articulated by Chrysippus, offers a coherent and transformative approach to understanding human psychology and ethical behavior. Unlike the tripartite model, which divides the psyche into separate faculties, the Stoic model emphasizes the unity of the psyche, centered around the `hégemonikon` (the rational control center). This unified perspective underscores the Stoic belief that reason is the defining feature of human nature and the key to achieving moral virtue. By framing emotions (`pathē`) as cognitive judgments stemming from incorrect beliefs, Chrysippus provides a practical framework for self-improvement. Emotions are not irrational disruptions but errors within the rational core, correctable through the cultivation of wisdom.

The concept aligns with the Stoic ideal of `apatheia`, a state of freedom from destructive passions, achieved by aligning one's thoughts and actions with nature and reason. The Stoic model's strength lies in its simplicity and internal coherence. By focusing on a single rational principle, it avoids the fragmentation of the self as essential to the tripartite model, offering instead a vision of psychological unity and moral consistency. Moreover, the Stoic emphasis on rational self-governance resonates with contemporary approaches like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which also target faulty beliefs as the root of emotional distress.

Modern Scholars on Chrysippus´ Monistic Version

The debate over Chrysippus' monistic model of the soul versus the Platonic tripartite framework, championed by Galen and Posidonius, reflects deeper tensions in ancient psychological thought regarding the nature of emotions and human rationality. At its core, this discussion revolves around whether the psyche should be understood as a unified whole or as composed of distinct parts, each contributing to emotional and irrational impulses. Chrysippus' monistic model of the soul views it as an integrated whole, with emotions arising from cognitive judgments about good and evil. These judgments, rooted in reason but corrupted by false beliefs, result in emotional disturbances.

Critics like Galen accused Chrysippus of reducing emotions to errors in reasoning, contrasting this with Plato's tripartite model, allowing for non-rational drives. However, scholars such as Teun Tieleman and Richard Sorabji argue that Chrysippus' model is more nuanced, recognizing emotions as involving both rational (cognitive) and affective (emotional) dimensions. Sorabji highlights that Stoic psychology seeks to transform irrational impulses into rational virtues, achieving harmony through disciplined practice and achieving `apatheia` (freedom from passions). While Galen and Posidonius criticized Chrysippus for neglecting the chaotic nature of non-rational elements, Tieleman suggests Posidonius may have expanded on Chrysippus' insights rather than rejecting them.

Josiah Gould, however, questions an apparent inconsistency in Chrysippus' account—how emotions, based on rational judgments, can produce irrational outcomes. Despite these debates, Chrysippus' framework is seen as a sophisticated approach to understanding and transforming emotions. (3)(8)(22)(23) If emotions are based on false beliefs, they remain tied to reason, yet their irrational manifestations seem to contradict this rational foundation. **Christopher Gill** furthers this discussion by reframing the debate as one of `monism versus part-based psychology`. He highlights how Chrysippus' unified model seeks to integrate emotions into the rational fabric of the soul, while the Platonic tripartite approach isolates and externalizes emotional and irrational forces.

Ancient Psychology`s Relevance to Modern Challenges

Combining these arguments reveals that the debate between Stoic and Platonic models is not a simple opposition but a rich dialogue about the human psyche's nature. While Galen and Posidonius favor the tripartite division for its ability to account for irrational impulses, modern scholarship underscores the sophistication of Chrysippus' monistic approach. Far from being reductive, Chrysippus' theory offers a compelling vision of the self as an integrated whole, where emotions are understood as rationally grounded yet subject to distortion. Rather than rejecting each other outright, Stoic and Platonic models offer complementary insights. Chrysippus' emphasis on reason as the unifying force of the soul provides a framework for personal growth and emotional resilience, while the tripartite model highlights the internal struggles that characterize human nature. Together, these perspectives enrich our understanding of ancient psychology and its relevance to modern challenges

in ethical and emotional life.

Christopher Gill adopts the scholars' approach to Galen's critique of Chrysippus' view on emotions. However, he considers the opposition toward Galen's concept as *an open door* to a more credible understanding of Stoic thought in relation to Plato's views on emotions within ethical psychology. He points to one crucial issue, which has received surprisingly little scholarly attention: the debate about whether the psyche should be understood as part-based or unified/monistic. This question has significant implications for ethical and psychological theory, highlighting the ongoing relevance of these ancient debates in understanding the human mind. The historical roots of the debate can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle with the adoption of a unified (holistic) psychological model defined by the Stoics.

The Debate in Middle Platonism

In Hellenistic and Roman thought, the contrast between part-based and unified models of the psyche encapsulates earlier philosophical positions. It remains unclear when this issue first emerged in the form presented by Plutarch and Galen. The first text, in which the ancient debate about a unitary (monistic) and tripartite (part-based) model of mind is made explicitly clear, and presented by Plutarch is in his essay "*On Ethical Virtue*". Where the contrast between Platonic-Aristotelian (part-based) and a Stoic (monistic/monistic/pantheistic) psychological model is polemically debated, from an anti-Stoic standpoint. (3) Plutarch`s concepts further developed by Galen in his `*PHP de Placitis Hippocratic and Plato,* focus on the contrast between a tripartite and a monistic model combined with distinctive ideas of Platonic-Aristotelian and medical ideas.

The reason for the emergence of this debate peculiar to Plutarch and Galen can be related to their positions as non- or anti-Stoics as well as the emergence of the broad movement of `Middle Platonism` The period falls between the post-Platonic Academy and Neoplatonism. Middle Platonism defends Platonic ideas from those of other schools, especially the Stoic school. This approach is apparent from Antiochus of Ascalon onwards with focus on categories of value and ethical development. Gill points to Plutarch as the first thinker to address ethical psychology and ethical value, based on the Platonic-Aristotelian tripartite model, against the Stoic unitary view. As mentioned earlier, Galen also improves a shared Platonic-Aristotelian psychological model, which he believed to be supported by earlier medical thought and empirical evidence. Another reason for the emergence of the debate, about whether the psyche should be understood as part-based or unified/monistic, is the effect of doxography. The practice plays a significant role in shaping the ancient understanding of philosophical issues. (3)

The doxographical tradition and the Placita texts systematically compile various philosophical views, and significantly influenced how later thinkers approached the nature of the psyche and its

functions. Aëtius[9] is a crucial figure in this context as he organized and transmitted philosophical opinions on these subjects. His work contributed to the systematic categorization of ideas about the psyche, including its substance, parts, location of the ruling part, and its functions. In the doxographical tradition, different philosophical perspectives were collected and presented in a way that sought to highlight both the diversity and commonalities among various thinkers. Such approach often involved harmonizing differing views to find a coherent interpretation that could encompass multiple viewpoints. The tendency is evident in the work of later philosophers like Plutarch and Galen. Plutarch and Galen often sought to reconcile and integrate different philosophical frameworks. They both explored how Platonic and Aristotelian theories of the psyche could be viewed as different manifestations of a similar underlying concept. Plutarch's works often reflect an attempt to harmonize Platonic tripartition (tree part) with Aristotelian bipartition (two part), suggesting that they could be seen as complementary rather than entirely opposed.

Efforts to Unite Different Theories

Galen's approach is engaged with and attempt to synthesize various philosophical and medical views on the psyche. His extensive works demonstrate an effort to integrate and reconcile different theories, reflecting the doxographical aim of finding a unified understanding. Chrysippus' text: "*On the Psyche"* cited by Galen highlights key Stoic ideas about the psyche, particularly the debate between the physical and psychological aspects of human functioning. Chrysippus maintained that the soul (psyche) is corporeal, made up of a finer, breath-like substance known as *pneuma*[10]. This materialist view of the psyche placed an emphasis on its connection with the body and its physiological functions. Galen cites Chrysippus' views on the soul, emphasizing that he believed the soul to be responsible for rational thought, emotions, and desires all located in the heart, rather than in the brain (which Galen, influenced by Hippocratic thought, argued was the actual seat of reason).

> *"Chrysippus asserts that the soul is a corporeal substance, a warm breath (`pneuma`) that spreads throughout the body, controlling its functions. He locates the seat of rational thought in the heart, the central organ that governs the body. The impulses, emotions, and desires all originate from the soul, which regulates them through its rational capacities."(6)*

Galen used the citation to contrast Stoic beliefs about the psyche with his own views, which leaned towards a more anatomically grounded understanding of the brain as the center of mental activity. The text represents one of the early inquiries into the nature of the soul and mind, raising questions about the relationship between the body and mental functions, which would be fundamental to later philosophical and medical discussions. Overall, the doxographical tradition provided a framework that influenced how later philosophers like Plutarch and Galen approached and synthesized philosophical theories about the psyche, often leading to a more integrative and harmonized understanding of psychological concepts. Pinpointing the exact date when the doxographical

[9] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
[10] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

method began to exercise a marked influence is challenging, but it is possible to trace its development and increasing prominence over time. While Cicero and Seneca were influenced by the doxographical tradition, they do not explicitly engage with the debate between monistic and part-based approaches to the psyche in the same way that later thinkers like Plutarch and Galen.

Central Ideas of Psychological Development

Plutarch in his essay `*On Ethical Virtue*` presents the contrast between the Stoic theory of passions in a psychological model of an ideal character-type and an alternative approach to emotions and psychology in a Platonic-Aristotelian perspective. In the first part of the book, Plutarch identifies central ideas in opposition to Platonic-Aristotelian concepts. The two sections of the book focus on how a Middle Platonist in the early Roman Empire sees the main competing current positions as models of human personality. The first passage in section two gives an outline of the psychological version:

> *The Stoics assert that the emotions and irrational aspects of the soul are not distinct in nature from the rational, but that they are the same part of the soul. They call this part the 'mind' or 'control-center' (hégemonikon). According to them, this part contains nothing irrational by its own nature, but is only called irrational when it is overwhelmed by excessive impulse, which drives it toward unrestrained or improper actions, opposing the decisions of reason. In fact, they define the emotions as forms of reason—albeit corrupt or misguided reason—which result from false or mistaken judgments and which have acquired strength and force through habit or repetition." (18) (Περ? θικ? ρετ?), section 441C–D.)*

The passage encapsulates key Stoic philosophical themes, especially concerning the nature of psychological development, ethical holism, and the path toward virtue. Stoics viewed all living beings as unified systems where mind and body work in harmony, with a single control-center (hégemonikon) governing all actions and responses. The center represents the rational mind capable of making decisions and judgments. They emphasized that ethical development is holistic, meaning that moral growth encompasses both cognitive and physical aspects of human nature. As individuals mature, they develop the capacity to think and act rationally, which is central to their understanding of ethics. The process of becoming an adult is linked with gaining knowledge, making sound judgments, and acting in alignment with reason.

Virtue, in Stoic thought, is the end goal of ethical development. It is attained through the completion of a process of becoming fully consistent (homologoumenton) in one's reasoning and actions. Where internal consistency involves stability and coherence in decision-making, leading to an ethical life that is in harmony with nature and reason. As individuals progress toward virtue, they begin to understand that external conditions, such as health, wealth, or status, are indifferent. These are not inherently good or bad but are only significant insofar as they contribute to virtuous action. A virtuous person recognizes that external factors are beyond complete control and should not disturb inner harmony or the pursuit of rational action. Ethical progress in Stoicism is marked by an increasing sense of internal stability, harmony, and deeper insight into the nature of life. This inner stability allows the individual to remain unaffected by external changes and to act consistently according to virtue. (18)

Irrational Desires and Internal Conflicts

For Plutarch the soul is ruled by irrational desires and passions experiencing constant internal conflict, which leads to instability and suffering. Such a soul is pulled in many directions by its desires, fears, and anxieties, resulting in a lack of peace and coherence. Only reason can bring order and harmony to the soul, leading to a virtuous and stable life. Such a state of mind is based on a unified set of virtues in co-ordination with all aspects of the personality. The process of ethical development is the highway to recognition of virtue as the only good and proper object of option. For someone to acquire peace and harmony the entire ethical development must be completed. Plutarch defines the process as `diathesis`[11]. The term refers to the Stoic concept for the complete stable character of a virtuous (wise) person – also characterized as Socratic – suggesting that non-wise persons are relatively incoherent and unstable. In relation to these ideas the term `pathos` passion or bad emotion can be mentioned. The concept implies that a condition can be expressed as relating to reason or to a forceful or violent emotion.

Even though passions involve reason they also imply intense psychophysical reactions. *An extreme passion can become dominating and carry someone away and lead to acts of unreasonable behavior. The intensity of a false belief and the power of a passion can block a person´s ability of forming reasonable analysis*. The paradoxical combination of rationality and irrationality in Stoic passions is underlined by Galen and mentioned in his *`On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato`*, with focus on the intensity of a false belief and the force of an impulse preventing someone from acting in according to reasonable analysis. The Stoic explanation of the phenomenon involves a psychological division based on a unified or holistic model of the psyche. (3) Plutarch engages with the Stoic analysis of psychological division in his: *On Moral Virtue*:

> *The Stoics say that passion is no different from reason, and that there is no dissension and conflict between the two, but a turning of the single reason in both directions, which we do not notice owing to the sharpness and speed of the change. We do not perceive that the natural instrument of appetite and regret, or anger and fear, is the same part of the psyche, which is moved by pleasure towards wrong, and while moving recovers itself. For appetite and anger and fear and all such things are corrupt opinions and judgements, which do not arise around just one part of the psyche but are the inclinations, yielding, assents and impulses of the whole control center, and are, quite generally, activities which change rapidly, just like children´s fights, whose fury and intensity are volatile to their weakness. (18) Mor. 446f-447a) (222)*

In the passage Plutarch addresses the nature of moral virtue in the context of Greek philosophy, specifically drawing on ideas from Plato and Aristotle. The main theme here is the structure of the self in relation to moral virtue—essentially, how one's character and rational capacities work together to create a morally virtuous person. Plutarch explores the idea that virtue involves a harmony or alignment between the rational part of the soul and the emotions or desires. Moral virtue isn't just about controlling or suppressing emotions; it's about achieving a balanced state where

[11] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

rational understanding aligns with one's emotions, resulting in consistent, virtuous behavior. Plutarch emphasizes that such an alignment doesn't require erasing emotions but, rather, cultivating them so they support rational decisions and moral insight. Where the self - as a structured entity - is a combination of reason and emotion. He sees this as a distinctive feature of Hellenistic and Roman views on the self: moral development involves internal coherence, self-reflection, cultivated as an integrated personality. Opposing forces in the psyche—passions versus rational control—are actually expressions of the same rational core. The idea challenges the dualistic notion (common in earlier philosophical thought, like Plato's tripartite soul) considering reason and passion as fundamentally separate and competing parts of the psyche. (3)(18)

The Control-Center of the Psyche

Plutarch's view both passions and reasonable impulses stem from the same rational source. When reason is functioning well, it gives rise to reasonable and virtuous actions. When it is distorted or misaligned, it manifests passions or unruly desires. Therefore, the problem isn't that we have distinct parts battling within us; rather, it's the state or condition of the rational "control-center" that determines whether our impulses are virtuous or corrupt. The approach implies a more unified model of the psyche, where differences in behavior and emotional responses reflect the different "states of mind" of a single, cohesive self rather than fundamentally separate psychological entities. In this view, moral improvement is about bringing our reasoning to a healthy, clear state, so it can harmonize our impulses and passions toward virtue, rather than suppressing or battling them as separate parts. The model of a unified psyche with reason at its core underscores Plutarch's belief that the path to virtue involves understanding and refining one's rational nature—not by fragmenting the self, but by aligning it within. (3)

The Stoic view of passions, points to inner conflicts based on distinct parts within the psyche. If reason alone were responsible for passions (albeit in a corrupted form), it would logically be able to correct or transform them immediately upon recognition. However, this is often not the case: passions persist, even after reason intervenes and attempts to counteract them. The persistence is evidence of a more fundamental psychological structure where reason and passion are separate forces, each with its own nature. If reason and passion were truly part of the same rational faculty, then reason would have a more direct and immediate control over passions. The fact that it doesn't—observed in cases where a person's rational understanding fails to curb their emotional impulses—implies to Plutarch that the psyche must indeed be composed of distinct parts. This model resonates with the Platonic idea of a divided soul, where reason (the rational part) and passion (the spirited or appetitive parts) are inherently different in nature and may even conflict with one another. (18)

Reason as Regulator of Internal Tension

Plutarch underscores the reality of internal struggle, suggesting that reason's difficulty in subduing passions indicate a lack of unity within the psyche. So, moral virtue involves not just refining a single, unified rational self but also managing the distinct parts of the psyche, aligning them through a kind of internal governance, where reason must continually guide, restrain, or harmonize these parts to achieve virtuous action. The distinction is crucial because it reflects two competing models of the self in ancient philosophy: one that sees internal unity and another that accepts fundamental division within the psyche. Plutarch more closely align with a part-based view, suggesting that moral development is about harmonizing these distinct elements rather than transforming a unified rational core. The significant tension between the arguments reflects Plutarch's critique of the unified self-model versus his own leaning toward a part-based model of the psyche, with an essential argument to the idea, that passions are simply misguided expressions of reason. Instead, he suggests that persistent inner conflict can only be explained by assuming that the psyche has distinct, potentially opposing parts. Gill attempts to clarify the argument of the two opposing views in Plutarch's discussion as following:

> *Unified Self Model (Gill's interpretation of some ancient views, attributed to Plutarch in certain readings): This perspective suggests that all parts of the psyche, including passions, derive from a single rational center. Passions arise from distortions or misalignments within this rational core, not from a separate part of the psyche. Thus, moral development involves refining reason itself to achieve harmony without assuming fundamentally separate psychological entities.*
>
> *Part-Based Model (Plutarch's critique in 447b–c): In this view, Plutarch argues that persistent internal conflict suggests distinct parts within the psyche—reason and passion are not just different expressions of the same core. Since reason does not automatically control or correct passions, they must have their own independent nature and source, leading to ongoing tension between these parts. This model, therefore, assumes a divided psyche, echoing Plato's tripartite soul, where reason must continuously manage or harmonize the other parts. (18)*

Plutarch critique of the unified model suggesting that true moral struggle points to distinct parts in the psyche. He argues that if reason and passion were merely different states of the same rational center, reason would directly and effortlessly correct passions once it intervenes. Instead, the enduring presence of conflict implies a need for a part-based understanding, where reason and passion coexist as separate elements, each needing to be reconciled for moral virtue to be achieved. Plutarch goes further to describe psychological conflict, involving both appetite and regret, showing the psyche's complex responses to moral failings. Plutarch describes how the psyche is drawn by `pleasure` toward wrongdoing, and in this process, individuals often experience `regret` as they "find themselves again"—recognizing that they have acted contrary to reason. This moment of self-reflection reveals a type of inner rational response against the passions, signaling that the psyche is not entirely overtaken by these emotions.

Gill`s Analysis of the Debate

Gill interprets this dynamic as underscoring a Stoic-inspired view of moral consistency and stability, where only the `Sophos` (the Stoic ideal of the wise person) achieves complete psychological harmony. In Stoic philosophy, the ideal wise person possesses a fully integrated character, marked by `homologoumenon` (living in agreement or harmony). Such a person's psyche remains stable and aligned, unaffected by passions because they have cultivated a perfect rational state that neither appetite nor anger can disrupt. In contrast, ordinary individuals—those not yet wise—experience internal conflict as they are drawn by appetite toward pleasure but later pulled back by reason and regret. The oscillation between passion-driven impulses and rational self-reflection illustrates a lack of stability and consistency in character.

Plutarch's use of appetite and regret shows that for most people, passions continue to disrupt rational control, leading to internal conflict and inconsistency in behavior. Plutarch's comment reflects the Stoic belief that only the perfect character of the wise person can achieve the unwavering, conflict-free state that aligns fully with reason. For those short of wisdom, the psyche remains divided, and passions still exert influence, creating an ongoing struggle between reason and emotional impulses. The Stoic ideal of internal coherence (achieved through wisdom) serves as a sharp contrast to the psychological conflicts experienced by the non-wise, who must continually strive to align their rational and emotional selves. Plutarch's analysis of appetite, pleasure, regret, and the recurring conflict between reason and passion implicitly acknowledges that while complete harmony is an ideal, it is only attainable by the wise. For most, passions like appetite and anger lead to inconsistency and inner tension, underscoring the Stoic notion that only the perfectly rational individual can achieve true psychological stability.

Stoic thought acknowledges that intense emotional responses, or passions, alternate with more reasoned responses within individuals, who have not yet achieved the ideal of Stoic wisdom. Such alternation is, in fact, essential to the Stoic conception of passions. The theme is elaborated in the second passage in Plutarch´s `*On Ethical Virtue*`:

> *Anger is a blind thing: often it prevents us from seeing the obvious, and often it stands in the way of what has been understood.....when passions occur, they thrust out reasoning and divergent views and push on forcibly to actions contrary to reason....it is the nature of a rational animal to apply reason to all his actions and to be guided by this; but often we reject it, when subject to a more violent movement. (18) Mor. 450 c-d)*

In this passage, Chrysippus explains how anger, as a specific example of passion, blinds individuals, obstructing their ability to perceive obvious truths or understand what they otherwise might grasp. Passions, in Chrysippus's view, have a forceful nature that displaces rational thinking, causing people to act against reasoned judgment. It can lead to impulsive actions that run contrary to what they might otherwise rationally choose. In short, passions disrupt the natural inclination of a rational being to be guided by reason in all actions.

- The Stoic ideal is to cultivate wisdom, which involves reason as the guiding principle of actions with the ability to diminish the power of passions. For the Stoics, wisdom is marked by an internal state where reason is no longer threatened by emotional upheavals, achieving a stable, rational disposition that no longer succumbs to these disruptive passions.
- The Stoics divide the four primary passions as appetite and fear, pleasure and distress in relation to what seems good or bad. Three central good emotions correspond to the first passions: wish, caution and joy - and seem to be considered a passion. There is no equivalent for the passion of distress, as a wise person is not affected by bad emotions. An impression can be good or bad and stimulates an impulse of appropriate reactions. They are, however, substantially different.
- A bad emotion or passion `Pathos`[12] depends on placing an unsuitable value on preferable indifferent matters, like material consumption, and taking them as inherently desirable. In regard to good emotion `eupatheia` there is no such mistaken valuation of preferable things. Good feelings are conceived as reactions to the only things that are genuinely good or bad virtue and vice. So good emotions form one of the types of psychological state informed by virtue relating to the constructed wholeness of the character of the wise person. (3)

Plutarch`s Ethical Doctrine of the Psyche

Plutarch's critique of Stoic ethical psychology, focusing on comparison of Stoic monism with his own part-based psychological model initially presents the Stoic doctrine without strong opposition, yet contrasts it with his model, which divides the psyche into rational and non-rational parts, arguing that this structure aligns better with conventional views of psychological experience. He suggests that Stoicism's unified model fails to account for both ethical coherence (in the virtuous) and psychological conflict (in the non-wise) as convincingly as his own model does. According to Plutarch, virtues like stability are better understood as harmony between distinct psychological parts, rather than as a result of a single, unified reason. Similarly, he interprets the moral failings of the non-wise as an inability to achieve this harmony.

In the second half of his essay, Plutarch explicitly challenges Stoicism's inability to explain psychological conflict (e.g., weakness of will) and criticizes their concept of "good emotions," which he views as a covert admission of the need for emotional moderation rather than elimination. However, Gill notes that Plutarch's arguments lack depth; Plutarch presupposes the validity of his part-based model, failing to engage seriously with the Stoic idea that emotions are expressions of reason. Additionally, his critique overlooks Stoic defenses of unified psychology, such as Chrysippus's notion that psychological conflict involves fluctuations within reason-based emotions, not a battle between reason and emotion.

[12] Search (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Plutarch, unlike the more analytical Galen, does not expose contradictions in Stoic thought but instead relies on less incisive critiques. He further points out that the Stoic goal is to develop a holistic conception of personality, where all psychological functions are shaped by reason. Plutarch's attempt to interpret Stoic thought through a Platonic–Aristotelian lens obscures this Stoic innovation, which envisions the psyche as an integrated, rational whole. Finally, his essay also reflects Hellenistic debates on psychology and character. Stoicism's unified model aligns with the ideal of "freedom from passion" (apatheia), while Plutarch's part-based approach supports "moderation of passion" (metriopatheia). This debate links psychology to broader cosmic themes, as Stoic psychological unity reflects their belief in a rational, integrated universe, a cosmic vision that Plutarch acknowledges but downplays in his arguments.

Plutarch's psychological model is both rooted in and a unique adaptation of Platonic and Stoic thought, emphasizing the soul's division into rational and irrational parts. His framework is complex, presenting the soul as a blend of rationality, emotions, and desires, each of which must be balanced for ethical living. And builds on Plato's tripartite model (rational, spirited, and appetitive), adapting it to stress the role of rationality as the guiding force for the self. The irrational part contains emotions and desires that, if left unchecked, can lead to disorder within the individual. Unlike the Stoics, who see the irrational elements as disturbances to be eradicated, he sees these elements in need of proper management and integration, rather than elimination. (3)

For Plutarch ethical selfhood requires an internal harmony where the rational part exerts a guiding influence over the irrational. *Achieving this harmony does not mean suppressing emotions but cultivating them so they align with reason*. This self-regulation is viewed as a path to moral virtue, with the rational part functioning as a kind of inner governance, harmonizing desires and emotions to contribute to ethical action. His psychology suggests that moral virtue is attained through a balanced relationship between reason and emotion. Virtuous individuals develop a "structured self," where rationality regulates the soul's different parts into a cohesive whole.

Gill emphasizes that, for Plutarch, philosophy and ethical training are key practices that nurture the rational part, enhancing self-awareness and the ability to harmonize one's internal drives. His approach is a synthesis, drawing on Platonic hierarchy (with reason as the highest authority) while also incorporating a Stoic-like emphasis on virtue and self-mastery. Instead of accepting the Stoic idea of suppressing emotions he argues for a process of educated personal guidance. Gill notes that this integration positions Plutarch's psychology as uniquely suited to promote a model of selfhood that is structured, unified, and ethically motivated.

Through these ideas, Gill explains, Plutarch's psychology is less about dichotomy and more about integration and balance, where virtue arises from the rational part's mastery over—rather than elimination of—the soul's emotional dimensions. Plutarch's psychology reflects a broader ethical commitment to self-governance and moral harmony, where the structured self-embodies the ideal of a balanced and well-ordered life. Plutarch's essay is however only a short step along the way of comprehending the Stoic theory of the passions and the issues within the psychological debate in

the first and second centuries ad. In order to make further progress examination of Galen´s ideas about human personality are invaluable sources. (3)

Galen`s Ideas of Harmony Between the Soul's Parts

Chrysippus proposed a unified view of the soul. He argued that the soul is entirely rational and that emotions (like anger and desire) are judgments or false beliefs arising within the rational soul. The theory rejects Plato's tripartite division of the soul and instead emphasizes the Stoic ideal of rational self-control. Galen attacks Chrysippus' claim of the soul's unity, arguing that it contradicts observable human behavior and medical evidence. He asserts that the diversity of human actions and emotions (e.g., rational thought vs. uncontrollable anger) supports Plato's tripartite soul, where the rational, spirited, and appetitive parts have distinct functions and conflicts.

Galen draws on his medical knowledge, particularly anatomy and physiology, to challenge Chrysippus. He argues that the brain, heart, and liver correspond to the three parts of the soul, making it impossible to explain human behavior through a single, unified rational principle. This reliance on empirical evidence underscores Galen's methodological difference from Chrysippus, whose views are based on speculative reasoning. Chrysippus' theory fails to account for the difficulty of controlling desires and emotions. By recognizing the tripartite soul, Galen believes it is possible to develop more effective strategies for ethical self-governance. Posidonius, unlike Chrysippus, acknowledged aspects of Plato's tripartite soul. He argued that emotions are not merely rational judgments but also have a non-rational element tied to the body and innate drives. The position represents a compromise between Platonic and Stoic psychology.

Galen appreciates Posidonius' acknowledgment of the non-rational aspects of the soul, seeing it as closer to the truth than Chrysippus' rigid rationalism. However, Galen criticizes Posidonius for failing to fully embrace the tripartite model and for not providing sufficient empirical backing for his views. Galen emphasizes that Posidonius' recognition of bodily influences on emotions aligns with medical observations. For instance, desires and passions often arise independently of rational thought, supporting the need for a distinct appetitive part of the soul. While agreeing with Posidonius that reason must guide the non-rational parts of the soul, Galen insists that the process requires medical as well as philosophical intervention. - Proper care of the body and mind, through diet, exercise, and ethical practice, is essential for achieving harmony between the soul's parts. (3)

Christopher Gill highlights the significance of Galen's critique of Stoic psychology and his defense of Platonic tripartition. He emphasizes Galen's rejection of Chrysippus' rationalist and unified model of the soul. The argument is grounded in observable phenomena, such as the physical and emotional struggles humans face, which Chrysippus' theory cannot adequately explain. Posidonius on the other hand is by Galen considered a more reasonable interlocutor than Chrysippus. His par-

tial acceptance of the soul's complexity aligns better with Galen's medical and philosophical observations, but Galen believes Posidonius does not go far enough in adopting a tripartite framework. Galen challenges the speculative nature of Stoic philosophy and reinforces the practical value of Platonic psychology. Galen's critique of Chrysippus is by Gill considered as central to the vision of `The Structured Self`. The tripartite soul provides a model for understanding the tensions within human nature and for developing strategies to harmonize the rational, spirited, and appetitive aspects of the self. In the work PHP Galen focus on Stoic psychology, particularly his critiques of Chrysippus' unity of the soul and Posidonius' partial acceptance of tripartition. Gill's analysis highlights how these debates reinforce Galen's synthesis of Platonic and medical ideas, advancing a holistic view of the soul that combines empirical evidence with philosophical insight. (3)

Psychological and Physiological Unity of the Psyche

Galen's integration of philosophy and medicine, in his synthesis of Platonic psychology and Hippocratic medicine in relation to the tripartite soul, is unique. For Galen, the rational soul resides in the brain, the spirited in the heart, and the appetitive in the liver. This empirical approach validates Plato's theory while exposing the speculative nature of Stoic monism. Galen's critique of Chrysippus is even more systematic than Plutarch's. He rejects the Stoic claim that emotions are rational errors, arguing that the soul's non-rational elements have distinct psychological and physiological bases. By relying on medical evidence, Galen demonstrates the limits of the Stoic belief in the soul's unity, offering a tripartite framework as a more accurate and practical model.

Galen acknowledges Posidonius' attempt to reconcile Stoic and Platonic ideas by recognizing the non-rational aspects of the soul. However, Galen critiques Posidonius for not fully adopting the tripartite model or providing empirical evidence for his claims. Both Plutarch and Galen find Chrysippus' Stoic psychology inadequate for explaining the complexities of human experience. They argue that reducing emotions to false rational judgments overlooks the independent influence of desires and emotions. Chrysippus' monistic view fails to account for the internal struggles that arise between reason, emotion, and desire, which are central to human psychology and ethical development. While Plutarch critiques Stoic rationalism philosophically, Galen adds a medical dimension, arguing that Chrysippus ignores the physiological underpinnings of psychological functions. (3)

The Ancient Debate Essential to Modern Psychology

Gill emphasizes Plutarch's role as a transitional figure who defends the Platonic tripartite soul against Stoic monism. His critiques of Chrysippus anticipate many of Galen's arguments, particularly the emphasis on the soul's complexity and the interplay between reason and emotion. Galen moves beyond Plutarch by integrating philosophical ideas with medical evidence. His reliance on

anatomy and physiology not only strengthens the case for the tripartite soul but also grounds psychology in observable phenomena, making it more practical and scientifically credible. Gill sees Galen's approach as a groundbreaking synthesis, where philosophy and medicine converge to address both the ethical and physiological dimensions of the self. Gill's analysis demonstrates how Plutarch and Galen defend the Platonic tripartite soul while critiquing Stoic monism, particularly Chrysippus' model of the unified soul. Both thinkers argue that human psychology is inherently structured, with distinct rational and non-rational components that interact dynamically. Plutarch provides a philosophical foundation for this view, while Galen builds on it with empirical evidence and practical applications. This structured self-model offers a more realistic and effective framework for understanding human nature and moral development, addressing the limitations of Stoic rationalism. Gill's interpretation highlights the enduring relevance of these ancient debates, showing how they shaped the intellectual landscape of psychology, ethics, and medicine in antiquity. (3)

Synthesis: The Structured Self

Christopher Gill synthesizes the Stoic and Platonic-Aristotelian models into the concept of `The structured self`, which integrates rational governance with the recognition of psychological diversity. This synthesis addresses the limitations of both monistic and part-based models, proposing a framework where reason harmonizes the psyche's components rather than suppressing them. (17) Gill's `The structured self` offers a compelling vision for contemporary applications, such as emotional regulation and moral development, by incorporating insights from both philosophy and psychology. (15)

One of Gill's key contributions is his exploration of how Galen's integration of medical evidence into Platonic psychology adds a unique, empirical dimension to the debate. Gill shows how Galen's reliance on anatomy and physiology challenges the speculative nature of Stoic monism, particularly Chrysippus' claim that emotions are purely rational judgments. His approach moves beyond abstract philosophical reasoning to ground the discussion of the soul in observable phenomena. By framing the debate as one that incorporates not only philosophical but also medical and scientific insights, Gill highlights how the part-based model gains practical credibility in a way that Stoic monism lacks. This shifts the focus of the debate toward empirical validation, making the tripartite model more defensible in a broader intellectual context.

Gill's analysis emphasizes the inadequacy of monistic models to account for the psychological and moral complexity of human experience, a point that both Plutarch and Galen articulate. He shows how Plutarch's critique of Chrysippus restores the importance of emotional and appetitive dimensions in human psychology, which monistic theories tend to oversimplify or deny. Plutarch's defense of the tripartite soul underscores the dynamic interplay between reason, emotion, and desire, providing a richer and more nuanced understanding of moral conflict and development. Through

Galen, Gill reinforces this argument by showing how physiological evidence confirms the distinctiveness of these soul parts. The division of rational (brain), spirited (heart), and appetitive (liver) faculties aligns with observable human behavior, making the part-based model more robust. Combining Plutarch's philosophical defense with Galen's empirical validation, Gill revitalizes the part-based model as not only a theoretical construct but also a practical framework for understanding the complexities of human nature. Gill's work highlights how the part-based model of the soul offers more effective ethical and practical tools for self-management than monistic models.

Gill critiques the Stoic view, particularly Chrysippus' model, for failing to provide actionable strategies for managing the tension between reason and emotion. If emotions are merely mistaken judgments, then their control rests entirely on correcting rational beliefs—a method that, as Gill points out, ignores the deeper, non-rational sources of human behavior. By contrast, the tripartite soul allows for a hierarchical but cooperative relationship between the parts. This structure provides a basis for self-governance, where reason does not suppress but harmonizes the spirited and appetitive parts.

Gill positions the part-based model as not only more accurate but also more practical for ethical life. This connection between the psychology of the soul and ethical self-governance offers a way to integrate philosophy with everyday human experience, expanding the relevance of the debate beyond abstract theory. Gill reframes the debate by showing how the positions of Chrysippus, Plutarch, and Galen reflect different methodological commitments and epistemological priorities. He underscores how Chrysippus' monism is rooted in the Stoic commitment to rationalism, prioritizing coherence and simplicity over empirical evidence. This methodological bias leads to an overreliance on speculative reasoning, as evidenced in the Stoic treatment of emotions as rational judgments.

In contrast, Plutarch and Galen's part-based approach aligns with a recognition of the complexity and duality of human nature, acknowledging the interplay between rational and non-rational dimensions. By situating the debate within these broader philosophical and methodological contexts, Gill provides a new lens for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of monistic and part-based models. This approach moves beyond the binary opposition between the two views to consider the philosophical priorities that underlie them. Gill's analysis culminates in the concept of `The structured self`, which synthesizes Platonic, Aristotelian, and medical insights into a cohesive framework for understanding the soul. The tripartite model does not simply divide the soul but emphasizes its structured unity, where reason's role is to harmonize the spirited and appetitive parts. This balance is both a psychological ideal and an ethical imperative.

Conclusion

The debate between Stoic monism and the Platonic tripartite model reflects deeper philosophical tensions regarding the nature of human emotions and rationality. While Chrysippus' unified psyche

offers a coherent framework for rational self-governance, Galen and Plutarch's tripartite model provides a richer understanding of emotional complexity and ethical development. Christopher Gill's `The structured self`` bridges these models, demonstrating their enduring relevance to modern psychology and ethics. *Together, these ancient perspectives enrich our understanding of the human psyche and its role in navigating the complexities of life.*

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