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Division and Animal Sacrifice in Plato's *Statesman* *

Freya Möbus [i]
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4908-1086
fmobus@luc.edu

Justin Vlasits [ii]
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0927-517X
jvlasits@uic.edu

[i] Loyola University – Chicago – USA

[ii] University of Illinois – Chicago – USA

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Abstract: In the *Statesman* (287c3-5), Plato proposes that the philosophical divider should divide analogously to how the butcher divides a sacrificial animal. According to the common interpretation, the example of animal sacrifice illustrates that we should "cut off limbs" (*kata mele*), that is, divide non-dichotomously into functional parts of a living whole. We argue that this interpretation is historically inaccurate and philosophically problematic: it relies on an inaccurate understanding of sacrificial butchery and leads to textual puzzles. Against the common interpretation, we argue that the example of animal sacrifice illustrates that correct division minimizes (it cuts into the smallest number possible) by first dividing dichotomously and then dividing non-dichotomously into "parts," not "limbs." We will show that both the philosophical divider and sacrificial butcher proceed exactly in this way. By taking Plato's comparison to the historical practice of animal sacrifice seriously, our interpretation provides better solutions to several textual puzzles than the common interpretation.

Keywords: Method, Definition, Dialectic, Plato, *Statesman*

Introduction

In a curious passage in the *Statesman*, Plato compares philosophical division to the practice of animal sacrifice:

> **[T1]** Visitor: Now let us divide (*diairometha*) part by part (*kata mele*), like a sacrificial animal (*hoion hiereion*), since we are unable to divide in two (*epeide dicha adunatoumen*). For (gar) one ought to always (*aei*) cut (*temnein*) into the smallest number possible (*eis ton engutata hoti malista…arithmon*).[1] (*Stat.* 287c3-5)

[1] Translations are ours. The last part of this paragraph literally says to cut "into the nearest number (*eis ton engutata arithmon*) as much as possible (*hoti malista*)."

According to the common interpretation, this passage marks an important transition in the *Statesman*.[2] So far, we have been investigating the statesman dichotomously (by dividing into two). But dichotomy has led to a problem: we could not separate the statesman from other caretakers of the city (*Stat.* 287b). Thus, the common interpretation proposes, Plato abandons dichotomy for a new method that is more appropriate for capturing the nature of statesmanship: the method of dividing non-dichotomously "limb by limb, like a sacrificial animal."

However, this common interpretation leads to a puzzle: immediately after Plato allegedly announces that we should abandon dichotomy, he gives what seems by all accounts to be a dichotomous division (kinds of knowledge that care for the city are divided into causes and co-causes of the city, *Stat.* 287c7-d5), which is *then* followed by non-dichotomous divisions (different co-causes are separated from one another; different causes are separated from one another, *Stat.* 287d ff.). If Plato were recommending that we abandon dichotomy entirely, why would he then immediately proceed dichotomously, indeed making use of a distinction that originated in the dichotomous division of the art of weaving? We argue that spelling out Plato's comparison between the method of division and the practice of animal sacrifice can solve this puzzle.

Against the common interpretation of this passage, we propose that Plato does not abandon dichotomizing (dividing into two) for non-dichotomizing (dividing into more than two). Instead, we argue that Plato unites both dichotomous and non-dichotomous division under one norm of division, namely minimization (i.e., division into the smallest possible number; cf. Hochholzer, 2016, p. 63-8; Vlasits, 2021, p. 291-2). Correct division minimizes: first, it divides into two, *then* into more than two. We will show that both the philosophical divider and sacrificial butcher proceed exactly in this way.

How we understand Plato's comparison between division and animal sacrifice in the *Statesman* may have important implications not only for our understanding of Plato's method of division in other

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We take this to mean "to cut into the number nearest to two," that is, "the smallest number possible."

[2] See, e.g., Carpenter, 2021; Gill, 2012; White, 2007; Miller, 2004; Scodel, 1987; Benardete, 1984.

dialogues like the *Sophist*, *Phaedrus*, and *Philebus*, but also for our understanding of Platonic philosophizing more fundamentally: what is the right way to do philosophy? How does one divide correctly? We hope that this paper will ignite more interest in Plato's comparison.

The plan for the paper is as follows: we will first discuss the two existing interpretations of Plato's comparison between philosophical division and animal sacrifice – the *Priority of Collection Interpretation* and the *Functional Cutting Interpretation* (section two). We will reject both interpretations because they are at odds with our text and the historical practice of animal sacrifice. At this point, we will give a brief introduction to the process of animal butchery in ancient Greece, that is, the process of dividing a sacrificial animal (section three). Afterwards, we will present our own interpretation – the *Minimization Interpretation*. In short, we claim that philosophical division, like animal butchery, minimizes, which leads to dichotomous and non-dichotomous divisions at different points in the process (section four). Our interpretation solves the textual puzzle: since Plato does not in fact abandon dichotomy, he can proceed to divide dichotomously right after *Stat.* 287c. Finally, we consider ways in which animal sacrifice might shed light on the nature of Platonic philosophy more generally (section five).

1. The Puzzle of Dichotomy

The Visitor introduces the example of animal sacrifice to help Young Socrates understand how to conduct philosophical division correctly. If you want to learn how to divide philosophically, the Visitor seems to say, think of how the butcher (*mageiros*) divides a sacrificial animal. Plato's comparison between philosophical and sacrificial division is, then, clearly important for understanding his method of division. But despite its importance, few interpreters have analyzed it in more detail.[3]

[3] One notable exception is Moore, 2015, whose interpretation we will discuss below. Many interpreters do not analyze Plato's comparison at all. For such an omission, see, for instance, Ricken's, 2008, otherwise careful and extensive commentary on the *Statesman*.

The comparison to animal sacrifice in **T1** raises three questions:

1. What does it mean to divide "kata mele," like a sacrificial animal?
2. The Visitor claims that one "cannot" divide into two. However, he then goes on to divide into two (the kinds of knowledge that care for the city are divided into causes and co-causes). How can the Visitor go on to divide into two, even though they are "unable" to do so?
3. How is dividing like a sacrificial animal related to "cutting into the smallest number possible"?

Any successful interpretation of the comparison to animal sacrifice at **T1** must be able to answer these questions. We will show that the two main existing interpretations of this passage – the *Priority of Collection Interpretation* and the *Functional Cutting Interpretation* – do not answer these three questions correctly. We will thus reject both interpretations and instead propose our own *Minimization Interpretation*.

According to Moore (2015), the example of animal sacrifice illustrates the priority of collection over division. Before we can divide anything into parts, Moore (2015, p. 186) explains, we must collect a whole that can be divided. In the case of animal sacrifice, "a living, whole animal must already be available for sacrifice before it can be butchered." Moore (2015, p. 185) argues that collection is "not only…necessary in advance of any division, it also appears to be responsible for identifying the distinctions among subsequently divided classes." In Moore's interpretation, collection has priority over division, and the comparison to animal sacrifice is supposed to illustrate precisely that. Let us call this the *Priority of Collection Interpretation*.

The *Priority of Collection Interpretation* does not clearly answer any of our three questions above – it remains unclear what exactly it means to divide "*kata mele*" (question one), why we cannot divide into two and yet continue to divide into two (question two), and how dividing *kata mele* is related to "cutting into the smallest number possible" (question three). Further, while we agree with Moore that

collection is important for, and in a sense prior to, both philosophical and sacrificial division (for example, the butcher must have united the bits that he will cut off into bits for gods and bits for men), we doubt that emphasizing collection is the point of the comparison. The Visitor tells us explicitly that the example of animal sacrifice illustrates how to *divide* correctly: "let us divide part by part, like a sacrificial animal, since we are unable to divide in two. For one ought to always cut into the smallest number possible" (*Stat.* 287c3-5). There is no textual reason to believe that the point of the comparison to animal sacrifice is to illustrate the priority of collection over division, simply because collection is never mentioned.

According to the most common interpretation of **T1**, the example of animal sacrifice illustrates that we should divide non-dichotomously into functional parts, that is, into interrelated, cooperating, mutually dependent parts that work together in an organic whole.[4] In this interpretation, the sacrificial butcher cuts off parts of the animal that have a certain biological function, specifically limbs, such as legs, arms, and the head. Thus, when Plato recommends that we "divide *kata mele*," according to this interpretation, he means that we should "cut off limbs" or "cut at the joints," that is, that we should separate functional parts.[5] Let us call this the *Functional Cutting Interpretation*.

According to the *Functional Cutting Interpretation*, Plato's comparison between philosophical and sacrificial division marks an important transition in the dialogue. So far, we divided dichotomously (i.e., into two parts), but dichotomy has led to an impasse: we could not separate the statesman from other caretakers (*Stat.* 287b). The example of weaving illustrated why: we did not distinguish causes from co-causes. At *Stat.* 287c, Plato thus starts

[4] Carpenter, 2021; Gill, 2012; White, 2007; Miller, 2004; Benardete, 1984.

[5] This understanding of "dividing *kata mele*" in *Stat.* 287c as "cutting off limbs" or "cutting at the joints" is widely shared among interpreters of the *Statesman* and not only among those who argue for the more specific *Functional Cutting Interpretation*. See, e.g., Carpenter, 2021, p. 139; Moore, 2015, p. 182; Grams, 2012, p. 144; White, 2007, p. 98; Sayre, 2006, p. 207; Miller, 2004, p. 76; Dorter, 1999, p. 207; Rowe, 1997. The earliest mention of this interpretation that we could find is Stenzel, 1931, p. 59.

using a different method, rejecting dichotomous division and requiring non-dichotomous division.

This new method of non-dichotomous, functional division is needed, this interpretation continues, because of the object of our division—the city.[6] The city is like a sacrificial animal, this interpretation proposes: all parts of the city cooperate with one another just like the parts of an animal's body cooperate with the entire organism. When dividing organic wholes like the city and an animal, it is best to distinguish parts by their purpose (*heneka*, *Stat.* 287e). For example, some crafts are for the "purpose of causing the coming into being of something as a tool," other crafts are "for the purpose of preserving what craftsmen have produced" (*Stat.* 287e). By distinguishing crafts according to their purpose, this interpretation argues, Plato distinguishes them according to the specific functional role they play within the city as a whole. But if we were to dichotomize, we would obscure the functional relations between statesmanship and all the other crafts. Thus, we need a different method—the method of division that the butcher (*mageiros*) uses when cutting up a sacrificial animal. According to this interpretation, when the sacrificial butcher divides an animal, he supposedly cuts off biologically functional parts of the animal, leaving them intact (e.g., he cuts off legs and arms); cutting into two (diagonally or horizontally) would destroy the functional parts. Likewise, the philosophical divider should cut off and leave intact functional parts of his object of division – in our case, the city.[7]

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[6] See, e.g., White, 2007, p. 98: "The Stranger is moving away from strict adherence to dichotomous division and towards division controlled by the nature of the reality to be divided."

[7] For this interpretation, see Miller, 2004, p. 76: "the stranger compares the arts, taken as a whole, to a body, that is, to an organic totality. The various arts are compared to the various "limbs" or "members" of this body. As such, they are essentially interrelated, not merely in the abstract sense of being physically connected but rather in the sense of cooperating, each with each other, and contributing, each in its specific way, to the well-being of the whole. Hence, to divide "limb by limb" is not merely to recognize the various kinds of work distinguished in accord with a division of labor; it is also to recognize both the interrelations of these kinds and the sense in which each, in being essentially interrelated with each other, implies or partially represents the well-being of the whole." See also Gill, 2012, p. 191: "the new procedure [i]s division 'by limbs (*kata mele*), like a sacrificial animal'… division by limbs breaks of parts off an

The *Functional Cutting Interpretation* faces serious problems, arising from both our text and the cultural practice of animal sacrifice. To see this, we will return to the three questions at the beginning of this section. According to the *Functional Cutting Interpretation*, dividing "like a sacrificial animal" means division "limb by limb," that is, cutting off biologically functional parts (question one). But we will see below that this is a historically inaccurate interpretation of animal sacrifice: the sacrificial butcher does not always or only cut off limbs and other biologically functional parts. What guides sacrificial cutting is not the biological functions that the parts play within the living animal, or so we will argue. Turning to the second and third question, we can see that the *Functional Cutting Interpretation* does not answer them. It remains unclear why we "cannot" divide into two and yet continue to divide into two (question two), and how sacrificial division is related to "cutting into the smallest number possible" (question three). In fact, both of these texts provide strong evidence against the *Functional Cutting Interpretation*, as we will argue now.

First, although the Visitor says that we "cannot" divide into two, he in fact continues to divide into two in the passage that immediately follows the comparison to animal sacrifice. There, the Visitor gives a dichotomous division (kinds of knowledge that care for the city are divided into causes and co-causes of the city, *Stat.* 287c7-d5), which is *then* followed by non-dichotomous divisions (different co-causes are separated from one another; different causes are separated from one another, *Stat.* 287d ff.). If the Visitor were recommending that we abandon dichotomy, why would he then immediately proceed dichotomously?

Second, the Visitor endorses dichotomy by endorsing minimization at *Stat.* 287c5. He says that one should "always cut into

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original whole, whose members are interrelated and cooperate in tending their common object." Benardete, 1984, p. III.120: "For this reason the stranger likens them [i.e., the seven classes of possessions] to a sacrificial animal…whose several parts, insofar as they are functionally definable, do not form an instrumental cluster of pairs. The seven classes form a whole which is not hierarchically arranged but, like the parts of an animal body, are mutually useful and dependent." Benardete's interpretation is problematic because, as we will see below, the parts of a sacrificial animal *do* have a hierarchical order (for example, the thigh bones of the animal are most valuable) and they are *not* "mutually useful and dependent."

the smallest number possible" but that means that one should cut into two (i.e., divide dichotomously), or if that is not possible into three, or if that is not possible into four, and so on. If all that mattered at this point were the functional relationships, then why continue to endorse minimization at all? This seems to rather indicate an element of continuity with the previous discussions that is lost on the *Functional Cutting Interpretation*, which postulates a significant break and a departure from dichotomy.

Against the *Priority of Collection Interpretation* and the *Functional Cutting Interpretation* we propose our own interpretation of Plato's comparison to animal sacrifice, the *Minimization Interpretation*: the example of animal sacrifice illustrates that we should minimize. Our first argument for the *Minimization Interpretation* is textual. When the Visitor says, "let us divide part by part like a sacrificial animal… *for* (*gar*) one ought to always divide into the smallest number possible," the "*gar*" suggests that "dividing into the smallest number possible" (i.e., minimization) is the point of the comparison to animal sacrifice; it is supposed to explain why we should divide "part by part" (*kata mele*).

The importance of the *gar* clause is generally missed in the literature on this passage.[8] In proposing that the main point of the comparison is to emphasize collection or functional cutting, both existing interpretations seem to ignore the *gar* clause, which leads to an awkward reading of our passage. To see this, imagine the following example. Imagine you tell me, "Let's live like Socrates, for (*gar*) the unexamined life is not worth living," and I take this to mean, "Let's live like Socrates and not wear shoes." Clearly, I misunderstood your point. Socrates may not have worn shoes but that is not the point of your comparison. The point of your comparison is introduced by the "for" (*gar*): you bring up Socrates as an example because he lived an examined life, not because he did not wear shoes.

[8] Some pay attention to the *gar* clause but still miss its significance. Sayre, 2006, p. 124-5, for example, understands the requirement to divide like a sacrificial animal (which he interprets as dividing according to forms) and to minimize as two *distinct* requirements on division, with the result that "the Stranger's advice here is that one should cut things into the smallest number possible, as long as the cuts correspond to Forms" (Sayre, 2006, p. 125). But such an interpretation does not do justice to the *gar* clause.

Our second argument for the *Minimization Interpretation* is historical: minimization is fundamental to the process of butchery. To see this, we will have to take a closer look at the practice of animal sacrifice.

2. Division and Sacrificial Butchery

Since Young Socrates is familiar with animal sacrifice, the Visitor does not need to provide any further explanation. For us, however, it will be helpful to familiarize ourselves with the procedure. In ancient Greece, animal sacrifices—the ritual killing of animals in the presence of the divine[9]—were performed "to communicate with the gods, heroes, and other divine beings…to thank [them]..., ask them for favours, protection, and help, or propitiate their anger" (Ekroth, 2014, p. 324). We can distinguish between the following kinds of animal sacrifice: sacrifices dedicated to the Olympian gods (*thusia*); sacrifices offered to the heroes or to the dead (*enagisma*); sacrifices before battle (*sphage*); oath sacrifices; and sacrifices as part of purification rituals, amongst others.[10] In all of these cases of sacrifice, an animal is killed; however, only in the case of *thusia* is the animal divided into parts and then shared and consumed by gods and men. In all other cases of animal sacrifice, the sacrificial animal was not prepared for consumption but either burned wholly, abandoned, or discarded. Since, in the *Statesman*, the Visitor references a sacrificial ritual that divides the victim into its parts, the kind of sacrifice he must have in mind is *thusia*.

Thusia was performed as part of the major public festivals of the Greek cities at public sanctuaries or designated cult places, but it was also performed on a smaller scale to celebrate important family events such as weddings and births.[11] Perhaps, scaled-down versions of *thusia* were performed at private homes, though the archeological

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[9] Naiden, 2015, p. 463: "a divine presence of some sort…is indispensable for the rite."

[10] For this distinction between the different kinds of sacrifice, see Hughes, 1991, p. 4-5; Ekroth, 2014; Naiden, 2015, p. 463-464.

[11] In Plato, see e.g., *Alc*. 1 121c7; *R*. 459e, 461a.

and literary evidence is not decisive.[12] The sacrificial animal was usually domesticated (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs). The species, sex, age, color, and number of victims depended on the god to be honored, the occasion of the sacrifice, and the economic means.[13] For example, cattle were most expensive and prestigious and thus mostly used in state-sponsored sacrifices rather than private ones. Any animal considered for sacrifice had to pass a careful selection process. Only animals determined to be "pure and perfect" (*katharos kai enteles*) or "most handsome" (*kallistos*) were suitable for the gods.[14]

Thusia was practiced in a very similar way across the ancient Greek world, although certain parts of the ritual could be "modified to suit the purpose of the particular occasion" (Ekroth, 2014, p. 324).[15] The animal was first adorned and then led to the altar in a procession. After the initial rituals were performed—which included food offerings, cutting and burning some of the victim's hair, sprinkling the victim with water to elicit signs of vitality, and certain prayers—the animal was killed, smaller animals by cutting their throats, larger ones with a blow to the neck first. The blood was collected.

The subsequent division of the animal followed an elaborate, rule-governed procedure and was performed by a particular person, the *mageiros*. The *mageiros* is butcher and chef in one, being in charge of both cutting up and cooking the animal. Based on iconographical (e.g., vase paintings), osteological (e.g., bones found at sanctuaries), and textual evidence (e.g., literary texts, sacrificial calendars, priestly contracts) as well as experimental archeology (replications of sacrificial butchery), researchers distinguish different steps in the process of butchery.[16] Below, we propose that these steps

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[12] Ekroth, 2014, p. 343. Cephalus in the *Republic* appears to perform a sacrifice at home (*R.* 328c).

[13] Ekroth, 2014, p. 331.

[14] Naiden, 2015, p. 468-469; Ekroth, 2014, p. 332-333.

[15] For one of the most detailed early descriptions of *thusia*, see Homer *Od.* 3.425-470. For helpful discussions of the ritual step-by-step, see Bremmer, 2007; Hitch, 2015; Ekroth, 2014, 2008.

[16] For a detailed description of the process of butchery, see Morton, 2024; Carbon, 2017; Ekroth, 2014, 2008; Durand, 1989.

can be divided into two phases, the first phase is dichotomous while the second is non-dichotomous.

The first phase in the process of sacrificial butchery is dedicated to dichotomous divisions:

1. The animal is skinned: the skin is separated from the rest of the animal.[17]
2. The animal is gutted: the innards (organs and intestines) are removed from the rest of the animal.
3. The carcass is divided into two: the butcher cuts "lengthwise through the spine" to divide the carcass into two halves.[18]

The second phase in the process of sacrificial butchery is dedicated to non-dichotomous divisions:

4. Each half of the carcass is cut into its so-called "primals":[19] depending on the animal and method, the number of primals is between four and seven. For example, a sheep can be divided into legs, flank, loin, rack, breast, shoulder, and neck/head.
5. Each primal part is further divided into "subprimals": for example, the thighs and the tail are removed from the back leg.
6. The subprimal parts are divided into "portioned cuts": the butcher cuts into as many pieces as needed to distribute to all participants, which may happen after cooking.

The animal was cut in this specific way for the purpose of distribution and consumption. Sacrificial butchery is fundamentally a division of the animal into two kinds of parts: those offered to the gods and those consumed by men.[20] The most important animal parts

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[17] The hide was removed first to avoid contamination of the meat, as Jake Morton explained to us in conversation.

[18] Morton, 2024.

[19] Primals are "the largest segments of a carcass that precede further breakdown into subprimals and portioned cuts" (Danforth, 2023, p. 439). "Within the world of butchery all animals are broken down into primals and subprimals, distinguished often by skeletal features as well as by culinary preparations" (Danforth, 2023, p. 232). For a step-by-step division of an animal into its primals, subprimals, and portioned cuts, see Danforth, 2023, especially chapter eleven.

[20] It seems that all butchery—not only butchery as part of *thusia*—was fundamentally dichotomous in this sense: a division of the animal into parts for

that were divided between gods and men were the back legs: the two thigh bones were wrapped in fat and burned on the altar, the smoke going up to the sky for the gods. The meat of the back legs was grilled and given to the priest as one of the best cuts. Likewise, the internal organs were divided: the edible ones (*splagchna*) were grilled and then distributed among the participants closest to the altar. The inedible ones were burned for the gods. The head of the animal was also divided. Which part(s) of the head would fall to the gods and the priest respectively appears to have varied; in some cases, the head was split in half, one half head (*hemikraira*) was given to the gods and the other to the priest;[21] in other cases, only the tongue and cheeks were separated and given to the priest.

During the final stage of sacrificial butchery, the remainder of the carcass was cut into parts of equal weight to be distributed among all remaining human participants. How many parts depended on the number of participants. Note that while the cuts were all equally heavy, they differed significantly in quality, some containing much more bone than others. The meat was distributed boiled or raw and consumed at the sanctuary as part of the feast, brought home, or sold at the market.

To sum up, sacrificial butchery has a dichotomous and a non-dichotomous phase both when it comes to the physical cutting of the animal and when it comes to its distribution. The animal is first cut into two and then into more than two. Its parts are first distributed between two (gods and men) and then between more than two (all human participants).

3. Resolving the Puzzle: The Minimization Interpretation

The Visitor's comparison between philosophical and sacrificial division has important implications: it suggests that philosophical division is fundamentally dichotomous, while also including non-

gods and men. Even non-sacrificial butchery—that is, butchery that did not happen at the altar in the sanctuary in the full-scale *thusia*—was not entirely secular or profane as one was still expected to offer parts of the animal to the gods (Ekroth, 2014, p. 343).

[21] On the division of the head, see Carbon, 2017, p. 160, 167-168.

dichotomous divisions. In particular, the process of animal sacrifice *begins* dichotomously, but it *ends* non-dichotomously. The division in the *Statesman* appears to follow the sacrificial ritual exactly in this way. To see this, compare step three and four of the process of sacrificial butchery that we described above to the divisions that the Visitor makes at *Stat.* 287d-291c: first, the butcher divides the carcass into two halves. Then, he cuts each half into its four to seven primal parts at once. Likewise, the Visitor first divides into causes and co-causes of the city (*Stat.* 287d). Then, he cuts each of these two halves into smaller parts at once, seven co-causes and between five and seven causes (*Stat.* 287d-291c).[22] Notice that the number of 'subprimal parts' is similarly minimal: four to seven in the case of sacrificial butchery and five to seven in the case of philosophical division of the city. Thus, we conclude that Plato's comparison between the method of division and animal sacrifice in the *Statesman* suggests that one should first divide dichotomously and then non-dichotomously.

Both dichotomous and non-dichotomous divisions are united by the norm of minimization, that is, "cutting into the smallest number possible" (*Stat.* 287c5). Cutting into the smallest number possible means dividing dichotomously into two, or if that is not possible dividing non-dichotomously into three, or if that is not possible into four, and so on. Minimization is fundamental to the process of sacrificial butchery. In the beginning, minimizing means dichotomizing, namely dividing into two pieces, (for example, cutting the carcass into two halves). At the end, minimizing means non-dichotomizing, namely cutting into more than two pieces but only into as many pieces as needed to cook the meat (for example, dividing the carcass into legs, ribs, belly, and shoulder). In both philosophical division and sacrificial butchery, minimization is not the *goal* but the *norm* that helps the inquirer/butcher to achieve their goals. Therefore, its justification is purely instrumental.

Why should we minimize? While we do not get an explicit justification for this norm, we can imagine an argument parallel to the justification for not skipping steps (*Stat.* 262b-264c). Not skipping steps is supported by considerations of safety (see below

[22] The exact number of causes and co-causes is debated. See Gill, 2012 and Miller, 2004.

T4), which we might here understand as reliably finding all and only the essential features of the target kind. The Visitor says that one might miss something essential if one skips steps. A similar line of thought would also support minimization: suppose the goal of division is to mention all and only the essential features of a target kind in order to produce a definition. Further suppose that you violate minimization. Then there *could* be a kind which belongs to the essence of the target kind and is the genus of several of the kinds divided into. However, this would not be included, as you divided directly into its subkinds. Thus, you would not meet your goal of having a complete account. The justification for minimization thus relies on the idea that following this norm *reduces the possibility of error*.

Likewise, in the case of sacrificial division, one might say that minimization is more likely to result in correct division. It is more likely to yield pieces of meat that are suitable for safe consumption and fair distribution. If one were to skip steps and cut into more than two pieces too quickly one might make mistakes that render parts of the meat contaminated or otherwise unsuitable for consumption. For example, if one were to skip step two and three above and cut into primal parts without first removing the organs, one might cut into the gallbladder and contaminate the meat with bile.[23] Minimization—that is, cutting up the animal into the fewest pieces possible—is also conducive to fair distribution. Cutting into fewer pieces than needed would mean that some would get no meat. Cutting into more pieces than needed would mean that some get less and others more than their fair share.

Given our *Minimization Interpretation*, we propose the following answers to the three questions we raised at the beginning of section two.

Regarding the first question, when the Visitor says that we should divide "*kata mele*, like a sacrificial animal" he does not mean that we should only "cut off limbs" or "cut at the joints," that is, that we should separate parts that played a certain biological function in the living animal. The butcher does not only cut off limbs (i.e., appendages, legs and arms in the case of mammals, and wings in the

[23] Danforth, 2023, p. 93, 124.

case of birds), and he does not only cut at the joints (i.e., at the interaction of two bones).[24] Instead, we should divide "part by part," where "part" refers to all of the parts of the carcass, which may or may not correspond with the functional parts of the living animal.[25] The half-head (*hemikraira*) is a "part," for instance.[26] To get those parts, the butcher does not only separate joints (i.e., cut at the intersection of bones) or cut off limbs; rather, he uses several different methods and performs different cuts, such as boning (i.e., removing bones from the carcass) and peeling the bone (peeling the fascia layer off the bone).[27]

Regarding the second question, when the Visitor says that "we are *unable* (*adunatoumen*) to divide in two," he does not mean that we should abandon dichotomous divisions entirely. Rather, he means

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[24] See also Hdt. (I.119,10), where the very phrase *kata melea*, "into pieces", is used to describe the cutting of a body to be cooked, and it is clear that the chef does not only cut off the limbs but also chops up the torso. In I.132, Herodotus also uses *kata melea* in the context of sacrificial butchery, and nothing in the text suggests that the butcher cuts off only the limbs of the animal. Outside of the context of animal butchery, numerous passages suggest that translating *melos* as "limb" is too specific. For example, Homer writes that Circe removed the bristles from Odysseus' shipmates' *mele* when she transformed them back into humans (*Od.* 10.393). Bristles are found all over the pig's body, and indeed mostly on the back, not even especially on the limbs. In Plato *Tht.* 209b, nose, eyes, and mouth are called *mele*. Sometimes the term gets paired with "*mere*" (*Phlb*. 14e, *Ti.* 77a), which may suggest that it cannot just mean "part." One could respond by saying that these are rhetorical flourishes made possible by the fact that two words with very similar meaning also sound alike. Indeed, even a defender of the common translation of *mere* as "limb" would have to say that "*mere*" is the more general term so that there is some overlap between them.

[25] In defending the limb-by-limb interpretation of *kata mele* in *Stat.* 287c, interpreters often point to *Phdr*. 265e. There, Socrates says that we should divide like a good butcher *kat' arthra*, which interpreters have taken to mean "cutting at natural joints." However, we suspect that this translation is also too narrow. The word *arthra* can mean "joints" or "limb" but also "organ." Any translation of *kata mele* and *kat' arthra* in these passages on animal sacrifice must accommodate that the butcher also chops up limbs and torso.

[26] When separating those "parts," the butcher tries to cut along what we might call "natural lines" or "natural seams" but not in order to maintain biologically functional parts but rather in order to make the cutting more efficient and less labor intensive and to maximize carcass yield (Danforth, 2023, p. 62). Again, such cutting destroys what used to be biologically functional parts.

[27] See Danforth, 2023, especially chapter four.

that we cannot make it all the way to the statesman by just employing dichotomous division. At some point in the process, the task will require non-dichotomous divisions in the same way that sacrificial butchery eventually requires non-dichotomous divisions. This solves the textual puzzle of why the Visitor continues to divide dichotomously: if the example of animal sacrifice is supposed to illustrate minimization, and if minimization includes both dichotomous and non-dichotomous cuts, then Plato does not in fact abandon dichotomy at *Stat.* 287c and it is not puzzling that he proceeds to divide dichotomously immediately after *Stat.* 287c—in fact, in our interpretation, this is to be expected because in philosophy as in sacrifice we first divide dichotomously, then non-dichotomously.

Regarding the third question (how is "always cutting into the smallest number possible" similar to "dividing according to parts, like a sacrificial animal"?), we suggest that "always cutting into the smallest number possible" (i.e., minimization) is one of the characteristics of sacrificial butchery. The butcher first divides dichotomously and then non-dichotomously. But there is more to dividing a sacrificial animal than merely observing the norm of minimization: the butcher should not only cut off as few parts as possible, but those parts should also be *significant* pieces of the animal (see step four above; the primal parts are large pieces of meat). This second norm of division is discussed earlier in the dialogue when the Visitor says, **[T2]** "Let's not subtract a single small part in relation to many large ones." (*Stat.* 262a8-b1)

Here we get the counsel not to lop off small pieces in a rush to get to the target. Putting this together with the norm that one must always divide into the smallest number of subkinds, we can see why our division should resemble "part by part" (*kata mele*) division: they should minimize and divide into big pieces.

In our interpretation, minimization is an important norm of division. This is further supported by the *Philebus*:

> **[T3]** The ancients, greater than us and living nearer to the gods, have transmitted to us this report that what is is always said to be composed of one and many, having naturally within them limit and

> unlimitedness. Now, since these things are structured in this way, we ought to always inquire by positing a single idea about each thing at each time (since we ought to discover its presence). **Now if we grasp this, after finding this one we ought to look for two, if that's possible and if not three, or some other number** and do the same again for each of these ones, until one is able to see that the original one is not only one and many and unlimited, but also how many it is. (*Phlb.* 16c7-d7)

Although there are many controversies about this passage that need not detain us, it is clear that the bolded sentence endorses a norm of minimization in division. The *Statesman* and the *Philebus* then both emphasize the importance of minimization. Mastering minimization is part of becoming a better dialectician *in general* (*Stat.* 285c-d) and is essential for anyone who wants to be wise about anything whatsoever (*Phlb.* 16d). We should "always" (*aei*) cut into the smallest number possible (*Stat.* 287c3-5).

We thus suspect that minimization is not necessarily restricted to any particular subject matter or sorts of kinds (e.g. functional kinds). Such is suggested by the fact that the *Statesman* features prominent divisions of humans and numbers as examples meant to inform a division of sciences (*Stat.* 262c-e). When we turn to other dialogues, it becomes even clearer that division is universal in scope, in the sense that is applicable in any and all scientific contexts: harmonics and phonology figure prominently in the *Philebus*, psychological types in the *Phaedrus*, kinds of crafts in the *Sophist.* It seems to us unlikely that there is some common feature of the types that figure throughout these dialogues. Now if non-dichotomous but minimizing division is supposed to be a general norm of division, it seems probable that it does not propose any particularly narrow set of kinds that it works with.

One might object to our interpretation that function *must* be at issue in the sacrifice analogy in the *Statesman*. What is new about the divisions that follow the butchery analogy, one might argue, is that they use the functional relations between various crafts. Against this objection, we maintain that emphasizing functional relations is not the point of the comparison to sacrificial butchery for two reasons.

First, the importance of function was already emphasized by the division and definition of the weaver but, crucially, in a *dichotomous* context. Thus, we suggest, the butchery analogy is not necessary to make the point about function. Secondly, biologically functional cutting *cannot* be the point of Plato's comparison to animal sacrifice because the sacrificial butcher does not always cut off parts that play a certain biological function in the living animal. Above, we saw several examples of such cuts: the division of the animal's head into two half-heads (*hemikraira*), the division into primal and secondary cuts, and the final division into parts of equal weight. All of these cuts destroy what used to be functional units in the living animal.

While we argue that functional cutting of an organic whole cannot be the point of Plato's comparison to animal sacrifice, we agree with the *Functional Cutting Interpretation* that the philosophical division after *Stat.* 287c emphasizes that the jobs of the target kind relate to other jobs in a cooperative activity. Our interpretation can accommodate this point. We propose that these non-dichotomous cuts happen at a later point during the process of division (just like non-dichotomous cuts happen at a later point during the process of animal sacrifice). These non-dichotomous cuts can be in accordance with functional parts, but they do not have to be. The example of animal sacrifice illustrates this nicely: the butcher cuts sometimes but not always in accordance with biologically functional parts. The reason is that, in sacrifice, the animal that is divided is not alive but dead – it is a *carcass*. The parts of a dead, sacrificial animal play different roles than the parts of a living animal. For example, the head of a living animal fulfills a different function than the head of a dead, sacrificial animal. Since the body parts of a dead animal no longer play the roles that they once did, the butcher may split what was once a functional unit (e.g., the head). By focusing on biologically functional parts, the *Functional Cutting Interpretation* ignores the fact that we are dealing with a sacrificial animal, that is, a carcass that is divided for religious purposes and consumption.

But if the butcher divides for the purpose of consumption, one might worry further, then he seems to perform functional cuts. While he does not cut off parts that have a certain biological function, as the *Functional Cutting Interpretation* proposes, he does cut off parts that have a religious function (namely feeding gods and men). So, one

might think that not biological, but religious function is the point of the comparison to animal sacrifice. But notice that this interpretation faces the same problem: it conflicts with the *gar* clause. The *gar* clause demands that the minimization norm, not functional cutting, is the point of the comparison. Thus, while we accept that the butcher divides for the purpose of consumption, we deny that purpose or function *is the point* of the comparison. Thus, we reject both the biological function and the religious function reading of the comparison to animal sacrifice.

If what has been said before is correct, what should we conclude about the role of dichotomy, and division more broadly, in the *Statesman*? It will be helpful here to divide (!) these conclusions into two categories: the methodological and the metaphysical. In both cases, our conclusions are supported by the earlier discussion of Young Socrates' errors in dividing animals into humans and beasts.

Methodologically, we see an interest in good and bad divisions. Philosophers, like butchers, can do their jobs well or badly. The Visitor shares at least two norms for division, that is, rules for dividing that make one's procedure less haphazard and more likely to be correct. One such norm is minimization (*Stat.* 287c3-5; cf. *Phlb*. 16c7-d7), as we argued above; another is step-by-step division (*Stat.* 262a-c; cf. *Phlb*. 16e-17a). We skip steps and divide too quickly when we think we see where things are heading. According to the Visitor, this is precisely what happened to Young Socrates when he divided animals into humans and beasts (*Stat.* 262a3-4). Socrates erred because he chopped off a small piece in a hurry (i.e., the class of humans), thereby skipping intermediate steps. Instead, he should have taken the safer route by dividing more slowly, step-by-step:[28]

> **[T4]** For it is most noble to straightaway separate off the object of inquiry from other things, if you do it correctly (just as a moment ago, thinking you possessed the division, you hurried the argument on, seeing it was heading towards human beings). But really, friend, such subtle work is not safe. Rather, it is safer to proceed by cutting through intermediates, and one would thereby more likely happen upon

[28] This interpretation is defended in Vlasits, 2021.

> forms, which makes all the difference in inquiry. (*Stat.* 262b2-c1)

The Visitor's advice to not lop off small pieces in a rush to get to the target applies well to sacrificial butchery. Neither the philosopher nor the butcher should skip steps. For example, the butcher should first separate the larger piece of the back leg before separating the smaller piece of the thigh bone.

Turning now to the metaphysics, our interpretation of the sacrifice analogy suggests that there are objective criteria for good and bad divisions. The facts about the religious ritual determine whether and where the butcher should cut. Similarly, we would expect something about inquiry into kinds to provide objective criteria for correct and incorrect divisions. This point is also confirmed in the discussion of Young Socrates' mistake. There the Visitor makes a fundamental distinction between a part (*meros*) and a kind (*eidos*), claiming that every kind is a part but not vice versa. These part-kinds are important because they are the essential features that we are aiming to include in our definition of the target kind.

When looked at from this perspective, **T1** does not constitute a radical departure as commentators such as Gill, 2012, Miller, 2004, and Scodel, 1987, have suggested. Rather, there is a deep continuity in the methodological passages. The Visitor identifies mistakes, or possible mistakes, and suggests general norms to avoid them. The goal of these norms is to hit at fundamental, essential relations between kinds that hold regardless of the interests of the inquirers, *kat'arthra tes phuseos*. This procedure is in stark contrast to the *Sophist*, where the Visitor barely pauses to catch his breath as he blazes through the first six definitions.

If we consider the different quarries of the two dialogues, this is unsurprising. The politician, unlike the sophist, is concerned with *nomos*. Thus, we would also expect the methodology of the *Statesman* to be concerned with correct rules, such as the norm of minimization. The dialectician in the *Statesman* can formulate such general rules because his subject matter – philosophical kinds – are regular. The politician, by contrast, deals with human behavior, which is fundamentally irregular. Thus, the politician must look at all

the particular details of the case and cannot rely on written generalizations.[29]

With the butcher analogy in mind, we can imagine several ways to think about the role of these generalized rules in dialectic. On a strong interpretation, one might imagine that division can be sufficiently constrained by general rules that there is no room for leeway on the part of the dialectician. On an intermediate interpretation, there might be some generalizations, but not enough to entirely determine what the dialectician would do in a particular situation. Finally, on a very weak interpretation, we could imagine that there are no real generalizations, and that insight alone is what is used by the inquirer (cf. Henry, 2011).

The analogy with butchery seems to support either the strong or intermediate interpretations. Given that the evidence about ancient sacrifice shows a strong interest in rules, it would be surprising if Plato would make the analogy in the context of rules for division only to think that they should be set aside by the mature dialectician. It might be thought that the analogy favors the intermediate interpretation. For, in the case of animal sacrifice, variations in the animal to be sacrificed, the occasion of the sacrifice, number of attendees, etc. all necessitate flexibility on the part of the butcher. However, the objects of dialectic (i.e., forms) seem to be insensitive to the sorts of variations that are found in the different sacrificial contexts. Division may not be as context sensitive because it is a part of dialectic, which Plato takes to be maximally rigorous and precise, even though it is not a mechanical process. Thus, it is unclear whether the analogy to animal sacrifice would extend this far.

In sum, considerations of the sacrifice analogy help point us towards a unified conception of the role of division in the *Statesman* by supporting the *Minimization Interpretation*.

[29] *Pace* Gill, 2012, and Henry, 2011.

4. Conclusion and Further Possible Connections to Platonic Philosophizing

We argued that Plato's comparison to sacrifice helps us understand philosophical division, specifically the role of dichotomous and non-dichotomous cutting. When the Visitor says that we should divide (*diairometha*) in accordance with parts (*kata mele*) like a sacrificial animal (*hoion hiereion*), he emphasizes that we should minimize by first dichotomizing and then non-dichotomizing.

While we focused on minimization, we suspect that the comparison to animal sacrifice is even richer and allows for a discussion of further similarities, even if such similarities are not the primary points of the Platonic analogy in the context of *Stat.* 287c3-5: (i) both sacrificial and philosophical division do not necessarily divide into mutually exclusive classes. Certain parts of the animal (e.g., the tongue) may first be given to the gods by placing it next to the altar and then to the priest after the ceremony is over;[30] (ii) what is divided must be most beautiful (*kallistos*): an outstanding animal in the case of sacrifice and immaterial forms in the case of philosophy; (iii) philosophical division, like sacrificial division, follows certain rules, but it does not proceed mechanically. For sacrificial division, which parts are separated and assigned to gods and men respectively varies to some degree, depending on what kind of animal is sacrificed to which god(s) and on which occasion. Likewise, philosophical division is not rote: the results of applying the norms in different cases may yield substantially different division because of the nature of the subject matter even though general rules are followed. (Compare: an algorithm to find prime numbers will yield different results when one inputs 7 and 9.) Both dividers, it seems, must have the second kind of the craft of measurement—measuring in relation to what is fitting (*prepon*, *Stat.* 286d).

Beyond the method of division, the comparison to animal sacrifice may have broader implications for our understanding of Platonic philosophizing: it suggests that philosophy, like sacrifice, is service to the gods. As such, both philosophy and sacrifice establish

[30] Ekroth, 2014, p. 327. See Vlasits, 2023, on non-exclusive Platonic division.

a connection between humanity and the divine, and both can be done correctly and piously or incorrectly and impiously.[31]

The idea that philosophy is service to the gods is common in Plato's earlier dialogues. In the *Apology*, Socrates repeatedly claims that his philosophical activity—refuting those who claim to be wise—is service to the god (*Ap*. 22a4, 23b7, 30a). In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates appears to accept that we serve the gods by promoting their work (*ergon*) (*Euthphr*. 13d-14c). In Plato's later dialogues, we seem to encounter a much bolder picture of the philosopher's relation to the divine: while the Socratic philosopher serves the gods, the Platonic philosopher becomes like god (*Phdr*. 265e-266c; *Tht*. 176a-b).[32] But if we take Plato's comparison between sacrificial and philosophical division in the *Statesman* seriously—if we think of philosophy as a service to the god—then we can point to an interesting continuity between Plato's earlier and later thoughts on the philosopher's connection to the divine, despite their differences.

The practice of animal sacrifice appears to have been very meaningful to Plato, and so it seems that he would not have used this example offhandedly. As for Socrates' very last words at the end of the *Phaedo*, Plato famously chooses the request to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius (*Phd*. 118a). When setting up fictitious cities both in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, Plato lays down strict laws on when and how to sacrifice. In the *Republic*, weddings (*R*. 459e) and births of legitimate children (*R*. 461a) should be celebrated with sacrifice. In Magnesia, Plato maintains, there should be at least one sacrifice per day (*Lg*. 828b). The laws concerning sacrifice are very strict. All sacrifices must be performed in public shrines. Private sacrifices are punishable by law—in certain cases with death (*Lg*. 910c). During a sacrifice, only certain songs and dances are allowed (*Lg*. 799b). Magnesia has such detailed laws about sacrifice because, the Athenian explains, "to establish gods and temples is not easy. It's a job that needs to be very carefully pondered if it is to be done

[31] Some sophists may be examples of the latter.

[32] For this interpretation, see McPherran, 1996, p. 291-302. "Plato has moved on to characterizing philosophers as divine," McPherran, 1996, p. 300, explains, "because their activity brings them into the bright region of divinity, into communion with the divine Forms." McPherran does not discuss Plato's comparison between philosophical and sacrificial division at *Stat.* 287c.

properly" (*Lg*. 909e). When we take the sacrificial metaphor seriously, philosophical practice takes on religious significance and we can better appreciate why Plato believes that not everyone is up to the task of being a philosopher.[33] [34]

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[33] For example, to engage in philosophy, one must be of a certain age and temperament (*R*. 539a-d).

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