

Nietzsche and Plato on Order and Disorder of the Soul

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1) Introduction¹

In a book that proved seminal in anglophone Nietzsche scholarship, Alexander Nehamas observed that “Nietzsche’s view [of the soul] ... is surprisingly similar to Plato’s analysis of the soul in the *Republic*. Both divide the subject, both depend on a political metaphor for the self, and both are faced with the problem of relocating the agent once they have accomplished their division” (Nehamas 1985: 182). Since then, Nietzsche scholars have often returned to the similarities pointed out by Nehamas (see Parkes 1991; Katsafanas 2011, 2016; Clark, Dudrick 2012; Janaway 2014). This paper continues that tradition.

Both Plato and Nietzsche see a close relation between human psychology and human conduct, as they believe that the kind of soul one has determines the kind of life one takes to be valuable. As Sarah Brodie puts it with regard to Plato, the soul “is essentially a valuing power”, i.e. “a power to create and maintain for itself the life it truly desires and thinks good, along with that lifestyle’s accoutrements or freedom from accoutrements” (Brodie 2001: 305-6). Nietzsche too argues that one’s values depend on the specific “structure” of one’s soul (see BGE 268). In short, Plato and Nietzsche believe that the notion of soul is essentially a *normative* one.²

As they think that not all kinds of life are equally valuable, Plato and Nietzsche must then conclude that some souls are better than other ones. But in which sense is a soul better than another? And what makes it so? These are the specific questions I am interested in in this paper. Answering them will require us to explore how Plato and Nietzsche each realize the first two moves alluded to by Nehamas, namely the way in which they divide up the soul as well as the different kinds of inner government they individuate.

¹ Many thanks to Chris Janaway for written comments on a previous draft, which prompted many changes, the major ones in section 5.

² Clark and Dudrick (2012) have forcefully made this point with regard to Nietzsche. Though I disagree on the way in which they spell out the normative dimension implicit in his conception of the soul, their initial insight is both correct and important. I articulate my disagreement in Riccardi (forthcoming).

Here is an outline of the paper. I start by considering in which sense Nietzsche's notion of the soul can be seen as updating Plato's own one (section 2). I then work out the deep analogies between the psychological typology Plato present in the *Republic* and Nietzsche's own conception of the soul's different hierarchical arrangements (section 3). The upshot of this discussion will be that there seems to be no substantive disagreement between Plato and Nietzsche, for both converge on the idea that the best possible psychological makeup consists in the harmonious unity among the soul's parts. That nonetheless some form of substantive disagreement between them exists is what the rest of the paper tries to show. My main claim will be that Nietzsche's essential disagreement with Plato concerns the role reason is supposed to play in the ideal soul. To spell out this claim, I consider the diagnosis of socratico-platonic moral psychology Nietzsche offers in TI's section on Socrates (section 4) as well as in BGE 181 (section 5). The result of this discussion is twofold. First, it shows that Nietzsche appeals to two different and unequally efficacious strategies in order to undermine the claim at the heart of socratico-platonic moral psychology that the soul's rational part—reason, as Nietzsche has it—should rule over the whole soul. Second, it reveals a tension between the diagnosis provided in TI and the one provided in BGE. I thus suggests two possible ways of solving this tension.

2) A Refinement of Plato's Ancient Hypothesis?

In BGE 12, Nietzsche argues that we should finally dispose of what he calls the “atomism of the soul”, i.e. the idea that the soul is “something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, that it is a monad, an *atomon*” (BGE 12). However, he continues, “there is absolutely no need to give up ‘the soul’ itself, and relinquish one of the oldest and most venerable hypotheses—as often happens with naturalists: given their clumsiness, they barely need to touch ‘the soul’ to lose it” (BGE 12). Who are the naturalists in question? Of course, all philosophers who try to reduce psychological states to biological ones would qualify as such. Nietzsche's formulation, however, seems to target a broader class. Merely touching the soul is sufficient to lose it, he writes. Arguably, reductionists of all sorts do not merely “touch” the soul: they deliberately and carelessly sweep it away. A more apt instance of the clumsy naturalism Nietzsche refers to might be Friedrich Albert Lange. Though rejecting reductive materialism in favor of a neo-Kantian view about mind and physical world, he suggests that psychology should abandon the traditional notion of soul. In a phrase that became famous, he advocates a “psychology without a soul”.³ Now, if Lange's position is indeed

³ See Lange (1887). Though Lange never actually uses this phrase, it became a famous slogan for the kind of position he advocates. See Gori (2015) on this.

what Nietzsche has in mind while writing BGE 12, its supposed shortcoming cannot be the endorsement of crude materialism. A better option seems to be blindness to the essential normative dimension of philosophical psychology—a dimension that the traditional notion of soul is, on the contrary, suited to capture.

Clark and Dudrick (2012) are therefore right that in BGE Nietzsche aims at building his own normatively oriented philosophical psychology by updating the traditional conception of soul. This updating, however, requires that we change that conception in a number of ways. On the one hand, Nietzsche clearly departs from the Platonic (and, of course, Christian tradition) by rejecting the idea that the soul is immortal.⁴ As he writes in a famous Zarathustra's speech, the soul is just "something about the body (*am Leib*)" (Za, "On the Despisers of the Body"). We should therefore replace the Platonic-Christian notion with the new concept of a "mortal soul" (BGE 12). On the other hand, and more importantly, Nietzsche wants to retain Plato's conception of the soul as composed by multiple parts. According to Plato's original version of this idea, the soul is composed by three parts: a rational or calculating one, an appetitive one and a spirited one (*Rep* 439 d-e). Nietzsche's own view, on the contrary, is alluded to by some new "concepts" he introduces, i.e. those of "soul as subject-multiplicity" and "soul as a society constructed out of drives and affects" (BGE 12). This therefore suggests, as Clark and Dudrick (2012) put it, that he takes up the basis idea of Plato's philosophical psychology according to which "human behavior is to be explained in terms of an internal or unobservable structure, the causal properties of which are specified in terms of the interrelations of its elements" (167).

Of course, one may wonder why we should assume that the soul is composed by different parts in the first place. The traditional answer to this question is that cases of mental conflict provide compelling psychological evidence in favor of such assumption. Consider Plato's famous depiction of the necrophiliac Leontios:

Leontius, the son of Aglaion, was going up from the Piraeus along the outside of the North Wall when he saw some corpses lying at the executioner's feet. He had an appetite to look at them but at the same time he was disgusted and turned away. For a time he struggled with himself and covered his face, but, finally, overpowered by the appetite, he pushed his eyes

⁴ Things are actually more complicated. Though Plato claims that the soul is immortal, he also argues that some of its parts depend on embodiment. Thus, such parts are arguably mortal. Nietzsche seems to be aware of this complication, as in a late note he writes that Plato wanted "something to be taught as absolutely true that he didn't even take to be conditionally true: namely the extra existence and extra immortality of 'souls'" (N 1888 14[116], KSA 13: 293).

wide open and rushed towards the corpses, saying, “Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight!” (*Rep* 439e-440a)

On the one hand, an overwhelming urge drives Leontios to take sight of the corpses. On the other hand, he feels disgusted by this very urge of him. Leontios’ one is thus a typical case of psychological conflict. Such cases, Plato argues, suggest that the agent is in some sense fragmented, which in turn seems to require that different mental elements are independently active in her or him. The very intelligibility of psychological conflict presupposes that the human soul is constituted by different parts that can somehow clash against each other.

Of course, if we assume that the soul has different parts, the question immediately arises about how those parts are supposed to work together. More specifically, cases such as Leontios’ one clearly illustrate that certain patterns of conflict among the soul’s parts are dysfunctional for the agent. So what is wrong about such specific kinds of interaction among the soul’s parts? And under which conditions, on the contrary, can their joint functioning be beneficial to the whole agent? The next section explores how Plato and Nietzsche answer these questions.

3) Ordered and Disordered Souls

A picture of the soul as composed of parts that incline the self towards diverging patterns of behavior immediately poses the question whether some specific arrangement among those parts better suit the soul’s overall welfare. Plato and Nietzsche both clearly see this problem and—however different their normative ideals might in the end look like—both agree at least about a *necessary condition* a soul needs to satisfy to prove just, as Plato puts it, or healthy, as Nietzsche sometimes puts it, namely *that a certain kind of hierarchical order obtains among its part*.

Let us start with Plato. In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates suggests that “to produce justice [is] to establish the parts of the soul in a natural relation of control, one by another, while to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature?” (*Rep* 444d). But what makes a certain hierarchical order among the parts of the soul conform or contrary to nature? To answer this question, we should first understand what it means for a given part of the soul to dominate another one.

According to Plato, each of the three parts of the soul naturally values certain objects and activities as good. Very roughly, the appetitive part naturally values pleasure of the sensuous sort; the spirited part naturally values honor and consequently all those agonal activities that allows one to stand out; finally, the rational part naturally values truth and

the good as such. By saying that a certain part of the soul “naturally” values certain objects and activities I mean that such objects and activities are its proper ends. Of course, each soul-part drives the entire soul toward its proper end: whether my appetitive part drives me towards grabbing another piece of cake, my rational part wants me to refrain from so doing. In order to dominate the other soul-parts, thus, a certain part needs to have them adopt its own proper end. For instance, if the appetitive part manages to recruit some of the calculating capacities constituting the rational part in order to maximize pleasure, we can say that the former part rules the latter one. Any hierarchical arrangement that obtains within the soul results from such a “principle of psychological hegemony”, as Brown (2012: 68) calls it.

So far we have seen how hierarchical arrangements in the psychological domain can get built. However, we still have to see what makes them conform or contrary to nature. As in the political community of the *polis* each social class has a specific role, Plato argues that each part of the soul also has a proper function. Therefore, if justice in the *polis* is realized only when its classes play the role they are assigned to (and only that role), justice in the soul obtains only when each of its parts perform its proper function:

“One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious.”
(*Rep* 443d)

So for Plato there is a part of the soul, the rational one, the proper function of which includes ruling the other parts. The just person is thus someone whose soul is such that its rational part occupies the dominant position in the soul’s overall hierarchical arrangement.

I now turn to Nietzsche. Like Plato, he thinks that one’s actions reveal the specific hierarchical arrangement among one’s psychological constituents, which he takes to be drives and affects. This is how he conceives of the nature of volition: “A person who *wills*—commands something inside himself that obeys, or that he believes to obey” (BGE 19). This happens, as he writes later in the same aphorism, “on the groundwork [...] of a society constructed out of many

‘souls’” (BGE 19), by which Nietzsche here means our drives.⁵ Of course, that the command issued by a drive ends up being actually executed by another drive will depend on whether the hierarchical relation among the two is somewhat stable and reliable. Otherwise, a recalcitrant drive would arguably try to overrule the orders it receives.

Let us take stock. On the one hand, Plato and Nietzsche seem to converge on two important points. First, they both take agency to require some soul-part to rule over the other ones. Second, they endorse a view of psychological domination according to which the lower-ranked soul-parts are made to pursue the ends of the higher-ranked one. On the other hand, Nietzsche disagrees with Plato’s claim that a specific soul-part—according to Plato, the rational one—is by its own nature designed to rule in our soul. To Nietzsche’s eyes, which drive or set of drives should dominate in one’s soul depends ultimately on the kind of person one is. As Nehamas puts it, “the question which should govern the self requires a different answer in each particular case” (1985: 183). It is a problem that allows no universal solution.

So what makes a soul “healthy” in Nietzsche’s sense? As some commentators have argued (see Gemes 2009a, Katsafanas 2011, 2016), that the arrangement of the drives proves harmonious—in some sense to be clarified—seems to be a crucial component of his conception of psychological health—as it was already of Plato’s one, to be sure. To spell out this idea, it is useful to start by considering those cases in which the drives fail to be harmoniously ordered simply because they fail to be ordered altogether. Nietzsche describes this condition as a form of “corruption” due to the fact that “anarchy threatens inside the instincts and that the foundation of the affects, which we call ‘life’, has been shaken” (BGE 258). Taken at its extreme, a condition in which no clear and stable hierarchy sets in among one’s drives ends up undermining agency as such, for the pursue of any goal becomes virtually impossible. Each time a drive makes me engage in a given activity, another drive will soon induce me to strive for something different instead. Moreover, in such a condition one will constantly experience “the inability to resist a stimulus—you have to react, you follow every impulse” (II, Germans 6). Any impingement on the body’s periphery will suffice to divert one from any meaningful activity. One ends up merely succumbing to inner urges and external stimuli.

This characterization of the anarchic soul is strikingly reminiscent of Plato’s own description of the democratic soul. This kind of soul ranks pretty low in the hierarchy of psychological types presented in the *Republic*, as its corruption and deformity is only surpassed by

⁵ This last claim, that may seem controversial, is defended in Riccardi (forthcoming).

those of the tyrant. The most salient feature of the democratic soul is its lack of any firm hierarchy among the desires it harbors and the pleasures it pursues. The democratic man

“puts his pleasures on an equal footing. And so he lives, always surrendering rule over himself to whichever desire comes along, as if it were chosen by lot. And when that is satisfied, he surrenders the rule to another, not disdaining any but satisfying them all equally” (*Rep* 561b).

There is “neither order nor necessity in his life” (*Rep* 561d), which simply consists in the rhapsodic satisfaction of whatever desire presents itself to his mind. Thus, as Johnstone convincingly argues, “Plato intended us to understand the democratic man as having an ‘anarchic’ soul – that is, one that is not ruled in a stable and enduring way by any of its elements or parts” (Johnstone 2013: 140)—something one could also perfectly write to summarize Nietzsche’s own position.⁶

Both Plato and Nietzsche disvalue a soul lacking a stable hierarchical order among its constitutive elements. However, they also agree that the presence of a dominating element exerting a powerful control over the other parts is also no guarantee of psychological harmony. To start with Nietzsche, he argues that certain forms of stable psychological hierarchy nonetheless yield an unhealthy soul. Consider, for instance, his characterization of the kind religious fanaticism embodied—to his eyes—by Buddhism and Christianity, which he describes as “a type of hypnosis of the entire sensual-intellectual system to benefit of the excessive nourishment (hypertrophy) of a single point of view and feeling which is now dominant—the Christian calls it his *faith*” (GS 347). The dominant “point of view and feeling” reflect here the evaluative stance and affective counterpart of the ruling drive, which is able to recruit the entire sensory and cognitive system. Here, the hypnosis metaphor is particularly suggestive. The hypnotized patient is externally controlled by the hypnotizer: the former only executes the commands she receives from the latter. Analogously, the fanatic’s sensory and cognitive system is fully controlled from the outside by her dominating drive. This means that whatever proper function and goal that system may have, its working is now subordinated to those of the ruling drive. Though fanaticism presupposes that a strict hierarchy reigns in one’s soul, it nonetheless qualify as a “*sickening of the will*” (GS 347). More precisely, Nietzsche writes that it constitutes the “only ‘strength of the will’ that even the weak and insecure can be brought to attain” (GS 347).

⁶ Parkes (1991: 62), who perceptively spot the analogy between Plato’s and Nietzsche’s treatment of the democratic soul, oddly ascribes to both of them a relatively positive evaluation of it. But this cannot be right.

Due to the austere psychological order on which it is based, that of the fanatic person may look like a case of strong will. Nietzsche, however, denies it actually is.

Let me now turn to Plato. As I have already mentioned in passing, the tyrannical soul occupies the lowest position in his ranking of psychological types. It is described as absolutely dominated by an utterly depraved kind of lust: “this leader of the soul adopts madness as its bodyguard and becomes frenzied. If it finds any beliefs or desires in the man that are thought to be good or that still have some shame, it destroys them and throws them out, until it’s purged him of moderation and filled him with imported madness” (*Rep* 573a-b). Such a dominating lust destroys all good desires and beliefs that are still left in the democratic soul to give way to the insatiable pursuit of the lowest kind of bodily pleasure. The resulting picture is that of someone somewhere between addiction and pathology.

Nietzsche and Plato seem thus to agree that, in certain cases, the *absolute* dominance of a certain psychic force leads to an extremely bad kind of life. There is, however, an important difference here. On the one hand, it is easy to see why Plato takes the tyrannical soul to be the lowest-ranked one: in it, any residual form of goodness gets completely destroyed. Thus, no other kind of soul departs as radically as the tyrannical one from the natural order in which the rational part rules. On the other hand, given that Nietzsche denies that certain drives are by their own nature designed to rule over the other ones it is not clear what makes the fanatic a bad type to his eyes. Absent a natural metric for the different degrees of psychological imperfection, Nietzsche scholars usually point at structural features of the drives’ hierarchy. For instance, Gemes (2009b) argues that we should distinguish between two basic forms of psychological domination. Accordingly, a drive could dominate either by simply repressing the subordinated drives or by sublimating them. Gemes argues that the soul is harmoniously unified only if the hierarchy among the drives is obtained through sublimation, and not repression. In the latter case the agent is alienated from a certain part of herself—that constituted by the repressed drives—and thus remains ultimately fragmented.

The main upshot of this discussion is that Nietzsche and Plato seem to converge on three essential claims concerning psychological unity.

1. A stable hierarchical order among the soul’s parts is a necessary condition for unity (as shown by reflection on the anarchic soul).
2. A stable hierarchical order among the soul’s parts is no sufficient condition for unity (as shown by reflection on the tyrannical (Plato) and fanatic (Nietzsche) soul).

3. Unity consists in the harmonious arrangement between the soul's parts (and perhaps other cognitive powers).

This is substantive agreement. Indeed, one may wonder where exactly Nietzsche is supposed to depart from Plato's picture. To be sure, Nietzsche denies that harmony simply consists in conformity to the natural order among the soul's parts, for he simply rejects that any such order exists. Nonetheless, this seems a relatively minor point when compared to the substantive claims he shares with Plato. Should we then conclude that there is no substantive disagreement between Plato and Nietzsche when it comes to the question of how harmonious psychological unity is realized?

4) Socrates' Soul

The comparative analysis carried out in the last section has revealed how deep the similarities are between Plato's and Nietzsche's conceptions of harmonious psychological unity. Nonetheless, it would be puzzling if Nietzsche's frequent anti-Platonic avowals were *just* smoke in the eyes of reader. It seems *there must also be* some substantive disagreement between them. Nietzsche's philosophical diagnosis of socratico-platonic moral psychology will give us some important clues as to where such disagreement actually lies.

In TI Nietzsche famously describes Socrates as embodying a profound "chaos and anarchy of the instinct" (TI Socrates 4). This condition, however, was not unique of Socrates. Most of his fellow Athenians suffered from the same kind of inner disorder. What's decisive about Socrates, however, is the way in which he reacted to his state of psychological disunity:

The same type of degeneration was quietly gaining ground everywhere: old Athens was coming to an end. – And Socrates understood that the world *needed* him, – his method, his cure, his personal strategy for self-preservation... Everywhere, instincts were in anarchy; everywhere, people were five steps away from excess: the *monstrum in animo* was a universal danger. 'The drives want to act like tyrants; an even stronger *counter-tyrant* needs to be invented'... When the physiognomist revealed Socrates to himself as a pit of bad appetites, the great ironist dropped another clue that gives us the real key to his nature. 'This is true', he replied, 'but I have mastered them all.' *How* did Socrates master *himself*? (TI Socrates 9)

Let me start by briefly reconstructing the sequence of psychological conditions and attitudes the ancient Greeks went through according to Nietzsche's narrative. What Nietzsche liked to call the

Tragic Age was characterized by a “noble taste”, which in turn rooted in an “*excess* of strength” culminating in what Nietzsche calls the Dionysian “*tragic feeling*” (TI Ancient 3,4,5). In such traits, he argues, consists the most intimate, awe-inspiring nature of the Ancient Greeks. However, according to Nietzsche the Athenians of the 5th Century were already far removed from that world. Whereas the fundamental vitality of the early Greek culture is supposed to depend on the effective taming of its powerful instincts, Socrates experienced a generalized psychological disaggregation—not only in the Athenian youth around him, but also and foremost in himself. Though less powerfully so than in the soul of the Greeks of the Tragic Age, the drives still act as fierce forces driving one in this or that direction: “they want to act like tyrants”, as Nietzsche puts it. Moreover, no drive emerges that is able to reestablish some form of psychological hierarchy. Overt conflict and subsequent confusion now dominate. Socrates, however, as he manages somehow to master such an inner chaos, is in a position to supply the disoriented Athenians with the yearned-for remedy: reason as the “*counter-tyrant*” able to tame one’s drives.

There are some intriguing parallels between the stages in Nietzsche’s story and those in the progressive degeneration of the soul as described in Plato’s *Republic*.⁷ The anarchic soul of 5th century Athenians as described by Nietzsche clearly resembles Plato’s picture of the democratic man. According to the genealogical narrative of the *Republic*, however, further decay of the democratic soul leads to the most miserable type of human being, i.e. the tyrant. Remarkably, the cure Socrates offers for the messy soul of young Athenians is also described by Nietzsche as a form of tyranny: that of reason over all other components of the human soul—most notably, over what Plato called the appetites:

When people need *reason* to act as a tyrant, which was the case with Socrates, the danger cannot be small that something else might start acting as a tyrant. [...] The fanaticism with which all of Greek thought threw itself on rationality shows that there was a crisis: people were in danger, they had only one option: be destroyed or – be *absurdly rational*... [...] Reason = virtue = happiness only means: you have to imitate Socrates and establish a permanent state of *daylight* against all dark desires – the daylight of reason. You have to be clever, clear, and bright at any cost: any concession to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads *downwards*...

Nietzsche places reason’s rising to dominance in a situation of extreme instability and danger: perhaps “something else” could have become the tyrant in our soul instead of reason. What this “something else” may be is left unspecified, but Nietzsche implicitly suggests that it would have

⁷ I owe this observation to Chris Janaway.

been a much worse option: reason's tyranny turns out to be a debilitating remedy, but it manages at least to keep its Athenians patients alive. Thus, the alternative scenario Nietzsche does not explicitly mention could be one in which an unleashed and destructive lust establishes its tyrannical rule, very much like in Plato's original sketch.

Be it as it may, it is important to stress that both Plato and Nietzsche take the tyrannical rule to develop out from democratic anarchy. Plato argues that the democratic man in which all different kinds of desires enjoy equal standing evolves into a type in which a very powerful lust for sensuous pleasure has taken over the entire soul. According to Nietzsche, Socratic response to democratic anarchy among the instinct consists in blocking all the (often unconsciously triggered) desires of sensuous nature by imposing reason's absolute rule. It is thus by no accident that he describes the cure supplied by Socrates as a form of "fanaticism". As we saw, according to GS 347 fanaticism implies that all the cognitive resources are recruited to serve "a single point of view and feeling which is now dominant". In the case of Socrates, such dominant point of view is that of reason.

At this point, one might wonder about the philosophical cogency of Nietzsche's criticism. Such criticism construes socratico-platonic moral psychology as aiming at the root-and-branch repression of all sensuous appetites. But isn't this just a gross misunderstanding of Plato's actual view of the harmonious soul? To be sure, there are passages in Plato's dialogues that seem to support Nietzsche's rendering. Many others, however, suggest a quite different picture. This ambiguity is nicely captured by Annas:

"There are two ways in which Plato regards the divided soul... In one he is trying to do justice to the way in which some aspects of us may fail to go along with right reason, and may need habituation and training to develop in rational ways and in pursuit of ends sanctioned by reason. The idea here is the harmonized, integrated person all of whose motivations are, without conflict, in line with reason... But Plato also sees the idea at times in a different way, one in which the person isolates the 'true self' in his reason and then externalizes the parts other than reason as something subhuman, rejected and kept under harsh external control." (Annas 1999: 135-36; quoted in Kamtekar 2012: 93)

Nietzsche's claim that socratico-platonic reason "acts like a tyrant" surely fits the second strand in Plato's dialogues. Our animal inclinations are experienced as somewhat foreign forces that acts on the self from the outside. Consequently, the proper way of dealing with them could only be thorough extirpation. This is not what the first strand in Plato's treatment of the soul mentioned by Annas seems to suggest. Recall, for instance, the description of the just man as someone who

“harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low, and middle.” As the comparison to musical harmony indicates, reason’s control over the other two parts of the soul does not require that the desires coming from these—including our sensuous appetites—be suppressed or eradicated, at least not completely. Moreover, it seems that this kind of harmony allows one to wholeheartedly identify with the different parts of one’s soul and with the specific way in which they are ordered. This aspect of Plato’s philosophical psychology seems to be something Nietzsche remains—or wants to remain—completely blind to. More relevantly, the case can be plausibly made that Plato’s ideal of a person able to integrate all her desires under the lead of reason is not essentially different from Nietzsche’s conception of harmonious psychological unity. Take, for instance, Gemes’ suggestion according to which such unity occurs when the dominant drive sublimates the subordinated drives instead of repressing them. In a similar vein, one could argue that the just soul described by Plato in the *Republic* equally requires that the rational part dominates the spirited and appetitive ones not via repression, but rather by sublimation.⁸

Let us take stock. The treatment of Socrates in *TI* reveals that Nietzsche’s main criticism of Plato’s moral psychology concerns the role reason is supposed to play within a harmonious soul. Unfortunately, the argument presented in support of such criticism—Plato’s just soul cannot be just after all, for it requires reason to act like an inner tyrant—is hardly convincing, as it assumes an extremely one-sided view of Plato’s position. Key passages from the *Republic* indicate, quite to the contrary, that reason’s rule does not aim at completely subduing our sensuous desires, but rather at mastering and perhaps sublimating them. Again, it looks like there is no substantive disagreement between Nietzsche’s conception and Plato’s (actual) one.

5) Socrates’ Soul Again

TI is not the only late work in which Nietzsche offers a diagnosis of socratico-platonic moral psychology. A somewhat different story is also to be found in aphorism 191 from *BGE*. Here, I want to argue, we can finally find a more plausible argument supporting Nietzsche’s criticism of Plato’s view about the role reason is supposed to play in a harmonious soul. To anticipate a bit: Plato’s model assumes that reason can dominate in one’s soul in virtue of its being an independent source of motivation capable of imposing its proprietary ends to the other soul’s parts. This is the claim against which Nietzsche argues. More precisely, his claim is that reason

⁸ See Berger (2001) for the case that both Plato’s conception of psychological harmony as well as Nietzsche’s own one are best understood in terms of sublimation.

lacks any independent motivational source: it merely serves the ends of certain socially-selected drives.

Though this point does not figure in Nietzsche's reflections on socratico-platonic moral psychology in TI, it plays the crucial role in BGE 191. Let us start with his treatment of Socrates:

The old theological problem of "faith" and "knowledge" – or, to be more precise, of instinct and reason – and so, the question of whether, with respect to the value of things, the instincts deserve more authority than reason – this is the same old moral problem that first emerged in the person of Socrates and divided opinion long before Christianity came along. Socrates of course had initially sided with reason, given the taste of his talent – that of a superior dialectician. And, in point of fact, didn't he spend his whole life laughing at the shortcoming of his clumsy, noble Athenians, who, like all noble people, were men of instinct and could never really account for the why they acted the way they did? But in the end, silently and secretly, he laughed at himself as well; with his acute conscience and self-scrutiny, he discovered the same difficulty and shortcoming in himself. "Why free ourselves from the instincts" he asked himself; "We should give them their fair dues, along with reason – we have to follow our instincts but persuade reason to come to their aid with good motives." This was the genuine *falseness* of that great, secretive ironist; he made his conscience seem satisfied with a type of self-deceit. Basically, he had seen through to the irrationality of moral judgments. (BGE 191)

As in TI, Socrates intervenes in the struggle between instincts and reason. However, Nietzsche's narrative here is somewhat different. First, Socrates is said to initially take reason's part by proving to his fellow Athenians that they act instinctively and thus irrationally, i.e. without being able to provide reasons for what they do. However, this is only the superficial result of his peculiarly disturbing practice. For Socrates soon recognizes that he is himself equally unable to say what the reasons for his actual actions are. He thus concludes that, instead of enlarging the cleft between reason and instinct, the best strategy is to have the former supply good motives to the latter. However, to Nietzsche's eyes this conclusion amounts to an instance of gross "self-deceit": Socrates, though he has actually realized its falsity, prefers to stick to the belief that our instinctive actions can be rationalized.

BGE 191 then continues by considering Plato:⁹

⁹ In a note in which Nietzsche first formulates the main points of BGE 191, the treatment of Socrates is less subtle and much more closer to the position Nietzsche ascribes to Plato in the published text. See N 1885

Plato, who was more innocent in such matters and lacked Socrates' plebeian craftiness, wanted to use all his strength ... to prove to himself that reason and the instincts converge independently on a single goal, on the Good, or "God"; and, ever since Plato, all theologians and philosophers have been on the same track. Which is to say: in matters of morality, it has been instinct, or, (as the Christians say) "faith", or (as I say), "the herd" that has had the upper hand so far. (BGE 191)

Whereas Socrates contented himself with a piece of self-deception, Plato pursues the project of showing that reason and instincts tend toward the same end, i.e. the knowledge of the truth and of what is good as such. Of course, this is not quite Plato's position; assuming that the term "instincts" here refers to the non-rational inclinations and desires in one's soul, what Plato actually thinks is that only a perfectly ordered soul is such that truth and goodness as such constitutes the end shared by all its parts. But I think we can bracket this, for Nietzsche's point seems to go through nonetheless: if reason, as Socrates has discovered, cannot determine my actions, it then follows that these simply result from my instincts. Thus, if reason and instincts share the same end, it can't be the end imposed to the whole soul by its rational part. It must be an end imposed by the instincts. Nietzsche's further contention, which he doesn't argue for in this aphorism, is that this end is the one harbored by a set of socially-selected instincts alluded to by the term "herd". That this is Nietzsche's view is confirmed by his qualification of reason as "only a tool of the drives" (BGE 191). Saying that reason is a "tool" of certain drives means that it inherits its goal from those drives. If that's the case, the soul ideal order envisaged by Plato turns out to be a psychological impossibility, for reason can't autonomously set any goal for the whole soul.

There are, however, two problems with the argument we can extract from BGE 191. The first problem is that Nietzsche's argument in BGE 191 turns on the assumption that reason and drives are fundamentally distinct. However, one could object that this misrepresents Plato's own conception. As Janaway (2014) stresses, that all soul parts can act as an independent source of motivation can only make sense if they are something very much akin to drives. This claim is clearly supported by an important passage from book IX, where Plato takes up again the discussion of the soul parts and maintains that each part has its proprietary pleasures and desires (see *Rep.* 580d-581c). As Cooper writes, this passage demonstrates that Plato's way of drawing "the contrast between reason and the other two [soul parts] is not really akin to the modern theory's distinction between inert, purely factual belief and motivating desire" (Cooper 121). As

34[36], KSA 11: 431. For the idea that Socrates tried to rationalize the actions prescribed by the "costume", see N 1885 34[136], KSA 11: 465.

long as Nietzsche claims that Platonic reason lacks any substantive motivational force, he seems to commit the kind of interpretive mistake Cooper warns us about. From this mistake, then, a further one follows, namely, Nietzsche's ascribing to Plato the claim that reason and drives are fundamentally distinct. If we accept this line of reasoning – as textual evidence suggests we should –, Nietzsche's contention that Platonic reason cannot possibly rule on the drives turns out to be unmotivated. At best, it would require additional arguments to show that.

To my eyes, Nietzsche could respond in the following way. He could accept that what Plato calls reason has a drive-like nature in that it motivates us to fulfill a specific goal. What he would deny is Plato's identification of reason so conceived with "an irreducible desire for knowledge", as Cooper puts it (121). Here, Nietzsche clearly sees Plato's move as some kind of ideological obfuscation. What Plato presents as a pure drive towards knowledge and goodness as such is, in fact, the product – or the "tool", as Nietzsche has it – of a set of pretty mundane gregarious drives. As we saw, if what Plato calls reason is just the product of such drives, it means that whatever goal reason has, that has to coincide with the goal of the "herd" drives it is the product of. As these drives don't strive for knowledge, neither does reason. More importantly, that reason has no goal independently from those of the drives it is the product of also means that reason is motivating only insofar as those drives are motivating. There would then be a weaker sense in which Platonic reason would indeed be inert, namely, *qua* lacking *independent* motivational efficacy: on the one hand, Platonic reason – conceived as a drive towards "pure knowledge" – cannot motivate us simply because it doesn't exist; on the other hand, the "real" patterns of rational behavior we display in our mundane enterprises are ultimately dictated by our gregarious drives. So whatever motivation "real" reason can instill in us, it derives from the underlying drives it is the product of.

The second problem I want to briefly address is that there seems to be an inner tension between the narrative Nietzsche supplies in BGE 191 and his later Socratic diagnosis in TI. In BGE 191, Nietzsche tells us that reason is merely the "tool" of the drives. In TI, he tells us that reason acts as a "counter-tyrant" that manages to rule over the drives. But how can reason tyrannize the drives if it is a mere "tool" of them? It seems that taken together the two stories Nietzsche tells us are inconsistent.

I'm not sure how to solve this puzzle. The best option seems to me to adopt a contextual stance in considering the two passages in questions. Nietzsche typically aims at exposing Plato's alleged sublimity as some kind of pompous masquerade. To fulfil this aim, he resorts to different kinds of argumentative and rhetorical tools. On the one hand, it seems obvious to me that *irony* plays an essential role in the way in which Nietzsche's tries to undermine Plato's moral

psychology in TI. As we saw, as long as he characterizes Socrates as switching from inner anarchy to inner tyranny Nietzsche was surely aware that these two conditions occupy the two lowest-ranked positions in Plato's typological psychology. My suggestion is thus: first, that Nietzsche uses these typological categories to criticize Plato's own project from the inside—though Plato depicts the just soul as aiming at truth and goodness as such, it looks rather like the quasi-pathological rule of a tyrannical reason over a jumble of fierce drives; second, that Nietzsche intends this maneuver to have an immediate ironical effect in that it reveals Socrates as oscillating between what Plato took to be the two worst possible conditions of the human soul. This, in turn, can be seen as part of the ruthless pathologizing strategy characteristic of TI's section on Socrates as well as of the general highly polemical tone of the entire book. On the other hand, BGE 191 seems to adopt a more straightforward argumentative strategy. The first and main part of the aphorism focusing on Socrates argues that reason doesn't play any role at all in determining our actions. The second part – where Plato comes into play – suggests that the only way in which reason could be seen as having motivational force is as a “tool” of a set of socially-selected drives. In that case, however, reason's motivational force would just be the force of those drives it is the product of. So BGE 191 seems to put forward a dilemma: either reason lacks any motivational force whatsoever, or it cannot act as an independent source of motivation.

7) Conclusions

In this paper I have shown that Nietzsche shares much of Plato's views about the soul. They both believe not only that the soul is made up by different parts, but also that a certain stable as well as harmonious hierarchical arrangement among those parts is required for the it to be “just” (Plato) or “healthy” (Nietzsche). Despite such a substantive agreement, Nietzsche wants to reject Plato's ideal of the “just” soul as dominated by its rational part. Nonetheless, it is not easy to reconstruct how he motivates this rejection. From the different diagnoses of socratico-platonic moral psychology he offers in TI and BGE, two alternative arguments can be extracted. However, both turn out to be problematic. The first one (from TI) is weak, as it presupposes an extremely one-sided reading of Plato's view. The second one (from BGE) proves more convincing, but seems to undermine what Nietzsche says in TI. We are therefore left with a tension between his two diagnoses of socratico-platonic moral psychology. My tentative suggestion is that we can solve this tension by seeing TI and BGE as pursuing two different argumentative and rhetorical strategies in order to undermine Plato's moral psychology.

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