

## PLATO AND TRIPARTITION OF SOUL<sup>1</sup>

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According to a standard interpretation, Plato's conception of our moral psychology evolved over the course of his written dialogues. In his earlier dialogues, notably the *Protagoras*, *Meno*, and *Gorgias*, Plato's Socrates maintains that we always do what we believe is best. Many commentators infer from this that Socrates holds that the psyche is simple, in the sense that there is only one ultimate source of motivation: reason. By contrast, in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*, Socrates holds that the psyche is complex, or has three distinct and semi-autonomous sources of motivation, which he calls the reasoning, spirited, and appetitive parts. While the rational part determines what is best overall and motivates us to pursue it, the spirited and appetitive parts incline us towards different objectives, such as victory, honor, and esteem, or the satisfaction of our desires for food, drink, and sex.

Many of Plato's readers think his views evolved for the better, at least in so far as the tripartite theory of the psyche seems better suited to explain the experience of motivational conflict, or the experience of believing that some course of action is best overall and yet feeling simultaneously inclined to do something else. According to the tripartite theory, we can have this experience because we have distinct and semi-autonomous sources of motivation, each with its own distinctive way of assessing and responding to the world. More specifically, reason is oriented towards what is best overall, but spirit is solely focused on the pursuit of victory and honor, and the appetitive part is single-mindedly attuned to the satisfaction of bodily desires.

Socrates's tripartite psychology seems intuitive enough, at least in broad outline; but in fact, it is more puzzling than it might first appear. While it is obvious that Socrates primarily characterizes and distinguishes the parts in terms of what each desires and pursues, what is less often brought to the fore is that he also characterizes and distinguishes the parts in terms of how they think. More specifically, he claims that the rational part forms its beliefs on the basis of rational calculation, while the spirited and appetitive parts form their beliefs on the basis of how things appear, without scrutinizing those appearances.

Socrates's dual characterization of the parts of the soul raises a question: why does he characterize each part as having the particular desires and cognitive abilities that he does? While it is perhaps reasonably clear why Socrates might think that the part that desires what is in fact best overall is also the part that engages in rational calculation, it is less clear why he would think that the part that desires victory, honor, and esteem, and the part that desires food, drink, and sex, are also parts that form their beliefs on the basis of appearances alone. As long as Socrates attributes to the spirited and appetitive parts the capacity to form beliefs at all, then why not attribute to them the capacity to form their beliefs using more sophisticated ways of reasoning? In general, how do facts about what a part desires relate to facts about how it thinks?

In this chapter, I suggest an answer to this question, one that I hope sheds light on the nature of the parts of the soul and so on Plato's theory of tripartition more generally. I begin in the first section by presenting the evidence that Socrates distinguishes and characterizes the parts of the soul along two dimensions: in terms of what they desire and in terms of how they think. In the second section, I consider and reject one possible account of the relationship between what a part desires and how it thinks. In the third section, I present an account of the parts of the soul which highlights the fact that each part of the soul has a specific function or capacity, and I show how this account suggests an answer to the question of why Socrates thinks that only the rational part forms its beliefs on the basis of calculation, while the spirited and appetitive parts form their beliefs on the basis of appearances alone. In the conclusion, I show that Socrates's theory bears a notable resemblance to contemporary dual process theories of judgment, according to which we have two distinct processes for forming judgments, one which is broadly akin to reflection and another to intuition.

### 1. Two characterizations of the parts of the soul

Perhaps Socrates's most well-known argument for the view that the soul has three parts occurs in *Republic* IV. Socrates begins by noting that it is obvious that we can do and desire different things. For example, we can love learning and acquire knowledge, we can get angry, and we can have appetites for the pleasures of things like food and sex. What is less obvious, he claims, is whether we do these things with the whole soul once we feel the impulse, or whether we do them with some distinct aspect or part of the soul (435e–436b). Socrates wants to know, then, whether the soul has distinct parts that can function independently and so by themselves lead the person to act, while the other parts of us play no role in desiring and pursuing that action, or even positively resist.

Socrates thinks that the experience of a certain kind of psychological conflict shows that the soul does contain distinct sources of desire and motivation. More specifically, he thinks that the fact that we can simultaneously desire and be averse to the very same object or course of action shows that we must have distinct parts of the soul. Socrates begins by pointing out that sometimes people determine

through reasoning that they should not drink and so are averse to drinking, and yet are thirsty and so desire to drink. He claims that this shows that there are two parts of the soul: the rational part, which determines what is best and gives rise to motivations to act accordingly, and the irrational and appetitive element, which feels passion, hungers, thirsts, and is stirred by other appetites (439a–e). Socrates goes on to argue that there is a third part of the soul, the spirited part. He presents the case of Leontius, who has an appetitive desire to look at some recently executed corpses, but is simultaneously disgusted at the thought of acting this way. Socrates claims that it is Leontius's appetitive part which gives rise to the desire to look at corpses, while his spirited part gives rise to his disgust and is averse to the very same action (339e–440a). To show that the spirited part is distinct from the rational part, Socrates presents the case of Odysseus, who returns home from a long journey to find that his maids are flirting with his enemies in his own home. He is angry and shamed at this insulting behavior and desires to retaliate immediately; at the same time he is opposed to this action and struggles to restrain himself from retaliating (440b–c). According to Socrates, Odysseus's spirit is the source of the desire to retaliate, while his reason urges him to wait, presumably on the grounds that it is best overall not to act on his anger at this point in time.

Socrates thinks, then, that these experiences of motivational conflict show that we can experience and assess the same situation from radically different and even opposed perspectives. This suggests in turn that within each of us there are distinct parts of the soul, each with its own aims and desires. Socrates's examples identify three such parts: the rational part, which cares about what is best overall; the spirited part, which is attuned to honor and esteem; and the appetitive part, which is solely interested in satisfying desires for things like food, drink, and sex.

But motivational conflict is not the only type of conflict that Socrates uses to show that the soul has parts. In *Republic X*, during the course of his critique of the imitative arts, and in particular, tragedy, Socrates draws on the experience of cognitive conflict to show that our souls have distinct parts, each with its own characteristic way not of desiring, but of thinking. Socrates begins by noting that sometimes the same object appears larger when viewed from nearby but smaller when viewed from a distance, or sometimes the same object can appear straight when seen out of the water but bent when seen in the water. In these cases, we use calculation (i.e. measuring, counting, weighing) to assist us. Nonetheless, sometimes, even when we have calculated that something is larger or smaller than others, or the same size, the opposite simultaneously appears to hold of these same things. According to Socrates, this shows that we have distinct parts of the soul, each with its own way of forming judgments about the world: the rational part, which forms its beliefs on the basis of calculations, and 'the inferior part,' which forms its beliefs on the basis of how things appear alone (602c–603a).

This alternative characterization of the parts of the soul poses a puzzle for commentators, for it is not clear how, if at all, this characterization of the parts of the soul relates to Socrates's earlier characterization. In the first place, in *Republic X*, Socrates claims that there are two parts of the soul, while earlier he had claimed

that there were three. In addition, in book X, Socrates characterizes the parts in terms of how they form beliefs, while earlier he characterized them in terms of what they pursue. These differences have led some scholars to conclude that, in book X, Socrates is referring to a different division of the soul. Specifically, he is highlighting a division within the rational part into its superior and inferior elements.<sup>2</sup>

There is sufficient evidence, however, to reject this conclusion, and to think instead that the so-called inferior part is or includes the spirited and appetitive parts.<sup>3</sup> Immediately following his division of the soul into the rational and inferior element, Socrates presents yet another characterization of the parts of the soul. He claims that just as we can be conflicted in matters of sight, we can be conflicted in matters of action. When someone loses a son or something else he values highly, he may be tempted to give himself over to grieving and do many things he would not want anyone else to see him doing, and yet at the same time he might resist excessive lamentation and try to have a more measured response in the face of his pain. According to Socrates, it is the rational part that deliberates about what is best given the circumstances and motivates the person to arrange his affairs accordingly, while it is the irrational, idle part that leads us to recollections of our suffering and lamentation (603c–604d). But Socrates then goes on to equate the part that experiences strong emotions with the part that believes on the basis of appearances. Specifically, he claims that imitative poetry, in particular, tragedy, should not be allowed in the city, since it gratifies this lamenting element, which he then describes as “the element in it that lacks understanding and cannot distinguish bigger from smaller, but believes the same thing to be now large, now small”<sup>4</sup> (605a–c). Thus, Socrates thinks that the part that experiences strong feelings and desires is also the part that forms its beliefs on the basis of appearances alone. Socrates then goes on to loosely equate this part of the soul with the spirited and appetitive parts, for he claims that imitative poetry nurtures and waters the anger, sexual desires, and appetites, pleasures, and pains that accompany all of our actions (606d). Thus it is reasonable to conclude that the ‘inferior’ part of the soul, the part that believes on the basis of appearances, is or includes the spirited and appetitive parts.

The general psychological picture, then, is compatible with the picture presented in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates likens the soul to the union of a charioteer and two winged horses, one noble and obedient, and the other unruly (246a–b). The charioteer represents reason, the good horse represents the spirited part, and the bad horse represents the appetitive part. In this image, Socrates depicts the rational part as importantly distinct from the spirited and appetitive parts, and he suggests that the rational part is more closely tied to what makes us human. The passages we have been examining in the *Republic* tell us why Socrates depicts the parts in this way: the rational part of the soul is the only part that is capable of scrutinizing appearances and using calculation to figure out the truth. The spirited and appetitive parts, on the other hand, are different from one another in so far as they desire different things (victory, honor, esteem, and things like food, drink,

sex, respectively), but they are similar to one another in so far as they think in similar ways; more specifically, both form their beliefs on the basis of appearances alone.

But all of this raises a question: why would Socrates argue that the spirited part, the part that gets angry, forms its beliefs on the basis of appearances? And similarly, why would he claim that the appetitive part, the part that thirst, hungers, and feels desires for sex, also forms beliefs on the basis of appearances? I should stress here that I am not asking why Socrates attributes to each part the capacity to both desire certain things and to form beliefs about the world. I am not, that is, asking why he characterizes the parts as agent-like in this way. Instead, I am asking why he characterizes each part as having the particular motivational and cognitive capacities that he does. More specifically, I am asking why he associates certain desires with certain ways of thinking. While it is reasonable to hold that the part that desires what is best overall is associated with the part that is capable of calculating, it is less clear why the spirited and appetitive parts should be associated with forming their beliefs on the basis of how things appear alone. Why does Socrates deny them the ability to scrutinize appearances? And why does he deny them the ability to weigh, measure, and calculate?

## 2. Appetitive and spirited desires and appearances

Surprisingly, commentators have paid scant attention to this question, perhaps on the grounds that there is no principled reason for Socrates to think that the spirited and appetitive parts must form their beliefs on the basis of appearances. A recent commentator sums up this thought sharply: “Plato presumably fails to see that his argument will not work, that desire has nothing to do with optical illusions, because he thinks of the lower part of the soul as being merely the trashy and reason-resisting part.”<sup>5</sup> Other commentators, however, have ventured a solution. They have argued that, for Socrates, the fundamental difference between the parts of the soul is the one expressed in *Republic X*: the rational part forms its attitudes, its beliefs and desires, on the basis of calculation, while the non-rational, inferior parts form attitudes on the basis of how things appear. In the case of forming desires, the rational part forms its desires on the basis of calculating about what is good and bad, while the non-rational parts form their desires solely on the basis of what *seems* or *appears* good or bad, without subjecting those appearances to scrutiny. These commentators argue, then, that it *is* reasonable for Socrates to associate certain desires with a certain way of thinking. More specifically, it is reasonable to think that the part that desires what is best overall is the part that calculates about what is best, since desiring what is best overall is a response to having a belief about what is best overall. And it is reasonable to claim that the part that seeks victory, honor, and esteem and the part that desires food, drink, and sex are also the parts that form attitudes on the basis of appearances, for these desires just are responses to things appearing good and bad. Indeed, the cognitive character of the parts explains the motivational character of the parts: it is *because* the rational

part forms its attitudes on the basis of calculation that it desires the things that it does, and it is *because* the appetitive and spirited parts form their attitudes on the basis of what merely appears good or bad that they desire the things that they do.<sup>6</sup>

What is the evidence for this view? It is difficult to deny that Socrates holds that the rational part forms its desires on the basis of calculation. In the argument for soul division in *Republic* IV, where Socrates first distinguishes the rational from the appetitive part, Socrates explicitly claims that the impulse to prevent the thirsty person from drinking arises from calculation, presumably about whether it is good or bad to drink (439c). But why think that Socrates holds that the spirited and appetitive parts form their desires on the basis of what appears good? The evidence is twofold. First, there is evidence that Socrates holds that spirited and appetitive desires involve cognizing the object of desire as good. Second, there is evidence that he thinks these evaluations are based on the fact that the object appears good or bad. I consider each piece of evidence in turn.

While many commentators have thought that only the rational part desires ‘under the guise of the good,’ there is strong evidence for thinking that the desires that emanate from the spirited and appetitive parts also involve cognizing the object of desire as good.<sup>7</sup> First, in *Republic* VI, Socrates claims that everyone pursues the good and does everything for its sake (505d–e); this suggests that even when an individual is motivated by spirited or appetitive desires, he or she pursues those objects thinking that they are good. Second, in *Republic* VIII, Socrates criticizes the individual who controls his appetitive desires by force instead of “persuading them that they had better not” or taming them with arguments (554c–d). It is reasonable to think that persuading and taming our desires through argument involves showing that the object of desire is not worth pursuing, and this in turn suggests that appetites crucially involve representing their objects as good. Finally, also in *Republic* VIII, Socrates describes how appetites can shape the beliefs of someone who does not have knowledge. He says,

they [his appetites] seize the citadel of the young man’s soul, since they realize that it is empty of . . . fine studies and practices. . . . Then, I suppose, beliefs and arguments that are lying imposters rush up and occupy this same part of him in place of the others.

(560b–c, my brackets)

Socrates is clear here that appetites can affect one’s beliefs about value, and this suggests that appetites involve cognizing the objects of desire as good. Thus, there is evidence for thinking that spirited and appetitive desires involve cognizing their objects as good. But how, then, do the spirited and appetitive parts arrive at these evaluations?

It is reasonable to think that while the rational part forms its desires on the basis of calculating about what is good and bad, the non-rational parts form their desires solely on the basis of what appears good and bad. As we have seen, *Republic* X explicitly states that the non-rational part of the soul forms its attitudes on the basis of how things appear alone. Moreover, in another dialogue, the *Protagoras*,

Socrates explicitly claims that things can appear good or bad and that desires are responses to those appearances. In a passage that bears a striking resemblance to the passage we have been discussing in *Republic X*, Socrates says that just as things can look bigger than they really are when seen from close-by and smaller when seen from a distance, so pleasures can seem greater than they really are when near at hand, and smaller than they really are when in the future. While knowledge, understood in this passage as the art of measurement, can show us the truth about what is good and bad, the ‘power of appearance’ can make us wander around confused, regretting our choices and actions (352b–357e). This passage suggests, then, that there are two ways of forming ideas about value and so desires: we can reason and calculate, or we can go with the way things appear. Of course, there are crucial differences between the moral psychology presented in the *Protagoras* and the *Republic*. Perhaps most importantly (at least for our purposes), the *Protagoras* is silent on the issue of whether we have distinct parts of the soul and thus on whether desires based on reasoning and desires based on appearances emanate from different parts of the soul. Nonetheless, the passage makes clear that Socrates holds that things can appear good or bad, better or worse, and that some desires are responses to those appearances.

To reiterate, then, recent scholars argue that it is reasonable for Socrates to think that the part that desires victory, honor, and esteem and the part that desires food, drink, and sex are also parts that form their attitudes on the basis of appearances, since their desires just are responses to things appearing good. Indeed, the tendency to form attitudes on the basis of appearances explains the motivational character of these parts: it is *because* spirited and appetitive parts form their attitudes on the basis of appearances that they desire the things that they do.

While I agree with this view in broad outline, I do not think it captures the full story. We can begin with the most obvious problem for this view. This view holds that the fundamental difference between the parts of the soul is how they form their attitudes: the rational part forms its attitudes on the basis of calculations, while the non-rational parts form their attitudes on the basis of appearances. But of course throughout most of the *Republic*, Socrates argues that the soul has *three* parts; indeed, there is a suggestion that there may be more than three parts (443d). How, then, can the difference between two tendencies – forming attitudes on the basis of calculation versus forming attitudes on the basis of how things appear – fully explain why there are three parts of the soul?

Defenders of the view we have been considering hold that the non-rational part of the soul, the part that forms its attitudes on the basis of how things appear, includes the spirited and appetitive parts. Perhaps the most obvious way to respond to this question, then, is to argue that the distinction between spirit and appetite is made on the basis of the different things that appear good to each. More specifically, victory, honor, and esteem appear good to the spirited part and so it forms its attitudes on the basis of these appearances. But things like food, drink, and sex appear good to the appetitive part and so it forms its attitudes on the basis of these appearances.

If, however, we assume, quite reasonably, that for something to appear good just is or at least includes being attracted to that thing, then it seems there is something about each part that is already positively attuned to and attracted to the relevant objects, *independently* of the tendency to form beliefs and desires on the basis of appearances.<sup>8</sup> And if this is true, then we cannot conclude that the tendency to form attitudes on the basis of appearances explains the tendency to desire certain things. The tendency to be attracted to and so ultimately desire certain things seems fundamental to the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul. And indeed this makes sense: it seems that we are creatures who find victory, honor, and esteem, as well as food, drink, and sex, attractive and good, independently of whether we also have a tendency to form beliefs and desires on the basis of how things appear. Whatever else the purposes of the tripartite theory, it certainly seems designed first and foremost to highlight this human tendency to find certain things attractive in order to explain common motivational patterns.

If all this is correct, then we still do not have an answer to our original question. We cannot say that Socrates associates the desire for victory, honor, and esteem, and the desire for food, drink, and sex, with forming beliefs on the basis of appearances since this cognitive tendency explains why we have these desires. Instead, we have seen that the tendency to be attracted to these things is fundamental to the parts of the soul. Thus, we still need an explanation for why Socrates associates the desire for victory, honor, and esteem, and food, drink, and sex, with the tendency to form beliefs on the basis of appearances alone.

### 3. The parts of the soul, function, and value

I propose that to answer our question we should look more carefully at the nature of the part. Most commentators have sought to illuminate the nature of the parts by focusing on the distinct things they desire and pursue.<sup>9</sup> But in fact Socrates also characterizes the parts as capable of *doing* distinct things.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, throughout the *Republic*, Socrates characterizes the parts in two main ways: in terms of what they do, their capacity or function, and in terms of what sort of thing each values and pursues. In what follows, I discuss the parts in turn, with an emphasis on highlighting their unique capacity or function, their unique object of pursuit, and the relationship between them. More specifically, I argue that each part of the soul is the source of a capacity that is uniquely suited to attain a certain end or goal, one which we are disposed to value.

#### 3.1 *The rational part*

Socrates claims that the rational part of the soul has the capacity to calculate. Thus, in the argument for soul division in *Republic* IV, Socrates distinguishes the rational from the appetitive element by holding that the rational element is “the element in the soul with which it calculates, the rationally calculating element” (439d). Throughout most of the *Republic*, Socrates emphasizes the rational part’s



capacity to reason about what is best for the soul as a whole. Thus, in *Republic* IV, he argues that the rational part is wise and “exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul” (441e); he claims that the rational part, in virtue of its capacity to deliberate, would do the finest job guarding the soul (442b); and he claims that the rational part makes pronouncements and “has within it the knowledge of what is advantageous – both for each part and for the whole, the community composed of all three” (442c). This conception of reason’s capacity to calculate about what is best for the whole soul is reiterated in book IX, where Socrates likens the soul to the union of a human being (reason), a lion (spirit), and a many-headed beast (the appetites). He holds that when the human being (reason) rules, it takes care of the many-headed beast like a farmer, nurturing the gentle heads and preventing the savage ones from growing, while making the lion’s nature his ally, with the result that they are friends with one another and with himself (589a–b). This suggests that reason scrutinizes the desires of the other parts, encouraging some and discouraging others, with the aim of harmonizing these desires and ensuring that the desires of one part do not grow too large and overwhelm the soul. We should stress, though, that Socrates does not think that reason only calculates about what is best for the person. In book IX, he characterizes reason as that with which a person learns in general (580d), and he claims that the person who is ruled by reason is a philosopher (581b–c), someone who strives for all kinds of knowledge and, in particular, knowledge of the forms (474bff).

But Socrates does not characterize the rational part only in terms of what it can do. He also characterizes it in terms of what it loves and values. Thus, in book IV, Socrates suggests that reason is the source of the love of learning found in those who live in Athens (435e–436a). In *Republic* IX, he describes the rational part as the part that loves to learn and that is always wholly straining to know the truth (581b). And, as we just saw, he describes the individual who is ruled by reason as a lover of wisdom, or a philosopher, an individual whose dominant value and greatest pleasure is thinking, learning, and trying to understand the world (581bff).

In sum, then, Socrates characterizes the rational part in two main ways: in terms of what it can do (namely, calculate) and in terms of what it loves and values (which is learning, understanding, and knowing the truth, including the truth about what is best). We can synthesize these characterizations in the following way: reason is the source of a certain capacity, calculating, that enables us to attain a certain end, knowing and acting in the light of the truth, which we desire and value. Socrates holds that a person who is ruled by reason makes exercising her ability to calculate in pursuit of the truth the dominant value in her life.

### 3.2 *The spirited part*

Socrates first explicitly introduces the spirited part as that with which we feel anger (439e) and his subsequent illustrations of spirit highlight its capacity to get angry and fight. Thus, Socrates describes Leontius’s spirit as angry at and

struggling against his desires for moving him to act in a way he does not approve (439e–442b). He claims that when a noble man is treated unjustly, his spirit boils and grows harsh and fights as an ally of what he holds to be just (440c–d). And he claims that Odysseus’s spirit grows angry and wants to retaliate against his maids for flirting with his enemies (441b–c). Socrates also highlights spirit’s ability to fight in his description of its normative roles. So, he claims that reason and spirit should rule the soul and guard it against unruly appetites and external enemies: reason by deliberating and spirit by fighting, following the ruler, and using its courage to carry out the things on which the former has decided (442a–b). Indeed, Socrates defines courage as spirit’s ability to preserve through pains and pleasures the pronouncements of reason about what should and should not inspire terror, presumably so it can enable the individual to stay strong against an enemy and carry out what reason deems best (442b–c).

It is reasonable to think that spirit gets angry and fights when it perceives some kind of threat to the self. Socrates seems to think that this can manifest in a variety of ways. Surely spirit enables one to get angry and fight against physical threats to oneself or one’s own. Thus, Socrates says that animals have spirit and that this is what enables their courage and ability to fight against an enemy, and he claims that spirited individuals are best suited to guard the city against enemies (375a–b). In other cases, however, Socrates stresses that spirit gets angry at threats to one’s honor and self-worth. Thus, Leontius is angry at his desires for moving him to act in a way he does not approve, the noble man is angry at the person who treats him unjustly, and Odysseus is angry at the disrespect he receives from his maids. We can conclude from all this, then, that the spirited part is the source of the ability or capacity to get angry and to use this energy to fight and win against an enemy, someone or something that poses a threat to one’s self, ranging from a threat to one’s basic life to a threat to one’s sense of honor and self-worth.

As in the case of reason, however, Socrates does not just characterize spirit in terms of what it can do, but also in terms of what it loves and values. In *Republic* IX, Socrates says that the spirited part loves mastery, victory, and high repute, and thus that it is appropriate to describe it as victory loving and honor loving (581a–b). He describes an individual who is ruled by spirit as victory loving (581c) and as someone who wants to be honored for his courage (582c). In *Republic* VIII, Socrates describes the individual who is ruled by spirit as a proud and honor-loving man (550b). He claims that such a person loves ruling and honor, but bases his claims to rule on exploits in war and things having to do with war; and he describes him as a lover of physical training and hunting (549a).

In sum, Socrates describes the spirited part in two ways: in terms of what it can do, namely, get angry and fight, and in terms of what it loves and values, victory, honor, and esteem. Again, then, we can synthesize these features of spirit in the following way: spirit is the source of a capacity, to get angry and fight, that enables us to attain a goal, victory, honor, and esteem, which we desire and value. When an individual is ruled by the spirited part of the soul, he or she makes exercising this capacity to get angry and fight in pursuit of victory and honor his or her

dominant goal. This explains why the person who is ruled by spirit is interested in competitive arenas – war, athletics, hunting – since these are arenas where one’s courage, one’s ability to fight against both external and internal enemies (e.g. fear), are on display.

### 3.3 *The appetitive part*

Socrates primarily characterizes the appetitive part of the soul as the source of the capacity to feel desires for things that satisfy bodily needs, though clearly the appetitive part’s desires go beyond what is necessary for bodily survival and well-being. Thus, in book IV, he introduces the appetitive part as the part that feels passions, hungers, and thirst, as well as that is stirred by other appetites, “friend to certain ways of being filled and certain pleasures” (439d). He also describes the appetitive part as the part that aims to be filled with the so-called pleasures of the body (442a). In book IX, he claims that the appetitive part is multi-form, but that it is reasonable to name it after the biggest and strongest things in it, its appetites for food, drink, sex, and all the things that go along with them (580d–e). In book VIII, Socrates discusses the difference between necessary and unnecessary desires, and this discussion also stresses the relationship between appetitive desires and the body. Socrates claims that necessary desires include those that are required for life and those whose satisfaction benefits us. Bread (here understood more generally as food), for example, is both necessary for life and beneficial, while relishes, though surely not necessary for life, are beneficial and conducive to well-being. Unnecessary desires are those that we can get rid of if we practice from childhood on and whose presence does not do any good but may do harm. Appetites that go beyond bread and relishes, for example, and seek other sorts of foods (which are neither beneficial nor conducive to well-being), are harmful to the soul’s capacity for wisdom and temperance (558d–559c). Interestingly, Socrates also repeatedly characterizes the appetitive part as desiring money (442a, 580e–581a), but it is reasonably clear that it does so, at least initially, because it associates money with the satisfaction of bodily desires (580e). In sum, then, the appetitive part is the source of the capacity to desire things that can be consumed by and gratify the body.<sup>11</sup>

As in the other cases, Socrates characterizes the appetitive part not just in terms of what it does, but also in terms of what it loves and values, though his characterization in this respect is not quite as straightforward. As we have seen, in *Republic* IX, Socrates claims that the appetitive part is multi-form but that for the purposes of argument it is reasonable to call it the money-loving and profit-loving part, since its appetites for things like food, drink, and sex are most easily satisfied by money (580d–581a). In books VIII and IX, Socrates claims that being ruled by the appetitive part of the soul can take different forms: some people who are ruled by this part love and value money more than anything else (553a–555); others seem to value the freedom to satisfy whatever desires they happen to have (558c–561e); and in the worst case, someone ruled by the appetitive part is simply driven to

satisfy his strongest desires, no matter how outrageous (571a–580c). Perhaps we can conclude that the appetitive part loves and values gratifying (or having the ability to gratify) its desires, whatever those desires may be.

So, in sum, Socrates characterizes the appetitive part in two ways: it is the source of our capacity to desire things that can be consumed by and satisfy the body, and it is at the same time the source of our interest in gratifying those particular desires. We can synthesize by saying that the appetitive part is the source of our capacity to desire, to signal that one should seek something in the environment that can be consumed by the body, which then motivates the person to pursue it, thereby enabling him or her to gratify the desire.

Let us, then, sum up the results of this examination of the nature of the parts of the soul. We have seen that Socrates holds that each part of the soul is dedicated to performing a certain function in pursuit of a certain end which it is positively oriented towards and values. More specifically, the rational part is the source of the capacity to reason and thereby attain truth and understanding; the spirited part is the source of the capacity to get angry and fight against threats to the self and thereby attain victory and honor; and the appetitive part is the source of the capacity to desire, to signal that there is something in the environment that can gratify the body, thereby moving the person to pursue the object and attain satisfaction. Socrates's tripartite psychology claims, then, that as humans we are fundamentally oriented towards certain ends and have parts of the mind that have the unique ability to attain them. Because we are, by nature, positively oriented towards these ends, Socrates seems to think that it is not uncommon for individuals to take one of them and elevate it to their dominant value in life. Thus, Socrates claims that to be ruled by a certain part of the soul is to take the relevant end to be one's dominant end or value.

But why does Socrates think that we have these parts of the soul in particular? In *Republic X*, Socrates suggests that tripartition is due to the soul's partnership with the body.<sup>12</sup> While reason is clearly essential to the soul, the spirited and appetitive parts are somehow a result of or related to embodiment (611b–612a). Thus, one reasonable answer to the question of why we have the non-rational parts in particular is that each part positively orients us towards something that we need given the fact that we are embodied and is uniquely suited to help us attain it. So, our body needs to be nourished, it needs certain things in order to survive and to be satiated; the appetitive part is the source of the capacity to desire those things, to positively orient us towards things in the environment that satisfy the body. But the fact that we have a body also means that we need to be protected, both from external threats, such as individuals who want to harm us, and internal threats that arise from the body, such as appetites, which are prone to go to excess in ruinous ways. Thus, the spirited part of the soul is the source of the capacity to get angry at those threats and fight against them, seeing victory over them as good.

The *Timaeus* provides some confirmation for this view. While a full discussion of the *Timaeus* is outside the scope of this chapter, some passages stress that the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul are tied to embodiment and are geared

towards attaining things that we need because we are embodied.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Socrates claims that when the demi-gods created mortals, they had to create a different type of soul as well, a mortal type of soul, which he describes as containing the desires characteristic of appetite and spirit (69c–d). When he describes where the gods placed each aspect of the mortal part of the soul in the body, he highlights their particular role in preserving and caring for the body. So, he says,

The part of the soul that has appetites for food and drink and whatever else it feels a need for, given the body's nature, they settled in the area between the midriff and the boundary toward the navel. In the whole of this region they constructed something like a trough for the body's nourishment. Here they tied this part of the soul down like a beast, a wild one, but one they could not avoid sustaining along with the others if a mortal race were ever to be.

(70d–e)<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Socrates is clear that the appetitive part of the soul is oriented, at least in part, towards getting the body what it needs to survive. He goes on to say that gods settled the part of the soul that exhibits manliness and spirit nearer the head, so that it could listen to reason and constrain by force the appetitive part if it refuses to obey the commands of reason. Thus, they settled it near the heart, which causes the blood to course through all the bodily members (69e–70b). He continues:

That way, if spirit's might should boil over at a report from reason that some wrongful act involving these members is taking place – something being done to them from outside or even something originating from the appetites within – every bodily part that is sensitive may be keenly sensitized to the exhortation or threats and so listen and follow completely.

(70b)

As in the *Republic*, then, we see Socrates highlighting spirit's role in safeguarding the person from threats, both external and internal.<sup>15</sup> Both the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, then, suggest that Socrates might think that we have appetitive and spirited parts of the soul in particular since they enable us to attain things – food, drink, and sex, and victory over enemies – that we need as embodied humans.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, Socrates thinks that the purpose of the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul is to positively orient us towards food, drink, and sex, and victory, honor, and esteem respectively, since these things are important for our survival as embodied creatures. Recall that earlier we said that the appetitive part of the soul is responsible for the fact that instances of food, drink, and sex consistently appear good to us, and the spirited part of the soul is responsible for the fact that threats to the self appear bad and winning out over them appear good. This account explains why: as embodied creatures food, drink, and sex, as well as victory, honor, and esteem, are necessary for our survival and so highly salient to us; instances of

such things are, in other words, likely to appear good to those parts of the soul whose job it is to attain those things.

We should stress, however, that the fact that we have a tendency to find instances of food, drink, and sex, as well as victory, honor, and esteem, good does not mean that every instance of these will appear good to us, for our other experiences and beliefs can affect the way things appear. If, for example, someone has been habituated to think that dessert is unhealthy or revenge small-minded, then instances of those things may not appear good to him or her. Moreover, the fact that we have a tendency to find food, drink, and sex, as well as victory, honor, and esteem, good does not mean that we will act on every appearance of goodness. Even if a particular instance of food or victory appears good to us, reason can intervene, scrutinize, and if necessary critique the appearance, and so prevent us from forming a full-fledged desire on its basis. This is why Socrates thinks it is crucial for reason to rule in the soul.

We are now in a position to suggest a line of response to the question with which we began: why does Socrates think that the parts that desire food, drink, and sex and victory, honor, and esteem are also the parts that form their beliefs on the basis of appearances? We have seen that the parts are fundamentally distinguished by what they do and value. Reason calculates, which enables it to pursue the truth. Spirit gets angry and uses this energy to fight, which enables it to attain victory, honor, and esteem. And the appetitive part desires, it positively orients the person to objects that can gratify the body, which enables us to pursue those objects and attain satisfaction. This account suggests an answer to our question. Socrates seems to think that each part of the soul has a specific job to do in the life of the person; perhaps, then, he thinks that each part only has the cognitive resources it needs to do its job. It is the rational part's role to discover the truth; thus, it is the part that has the ability to scrutinize how things appear and to use more sophisticated methods of reasoning to arrive at the truth. Spirit's role is to identify threats and move the person to win out over them, and the appetitive part's role is to identify things that can satisfy the body and move the person to pursue them. In both of these cases, forming judgments on the basis of appearances is enough to get the person in motion to go after these things and, in typical cases, get them. Perhaps Socrates thinks, then, that these parts simply do not need greater cognitive resources in order to attain their ends.

Of course one potential problem for this line of thought is this: there may be occasions where we do need to distinguish between, say, real and apparent food (e.g. between nutritious versus poisonous mushrooms) or between real and apparent threats. Thus perhaps these parts do need to scrutinize appearances and engage in calculations in order to attain their ends. However, while it is true that there may be occasions where we need to distinguish between real and apparent food or threats, this need not entail that the appetitive and spirited parts must have their own ability to scrutinize appearances. Instead, it could entail that the appetitive and spirited parts must have the ability to be responsive in various ways to reason, that part of the soul whose specific job is to scrutinize appearances and intervene

should the need arise. Indeed, it might be better in some respects for the spirited and appetitive parts to be merely responsive to reason as opposed to having their own sophisticated cognitive abilities. For scrutinizing appearances and performing calculations is effortful and may in certain circumstances – say circumstances of material scarcity and threat – slow down the operation of the parts in unnecessary and potentially detrimental ways.

In sum, I have suggested that thinking about the parts of the soul in terms of their functional role suggests a possible line of response to the question of why Socrates associates certain desires with certain cognitive tendencies: the spirited and appetitive parts have a specific role to play in the life of the person, a role which does not require that they have their own ability to scrutinize appearances and perform calculations; it is enough for these parts to be responsive to reason, the part of the soul whose specific job is to uncover the truth using sophisticated forms of reasoning should the need arise. Of course more needs to be said to fully articulate and defend this line of thought, but I hope to have shown that it is a promising route to explore.

#### **4. Conclusion: tripartition and dual process theories of judgment**

In closing, I would like to highlight some similarities between Plato's theory of tripartition and a theory championed by many psychologists today, dual process theories of judgment. Many contemporary psychologists hold that there are distinct processes by which human beings make judgments about the world. These processes are often referred to as 'system one' and 'system two,' and the operations of each correspond very roughly to the distinction between intuition and reflection.<sup>17</sup> While there is debate about how to characterize the necessary or defining features of each system, it is generally agreed that system one processes are often quick, automatic, and intuitive, while system two processes are often slow, deliberate, and sequential.<sup>18</sup> The judgments of system one, then, are not a result of the person deciding to determine whether something is, for example, large or small, good or bad. Instead, something just *appears* large or small, or good or bad, with little or no sense of voluntary control. Many contemporary psychologists think there are multiple system one processes; that is, there are multiple distinct and autonomous processes in the psyche which are responsible for generating our automatic, intuitive judgments. The judgments of system two, on the other hand, are a result of something more akin to conscious deliberation. Psychologists hold that, in general, system one processes yield default responses to a variety of situations. But these judgments can be intervened on by the distinctive higher-order reasoning processes of system two. Thus, system two is responsible for scrutinizing the intuitive judgments generated by system one and controlling its impulses if necessary.

Since both Plato and contemporary psychologists advance theories according to which there are distinct 'parts' of the mind, it is reasonable to wonder if

they are gesturing at the same basic distinctions and so positing theories with the same basic shape. I think that they are.<sup>19</sup> Just as contemporary theories hold that there are, broadly speaking, two ways of forming judgments, so Socrates thinks there are, broadly speaking, two ways of forming judgments: one that is deliberate and reflective and another that is automatic and intuitive. Moreover, like many contemporary psychologists, Socrates holds that there are numerous distinct and autonomous systems responsible for yielding our automatic and intuitive judgments. Socrates is keenly interested in motivation and value. Accordingly, he highlights the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul, which are the parts responsible for two kinds of very typical quick, intuitive judgments, those revolving around the value and pursuit of victory, honor, and esteem, as well as food, drink, and sex, respectively. As we mentioned earlier, however, there is evidence that Socrates is not committed to the thought that there are only three parts of the soul (443d–e).

In highlighting and characterizing the appetitive and spirited parts in the way that he does, Socrates tells us why we are prone to make quick, intuitive judgments about the value of victory, honor, and esteem or food, drink, and sex. In short, we have parts of the mind that are uniquely suited to positively orient us towards and attain instances of victory, honor, and esteem, as well as food, drink, and sex. In other words, we have parts of the mind that automatically see instances of these things as attractive and so are prone to form quick judgments about their value. And we have these parts of the mind in turn because they are uniquely suited to help us get what we need as embodied creatures. Socrates is clear, however, that in order to *flourish*, we often need to use our reason to scrutinize and intervene on the impulses of the spirited and appetitive part, which, without such supervision, can lead us astray and threaten to overtake our lives.

### Notes

- 1 Many thanks to David Bronstein, Peter Carruthers, Rachana Kamtekar, Whitney Schwab, Clerk Shaw, Christopher Shields, and John Sisko for comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
- 2 Adam, Murphy, Nehamas.
- 3 Lorenz, Moss, Singpurwalla (2011).
- 4 All quotations are from Reeve (2004).
- 5 Annas, pp. 337–338.
- 6 Moss, Singpurwalla (2010, 2011). As is evident from the argument of this chapter, I would no longer say that the cognitive capacities of the parts fully explain the motivational capacities.
- 7 For commentators who hold that Socrates thinks that appetitive desires at least are independent of our beliefs about goodness, see Irwin, Penner, Reeve. For those who hold that he thinks appetites involve cognizing the object of desire as good, see Bobonich, Carone, Lesses, Moss, Singpurwalla (2010).
- 8 See Singpurwalla (2006, 2010, 2011) for a more precise account of the relationship between appearances, attraction, and desire.
- 9 For one of the best papers exemplifying this approach, see Cooper.



- 10 Kamtekar (2008, 2018) is a notable exception. She focuses on the function, or as she calls it, the capacity, of each part to illuminate the nature of the parts of the soul.
- 11 In book VIII, Socrates claims that the ‘democratic character’ – one of the personality types that is ruled by the appetitive part – desires things like politics, military training, and philosophy (561c–d). These do not seem to be desires that gratify the body. Scott argues that the democratic person has a shifting character: at one time he is ruled by the spirited part, at another time the rational part, at another time by the appetitive part. If he is right, then we need not think that the appetitive part is the source of the desire to engage in military activity or philosophy.
- 12 Burnyeat also claims that the spirited and appetitive parts are somehow a result of embodiment.
- 13 Johansen and Kamtekar (2018) argue that the *Timaeus* stresses the positive function of the parts of the soul. Kamtekar (2018) argues that each part of the soul is teleologically oriented towards the good.
- 14 All translations of the *Timaeus* from Zeyl.
- 15 See Brennan for an interesting account of spirit’s functional role as ‘policing’ the appetites in others and ourselves.
- 16 In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates suggests that the gods have spirited and appetitive parts of the soul; this poses a challenge for the view that those parts are somehow tied to embodiment, since the gods (as Socrates conceives of them) are never embodied. However, the context for the claim that the gods have spirited and appetitive parts is complicated, for it is made during the course of a speech which is designed both to display Socrates’s oratorical skills and move his interlocutor, Phaedrus, towards a more philosophical way of life. Socrates describes the soul of both gods and humans as the union of a charioteer (reason) and two horses (spirit and appetite); the gods’ horses, however, are good and obedient, while humans have at least one bad and unruly horse (appetite) (246a–ff). It is possible that Socrates depicts the gods as having spirited and appetitive parts simply to inspire Phaedrus (and us, Plato’s readers) to make our spirited and appetitive parts fully obedient to reason, so that we can be as god-like as possible.
- 17 For a recent overview, see Kahnemann; see also Evans and Stanovich.
- 18 See Evans and Stanovich, who argue that the defining feature of what they call type one processes is that they are autonomous, in so far as they do not require controlled attention and make minimal demands on working memory, while the defining feature of type two processes is that they make use of working memory, which enables us to engage in hypothetical thinking and consequential decision-making. Carruthers argues for a similar characterization.
- 19 In a recent paper, Tamar Gendler has suggested that Plato’s theory is missing the insights crucial to dual process theories of judgment. While she lauds Plato for noting that the mind contains distinct and autonomous sources of motivation, and while she agrees that the parts he cites might indeed be the source of our felt experiences of conflict, she thinks that he fails to highlight a distinct source of error: our capacity to make quick, intuitive judgments, many of which are a result of culturally encoded stereotypes. Referring to Socrates’s image of the soul in the *Phaedrus*, she argues that Socrates fails to note that there is ‘a third horse,’ namely, the part of us that is responsible for making quick, intuitive judgments. I hope to have suggested in this chapter, however, that Gendler’s critique is at least somewhat misguided, since Plato’s theory of tripartition and dual process theories of judgment have more in common than might first appear. More specifically, Socrates *is* aware that there are parts of us that are prone to make quick, intuitive judgments, and he has identified two of those parts: spirit and appetite. Moreover, he is aware that the fact that these parts form beliefs on the basis

of appearances makes them particularly susceptible to cultural influences of a certain kind, as his critique of art in *Republic X* makes clear. If, then, Socrates's famous image of the soul requires a third horse (or more), it is not to acknowledge our tendency to make quick, intuitive judgments, but rather to identify additional sources of those judgments.

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