SELF AND BODY IN PLATO: PHAEDO, REPUBLIC, TIMAEUS

BY
ORESTIS KARATZOGLOU

DISSERTATION
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Classical Philology in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2019

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:
Associate Professor Kirk Sanders, Chair
Professor Antony Augoustakis
Associate Professor Angeliki Tzanetou
Assistant Professor Daniel William Leon Ruiz
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of the body in the fashioning of the self in Plato’s *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*. Even though it is usually argued that for Plato the real self is simply the soul and that the body is merely a hindrance toward realization of the ideal self, my analysis of these dialogues shows that the body may be assigned a constructive rather than obstructive role in the attempt to become a unified self. The *Phaedo* shows awareness that the indeterminacy inherent in the body infects the validity of any scientific argument but also provides the subject of inquiry with the ability to actualize, to the extent possible, the ideal self. The *Republic* locates bodily desires and needs in the soul, which is conceived of as a tripartite entity that enjoys at least minimum intelligible unity. Admittedly, achievement of maximal unity is dependent upon successful training of the rational part of the soul, as envisaged in the curriculum of Book 7. There is reason to suppose, however, that the earlier curriculum of Books 2 and 3, which aims at instilling a pre-reflectively virtuous disposition in the lower parts of the soul, is a prerequisite for the advanced studies of *Republic* 7. The *Timaeus* is most generous in the influence it accords the body. The world soul is fashioned out of Being, Sameness, and Difference: coupled with Aristotle’s observations, an examination of the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides* reveals that Difference is to be identified with the *Timaeus*’ third ontological principle, namely the Receptacle. Being thought of as space or matter, the Receptacle thus emerges as the quasi-material component that provides each individual soul with the alloplastic capacity for psychological growth and alteration.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Kirk Sanders, for assisting me with the formulation of my argument in its earlier stages, for being subtle about providing feedback without ever imposing his approach (the leash was long), and for being particularly responsive in practical matters. I am also greatly indebted to the members of my committee, especially Dan Leon, who was always keen to read the first drafts and to offer comments that made me narrow down the scope of my research and get a better grip on my own argument. I am grateful to Antony Augoustakis and Angeliki Tzanetou for their guidance and support during my years in Champaign-Urbana. I would also like to thank my former professor, Theokritos Kouremenos, for having introduced me to the field of ancient philosophy and for being to this day a source of inspiration. Special thanks to my friends Kostas Arampapaslis, Maria Goldshtein, Leon Wash, and Giorgos Rovatsos: to Kostas for being an ideal roommate as well as for our endless conversations in Champaign, Thessaloniki, and Berlin; to Maria and Leon for reading parts of the manuscript and always being willing to discuss all and everything; to Giorgos for his help in mathematics. Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents and my brother: none of this would have been possible without the financial and emotional support of Tasos, Sofia, and Sofoklis (deus).
To my parents

χρη δ’ ἄνδρα τοκεῖσιν φέρειν

βαθύδοξον αἰσιον.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 1: PHAEDO .................................................................................................................. 6
    1.1 Metaphors About Death ................................................................................................. 8
    1.2 Ordinary Vs. Socratic Conceptions of Death ............................................................... 20
    1.3 The Nature of Socrates’ ἑλπίς ....................................................................................... 32
    1.4 Soothing the Inner Child ............................................................................................ 59
    1.5 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 71

CHAPTER 2: REPUBLIC ............................................................................................................ 73
    2.1 Tripartition in Book 4 ................................................................................................... 74
    2.2 Beliefs and the Non-Rational Soul ............................................................................. 89
    2.3 Reason and Separation ............................................................................................... 105
        2.3.1 Reason and the Inner Human ............................................................................ 110
        2.3.2 Reason and the Sea-God Glauceus .................................................................. 114
    2.4 Types of Virtue ............................................................................................................ 117
        2.4.1 Natural and Artificial Virtue ............................................................................. 120
        2.4.2 Pre- and Post-Reflective Artificial Virtue ......................................................... 129
    2.5 Maximizing Unity ........................................................................................................ 133
        2.5.1 Non-Philosophers ............................................................................................. 136
        2.5.2 Philosophers ...................................................................................................... 142
    2.6 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 150

CHAPTER 3: TIMAEUS ........................................................................................................... 153
    3.1 Necessity as a Cause .................................................................................................... 156
    3.2 Receptacle and Sameness ......................................................................................... 163
    3.3 Receptacle in the Precosmos ..................................................................................... 170
        3.3.1 Protoelements .................................................................................................... 171
        3.3.2 Receptacle, Motion, and Difference .................................................................. 176
    3.4 Creation of the Immortal Part of the Soul ................................................................. 183
        3.4.1 Being, Sameness, and Difference in the Sophist .............................................. 189
        3.4.2 Difference in the Parmenides ......................................................................... 197
    3.5 Aristotle’s Testimony ................................................................................................. 203
    3.6 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 208

FINAL CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................................ 211

APPENDIX A: BODY AND THE PROBLEM OF SOUL INDIVIDUATION .......... 214
BIBLIOGRAPHY

 vi

 230
INTRODUCTION

It is standard Platonic doctrine that soul and body are distinct and that, in ideal conditions, the former should hold sway over the latter. Indeed, several dialogues canvass the view that the soul reaches its purity only when it is itself by itself, a condition that allows it to commune with the unalterable entities of the Platonic realm, namely the Forms. In conceiving of the self in non-physical terms, the Platonic notion falls in line with at least one aspect of the secular conception of personhood which dates back to Descartes and specifies that persons are immaterial and, as such, are to be dissociated from anything bodily. Yet, this Cartesian conception of personhood has been criticized, and it has been suggested that the body may constitute a necessary condition for personal identity. This dissertation aims at bringing to the fore the role of the body and the bodily in the constitution of Platonic selves: in pursuing the same line of thought with regard to the Platonic conception of selfhood, I have found that the Platonic corpus contains several approaches to the problem which contradict the apparent doctrine by allotting a necessary role to the body.

In Chapter 1, I focus on the *Phaedo*, which argues more directly and forcefully than any other Platonic work for the existence of an immaterial, incomposite, eternal, and essentially rational soul that is separated from the body at the time of death. Given the significance of the

---

1 Of course, there is a perhaps insurmountable gap between what is designated by the terms “mind” and “soul,” the most conspicuous difference being that the latter was conceived of almost universally by Greek philosophers not as merely the locus of consciousness or intentionality but also as the principle of growth and movement. See Everson (1991). Additionally, it need not be mentioned that there are differences between Cartesian and Platonic immaterialism, as, for example, that Plato never stresses Descartes’ indubitable nature of subjective experience. For the view that the body and soul problem did not exist in antiquity, see Matson (1966). For two complementary views on the notion of the self in antiquity, see Gill (2008) and Sorabji (2008).

2 Ayer (1936) 194; Williams (1973a) 19–25, 64–81. See also Blatti and Snowdon (2016) 2–11.
setting for this particular dialogue, which presents Socrates in the final moments before his own execution, I investigate whether this work intentionally downplays the connection of the physical body to the self, so as to make post mortem survival seem possible: four intricate arguments are presented to support the thesis that the soul does not perish along with the body but goes on to lead an independent existence, and in at least one passage Socrates seems to advance the view that the rational soul should be regarded as identical to the self. I shift the focus to the frames surrounding the arguments, which themselves express doubts concerning the validity of the inferences made within them, and suggest that Socrates intends the immortality of the soul, and thus of the self, to be treated in a rather skeptical way: I propose that Socrates’ confidence in the face of death does not stem from exact knowledge about the state of affairs that obtains posthumously but from his expectation (ἐλπίς) about post mortem survival, which is tied to his embodied condition. Additionally, I contend that Socrates assumes the validity of the thesis that the soul is immortal mostly because of its indispensability for establishing the conclusion that pure knowledge is possible. Lastly, I trace a connection between the realization that the validity of this assumption is unverifiable and the subsequent impossibility of the absolute eradication of fear of death: insofar as it rests on hypothetical assumptions, knowledge resembles mythical discourse and magical spells and is, as such, recommended by Socrates as a remedy to cure the irrational fears of “the inner child,” i.e. the part of ourselves that is impervious to reason and, therefore, cannot acknowledge the necessarily axiomatic nature of scientific discourse. Overall, my analysis of the Phaedo reveals the capacity of soul as intellectual self for change and psychological growth inasmuch as the hypotheses one employs to attain understanding are themselves alterable.

3 My analysis of the Phaedo owes much to Burger (1984); Peterson (2011); Berger (2015).
In Chapter 2, I turn to the more nuanced concept of the soul found in the Republic. Instead of an incomposite, essentially rational soul, the Republic offers an account according to which the soul is partitioned into reason, emotion, and appetite. The non-rational drives that were attributed to the body in the Phaedo are now incorporated into the soul, and the self—so it is usually argued—corresponds to the rational part thereof. My aim is to show that this identification is inaccurate on the grounds that the Republic includes evidence suggesting that the self is to be identified with the entire soul. My argument comes in two stages. First, I show that, contrary to the interpretation put forward by Bobonich and Lorenz, tripartition of the soul was never intended in the strong sense of distinguishing between different agents within the soul: indeed, Plato has Socrates speak in Book 4 as if there were three independent sources of motivation within the soul. Adducing as parallel a crucial passage of Book 5, I contend that Plato’s use of such metaphors should not be taken as indication that the soul is partitioned in a way analogous to the partitioning of a physical entity. I examine the figurative language employed to describe tripartition and conclude that it should be understood as conceptual division. In the second part of my argument, I follow Gill’s analysis of the educational program of the Republic with a view to showing that the lower parts of the soul are indispensable to the unification of the tripartite soul: bringing to light the division—found also in the Gorgias—of bodily virtue into natural and man-made, of which the former is a prerequisite for the latter, I argue that this division serves as a model for a corresponding distinction between natural and artificial virtue. Next, I examine how the Republic’s earlier educational stage instills pre-reflective virtue into the lower parts of the soul and explain how the development of such a pre-reflectively virtuous disposition is a necessary condition for the emergence of full-fledged virtue. Finally, I discuss the unitary nature of the entities that populate Plato’s intelligible realm and argue that the advanced education of the curriculum of Book 7 leads to the unification of the
self through the principle of assimilation, which specifies that the learner is assimilated to the object of learning.

Chapter 3 focuses on the *Timaeus* and aims at establishing the thesis that the world soul and its body are made out of the same components. I begin by examining the role of Necessity in the creation of the cosmos and showing that it still exerts its influence even after the arrangement of primordial chaos into an organized whole. Next, I bring out its opposing functions as cause of permanence and principle of differentiation, and I argue that these two functions, understood as matter and space respectively, correspond to the notions of Sameness and Difference, which are constituents of the world soul and, subsequently, of each individual human soul. Adducing parallels from the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*, I explain that Difference is the most peculiar of the constituents of the soul because it is bound by its own nature to generate an indeterminate amount of parts. Finally, building on Sayre’s analysis, I employ Aristotle’s description of Plato’s account of the soul as found in *De Anima* and *Metaphysics* to argue that the soul’s ability for cognition and interaction with the visible world may ultimately go back to the presence of the Receptacle in it: Aristotle relates that Plato fashions both the soul and the perceptible items out of the elements, which latter may be identified with the principles of the Dyad and the One. If we further consider Aristotle’s comment that Plato’s soul is crafted on the basis of the blind mechanism of attraction that prevailed in the precosmos and was specifically attributed to the Receptacle, then we may have good reason to think that the soul’s ability to interact with the perceptible world relies on their shared affinity.

In the Appendix, I explore the reasons why a conception of the self as soul fails to provide a coherent account of personal identity. In doing so, I bring out the difficulties inherent in the identification of the self simply with the soul and suggest how these might evaporate by assigning
the body a positive role in the constitution of the self: for one, the association of any given soul with one or more bodies allows for the former’s individuation; otherwise, each soul, especially when having actualized its potential for knowledge and unity, will turn out to be indistinguishable in its essence from any other soul and, as a result, the notion of personal identity will appear vacuous. In addition, as passages from Phaedo, Republic, and Timaeus make distinctly clear, philosophy cannot achieve its aim without the mediation of the body, since perception—itself inconceivable without the body—is a necessary condition for knowledge.
Plato’s *Phaedo* opens with Echecrates asking Phaedo (*Phd. 57a5–6, 58c6–7*): “What were Socrates’ last words? How did he die? What did he say about death itself?” These questions are indicative of the main worries that underlie the philosophical investigations of the *Phaedo*: What is the appropriate response to death? Should one feel indignation and fear at its prospect? Or will the prudent ones face it with welcoming acceptance? The dialogue focuses on Socrates’ death, but it seems as though by listening to the calmness and courage with which Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*, bore death one could hope to imitate him and alleviate the worries that accompany the imminence of death.¹

Indeed, if *Phaedo* were assigned any practical value at all, i.e. if among other purposes it also aimed at dispelling the fear of death through the insights of Platonism, the Socratic attitude toward death would have to be presented in a persuasive manner that would win over both internal and external audience to Socrates’ own views about death.² Of the intratextual evidence that *Phaedo* served such a purpose three examples should suffice: when criticized by his friends for bearing his death lightly and abandoning them, Socrates deems it right to offer them an apology as if in a court of law (63b2); additionally, the insistence on and repetition of the

---

¹ Peterson (2011) 193: “[Socrates’] young friends in the *Phaedo* are seeking instruction about the attitude they should have toward death. They have been with a community intensely preoccupied with what happens after death.” For the Pythagoreans’ preoccupation with death in their ἀκοοσμα, see Burkert (1972) 185.

² When Socrates states his expectation that “there is something for the dead ones,” Simmias asks him to communicate the thoughts that lead him to such an expectation and attempt to persuade the company since that would be good for all of them (63c8–d2): Τί οὖν, ἔρη ὁ Σιμμίας, ὦ Σόκρατες: αὐτὸς ἔχειν τὴν διάνοιαν ταύτην ἐν νόῳ ἔχεις ἀπίναι, ἢ κἂν ἡμῖν μεταδοθῇς; κοινὸν γὰρ ἡ ἐμοίης δοκεῖ καὶ ἡμῖν εἶναι ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο, καὶ ἣμα σοι ἡ ἀπολογία ἔσται, ἐὰν ἀπερ λέγεις ἡμᾶς πείς. Cf. Gallop (1975) 74: “The work is not an exposition of his doctrines, but a meditation upon the issues it raises, and a stimulus to the reader to explore them for himself.” Peterson (2011) 172–6 examines several passages that emphasize Socrates’ need to persuade.
terms πείθω and πίστις testify to the urge of the work as a whole to persuade;\(^3\) finally and most prominently, Socrates himself, in response to the criticisms of his arguments by Simmias and Cebes, admits it that he is disposed φιλονίκως and that his purpose is to convince primarily himself and only incidentally his audience of his opinion rather of the true state of things (91a).

It has been argued that the philosophical arguments of the *Phaedo* do not intend to convince the reason, but they are rather “sophistical devices designed to persuade the emotions.”\(^4\) Although I am sympathetic to this view, I believe that it drives a wedge between rational and non-rational means of persuasion, thus presenting a false dichotomy.\(^5\) Rather, in my analysis I argue that even demonstrative argumentation—the most rational means of persuasion—ultimately relies on unverifiable assumptions, which resemble mythological discourse and thus have a share in the non-rational. My overall aim is to examine primarily how and why, even though Socrates fails to prove the immortality of the soul, and hence to convince his audience, through demonstrative argument, he nevertheless remains of the opinion that the soul is immortal and indestructible. I begin by focusing on a number of metaphors that are operative throughout the work, such as the metaphor, frequently employed by Socrates in the *Phaedo* and the *Apology*, that sees death as μετοίκησις of the soul as well as the one that sees the body as the prison of the soul. I briefly explore the function of metaphor in the Platonic corpus, concluding that the use of metaphor in the *Phaedo* is to be explained as an attempt to communicate an intuited truth that cannot be verified or proved through demonstrative argument. In the second section, I notice the differences between ordinary conceptions of death and the one presented by Socrates, while also formulating clearly what it is that Socrates has set out to prove. I claim that Socrates’ four arguments on the

---

3 Dorter (1982) 8 with n. 8.
4 Cobb (1977) 173.
5 As examples of non-rational means of persuasion, one may think of the eschatological myth toward the end of the dialogue as well as the description of philosophical discourse as magical incantations at 77e9.
immortality of the soul fail to convince the internal audience. My third section examines the nature of ἐλπίς and its cognates, suggesting that the Socratic attitude toward death originates from a semi-rational source. In the last section, I adduce parallels from the Republic to show that Socrates’ stance toward death is not the result of endorsing conclusions of rational arguments and compelling reasons, but it is an attitude formed through inculcation of beliefs into the non-rational part of the self about the possibility of knowledge and, consequently, the nature of death and the soul, which are in principle unverifiable and resemble mythological discourse in that they cannot ever be proved or disproved.  

1.1 Metaphors About Death

Before proceeding to deal with the reasons Socrates offers to justify his attitude toward death in his fictional apology, I will focus on a number of metaphors that are subtly introduced early on in the opening of the dialogue and are largely operative throughout this section but also the whole work: (a) the metaphor of death as ἀποδημία, (b) the metaphor of body as prison cell, and (c) the metaphor of philosophy as purification. Even though Socrates makes extensive use of these metaphors in his fictional apology in order to persuade his interlocutors that he has good reason to bear his death lightly, he fails to achieve his aim: immediately after his peroration, Cebes poses two questions that focus on the crux of the matter, namely whether the soul survives the aforementioned separation from the body or it vanishes like wind or smoke, and whether, granted that the soul survives death, it still possesses some power and intelligence (69e6–70b4). It is

---

7 For the first two metaphors, see Cairns (2014) and Pender (2000) 150–5.
important to note that Cebes’ objections are also borrowings from the Homeric domain: the first one goes back essentially to the literal meaning of ψυχή that was associated with the cold breath of death, whereas the second one derives from the traditional conception of the dead as weak and enfeebled images of the previously alive individuals. Socrates then offers the cyclical argument to counter Cebes’ first point. However, based as it is on the definition of death as separation of body and soul, the cyclical argument not only assumes what it seeks to prove but also goes back to the same Homeric metaphor employed earlier by Socrates, namely the metaphor of death as μετοίκησις. In other words, Socrates rejects the literal conception of ψυχή in favor of its metaphorical counterpart. A small digression on the Platonic attitude toward metaphors and their cognitive role is at hand before clarifying the function of these metaphors.

Contrary to Aristotle, Plato does not provide a systematic account of metaphors, and his views on their function as well as their cognitive status have to be reconstructed from scattered remarks that span the whole corpus. He does not use the term μεταφορά but refers to them through the generic term εἰκών, which can be used for comparisons and illustrations in general.

Given Plato’s usual iconoclastic stance, one would expect him to avoid the use of metaphors, especially when it comes to philosophical inquiry and the attempt to arrive at the truth. Indeed, Plato calls attention to the unreliable nature of likenesses as well as the dangers of employing them.

---

8 Smoke: ψυχή δέ κατὰ χθονός ἦντε καπνός ὄχι (II. 23.100–1); wind: ψυχή δ’ ἐκ ῥεθόν πταμένη Ἀιδός δέ Βεβήκει (16.856 = 22.362); lack of intelligence: ὁ πόσοι ἤρα τίς ἐστί καὶ εἰν Αἰδαο δόμοις ψυχῆ καὶ εἴδωλον, ἀτὰρ φρένες οὐκ ἔνι πάμπαν (23.103–4).
10 For Aristotle on metaphors, see Po. 1457b7–9 and the analyses by Ricoeur (1978) and Kirby (1997).
11 Pender (2000) and (2003) offers a comprehensive analysis of Plato’s use of metaphors. The term μεταφορά is used by Isocrates at Evagoras 9. The verb μεταφέρω is used in Ti. 58b and 73e in the sense “transfer.” In his study of εἰκών in ancient literature, McCall (1969) 5 argues that it never refers to metaphors in Plato, but this view has to be modified in light of Meno 72a and Republic 531b, where εἰκών explicitly refers to metaphors; see Pender (2003) 56–7.
12 Cf. Robinson (1953) 220: “Plato’s whole theoretical philosophy is largely a condemnation of images and a struggle to get away from them” (cited in Pender (2003) 60).
in argument,\textsuperscript{13} caveats that can also be found in the \textit{Phaedo}: at 85e Simmias asks Socrates whether the soul might be a sort of harmony; when Cebees expresses his doubts about the immortality of the soul, he says that he too, like Simmias, will be in need of an \textit{eikón} (87b3); but, when Simmias refers back to his harmony theory of the soul, he stresses the deceptive nature of arguments that are based on probability rather than proofs, thus indicating that the metaphor of the soul as harmony—his own suggestion—lead him astray (92c11–d5).\textsuperscript{14}

Even though the cognitive status of images falls short of the demand for demonstrative rigor, Plato frequently employs them as an alternative, albeit epistemically inferior to proofs, method of investigation. For example, one need only think of the image of the sun or the introduction of the analogy between the individual and the state in the \textit{Republic}.\textsuperscript{15} Additionally, metaphors and analogies are used for illustrative and didactic purposes in numerous other passages in the dialogues, but, for all their usefulness, Plato carefully stresses that they are no substitute for understanding.\textsuperscript{16} As Pender puts it, “in all cases the ideas and suggestions provided by imagery have to be supported by the conclusions of dialectic before they can be accepted as knowledge.”\textsuperscript{17}

It seems that in the case of the \textit{Phaedo} as well metaphorical imagery serves such a didactic and illustrative purpose. However, there is a further complication because the conclusions of the philosophical arguments are based on premises that are themselves metaphorical. One such premise, namely the definition of death as separation of the soul from the body, is directly linked to the metaphor that sees death as a sort of journey. This metaphor is first introduced in the frame

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Sph.} 231a6–8: τὸν δὲ ἀσφαλὴ δεῖ πάντων μάλιστα περὶ τὰς ὁμοιότητας ἂεὶ πουσίσθαι τὴν φυλακήν· ὀλισθηρότατον γάρ τὸ γένος.

\textsuperscript{14} See Lloyd (1966) 394.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Republic} 506d–e and 368d, discussed in Pender (2003) 61 and Lloyd (1966) 395–7, respectively. Cf. Morgan (2000) 181: “Until the ascent to the intelligible realm is achieved, we will be compelled to use metaphor and analogy.”

\textsuperscript{16} Cf., for example, \textit{Grg.} 517d; \textit{R.} 487e, 509a; \textit{Ph.} 87b. See Pender (2003) 62 n. 25 for more references.

\textsuperscript{17} Pender (2003) 62.
of the dialogue by Phaedo, who describes Socrates impeding death as a journey to Hades (58e5–7). Socrates’ exhortation to Evenus is also made through the imagery of “departure” (61b8–c1: ἐμὲ διώκειν ὡς τάχιστα. ἀπειμὶ δὲ, ὡς ἔοικε, τήμερον). The language is made more explicit later on when Socrates describes death as ἀποδημία to Hades (61e1–2: μᾶλιστα πρέπει μέλλοντα ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ). The same metaphor is employed by Socrates in his speech in the Apology, where he entertains the various possibilities about the nature of death and wonders whether death is a sort of μετοίκησις or ἀποδημία. That Socrates does not break new ground but follows a traditional line of thought can be established by intratextual grounds since this metaphor is introduced by formulae such as κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα vel sim. (Ap. 40c8, e4). It seems evident that what Socrates refers to through these formulae must be the traditional Homeric conception according to which the ψυχή of a person leaves the body at the time of death. Suffice it to invoke merely one Homeric instance where the soul is said to leave the body and enter Hades, namely the death of Hector which is described by exactly the same formula used for the death of Patroclus (Il. 22.362–3 = 16.856–7):

ψυχή δ’ ἐκ ῥεθέων πταμένη Ἀἴδος δὲ βεβήκει
dν πότιμον γοδῶσα λιποῦσ’ ἄνδροτῆτα καὶ ἤβην.

The difference between the Homeric picture and the thesis Socrates advances in this work lies in the presuppositions about what survives death: there is no evidence in Homer that post mortem

---

18 Cf. Pender (2000) 151: “From general terms of motion (εἴμι, ἔρχομαι, οἴχομαι etc.) develop various detailed pictures of the soul as a human being undertaking a journey to another world. Plato is influenced by traditional Greek religion with its deeply ingrained idea of the soul's departure to Hades—an idea that goes back to Homer.” Pender also calls attention to the Platonic conception of the soul as a self-moving entity, something which makes it “a natural traveller.”
personal existence is possible. True, there is a sense in which a dead person survives in Hades, and, indeed, there are instances where the deceased person rather than his soul is said to make the journey to the underworld. However, two points should be emphasized here: first, whatever survives death in Homer is a bloodless and enfeebled image of the previously alive individual; and second, that, since in Homer corpses are cremated, it is never the physical body of the dead person that makes the journey to Hades. Given that psychosomatic unity is a *sine qua non* of the Homeric conception of the person, there is no indication of personal survival of death in Homer.

Contrary to what happens in Homer, Socrates argues for the *post mortem* survival of an entity that is to be identified with his essential personal characteristics. He uses the Homeric metaphor of death as *μετοίκησις* as his starting point because implicit in that metaphor is a conception of the self that suits his purpose. For actions such as these, namely traveling, leaving town and the like, are actions that can be attributed solely to persons. A metaphor that attributes such actions to the soul, implies not only its posthumous existence and personification as an intelligent agent but also its existence in the body as if in a building, something that leads us to the second metaphor mentioned above that sees the body as a prison cell.

Socrates introduces the body as prison metaphor to support his claim that, even though the philosopher should pursue death, he should nonetheless avoid committing suicide. His appeal is again to tradition and the lore of mysteries (*62b2–3, ὁ μὲν οὖν ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενος περὶ αὐτῶν λόγος*). The idea is that human beings are in a sort of prison from which they should not

---

21 As Cairns (2014) §22 notices, the images of the Homeric dead seem to presuppose a certain degree of corporeality since they can drink blood and are described as *νέκυες* or *νεκροί*, which are the words employed to refer to corpses and the physical remains of the deceased. This trait of the Homeric shades is picked up ironically by Socrates at *Phd. 81c–d*, where he argues that the souls of those who indulged their bodily desires have become heavy, earth-like, and visible and can thus at times be seen hovering above their burial places.
run away or escape without due notice from the gods. We are in no position to ascertain the origins of this doctrine: a parallel in the *Cratylus* attributes the belief that the body is the prison of the soul to the Orphic tradition, but, given that the boundaries between Orphism and Pythagoreanism are not easy to specify, it may also be associated with Pythagorean beliefs.\footnote{Cra. 400c. See also Grg. 493a1–3. For references on Orphism and Pythagoreanism, see Burkert (1985) 296–304; Rowe (1993) 128. See also Morgan (2010) 73 with n. 37. Aristotle also refers to the doctrine of the ancients that our present life is punishment for some great mistakes (fr. 60).}

Besides supporting Socrates’ thesis that the prohibition of suicide is reasonable, one wonders what exactly the reference to this doctrine accomplishes. It may be that Socrates employs it—even though he does not fully comprehend it (62b5–6, μέγας τέ τίς μοι φαίνεται καὶ οὐ ράδιος δυσδείν [sc. ὁ λόγος])—because of the familiarity of the internal audience with it: Simmias and Cebes seem to have studied with the Pythagorean Philolaus (61e), thus they are likely to be sympathetic to a thesis that is justified on a metaphor that is believed as fact by the Pythagoreans.\footnote{The assumption that Simmias and Cebes were Pythagoreans was made on the basis of this reference to their association with Philolaus and Simmias’ espousal of the theory of the soul as harmony. I concur with Rowe (1993) 7 that the evidence is inconclusive. Nails (2002) 82–3 and 260–1 makes no reference to the alleged Pythagoreanism of Cebes and Simmias. Notomi (2013) 56 argues for the Pythagoreanism of Echecrates on the basis of Aristoxenus fr. 19 Wehrli = D.L. 8.46.}

Additionally, this metaphor serves as an emblem of Socrates’ situation at the time of the discussion: Socrates is imprisoned just like the soul is incarcerated in the body; his impending death resembles the soul’s liberation from the fetters of the body and is thus transformed into a positive experience.\footnote{As Dorter (1982) 10 suggests, the theme of liberation is echoed even in the title of the work, which is peculiar because *Phaedo* is the only dialogue named after its narrator: Phaedo himself was allegedly captured and destined to serve as a prostitute before being ransomed at the behest of Socrates. According to Diogenes Laertius 2.105, “he then practiced philosophy as a free man.” His life story exemplifies the power of philosophy to liberate the soul even when confined by the body. Notomi (2013) 58 agrees: “Plato’s decision to set the frame conversation in Phlius and to use Phaedo as its narrator symbolises the idea that the dialogue as a whole presents the ideal of the philosophical life as a paradigm for imitation.”} This transformation into a positive of an experience popularly considered as a negative is also reflected in the result of the combination of the μετοίκησις and the body as prison metaphors: if death is seen as simply a change of location, it implies the continuation of existence;
add to this the metaphor that sees the body as a prison, and death is stripped of all its negative associations since it entails no harm to the surviving person. In addition to employing the metaphor of body as prison in order to make death seem harmless and liberating, Socrates appropriates additional aspects of the language of the mysteries such as the concept of purification. κάθαρσις is subtly introduced in the opening of the dialogue, where Phaedo explains to Echecrates why Socrates’ death was delayed: on the day before the trial the Athenians had crowned the prow of the ship that would be sent to Delos to celebrate Theseus’ successful trip to Crete, and a law ordained that the city should be clean (καθαρεύειν) and that no one should be put to death publicly during the interval of the departure of the ship to Delos and its return to Athens (58a–c). The next occurrence of a cognate of καθαρεύειν is found in Socrates’ fictional apology: when Cebes criticizes the Socratic thesis and concludes that the sensible ones should resent death, whereas the foolish ones should rejoice at it, Simmias grants that he has a point in wondering why Socrates bears it so lightly that he will leave behind both his friends and his good masters, namely the gods (63a4–9). Thus, Socrates feels as if he is being accused before a jury and attempts to argue in support of his thesis more persuasively than before the actual jury that condemned him (63b1–5). He offers three reasons to show that the philosopher would meet

25 Pender (2000) 153: “Thus the body becomes a temporary home which cannot offer the soul the same kind of familiarity or happiness. When viewed in this way, it is the soul's entry into the body that is its ἀποδημία, and death offers a chance to return home. Thus death can be seen as a joyous experience for the soul—a point that is made in the Timaeus when it is said that on the death of the body the soul μὲθ’ ἑδονῆς ἔξεπτατο (‘with pleasure flies away’, 81d7-e1).”

26 Contra Adluri (2006) 421: “The language of initiation is neither a mere metaphor nor a literal invitation to a cult practice or a call to conversion to a religious institution.” For purification and purificatory rites, see Rohde (1925) 294–7 and Burkert (1985) ch. 6.

27 White (2006) argues that there are two separate and insulated arguments here. Socrates begins by justifying his calm in the face of death and the absent feelings of resentment (63b9: οὐκ ἄγανακτόν τῷ θανάτῳ, c4–5: διὰ ταῦτα οὐχ ὀμοίως ἄγανακτό) on his belief that after dying he would meet other wise and good gods as well as dead human beings who are better than the ones presently alive (63b4–c7). Simmias urges him to communicate his thoughts, but Crito intervenes to give Socrates the warning of the person who will administer the poison that discussion might heat him up and diminish the action of the poison (63c8–e2). Socrates dismisses the warning but changes subject: he will now explain to the judges why he
the separation of soul from body gladly and without resentment. In the third one Socrates argues that whoever attempts to grasp the true essence of anything through the bodily senses will invariably fail and that only the one who approaches any object of investigation through thought and understanding would approximate the knowledge of that object most clearly (καθαρώτατα, 65d–e). This association of purity with knowledge through understanding has as a corollary the association of the body with ignorance and pollution that permeates the dialogue. 28

The interconnection of the metaphor of knowledge as κάθαρσις and the metaphors that see death as change of residence and as liberation from the bonds of the body is brought out most clearly in the following passage (67c5–d2):

Κάθαρσις δὲ εἶναι ἂρα οὗ τούτο συμβαίνει, ὅπερ πάλαι ἐν τῷ λόγῳ λέγεται, τὸ χωρίζειν ὅτι μάλιστα ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἐθίσαι αὐτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν πανταχόθεν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος συναγείρεσθαι τε καὶ ἄθροιζεσθαι, καὶ οἰκεῖν κατὰ τὸ

thinks that someone who spent his life doing philosophy will meet death courageously and will be of good hope that good things await him posthumously. Later on, he finishes his apology without having argued for what he says he believes (ἡγούμενος), namely that in the hereafter no less than in his present life he will find good masters and friends (69e1–2).

28 For the body as μίασμα, see Ph. 81b. When it comes to the acquisition of φρόνησις, the body is presented as a source of trouble: even the poets would agree that sight and hearing, the most precise of the bodily senses, never provide an accurate description of reality (65a8–b7); when invoked in the search for truth the body proves to be an utterly incompetent associate (65b9–11); it provides countless distractions through its pains and pleasures to the attempts of the soul to understand the essence of anything through contemplation and reasoning (65c5–9, d11–c4). In short, Socrates considers the body a necessary evil that obstructs the acquisition of knowledge and reduces the agent to a servant of what by nature ought to be controlled (66bd1–2). This deplorable state in which the normal order of things has been turned upside down dooms the embodied agent to epistemic failure: whoever prepares himself best and most accurately to understand and contemplate whatever he seeks will at best come closest to its knowledge (οὗτος ὁ ἐγγύτατα τοῦ γνῶναι ἐκαστόν, 65e4); truth and pure knowledge will never be attained in an embodied state (ἐν ἀκόι ἐν τῷ σώματι ἑχομεν καὶ συμπεριφερόμενή, ἦ ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχή μετὰ τοιοῦτον κακοῦ, οὗ μὴ ποτὲ κηρισῶμεθα ἴκανος οὐ ἐπιθυμομέν· φαίμαν δὲ τούτῳ εἶναι τὸ ἄλλης, 66b5–7). As Rohde (1925) 265 argues, the association of body with pollution might have emerged from the belief in the continued existence of the soul after the death of the body and the concomitant thesis that the soul is divine and immortal. What originated as a “naive” distinction between body and soul, ended up as an opposition between the two.
δυνατὸν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἔπειτα μόνην καθ’ αὐτὴν, ἐκλυμένην ὡσπερ δεσμῶν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος;

And does purification not turn out to be what we mentioned in our argument some time ago, namely, to separate the soul as far as possible from the body and accustom it to gather itself and collect itself out of every part of the body and to dwell by itself as far as it can both now and in the future, freed, as it were, from the bonds of the body?29

Purification is presented as separating the soul from the body to the greatest degree possible and accustoming it to gather itself from the body and reside (οἰκεῖν) “itself by itself,” having been released from the body as if from shackles. But it has also been agreed that death is the separation of body and soul and that the philosopher yearns for such a separation. In fact, philosophy has been presented as a deathlike state: the philosopher is dead in a metaphorical sense, one that the many do not fully comprehend when they ridicule philosophers for being nearly dead. Yet, there is no difference between the ordinary conception of death and the one presented by Socrates since it is agreed by all that death is the separation of body and soul (64c). The tension rather lies in the life choices made by the layperson and the philosopher since the latter will spurn the bodily pleasures and desires to the greatest degree possible and will primarily be concerned with intellectual ones such as the acquisition of wisdom and truth. Satisfying the pleasures of the body only minimally is regarded as a deathlike state by the majority of the people.30 Even though the many consider this

29 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are borrowed from Cooper (1997).
30 65a4–7: Καὶ δοκεῖ γέ που, ὁ Σιμία, τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὃ ἡμέν ἡδύ τῶν τοιούτων μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν οὐκ ἔξιον εἶναι ἐξα, ἀλλ’ ἐγγὺς τι τείνει τῷ τεθνάναι ὃ μηδὲν φροντίζον τῶν ἡδονῶν αἱ διὰ τοῦ σώματος εἰσίν. In Republic 1, Cephalus’ friends use a similar phrase to describe the conditions of old age.
as a deplorable process, Socrates sees it as the only viable option that would allow the philosopher to attain the object of his desire, i.e. wisdom.\(^3\)

Significantly, the metaphor of purification is also applied to virtue and wisdom. In a discussion about virtue, Socrates notices some fundamental flaws in the ordinary conceptions of courage and self-control: the so-called courageous ones are courageous because of fear of greater evils just as the so-called self-controlled avoid certain pleasures because of their fear that they will not enjoy others (68c5–69a4). But it cannot be that courage is what it is through fear and cowardice just as it cannot be that temperance is what it is through intemperance. Exchanging fear for fear and pleasure for pleasure as if they were coins cannot be what virtue really is, for a virtue of this sort would be just a semblance of virtue fit for slaves. Socrates suggests that temperance, justice, and courage might rather be a sort of purging (κάθαρσις τις) of pleasures, fears, and pains, whereas φρόνησις itself might be a sort of καθαρμός (69b7–c3).\(^3\) He then continues (69c3–d2):

καὶ κινδυνεύουσι καὶ οἱ τάς τελετάς ἡμῖν οὕτωι καταστήσαντες οὐ φαύλοι τινες εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὅπερ πάλαι αἰνίττεσθαι ὅτι ὅτι ἦν ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος εἰς Ἁιδοῦ ἀφίκηται ἐν ψυχικῷ κείσεται, ὅ ὒ ἕκαθαρμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος ἐκείσῃ ἀφικόμενος μετὰ θεῶν οἰκήσει. εἰσίν γὰρ δή, [ὁδὲ] φασίν οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετάς,

during which nearly all bodily pleasures are either altogether absent or significantly reduced (329a7–8): … καὶ ἀγανακτοῦσιν ὡς μεγάλων τινῶν ἀπεστερημένοι καὶ τότε μὲν εὖ ἰδόντες, νῦν δὲ οὐδὲ ἰδόντες.

\(^{31}\) Cf. Dorter (1982) 96: “By setting forth his views in the terminology of popular religion, he makes it seem that they are both confirmations and consequences of the religion and that they thus both support and are supported by the religious beliefs.”

\(^{32}\) For the distinction between καθαρμός as the process of purification and κάθαρσις as the state of having been purified, see White (2006) 454 n. 53. For ἔλεγχος as κάθαρσις, see Sph. 230d6–e3: Διὰ ταῦτα δὴ πάντα ἡμῖν, ὁ Θεατίτης, καὶ τὸν ἔλεγχον λεκτέον ὡς ἄρα μεγίστη καὶ κυριωτάτη τὸν καθάρσεων ἐστι, καὶ τὸν ἀνέλεγκτον αὑ χαμίσθεν, ἀν καὶ τυγχάνῃ βασιλεὺς ὁ μέγας ὁν, τὰ μέγιστα ἀκάθαρτον ὄντα, ἀπαίδευτον τε καὶ αἰσχρόν γεγονέναι ταῦτα ἐκ καθαρώτατον καὶ καλλιστον ἔπρεπε τὸν ὄντως ἐσώμενον εὐδαίμονα εἶναι.
“ναρθηκοφόροι μὲν πολλοὶ, βάκχοι δὲ τε παῦροι” οὗτοι δ’ εἰσίν κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν δόξαν οὐκ ἄλλοι ἢ οἱ περιλοσοφηκότες ὀρθῶς.

It is likely that those who established the mystic rites for us were not inferior persons but were speaking in riddles long ago when they said that whoever arrives in the underworld uninitiated and unsanctified will wallow in the mire, whereas he who arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with the gods. There are indeed, as those concerned with the mysteries say, many who carry the thyrsus but the Bacchants are few. These latter are, in my opinion, no other than those who have practiced philosophy in the right way.

Socrates implicitly rejects the ordinary interpretation of what those who established the rituals had been implying all along: the ἀἵνημα is not simply an affirmation that those who perform the rituals—something that does not involve understanding and, thus, appears to Socrates mechanical and superficial—will dwell with the gods, but there must be an alternative, more nuanced meaning.33 This he finds in a saying about the thyrsus-bearers and the bacchants: contrary to the thyrsus-bearers who are the majority and are concerned solely with the superficiality of external purification, the true initiates are the few who have practiced philosophy correctly. Thus, the appropriation of the religious register through its metaphorical application to death, virtue, and wisdom has as a consequence the elevation of philosophy to the status of the mysteries: philosophy, as the death-like practice that seeks to separate the soul from the body to the greatest possible

extent, is not only similar to but also more efficient than the superficial purification of mystery-rites.

As a conclusion, one may argue that metaphorical language is endemic in any discussion about the soul and, consequently, that Socrates has no other means of referring to an inherently metaphorical concept. However, the image-like nature of metaphors reduces their reliability as tools that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. In the special case of *Phaedo*, both metaphors—death as ἀποδημία and the body as prison—entail the metaphorical conception of ψυχή as an entity and form the starting point of virtually all the arguments of Socrates for the harmlessness of death and the immortality of the soul since they are implied in the definition of death as separation of body and soul, which is operative throughout the dialogue. Thus, Socrates’ reluctance to admit that he has knowledge about the soul as well as his assertion that there are holes in his arguments may reflect Plato’s awareness that the arguments of the *Phaedo* fall short of a rigorous proof since they are based on metaphors which serve as images of unverified, and perhaps unverifiable, assumptions. But assumptions such as these seem to be the base of Socrates’ method as he describes it in his “second sailing,” and they constitute an indispensable part of the theory of Forms (99c9–d1). Consequently, Socrates’ use of metaphors may be seen as an attempt to communicate to his interlocutors an intuition that cannot be verified because of its hypothetical nature. At the same time, it is an attempt to persuade them that those assumptions—that soul is immortal and Forms exist—are both true and necessary. In the sense that it attempts to verify what is by its nature unverifiable the metaphorical imagery employed by Socrates resembles a rhetorical

---

34 For example, Kearns (1987) 24–5 supports the view that mental phenomena cannot be expressed literally but only through metaphors. Cf. Penner (2000) 34–6.
35 Kearns (1987) 15 and 46 discusses the metaphor of “mind-as-entity” that was widespread in the language about the mind employed by philosophers of the 18th century. This metaphor saw the mind as tangible, passive, impressible, simple in its structure and specifically located. Cairns (2014) §12 sorts this as an ontological metaphor, since “it reifies the ψυχή as a physical object.”
device that aims at persuasion. Such a view is in line both with the quasi-judicial context in which the discussion takes place and Socrates’ insistence to persuade his interlocutors of his basic points. Let us now turn to the differences between the Socratic and the ordinary conceptions of death, and see what it is exactly that Socrates sets out to prove.

1.2 Ordinary Vs. Socratic Conceptions of Death

Admittedly, Socrates’ calmness in the face of death must have seemed quite extraordinary, and he must have had a peculiar notion about death, traces of which can be found in other works of the first tetralogy where his attitude toward death is less idiosyncratic: in the Apology he maintains an agnostic stance and entertains the possibility that death is not an evil but might as well be the greatest good that could befall one (Ap. 29a4–6); in the opening of the Crito he sleeps so pleasantly that Crito wonders how he bears his present misfortune so lightly, and the reader is left with the impression that Socrates is not at all disturbed by the prospect of his death (Cri. 43b3–9). Socrates’ views in these earlier works are inchoate, and it is not until the Phaedo that we find him making positive claims and holding a more nuanced notion about death. However, the reaction of the internal audience of this dialogue shows that there is a clash between the Socratic (or rather, we may say, Platonic) and the ordinary conception of death. Examples abound: one may point at Phaedo’s description of the strange and unusual mixture of pleasure and pain he experienced, even though he expected to feel pity “as it would seem reasonable in such grief” (59a1–2, ὡς εἰκὸς ἄν δοξεῖν εἶναι παρόντι πένθει). In fact, πένθος is a word employed to express mourning for the dead and indicates that Phaedo himself thought of death as a misfortune that ought to elicit

36 59a4–5, ἦτοπον τί μοι πάθος παρῆν καὶ τις ἁθήνης κράσις ἀπὸ τῆς ἤδονῆς συγκεκριμένη ὀμοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς λύπης. Recall Socrates’ remark at 60b that pleasure and pain are of such a nature that they cannot be experienced simultaneously. Dorter (1982) 5–6 explains away this seeming contradiction by referring to the distinction between true and false pains and pleasures made in Republic and Philebus.
emotions of grief and pain. Again according to Phaedo, the imminence of Socrates’ death overcame all present at the setting of the dialogue and produced an erratic emotional behavior: everyone was disturbed and transitioned from laughter to weeping, Apollodorus being exceptionally affected because of his character (59a7–b4). Finally, one may also mention the contrast between Socrates’ calmness and Xanthippe’s emotional reaction, who displays the behavior that was expected of women in similar circumstances, namely beating her breasts in lament while attempting to evoke pity in those around by mentioning that this would be the last time Socrates would address his friends (60a3–b1).

All the above examples support the claim that ordinary attitudes converge on the single point that death is an outright evil. It is important to note that, even though the internal audience consists of individuals who are to certain extent philosophically experienced, their conception of death as an evil does not differ from the ordinary, pre-philosophical conception and is still not reflective of the kinds of arguments about the immortality and imperishability of the soul that will follow in the dialogue. On the contrary, the Socratic attitude seems to originate from an unswerving adherence to the dictates of reason: keeping in mind the Socratic thesis of the earlier dialogues that virtue is knowledge and putting aside the Socratic disavowal of knowledge as a mere façade of ignorance, one should expect that Socrates would stand out from the crowd of his associates as the exceptionally virtuous philosopher who comes closest to knowing the true essence of things. However, Socrates mentions that pure knowledge is impossible for body and soul compounds such as he is (66e4–6), thus excluding the possibility of being completely sure about the true nature

37 Cf. 68d5.
38 On the issue of attainability of philosophical knowledge, i.e. knowledge of principles, by human beings Plato seems to be giving conflicting accounts. In his discussion of the philosopher’s project in Republic 506c–519c he has the learner proceed from the realm of the sensibles to the intelligible realm, but he makes use of an analogy and uses the sun as a metaphor for the Good. The Seventh Letter seems to imply that
of death and its presumable harmlessness. If knowledge in the strict sense is impossible for body and soul composites, it would then seem that the Socratic attitude is based on guesswork and that, as Hackforth has stated in commenting on the *Phaedo*’s final argument, it lapses into an appeal to religious faith.\(^{39}\)

Is it, then, a sort of religious, non-rational belief that provides Socrates with the confidence and courage with which he faces death?\(^{40}\) If so, there emerges the following problem: The questions Echecrates poses to Phaedo show that he expects to hear the *reasons* that lead to Socrates’ attitude, not the mere affirmation of a dictum of Pythagorean sort; but if Socrates’ attitude ultimately stems from an utterly non-rational source, then he would have no means of *proving* his thesis, and thus appearing consistent with his oft-repeated adherence to rational argument. Significantly, Socrates would seem to be caught up in a contradiction, if he is unable to provide an account for his life-choices, his willingness to die included: his interlocutors, especially Simmias, urge him on to justify his stance in the face of death just as whoever conversed with Socrates sooner or later had to give an account of his life-choices (63a4–9).\(^{41}\) An inadequate justification would entail that, even though Socrates spent his entire life examining others and considered an unexamined life not worth living, in the end he did not practice what he preached. At this point, the metaphor of the law court is introduced: Socrates will defend himself as if in a court of law (63b2: ὥσπερ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ). This already puts him in the position of the defendant

\(^{39}\) Hackforth (1955) 164.

\(^{40}\) Price (1969) 312 argues that two criteria are used to decide whether a belief is reasonable: “the evidential criterion,” according to which “a belief is reasonable if it is supported by the evidence which the believer has, and if the degree of his belief corresponds to the strength of the evidence”; and “the consistency criterion,” which specifies that any belief which any reasonable person holds during a given period should be consistent with the rest of the beliefs held during that same period.

\(^{41}\) Simmias goes as far as suggesting that Socrates might be hiding something from them (63e8–d2). Cf. Nicias’ description of Socrates’ practice of ἔλεγχος at *Lach.* 187e6–188c1.
whose aim is, as he himself admits at 91a, not so much to speak the truth as to speak persuasively.\(^{42}\) Let us turn to what it is exactly that Socrates has to prove in order to avoid appearing incoherent.

To no surprise, the first paradoxical thesis about death is put forward by Socrates when he asks Cebes to tell Evenus that, if prudent, he should follow Socrates to death as soon as possible (61b7–8). When Simmias says that Evenus would never willingly do that, Socrates retorts that any philosophical man would be willing to die (61c2–9).\(^{43}\) Should then philosophers take their own lives? Socrates anticipates this question by borrowing from the language of the mysteries the image that people are in a sort of prison and are, so to speak, slaves and possessions of the gods; it would thus be both impious and a sign of ignorance to run away from such masters by committing suicide, unless the gods themselves ordained such an act (61c9–62c8). Cebes then objects: if things are so, it is absurd for the philosopher to die willingly because this would deprive him of the best guardians possible, i.e. the gods, and only a foolish person would think that he would be better suited than a god to take care of himself (62c9–e7).

A further implication of Cebes’ objection is that, even if there were better guardians to take care of the deceased ones, it would still have to be shown that death does not entail the end of existence. This point he formulates more clearly in his detailed criticism to Socrates’ arguments at 86e6–88b8, where he offers the image of the soul as weaver and the body as cloak. Socrates sums it up very succinctly in the following passages (95b9–c4, d6–e1):\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\) Peterson (2011) 172: “A conventional speaker in a law-court does not necessarily say what he believes but aims at persuading his audience.”

\(^{43}\) Ebert (2001) argues that Evenus belonged to a Pythagorean community. Peterson (2011) 169 sees this reference to the willingness with which Evenus would welcome death as an allusion to his “reputation or self-reference as a philosopher.” For the view that what we have here is a suggestion that Evenus would be better off dead, see Peterson (2003).

\(^{44}\) For a lucid discussion of these passages, see Peterson (2011) 179–82.
You consider that the soul must be proved to be immortal and indestructible before a philosopher on the point of death, who is confident that he will fare much better in the underworld than if he had led any other kind of life, can avoid being foolish and simple-minded in this confidence. … for it is natural for a man who is no fool to be afraid, if he does not know and cannot prove that the soul is immortal.

Cebes’ objections could be rephrased as follows: a sensible person should resent death (a) because it has not been proven that the soul continues to exist after death, and (b) because, even if the soul is immortal, death would deprive one of the best guardians possible. In the special case of Socrates, it cannot be both that he is sensible and he does not resent death; one of the two should be abandoned, yet no one would welcome the conclusion that Socrates is foolish or that he fears death. Cebes’ argument suggests that fear should be the appropriate response for Socrates at the prospect of his death, unless he can provide a demonstrative proof for the immortality of the soul. Otherwise, his attitude would run the risk of being interpreted as foolishness. In other words, the crux of the matter is whether Socrates can support his attitude through reliance on a demonstrative proof.
To refute Cebes’ objection Socrates must show (a) that death is not the end of personal existence and (b) that being dead is a more beneficial state than being alive. In fact, that death is not the end of existence is already implicit in the way Socrates has set up the discussion through the Homeric metaphor that sees death as body and soul separation and change of residence. More detailed arguments will be needed later on to tackle Cebes’ objection that Socrates still has not shown that the soul does not disperse like wind at the moment of death but continues to exist and holds some power and intelligence (70a-b). As for showing that being dead is more beneficial a state than being alive, Socrates will base his argument on the possibility of knowledge at the cost of downgrading the subsidiary role the body plays in its acquisition later on in the dialogue and relegating the body to the status of a mere, if necessary, obstacle.

In general, Socrates’ arguments for the immortality of the soul have been found lacking in a number of respects. What interests me here, however, is not so much their independent demonstrative rigor as their effectiveness in the context of this particular work. In other words, do they succeed in persuading the internal audience? Let us turn briefly to the arguments and the reactions of Socrates’ interlocutors to see why the answer should be in the negative.

The first argument Socrates offers to show that the soul is immortal is the so-called Cyclical Argument (69e6–72e1). It is intended to establish the existence of the soul as a separate entity and to meet Cebes’ objection that the soul may disappear like smoke as soon as it is separated from the body at the time of death (69e7–70b4)—a view that is based on a Homeric parallel and has quite an appeal among the many (πολλὴν ἀπιστίαν παρέχει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις). The argument as a whole

---

45 He then reaches a conclusion that is at odds with what happens in the Homeric poems, namely that death does not entail the end of personal existence.
46 The arguments under discussion are the Cyclical Argument (69e6–72e1), the Recollection Argument (72e3–78b3), the Affinity Argument (78b4–84b4), and the Final Argument (102a10–107b10). For the view that the arguments fail, see Gallop (1975) 192–222; Bostock (1986) 135–89. Gerson (2003) 52 argues that the arguments were not meant to stand on their own but must be viewed as segments of a large argument.
seeks to establish the recurrent emergence of the living from the dead through appeal to a principle of opposites which specifies that, whenever a thing \( X \) comes to be \( F \), it does so from having previously been \(-F\): e.g., something becomes larger only if it previously was smaller; we fall asleep only if we were previously awake, and \textit{vice versa}. Given that life and death are opposites and that it is a factual truth that the deceased ones can only come from living humans, it should follow that the living ones come from the dead. The deficiency of the argument, as has been noted,\(^47\) lies in that it treats “alive” and “dead” as attributes that could be predicated on a preexisting subject and thus implicitly assumes the preexistence of such a subject, whereas this is exactly what has to be demonstrated.

Cebes’ initial response to the argument is positive. He prompts Socrates to remind them of another argument that corroborates the conclusion of the Cyclical Argument: the Recollection Argument (72e3–78b3). This argument attempts to show that our souls preexisted our births as human beings on the grounds that knowledge is in fact recollection of eternal truths accessible only to the intellect: to recollect any \( X \) one must have first known it (73c1–3); sensible objects such as sticks and stones are never equal \textit{simpliciter} but may on closer inspection appear unequal to one another or appear equal to one observer and unequal to another (74a9–b10); they are, in other words, contextually ambiguous. Sensory data is defective, yet it is only through it that one recollects the notion of the Equal itself (75a5–8). Knowledge of the Equal itself must have originated from another source at a time before our birth as human beings (75c4–5). Therefore, our souls preexisted our births (76e5–7).

Simmias and Cebes agree that Socrates has proved the preexistence of our souls, yet the arguments fail to convince them of immortality of the soul. They notice that Socrates has only

\(^{47}\) Gallop (1975) 106.
dealt with only half of the problem and that, in order for the proof to be complete, it still has to be shown that the soul continues to exist posthumously (77c1–5). Socrates argues that the arguments combined would yield the desired conclusion and reproaches them for harboring a childish fear that the soul might vanish in the wind at the time of death, Ce[be]s laughs at Socrates’ jest and urges him on to continue and attempt to persuade them not to fear death as though there were a child in them fearing such things (77c6–c7). Now Socrates turns to the Affinity Argument (78b4–84b4): this is in essence an argument by analogy that aims at showing that the soul has certain properties in common with the Forms on the basis that it is most like (ὁµοιότατον) that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, simple, indissoluble, and always the same with respect to itself (80a10–b5). Socrates concludes that it belongs to the soul to be either completely indissoluble or ἐγγύς τότου (80b9–10).

The Affinity Argument also fails to persuade Simmias and Ce[be]s. As soon as they start conversing in a low voice with one another, Socrates himself admits that a more thorough discussion would reveal that the argument leaves room for many doubts and objections and urges them on to voice their concerns (84c3–d2). Simmias then argues that the soul might be a sort of harmony that vanishes just like the musical harmony produced by a lyre ceases to exist when the instrument is destroyed (85e3–d4). Ce[be]s accepts that the soul is more enduring than the body but likens it to a weaver who has produced and worn out many cloaks over the course of his lifetime but is destined to die while wearing the last cloak. Likewise, a soul may inhabit and wear out many

---

48 This is usually taken to mean that the Cyclical Argument deals with pre-existence, whereas the Recollection Argument with post-existence of the soul. As Gerson (2003) 78 rightly observes, if the Cyclical Argument accomplishes anything on its own, it aims at proving both pre- and post-existence of the soul, and there is, thus, no need to combine the arguments.

49 It is often criticized in the bibliography as a very weak argument. See, for example, Elton (1997). Gerson (2003) 79–88 goes at great pains to do it justice on the assumption that, underlying the Affinity Argument, there is a conception of knowledge as a non-representational state of the soul. See also Young (2007) 10–69.
bodies, yet one cannot ever be sure which incarnation might be the last, after which the soul will be utterly destroyed; it still needs to be shown that the soul is ἀθάνατος τε καὶ ἀνώλεθρος, otherwise there will still be room for fear of death (86e6–88b8). When Simmias and Cebes express their doubts about the immortality of the soul, the narrative comes to a halt and a numbing effect is produced both to the internal audience and to Echecrates (88c1–e7): they had been persuaded by Socrates’ arguments but, after the counter-attacks of the Thebans, they were thrown into confusion (ἀναταράξατι) and lapsed back to a state of ἀπιστία, wondering whether they themselves were unworthy judges of such matters or the subject itself was such as to admit no definitive answer.50

After a small interlude Socrates returns to countering both the objections. He does away easily with Simmias’ proposal that the soul might be a sort of harmony by noticing its incompatibility with the belief that knowledge is recollection (92c8–e3) and offers other reasons why the soul cannot be a harmony,51 which satisfy both Simmias and Cebes (92c11–e3, 95a7–b4). Before addressing Cebes’ argument, Socrates deems it necessary to discuss the causes of generation and destruction (95e9–10) and embarks on a small digression in which he relates his intellectual development on the realm of natural philosophy, his disappointment with earlier

---

50 One of the effects of dialectic is to produce to the interlocutor a feeling of ἀπορία in order to turn them into philosophy. Cf. Tht. 167e1–168a7: ἄν μὲν γὰρ οὕτω ποιήσ [sc. helping out the interlocutors to notice their fallacies], ἑαυτοὺς αἰτιᾶσονται οἱ προσδιατριβοῦντες σοι τῆς αὐτῶν ταραξῆς καὶ ἀπορίας ἄλλοι οὕτως, καὶ σὲ μὲν διώξονται καὶ φιλήσουσιν, αὐτοὺς δὲ μισήσουσι καὶ φεύξονται ἢ ἀπ' ἑαυτῶν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν, ἢν ἄλλοι γενόμενοι ἀπαλλαγός τῶν οὗ πρότερον ἦσαν. Blank (1993) 431: “[D]ialectical argument produces an emotional effect on the conversational respondent, and the effect is beneficial when the questioner is serious, for he arouses in the respondent self-hatred and pursuit of philosophy.”

51 Socrates offers additional arguments to rebut Simmias harmony theory: (a) that a harmony cannot oppose that parts that constitute it, whereas the soul can oppose the body (92e4–93a10, 94b4–e6); (b) if a harmony can admit of degrees, then the soul is not a kind of harmony because no soul is more of a soul than another; and if a harmony does not admit of degrees because it cannot partake of discord (ἄναρμοστια), then the soul is not a harmony because there are both good and bad souls, i.e. souls that, if the hypothesis were to hold, would partake of harmony and souls that would partake of discord (93a11–94b2).
mechanistic explanations that failed to distinguish between necessary and sufficient causes (96a6–99d2), the method of hypothesis, and the postulation that εἴναι τι καλόν αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὐτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα (100b5–7). Then, he offers the Final Argument, which roughly runs as follows:

1. There are things that never admit their opposites (102d6–103a2): largeness itself never admits smallness.

2. There are things which, though not opposites themselves, always bring up one of a pair of opposites (105a1–5): fire and snow are not opposites, yet fire is necessarily linked with hotness as snow is necessarily linked with coldness; thus, fire never admits snow and *vice versa*.

3. On the advance of a carrier of opposites, the other carrier must either withdraw or perish (103d5–12): on the advance of snow, fire must either withdraw or perish.

4. The soul is what always brings up life to a body (105c9–d5).

5. Life and death are opposites (105d6–9).

6. The soul never admits death because it is necessarily linked with life (105d10–12).

7. Thus, the soul is immortal (ἀθάνατον, 105e2–7).

8. On the approach of death, the soul must either withdraw or perish.

9. The soul must withdraw because what is immortal cannot perish (106b1–e8).

10. Thus, the soul is immortal and imperishable (ἀθάνατον τε καὶ ἀνόλεθρον, 106e9–107a1).
Even though this argument has not been favorably received by ancient and recent commentators alike,\textsuperscript{52} it seems satisfactory to Cebes, whose doubts it aimed at dissolving (107a2–3). Yet, it seems that it fails to persuade at least two members of the company: Simmias and Crito. Simmias seems to waver between trusting the argument and having reservations about its conclusion (107a8–b3):

\begin{hellenic}
\textit{Ἀλλὰ μὴν, ἂ δ’ ὃς ὁ Σιμμίας, οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἔχω ἐτὶ ὁπὴ ἀπιστῶ ἐκ γε τῶν λεγομένων· ύπὸ μέντοι τοῦ μεγέθους περὶ δὲν οἱ λόγοι εἰσίν, καὶ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀσθένειαν ἀτιμάζων, ἀναγκάζομαι ἀπιστίαν ἐτὶ ἔχειν παρ' ἐμαυτῷ περὶ τῶν εἰρημένων.}
\end{hellenic}

Certainly, said Simmias, I myself have no remaining grounds for doubt after what has been said; nevertheless, in view of the importance of our subject and my low opinion of human weakness, I am bound still to have some private misgivings about what we have said.

His comments that he is compelled to distrust the arguments due to the significance of the matter and the light esteem in which he holds the human weakness are commended by Socrates, who urges him on to return to the initial hypotheses and check their validity (107b4–9). That Socrates has failed to persuade Crito is made evident toward the end of the dialogue, where he asks Socrates how they should bury him (115c3). Socrates replies playfully that they can bury him however they

\textsuperscript{52} For Strato of Lampsacus’ criticism of the Final Argument, see Hackforth (1955) 195–8; Baltussen (2015). Keyt (1963) argues that Plato is equivocating on the word “immortal.” O’Brien (1968) 101–3 and Gallop (1975) 215–6 argue against this, although the latter admits that it is not easy to make sense of the terms “death” and “immortal” in a way that the proof is not question-begging. Cf. Hackforth (1955) 164: “… [I]t is only if we allow that the appeal is to faith that we can avoid a feeling of deep disappointment in this matter, inasmuch as from the standpoint of logic the argument has petered out into futility.”
wish, provided that he does not escape them, but notices that Crito has not been convinced (115c6, οὐ πείθω, ὦ ἄνδρες, Κρίτωνα).

To sum up, all four arguments offered to prove that the soul is immortal and that posthumous existence is desirable for the philosopher have failed to persuade the internal audience. Misgivings are expressed about the first three arguments by Simmias and Cebes, whereas even Socrates himself states that the arguments still leave room for doubt to whoever would examine them more closely. The Final Argument fails to persuade Simmias, and one may infer that Crito has not been affected at all by any of them. I conclude, then, that both the weakness of the arguments as well as the negative response by the internal audience indicate that Socrates does not depend solely on demonstrative argument to form the opinion that the soul is immortal and that the reasons why he holds such a belief should also be sought elsewhere, namely his ἐλπίς that knowledge is possible.\textsuperscript{53}

In numerous passages Socrates maintains that the body poses a threat to the possibility of knowledge, hence to the philosophical quest as a whole. He summarizes this perilous situation toward the end of his fictional apology by presenting a dichotomy concerning the possibility of knowledge (66e4–6):

\begin{quote}
eἰ γὰρ μὴ οἶδὼ τε μετὰ τοῦ σώματος μηδὲν καθαρῶς γνῶναι, δυοῖν θάτερον, ἢ
οὐδαμοῦ ἔστιν κτήσασθαι τὸ εἰδέναι ἢ τελευτήσασιν.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{53} Peterson (2011) 166–95 argues that Socrates is merely advancing theses that are put forward by Simmias and Cebes, whereas in fact he does not endorse their Pythagorean conception of philosophy. Contra Butler (2015), who argues that the conception of philosophy of the Phaedo is in line with that of the Apology and that Socrates as presented in Phaedo did stay away from bodily desires and feelings as far as was ethically possible for a true philosopher. I think that Peterson downplays the importance of the passages where Socrates is presented as holding the beliefs to be proven as his own as, for example, 91a7–b1, 102d5.
For if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death.

If pure knowledge is attainable, there must exist a disembodied state to allow for such a possibility. Indeed, Socrates offers an argument that in essence equates learning to recollection of knowledge that had always been present in our souls and had been attained before our birth as human beings; at this point though his opinion that knowledge is possible rests on no other ground than hope: he does not describe himself as being certain that there is posthumous existence, but he repeatedly claims that he hopes things are so. In fact, there are so many repetitions of ἐλπίς and its cognates that it would not be an exaggeration to state that Socrates’ conviction about the possibility of knowledge stems from a non-rational source.54 This statement, though, would be accurate if it would be shown that ἐλπίς completely lacks a discursive nature. Focusing on the epistemic status of ἐλπίς would help shed some light on the reasons that lead to Socrates’ stance toward death and the attainability of knowledge.

1.3 The Nature of Socrates’ ἐλπίς

The very meaning of ἐλπίζειν is reflected in its most ordinary prose construction, namely the one that takes a supplementary future infinitive: one hopes for or expects something that has not yet occurred, something that lies in the future; as such the object of one’s hopes or expectations is by definition unknown. Since there can be no certainty about the realization of one’s hopes or expectations at any given moment, it follows that ἐλπίς is lower in the epistemic climax than

54 ἀλλ' ἐν ἐλπίς εἴμι εἴναι τι τος τετελευτηκόσι, 63c5; ὡς μοι φαίνεται εἰκότως ἀνήρ τῷ ὅντι ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίψας τὸν βίον θαρρείν μέλλον ἀποθανεῖσθαι καὶ ἐν ἐλπίς εἴναι ἐκεί μέγιστα οἴσεσθαι ἀγαθὰ ἐπειδὴ τελευτήσῃ, 63c9–64a2; πολλὴ ἐλπίς ἀφικομένῳ οἱ ἐγὼ πορεύομαι, 67b7; οἱ ἀφικομένοις ἐλπίς ἐστιν οὗ διὰ βίου ἤρων τυχεῖν – ἤρων δὲ φρονήσεως, 68a1; cf. 68a6–8.
knowledge. Apart from their difference in epistemic status ἐλπίς and ἐπιστήμη differ in two other fundamental respects, namely gradation and capability of being good or bad. When it comes to knowledge Plato seems to hold a very strict definition according to which it cannot admit of degrees: one either knows or does not know something. On the contrary, constructions such as ἐλπίς πολλή show that one can hope or expect in degrees, something which, as I will argue below, does not make sense unless we consider the reasons one has for hoping for and expecting something. Somewhat similarly, knowledge seems to be an essentially good thing for Plato: this does not mean that there can be no knowledge of bad or evil things—recall the proposed definition of courage as knowledge of future evils and future non-evils or goods in Laches 198c—but that even the knowledge of bad things is itself good. Hope, on the other hand, can be described as good but also as bad: one can be εὔελπίς, and the ἐλπίς can itself be καλή, ἀγαθή but also κακή. In what sense can ἐλπίς be good or bad? It would seem that a hope or expectation should be declared good or bad only retrospectively, once the outcome is clear and the event, action, etc., expected or hoped for has been realized or not.

However, a passage in the Republic suggests that κακὴ ἐλπίς refers not to an expectation that has not been realized but to the expectation of bad things awaiting those who have deliberately acted unjustly. A closer look to the passage under discussion will reveal that κακὴ ἐλπίς functions in a way similar to fear and its use thus betrays a notion of death that diverges from the Socratic one. Some context first: Socrates and Cephalus have a conversation about the conditions of old age; Cephalus related and rejected as beside the point the usual complaints of his coevals, namely that old age is unbearable because it deprives one of the pleasures of the youth, and proposed that the character of each individual is responsible for how they bear old age. When Socrates shifts the

---

55 E.g. Phd. 67b8, c1, 70a8, 114c8.
56 Phd. 63c5, 70a8; R. 331a1.
discussion on Cephalus' wealth and asks him what was the greatest good he enjoyed because of it,

Cephalus replies (R. 330d4–331a3):

'Ο, ἦ δ’ ὄς, ἵσως οὐκ ἐν πολλοῖς πείσαιμι λέγων. εὖ γὰρ ἢσθι, ἔφη, ὁ Σώκρατες, ὅτι, ἐπειδὰν τις ἐγγὺς ἦ τοῦ οἴεσθαι τελευτήσειν, εἰσέρχεται αὐτῷ δέος καὶ φροντίς περί ὧν ἐμπροσθεν οὐκ εἰσήει. οἶ τε γὰρ λεγόμενοι μῦθοι περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἀἰδοῦ, ὡς τὸν ἐνθάδε ἀδικήσαντα δεῖ ἐκεῖ διδόναι δίκην, καταγελώμενοι τέως, τότε δὴ στρέφουσιν αὐτὸν τὴν ψυχὴν μὴ ἀληθείς δισιν· καὶ αὐτὸς – ἦτοι ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ γῆρως ἁσθενείας ἦ καὶ ὅσπερ ἡδὴ ἐγγυτέρω ὃν τῶν ἐκεῖ μᾶλλον τι καθορᾶ αὐτὰ – ὑποψίας δ’ οὖν καὶ δείματος μεστὸς γίγνεται καὶ ἀναλογίζεται ἡδὴ καὶ σκοπεῖ εἰ τινά τι ἡδίκησεν. ὅ μὲν οὖν εὐρίσκων ἐαυτοῦ ἐν τῷ βίῳ πολλὰ ἀδικήματα καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὑπνών, ὅσπερ οἱ παῖδες, θαμὰ ἐγειρόμενος δειμαίνει καὶ ζῇ μετὰ κακῆς ἐλπίδος· τῷ δὲ μηδὲν ἐαυτῷ ἀδικον συνειδότι ἡδεῖα ἔλπις ἄει πάρεστι καὶ ἀγαθὴ γηροτρόφος, ὡς καὶ Πίνδαρος λέγει…

What I have to say probably wouldn’t persuade most people. But you know, Socrates, that when someone thinks his end is near, he becomes frightened and concerned about things he didn’t fear before. It’s then that the stories we’re told about Hades, about how people who’ve been unjust here must pay the penalty there—stories he used to make fun of—twist his soul this way and that for fear they’re true. And whether because of the weakness of old age or because he is now closer to what happens in Hades and has a clearer view of it, or whatever it is, he is filled with foreboding and fear, and he examines himself to see whether he has been
unjust to anyone. If he finds many injustices in his life, he awakes from sleep in terror, as children do, and lives in anticipation of bad things to come. But someone who knows that he hasn’t been unjust has sweet good hope as his constant companion—a nurse to his old age, as Pindar says…

Cephalus describes the situation that befalls anyone who thinks his end is near: it is a well-known fact (εὖ γὰρ ἵσθι) that fear creeps into him about things that did not concern him before, and the myths about Hades, namely that those who acted unjustly in this life will pay the price in the afterlife, once ridiculed, now start torturing his soul. It seems that κακὴ ἐλπίς is directed towards an imminent evil, and as such functions in the same way as δέος and δέημα: recall the definition of δέος at Laches 198b8–9 as προσδοκία μέλλοντος κακοῦ.57 Cephalus seems to endorse the idea that fear is the appropriate response to death for those who find themselves guilty of many crimes during their lifetime because of the punishment that awaits them. Similarly, he believes that those who led just and pious lives will live with the pleasant hope (ἡ δεῖ ἐλπίς) that since they owe nothing to no one they have nothing to fear about the afterlife. Cephalus concludes that acquisition of money is extremely valuable not for everyone but for the sensible and orderly ones (οὐ τι παντὶ ἀνδρὶ ἄλλα τῷ ἐπιείκεῖ καὶ κοσμίῳ, 331b1).

Cephalus’ beliefs reveal a number of divergences from two fundamental Socratic theses as found in the Republic as well as the Gorgias: (a) that justice is the inner condition of a healthy soul and has nothing to do with transactions, and (b) that deserved punishment is not an evil. The first point is easily illustrated by even a superficial reading of the discussion that follows the cited

57 Cf. the definition of ἐλπίς as προσδοκία ἄγαθοῦ in Def. 416a. Also, Laws 644c9–d1: Πρὸς δὲ τούτων ἀμφότεροι ἀδέξας μελλόντων, οίν κοινὸν μὲν ὄνομα ἐλπίς, ἰδιὸν δὲ, φόβος μὲν ἢ πρὸ λύπης ἐλπίς, θάρρος δὲ ἢ πρὸ τοῦ ἐναντίου.
passage: Socrates immediately picks up on Cephalus’ implicit definition of justice, namely to return to the owner whatever one has borrowed, and attempts to modify the definition by offering a contextually ambiguous example. As far as the second point is concerned, Socrates argues most vehemently in support of it in a discussion he holds with Polus in the Gorgias, where he advances the view that avoiding punishment for one’s wrongdoings is worse than suffering it on the grounds that it is like being sick and avoiding medical care (Grg. 476a–479e). The Republic also corroborates the thesis that deserved punishment does not constitute an evil: after introducing the spirited part through the example of Leontius, Socrates suggests that the θυμός of the wrongdoer is not willing to be roused when suffering just punishment (οὐκ ἐθέλει πρός τοῦτον αὐτοῖ ἐγείρεσθαι ὁ θυμός, 440c5). It seems, then, that Cephalus speaks in a pretheoretical manner when he uses κακὴ ἐλπίς to refer to fear of punishment in Hades since even that prospect would not count as an imminent evil to Socrates but, on the contrary, as an imminent good. Overall, it is not so much the essence of Cephalus’ view that does not fit the Socratic context as the justification that he offers: Socrates would probably concede that whoever has lead a just and pious life will live the rest of his life with pleasant hope as his companion, but for him a just life cannot be other than the philosophical life.

It may seem that ἐλπίζειν should be classified as a desire since it is true that in English, at least, “to hope that X” means that there is reason to believe that X is likely to occur, but there is

---

60 Cf. Wolfsdorf (2008) 15 purports to explain the protreptic and propaedeutic nature of the dialogues through appeal to what he terms a-structure: “a dramatic or discursive structure constituted by a linear sequence or progression of beliefs and values, at one pole of which lie conventional and traditional (antiphilosophical) views and values and at the other pole of which lie Platonic (philosophical) views and values.” He notes that the a-structure does not only “concern specific propositions debated in the course of the investigation, but, importantly, it may also concern the grounds of or justifications for belief of those propositions.”
also an implicit wish, a desire that X should obtain, regardless of whether it is likely or not. Indeed, a passage in the *Timaeus* links hopes and expectations to the mortal body and soul that is the source of all irrational passions: once the creator of the universe fashioned all the immortal beings included in the eternal living thing, he ordered the lesser gods to create whatever is mortal (69c). Imitating him, the lesser gods took the immortal origin of the soul and wrapped around it the mortal body to which they also assigned a different, mortal type of soul. This bodily soul contains within it dreadful and necessary affections: it is the source of pleasure, of pain and grief, of audacity and fear, of anger, and lastly of hope (69c5–d4). Hope is here described as εὐπαράγωγος: the adjective occurs only once in the platonic corpus, but its meaning may be illuminated by an instance in the Hippocratic corpus, where it is applied to bones that are flexible and easy to bring into place,\(^{61}\) as well as an occurrence in Aristophanes’ *Knights* that is worth quoting in full (*Eq.* 1111–20):

ΧΟ. Ὡ Δήμε, καλήν γ’ ἔχεις

ἀρχήν, ὅτε πάντες ἀν-

θρωποὶ δεδίασι σ’ ὤς-

περ ἄνδρα τύπαννον.

Ἀλλ’ εὐπαράγωγος εἰ,

θωπευόμενος τε χαί-

ρεις κάζαπατώμενος,

πρὸς τὸν τε λέγοντ’ ἀεὶ

κέχηνας· ὁ νοῦς δὲ σου

παρὸν ἀποδῆμεῖ. 1115

1120

---

\(^{61}\) *Hp. Fract.* 6.6: καὶ τὰ ὀστέα τὰ κατεγότα ἐπὶ μᾶλλον κινεῦμα καὶ εὐπαράγογα ἐς κατόρθωσιν.
Demos, you have a fine sway, since all mankind fears you like a man with tyrannical power. But you’re easily led astray: you enjoy being flattered and thoroughly deceived, and every speechmaker has you gaping. You’ve a mind, but it’s out to lunch.⁶²

The chorus addresses Demos, i.e. the people, and criticizes him for being εὐπαράγωγος (“gullible”) and easily deceived by whoever addresses him. Notice how the gullibility of Demos is contrasted to his νοῦς: the aristocratic chorus of the knights criticizes the people for rejoicing at being flattered and not having the ability to critically examine the speeches addressed to them—a criticism not that different from the one hurled against the people by Plato in the Gorgias; smooth-talking demagogues overcome the rational faculty of the people which is “absent, even though it is present.” It may be no more than a coincidence, but apart from being a pun that perfectly suits the Aristophanic context, the metaphor of “leaving town” employed to express the reduced critical abilities of the people is the one employed by Socrates in Phaedo and Apology to describe death, the difference being that in Phaedo, at least, ἀποδημέω is indicative of the peak activity of one’s

rational faculty and critical abilities since it denotes separation from the body and acquisition of truth in all its purity.

If ἐλπίς were merely associated with the mortal body and soul of the Timaeus, it would be accurate to describe any action based on it as an action that stemmed from a non-rational source. Socrates’ conviction about the posthumous benefits that await any virtuous and philosophical person would resemble blind religious faith since it would be based on a premise that altogether lacked propositional content. However, an examination of the relationship between hope and reason reveals that the above description is inaccurate. A discussion about true and false pleasures in the Philebus indicates that the nature of hoping or expecting is not altogether dissociated with the faculty of reason: Socrates and Protarchus agree that all human beings are filled with hopes which are in fact arguments (Πολλὸν μὴν ἐλπίδον, ὡς ἐλέγομεν ἄρτι, πᾶς ἀνθρώπος γέμει; ... Λόγοι μὴν εἰσὶν ἐν ἑκάστοις ἡμῶν, ἂς ἐλπίδας ὑπομάζομεν; 40a3–7). Additionally, a passage in the Apology suggests that ἐλπίς consists of arguments as well as non-rational elements: once the verdict has been reached and Socrates has been convicted to die of hemlock, he turns to that part of the jury that voted for his acquittal and relates to them how the failure of his divine sign to react to the series of events that led to his conviction could be interpreted as an indication that death is not an evil (40a8–c3). Thus, Socrates says, “what has happened to me may be a good thing and those of us who think death is an evil are certainly in the wrong” (κινδυνεύει γὰρ μοι τὸ συμβεβηκὸς τούτῳ ἄγαθὸν γεγονέναι, καὶ οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅπως ἡμεῖς ὑπομάζομεν, ὃσοι οἴομεθα κακὸν εἶναι τὸ τεθνάναι, 40b7–c1). Socrates seems to imply that he previously thought of death as an evil—or, at least, allowed this possibility—but a wonderful thing happened to him because the divine sign did not oppose him (ἐμοὶ γὰρ ... θαυμάσιον τι γέγονεν, 40a2–3). Here we

63 For an analysis of hope in the Philebus, see Vogt (2017).
have an indication that the belief that death might be a good thing stems from a rationally suspicious source, namely the realization that the divine sign that diverted him from wrongdoing remained inert. Socrates, however, does not stop short of offering a rational justification of the intuition entailed by the absence of his divine sign; he continues (40c4–9):

Ἐννοήσωμεν δὲ καὶ τῇδε ὡς πολλὴ ἑλπὶς ἐστιν ἁγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι. δυοὶ γὰρ θάτερον ἐστιν τὸ τεθνάναι· ἢ γὰρ οἶνον μηδὲν εἶναι μηδὲ αἰσθησίν μηδεμίαν μηδενὸς ἔχειν τὸν τεθνεώτα, ἢ κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα μεταβολὴ τῆς τυγχάνει οὕσα καὶ μετοίκησις τῇ ψυχῇ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἐνθένδε εἰς ἄλλον τόπον.

Let us reflect in this way, too, that there is good hope that death is a blessing, for it is one of two things: either the dead are nothing and have no perception of anything, or it is, as we are told, a change and a relocating for the soul from here to another place.

64 It should be noted that no one but Socrates is privy to his inner communication with the σημεῖον and that the nature of this communication is vaguely described as an opposition: it is not at all clear whether this ἐναντίωσις is by means of reason or some other force that prohibits Socrates from doing whatever the sign would deem inappropriate. Indeed, it could be that the δαιμόνιον opposed Socrates through an emotion that left him rigid or through a verbal command, an inner prohibition of the sort “Don’t do X!” In either case there is no rational justification for either feeling the relevant emotion or obeying the command. But even in that case the presence of the divine sign would explain—without justifying—why Socrates did not do X. Here, on the contrary, the appeal is to the absence of the divine sign which is itself adduced as an indication of the correctness of Socrates’ choices prior to and during his trial and, subsequently, of the harmlessness of death. Thus, a paradox seems to emerge since Socrates’ attitude stems from a force that failed to react: strictly speaking, the divine sign did not do anything, and, even though this reference to the δαιμόνιον serves the narrative of Socrates’ godsent mission that permeates the Apology and presents a pious Socrates, to base one’s convictions and attitude on something that did not happen seems to be, if I may be allowed a pun, hopelessly unjustified. On the δαιμόνιον, see Vlastos (1991) 283–7; Brickhouse and Smith (1994) 190–5; McPherran (1991) 368–73; Reeve (1989) 70–3.
A development has taken place in Socrates’ attitude toward death that starts with the popularly accepted thesis that death is the ultimate evil (ταυτὶ ἄ γε δῆ οἰηθεὶ ἂν τὶς καὶ νομίζεται ἔσχατα κακῶν εἶναι, 40a7–8) and ends up with the abandonment of that thesis because of the influence of an extrarational force that gives rise to “much hope” that death might after all be a good thing. He then formulates a dilemma about death which—irrespective of whether it is a false one or not—aims at justifying his belief that death is not an evil by means of argument. This seems to be the point where a belief that arose a rationally turns into a reasonably held expectation: ἐλπίς is the rational transformation of the previously unsupported intimation. It is important to note that Socrates does not claim to know or to have proven that death is a beneficial state; he simply produced an argument to support a belief that dawned on him and substituted it for a generally accepted belief about death, which was also extrarationally grounded since it originated from ignorance and irrational fear.⁶⁵

Hope, then, and expectation are universal features of human beings and can be rationally grounded in the sense that people can have reasons to expect or hope for anything. At the same time, ἐλπίς is associated with bodily passions and as such is easily lead astray. The malleability of ἐλπίς as well as its weakness and unreliability as a guiding principle are perhaps to be explained by appeal to the nature of the arguments or reasons on which its formation is based: hope does not lack propositional content since it consists of certain λόγοι within us which presumably deal with future events—perhaps future non-evils and goods. However, owing their origin to states of the mortal body that are among its many affections, these arguments share in the unpredictability and ambiguity that characterizes their source of origin: they are as unstable and multifaceted as anything that belongs to the mortal realm. One is reminded of the distinction between true opinion

and knowledge of *Meno* (97e2–98a8): the former resembles the statues of Deadalus that run away from their owner unless they are tied down. It is useful for as long as it remains in the soul, but it becomes valuable only when securely fastened through an account of the reason why (αἰτίας λογισμοῦ), which is also the process through which true opinion is elevated to the status of knowledge. The difference between hope and true opinion is perhaps that the former cannot ever be as securely fastened as the latter through a secure account of the reason why; nevertheless, one could safely assume that the better and the more the reasons one holds for expecting something, the more rationally grounded his expectation would be, something that would account for constructions such as πολλῇ καὶ ἀγαθῇ ἔλπις noted above.

It is thus probable that when Socrates says he is ἔδελπις about death he means that his expectations about Hades, namely that good things await him in the afterlife since he led a philosophical life, are rationally grounded in the sense that they are based not on blind faith but on certain arguments, which nevertheless cannot be proved or disproved because they depend on an unverifiable premise: there is reason to think that these expectations are disguised arguments (λόγοι) which rely on the assumption that pure knowledge exists and is attainable only in a disembodied condition. Socrates states that this is his hope when he describes the manner in which anyone who desires knowledge would welcome death in the same way that a person would welcome a journey to Hades knowing that they would meet there a beloved deceased (68a3–b2). Going back to the dichotomy presented by Socrates about the possibility of knowledge (66e4–6),

---

66 Cf. Morgan (2000) 201: “The close relationship between mythos and logos in the dialogue indicates that the subject of discussion is one which lends itself to mythological treatment. Such discussion must be monitored with particular care in order to distinguish blind from reasoned faith.”

67 Socrates plays on the word Hades, which for the ordinary unreflective person means simply the god of the underworld, whereas his use points forward to the Affinity Argument that will make use of the similarity of sound between the words “Hades” and “unseen” (80d5–7: Ἡ δὲ ψυχή ἄρα, τὸ ἀνέδεξ, τὸ εἰς τοιοῦτον τόπον ἔτερον οἰχόμενον γενναῖον καὶ καθαρόν καὶ ἀμήν, εἰς ᾿Αιδοῦ ὡς ἀληθῶς…).
we may safely infer that Socrates sincerely hopes knowledge is possible. A parallel can be found in *Meno*, where Socrates does not insist on the validity of his argument about the immortality of the soul, yet he argues that research on what one does not know leads to a better condition than abandoning all hope and lazily accepting it as a fact that all research is futile (*Men*. 86b1–c2). Additionally, the imagery Socrates employs to conclude his fictional apology reflects his awareness that his conviction rests on no firm basis and that as a composite of body and soul he is only entitled to an approximation of, but not direct acquaintance with, the truth (66b1–67b5): he repeatedly states that it is necessary (ἀνάγκη) for true philosophers to form an opinion (δόξα and δοξάζειν) according to which knowledge will never be possible through association with the impurity and folly of the body, and that the truth is perhaps (ἰσως) to be found in a disembodied state. This is, in fact, a kind of transcendental argument that could be formulated as follows:

1. In order for knowledge to be possible, \( x \) must be the case.\(^{68}\)
2. Knowledge is surely possible.\(^{69}\)
3. Therefore, \( x \) is the case.

Given the repeated allusions to the *Meno* and the thematic overlap between the two works, one cannot but notice that the epistemic status of (2) is no more than an opinion, albeit a necessary one, for otherwise philosophy would be deprived of its purpose.

\(^{68}\) \( x \) = the continuation of existence in a disembodied state.

\(^{69}\) In fact, Socrates does not make the strong claim that knowledge is possible, but the milder one that we must think that knowledge is possible (67b3–5: τοιαῦτα οἶμαι, ὁ Σμμία, ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πρὸς ἄλληλους λέγειν τε καὶ δοξάζειν πάντας τοὺς ὅρθους φιλομαθεῖς). See also 100b, where he assumes the existence of the beautiful itself in itself etc. Here one may compare the beginning of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* where he states that “all humans by desire seek to know.” It would seem rather absurd to anyone holding such a thesis that the world is ordered in such a way that this fundamental desire for knowledge is both innate and vain.
The necessity of forming such an opinion is echoed in another passage later on in the Phaedo, where Socrates admits that he runs the danger of acting non-philosophically in that he merely wishes to convince himself and, only incidentally, his audience of his thesis (90d9–91b1):

Πρῶτον μὲν τοῖνυν, ἔφη, τοῦτο εὐλαβηθῶμεν, καὶ μὴ παρίσωμεν εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν ὡς τὸν λόγον κινδύνευει οὐδὲν ύπιές εἶναι, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον ὅτι ἤμεῖς οὕπω ὕμιῶς ἔχομεν, ἀλλὰ ἀνδριστῶν καὶ προθυμητῶν ὕμιῶς ἔχειν, σοὶ μὲν οὖν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ τοῦ ἐπείτα βίου παντὸς ἕνεκα, ἔμοι δὲ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα τοῦ θανάτου, ὡς κινδύνευοι ἐγώγη ἐν τῷ παρόντι περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦτο τοῦ φιλοσόφους ἔχειν ἄλλ᾽ ὡσπερ οἱ πάνω ἀπαίδευτοι ἰλονίκως. καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνοι ὅταν περὶ τοῦ ἀμφιβολοῦν, ὅπτη μὲν ἔχει περὶ ὅν ἂν ὁ λόγος ἢ οὐ φροντίζουσιν, ὅπως δὲ ἂ αὐτοὶ ἐθεντὸ ταῦτα δόξει τοῖς παρούσιν, τοῦτο προθυμοῦνται. καὶ ἐγὼ μοι δοκῶ ἐν τῷ παρόντι τοσοῦτον μόνον ἐκείνων διοίσειν· ὅτι γὰρ ὅπως τοῖς παρούσιν ἂ ἐγὼ λέγω δόξει ἄληθη εἶναι προθυμήσομαι, εἰ μὴ εἴη πάρεργον, ἄλλ᾽ ὅπως αὐτῶ ἔμοι ὅτι μάλιστα δόξει οὕτως ἔχειν.

This then is the first thing we should guard against, he said. We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it; much rather we should believe that it is we who are not yet sound and that we must take courage and be eager to attain soundness, you and the others for the sake of your whole life still to come, and I for the sake of death itself. I am in danger at this moment of not having a philosophical attitude about this, but like those who are quite uneducated, I am eager to get the better of you in argument, for the
uneducated, when they engage in argument about anything, give no thought to the truth about the subject of discussion but are only eager that those present will accept the position they have set forth. I differ from them only to this extent: I shall not be eager to get the agreement of those present that what I say is true, except incidentally, but I shall be very eager that I should myself be thoroughly convinced that things are so.

Socrates admits here that his purpose will not be to search for the truth but to convince himself, a statement that could be interpreted as meaning that Socrates still harbors some doubts about the validity of the thesis he advances. He describes this change in his attitude as something dangerous (κινδυνεύω), for he starts acting like the quite uneducated people, whose main aim is merely to win an argument. I believe, though, that Socrates’ desire to win the argument, if taken at face value, is highly problematic because it betrays an attachment to the body on his part that contradicts what he has set earlier as the purpose of the philosophical life, namely the commitment to the search for wisdom (φρόνησις). It also presents a Socrates who is associated with the body to a degree that would not befit his conception of a philosopher. In the following, I will explore the contradictions that emerge if Socrates’ statement is taken at face value, and I will attempt to advance a more modest interpretation that mitigates his claim.

Socrates has stated that it is reasonable for those who have truly devoted their lives to philosophy to display courage on the face of death and be of good hope that good things await them posthumously (63e9–64a2). That he counts himself among those it is evident by the context

---

70 Dorter (1982) 94: “Socrates has here abandoned his usual philosophical role of a non-partisan examiner of things in favour of that of an advocate determined to make what he believes to be true seem as true as possible.”
within which this statement is made: having been asked to explain why he does not resent his death, he switches from the specific example of a philosopher, i.e. himself, to the class of true philosophers as a whole. In short, whatever is said of the philosopher in general we should understand as applying to the specific case of Socrates as well.\textsuperscript{71} As we have seen, what distinguishes the philosopher from the rest of the people is his disregard for the body and its desires: he is constantly closer than anyone to literal death because he identifies with his mental, non-bodily part, thus seeking death in a metaphorical way.\textsuperscript{72} However, when Socrates stops acting philosophically and starts acting φιλονίκως, he stops being associated with the class of philosophers and implicitly joins those who primarily care for their body, the φιλοσώματοι. Consider the following passage (68b8–c3):

\begin{quote}
Οὐκ οὖν ἵκανον σοι τεκμήριον, ἔφη, τὸῦτο ἀνδρός, ὃν ἂν ἵδης ἀγανακτοῦντα μέλλοντα ἀποθανεῖσθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἂρ᾽ ἦν φιλόσοφος ἀλλὰ τις φιλοσώματος; ὁ γὰρ τὸ ὧν ὦτος τυγχάνει οὐ καὶ φιλοχρήματος καὶ φιλότιμος, ἦτοι τὰ ἑτερα τούτων ἢ ἁμφότερα.
\end{quote}

Then you have sufficient indication, he said, that any man whom you see resenting death was not a lover of wisdom but a lover of the body, and also a lover of wealth or of honors, either or both.

\textsuperscript{71} Likewise, at 69d1–4 Socrates says that, in his opinion, the true Bacchants are those who have practiced philosophy properly, and explicitly states that he did everything in his power to be counted among them.

\textsuperscript{72} Gerson (2003) 54–65 examines the way Plato manipulates the ambiguity between literal and metaphorical death.
Once Socrates has explained why philosophers would gladly accept death as the only means that would provide them with pure understanding, he argues reversely that fear in the face of death indicates that someone leads a non-philosophical life and betrays an intimacy with the body rather than wisdom: it is a sign that someone is \( \varphi \lambda \sigma \omega \mu \acute{a} \tau \varsigma \) rather than \( \varphi \lambda \sigma \sigma \varphi \circ \omega \varsigma \). One may object that in the passage at 91a Socrates describes his attitude merely as one of \( \varphi \lambda \eta \kappa \varsigma \), whereas \( \varphi \lambda \omicron \tau \mu \eta \varsigma \) does not figure at all. Significantly, though, the two concepts are intimately related: in the description of character types and constitutions in Book 8 of the *Republic*, the character type that corresponds to the Spartan regime is called \( \varphi \lambda \omicron \nu \kappa \varsigma \tau \varsigma \) \( \kappa \alpha \iota \varphi \lambda \omicron \tau \mu \omicron \varsigma \) (545a2–3), whereas these two adjectives are used to describe the spirited part of the soul in Book 9 (581b2); eventually, the character type ruled by the spirited part of the soul will be called solely by the adjective \( \varphi \lambda \omicron \nu \kappa \omicron \varsigma \) (581c4), something which signifies that the two terms can be used interchangeably. Thus, if we were to transpose Socrates as presented in the relevant passage of the *Phaedo* to the context of the tripartite psychology of the *Republic*, he would be classified under the character type of the second class which is regulated by the spirited part of the soul. Given that in the *Phaedo* the functions of what in the *Republic* is called the spirited part of the soul are assigned to the body, one may safely infer that in being \( \varphi \lambda \omicron \nu \kappa \varsigma \) Socrates is also \( \varphi \lambda \sigma \omicron \omega \mu \acute{a} \tau \varsigma \). The corollary of this close attachment to the body is an association with \( \acute{\omega} \rho \rho \omicron \omicron \sigma \omicron \omicron \eta \) — the body’s essential characteristic — and, consequently, an inability to acquire even the limited understanding that is available to body and soul composites. As a result, Socrates should be counted among the non-philosophers who lack true moderation and, given the Socratic thesis about the unity of the virtues, true courage as well as true justice; for separated from \( \varphi \rho \omicron \omicron \eta \sigma \varsigma \varsigma \) these so-called virtues amount to no more than an illusion of virtue, a virtue that is fit for slaves and contains nothing true (69b5–8). Thus, Socrates’ courageous behavior in his present circumstance might be
interpreted not as the result of a purely courageous state of the soul, but as the outcome of an absurd exchange of fears for fears.73

Given that Socrates has explicitly stated that he has no fear of death on the basis of his expectation that knowledge is possible, one may venture the assumption that Socrates’ courage is the result of exchanging his fear of death for the greater fear of the impossibility of knowledge: just as a warrior would welcome death in battle because of the belief that appearing to be a coward to those around him is a greater evil than death itself, Socrates welcomes death because of his belief that hopelessness about the possibility of acquiring knowledge constitutes a greater evil than death. In fact, Socrates does believe that hatred of arguments (μιλοσογία) is the worst thing that could befall one (89d2–3: ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ἔρη, ὅτι ἀν τις μείζον τούτον πάθοι ἢ λόγους μισήσας). Shortly before his warning against misology, he has the following exchange with Phaedo (89b4–11):

Αὔριον δή, ἔφη, Ἰσως, ὦ Φαίδων, τὰς καλὰς ταύτας κόμας ἀποκερῆ.

"Εοικεν, ἢν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ Σώκρατες.

Οὐκ, ἄν γε ἐμοὶ πείθη.

Ἀλλὰ τί; ἢν δ' ἐγώ.

Τῆμερον, ἔφη, κἀγὼ τὰς ἐμὰς καὶ σὺ ταύτας, ἐάνπερ γε ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος τελευτήσῃ καὶ μὴ δυνάμεθα αὐτὸν ἀναβιώσασθαι.

Tomorrow, Phaedo, he said, you will probably cut this beautiful hair.

73 68d8–13: Οὐκοῦν φόβῳ μειζόνον κακῶν ὑπομένουσιν αὐτῶν οἱ ἀνδρείοι τὸν θάνατον, ὅταν ὑπομένωσιν; "Εστι ταύτα. Τοῦ δεδείναι ἄρα καὶ δέει ἄνδρείοι εἰσὶ πάντες πλὴν οἱ φιλόσοφοι· καὶ τοι ἄλογον γε δέει τινὰ καὶ δειλία ἄνδρεῖον εἶναι.
Likely enough, Socrates, I said.

Not if you take my advice, he said.

Why not? said I.

It is today, he said, that I shall cut my hair and you yours, if our argument dies on us, and we cannot revive it.

As it would be reasonable, Phaedo understands Socrates’ comment about cutting his hair as a remark pertaining to Socrates’ death and the ensuing custom of displaying grief for the death of a beloved deceased one through the symbolic act of cutting one’s hair. Yet, Socrates is presented as uninterested in his own death and as focused on the present threat against his arguments about the immortality of the soul. The imagery he uses suggests that the objections of Simmias and Cebe have killed his arguments, and his readiness to grieve through cutting his hair places his arguments in the position of a deceased beloved; failure to resurrect the argument would elicit emotions of grief and, consequently, should be considered an evil. Not only this but he promises not to let his hair grow until he has fought and defeated Simmias and Cebe’s objections (89c3–4). What is at stake here is to avoid the greatest of all evils, namely misology and, subsequently, skepticism.⁷⁴

It should be observed, however, that Socrates in the present passage refers to “the argument” in the singular, as if he has presented only a single argument so far. Yet, what has

---

⁷⁴ Immediately after the cited passage, Phaedo brings up a mythological parallel by commenting that not even Heracles was capable of addressing two enemies at once. Socrates then asks Phaedo to act like Heracles and have him, Socrates, play the part of Iolaus but Phaedo says that the roles should be reversed (89c9–10). Cf. Burger (1984) 115 connects this mythological reference to the dramatic frame of the dialogue that suggested a parallel between Theseus and Socrates: “… Socrates/Theseus engaged in a heroic mission to overcome the Minotaur, which consists in the fear of death. But the labyrinth of logos in which that monster lies has become itself a more forbidding monster, a Hydra whose multiple heads each double to meet any attack against it … To confront this monster, Socrates/Heracles must transform the fear of death, and of his death in particular, into the fear of the death of the logos.”
preceded this passage contains three arguments, one of which aims to prove a thesis different than the other two. Similarly, he refers to Simmias and Cebes’ objections in the singular, as if they jointly presented a single argument, whereas, in truth, their challenges did not converge at all (89c3–4: τὸν Σιμμίου τε καὶ Κέβητος λόγον). Why is it that Socrates uses the singular instead of the plural? I believe that his choice of words reflects a deeper concern of the Phaedo as a whole about the possibility of knowledge and foreshadows the warning against misology that is to follow: distrust of arguments does not come about spontaneously but is the result of process in which each and every argument that appears convincing ends up being replaced by another argument that appears more convincing and supersedes the previous one only to be superseded by another argument etc. (90b6–9). Those who trust these arguments while lacking the relevant τέχνη usually fall into believing that no argument is sound and resemble the antilogicians who hold the Heraclitean belief that everything is in flux (90b9–c6). This seems to have been the reaction of both the internal audience as well as Echecrates, after Simmias and Cebes offered their extended criticisms to Socrates’ arguments (88c1–e3). Socrates’ response is that skepticism has to be avoided at all costs and the blame should be put on the skeptic himself or his incompetence to judge the arguments (90d3).

Significantly, a passage in the Republic calls attention to the danger of lapsing into skepticism. In a discussion about the proper education of those who have reached their thirties, Socrates explains how philosophy comes to get a bad name and warns against the dangers of teaching dialectic to young children. He states that the nature of the learner of dialectic must be ordered and steady (539d4–5), otherwise there is the risk of considering dialectic to be a kind of game of contradiction in which the young children, acting like puppies, enjoy dragging and pulling to pieces those around them with their arguments (539b5–7: χαίροντες ὅσπερ σκυλάκια τῶ ἐλκειν
τε καὶ σπαράττειν τῷ λόγῳ τούς πλησίον ἄει). The result of such a misuse of dialectic is that, after refuting and being refuted many times, the children violently and quickly lapse into disbelieving what they believed before, thus discrediting both themselves and philosophy as a whole (539b9–c3). On the contrary, Socrates says, an older person will not be willing to participate in such madness, but will imitate those who wish to engage in discussion to search for the truth rather than those who offer counterarguments just to play (539c5–8).

Are we, then, to infer that in not being a hater of arguments Socrates is like the older person of the Republic who imitates only those who engage in earnest discussions in order to find the truth? Such an inference would classify him under the philosophers and would run counter to his statement that he would start acting φιλονίκως. However, his inclination to win the argument is what makes him φιλοσώματος, and winning an argument presupposes supporting certain beliefs and opinions which is what allows one to avoid μισολογία, i.e. the worst misfortune that could befall one. To complicate matters even further, this worst misfortune seems to have a multifaceted nature: in his description of the benefits enjoyed by the lovers of learning (φιλομαθεῖς), Socrates argues that the soul of the true philosopher will keep away as far as possible from pleasures, desires, pains, and fears because it reckons that, when someone feels intensely any of the above passions, he suffers no insignificant evil but the greatest and most extreme of all (83c2–3: ὁ πάντων μέγιστὸν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατον ἐστι). This greatest evil is that the soul is forced to form the belief that the passions experienced are most clear and most real (83c7–8: τοῦτο ἐναργέστατον τε εἶναι καὶ ἄληθέστατον). These intense pleasures and pains nail the soul to the body and make it body-like in that it starts considering true whatever the body says (83d4–6). As a result, the soul is forced to share the body’s manners and way of life (ὤμοτροπός τε καὶ ὦμοτροφός), thus never being able to reach Hades in a pure state and being doomed in reincarnation (83d9–e1). Finally, in a
discussion Socrates holds with Callicles in the *Gorgias*, he maintains that no one fears death itself except for the utterly senseless and cowardly people; what should be feared instead is doing wrong, for “the ultimate evil is to arrive at Hades with a soul filled with injustice” (522e3–4: πολλῶν γὰρ ἀδικιμάτων γέμοντα τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς Ἀιδὼν ἀφικέσθαι πάντων ἐσχατὸν κακὸν ἔστιν).

In short, there are three conceptions of the worst evil that could befall one. The first one is hatred of arguments that results in skepticism; the second is to trust the bodily senses and, thus, acquire a body-like soul; and, finally, the third one is to die while having an unjust soul. Given that all three formulations involve the worst evil possible, it is reasonable to suppose that they are somehow interchangeable, thus referring essentially to the same thing. In fact, there seems to be a connecting link between all three: skepticism is the foundation stone of immorality since it entails the absence of absolute moral values or, at least, our inability to comprehend them and, consequently, to abide by them. Thus, skepticism functions potentially as a gateway to injustice which is a sick condition of the soul. Indeed, it must exclude trusting sensory data and should thus be free of the charge that it gives agents body-like souls. Yet, in diverting the agents’ attention from the search of truth it renders them non-philosophers and, consequently, it deprives them of the ability to arrive at the race of the gods (82b10–c1). In other words, all such souls are bound to be reincarnated without ever escaping the evil of being linked to a body and, thus, run the risk of being assimilated to it and assenting to what the body presents as the truth. It should be noted, however, that one may end up having an unjust soul without being a skeptic; conversely, one may be a skeptic without ending up being an unjust person. We should conclude, then, that, even though there is a good case to be made that these three conceptions of the worst evil are somehow interrelated, there seems to be no necessary link between them. If it were the case that those three evils were identical in a straightforward manner, the argument could be made that, by offering the
Final Argument for the immortality of the soul, Socrates would have showed himself to have avoided the evil of misology and, given the identity of the three evils, all the rest as well. As it stands, though, Socrates may have avoided one danger but still runs the risk of having a body-like soul.

To summarize, there emerge a number of paradoxes if Socrates’ statement that he will switch to a victory-loving attitude is taken at face value:

1. To account for his fearless attitude in the face of his death, Socrates gives a defense of the philosophical life as a whole.
   a. It follows that he counts himself among the pure philosophers, otherwise his defense would amount to nothing.
   b. Being a philosopher, Socrates must despise the body, its desires, pleasures etc.
   c. Being a philosopher, Socrates must trust the intellect and not the senses.

2. Socrates switches from a philosophical to a victory-loving mode.
   a. He is not a pure philosopher because he will care mostly to win the argument rather than seek out the truth.
   b. By being φιλόνικος he also is φιλοσώματος.

3. Socrates warns against the worst of all evils:
   a. Hatred of arguments.
      i. Socrates avoids μισολογία; he is like the older person of the Republic, who imitates only those who engage in earnest discussions to search for the truth.
   b. Trusting the bodily senses and having a body-like soul.
   c. Arriving in Hades with an unjust soul.
It is clear that the following combinations generate contradictions and cannot be held simultaneously: 1a and 2a; 1b and 2b; 3ai and 2a; 1c and 3b (which must be true of Socrates because of 2b). As is evident, what generates the problems in all cases is Socrates’ claim in 2. I suggest that there is a way to interpret his φιλονικία in a milder sense, so as to make all the contradictions vanish.

First of all, Socrates never explicitly states that he is a victory-lover. His wording is careful: he says that he runs the risk of acting φιλονίκως. That is, he acknowledges there are dangers in adopting a victory-loving attitude, some of which may include the ones discussed above. However, he notices a difference between what he himself is about to do and what victory-lovers do: whereas the latter do not care about the truth in what is being discussed but wish merely to make to audience accept their position, Socrates desires not so much to get the agreement of his audience but mostly to convince himself that things are so (91a3–b1). Far from being an eristic, Socrates still displays the traits of a philosopher because he cares about the true state of things.75 Granted that he is a body and soul compound and that pure knowledge is impossible for such beings (cf. 66e4–6), he entertains the possibility that he might be carried away by his argument and that the thesis he advances might be mistaken. For this reason, shortly after explaining why he wants to convince himself of his position, he prompts his interlocutors to scrutinize carefully his arguments lest they all be deceived by his eagerness to prove his thesis.76 He says (91b8–c5):

---

75 Gallop (1975) 155: “[Socrates’] primary concern to convince himself is genuine. It is a mark of the true philosopher, and shows continually in what he says.” Cf. Chrm. 166d.
76 Cf. R. 450d8–451a1, where Socrates worries that he will drag both himself and his friends down by holding a mistaken belief about matters in which one should not err.
ὑμεῖς μέντοι, ἐὰν ἐμοὶ πείθησθε, συμπρόν φροντίσαντες Σωκράτους, τῆς δὲ ἀληθείας
πολὺ μᾶλλον, ἐὰν μὲν τι ύμιν δοκῶ ἀληθές λέγειν, συνομολογήσατε, εἰ δὲ μὴ, παντὶ
λόγῳ ἀντιτείνετε, εὐλαβοῦμενοι ὅπως μὴ ἐγὼ ύπὸ προθυμίας ἀμα ἐμαυτόν τε καὶ
ὑμᾶς ἐξαπατήσας, ὁσπερ μέλιτα τὸ κέντρον ἐγκαταλιπών οἰχήσομαι.

If you will take my advice, you will give but little thought to Socrates but much
more to the truth. If you think that what I say is true, agree with me; if not, oppose
it with every argument and take care that in my eagerness I do not deceive myself
and you and, like a bee, leave my sting in you when I go.

What matters is still whether what Socrates argues for is the truth. To be sure, this could be seen
as a rhetorical ploy to dispose the audience more favorably toward a thesis that is about to be
advanced. However, Socrates here does not argue that he will state what is objectively true. On
the contrary, his eagerness to convince himself shows that he has not yet been convinced but still
harbors doubt about the validity of the argument. Additionally, by encouraging his interlocutors to
check the validity of his argument he invites them to engage in earnest discussion about the true
state of things. The passage from the Republic referred to earlier suggests that Socrates urges his
friends to stop acting like children, who argue only for the sake of argument, and start acting like
the older men who imitate only those who search for the truth.

I submit that the reason Socrates clings to a thesis that has not been proven true as of yet is
associated both with the nature of the thesis itself and with the present circumstances. First, it is a
win-win situation because, if the soul is immortal, as Socrates argues, being convinced is the right

77 Cf. Smp. 201c8–9: ὃ μὲν οὖν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, φάνα, ὃ φιλοῦμεν Ἀγάθων, δύνασαι ἄντιλέγειν, ἔπει
Σωκράτει γε οὐδὲν χαλεπόν.
thing to do (91b2–3); if, on the other hand, the soul is mortal, then Socrates will be less disturbing to those around him by avoiding lamentations, whereas his false belief will perish along with his soul (91b3–7). Secondly, Socrates is about to die, and, thus, he will not be able to participate in future discussions about such matters. It lies in the responsibility of those who survive him to keep up the research and avoid the sting of Socrates’ false belief. This is the essence of Socrates’ exhortation to Simmias, when the latter expresses doubt about the validity of the Final Argument because of his disdain for human weakness (107b4–9):

Οὔ μόνον γ’, ἔφη, ὦ Σιμμία, ὦ Σωκράτης, ἄλλα ταῦτα τε εὖ λέγεις καὶ τὰς γε ύποθέσεις τὰς πρώτας, καὶ εἰ πισταί ύμῖν εἰσίν, δημος ἔπισκεπτέαι σαφέστερον· καὶ ἕαν αὐτὰς ἰκανῶς διέλειπε, ός ἐγὼ μας, ἀκολουθήσει τῷ λόγῳ, καθ’ ὃς οὐκ φαν δυνατόν μάλιστ’ ἀνθρώπων ἐπισκέπτεσθαι· κἂν τοῦτο αὕτο σαφὲς γένηται, οὔτεν ζητήσετε περαιτέρω.

You are not only right to say this, Simmias, Socrates said, but our first hypotheses require clearer examination, even though we find them convincing. And if you analyze them adequately, you will, I think, follow the argument as far as a man can,

78 There is, indeed, a practical aspect in Socrates’ decision which leaves room for doubting whether Socrates pursues truth disinterestedly or is biased towards a certain outcome of his investigations. For the view that Socrates values the content of a particular truth rather than truth itself, see Woolf (2007). Contra Wood (2007). Baima (2015) finds a paradox in Socrates’ desire to act as a modified eristic, i.e. to attempt to convince himself of a certain thesis regardless of the truth, and his insistence that his disciples should keep up searching for the truth disinterestedly. He argues that the outcome of adopting such a belief should be equally beneficial or equally pernicious to all agents (272). He rejects the “most obvious answer,” namely that Socrates will die soon and will, thus, avoid the risk of developing epistemic vice. His solution to what he terms “the verity puzzle,” is that Socrates is an epistemic authority and, as such, it is more fitting for him than his students, who are not as accomplished philosophers, to evaluate the dangers of any given situation and undertake risks that are appropriate for him but not for his students (274–5).
and if the conclusion is clear, you will look no further.

They should return to the first hypotheses and examine them more thoroughly, even if they seem convincing, and upon adequate analysis they will follow the argument *to the extent that is humanly possible*. This is, presumably, what Socrates himself has done: he kept going back to the first assumptions to make them more explicit, and perhaps he would have continued to do so, had he been able to. But because of the limitations inherent in human nature owing to the unavoidable perishability of the body, he was forced to stop searching and trust that the hypotheses he has established are true. It remains for those who will continue living to keep up the research in order not to spend the remainder of their lives in ignorance. In fact, Socrates here simply reiterates what Simmias had said earlier before introducing his objection that soul might be a kind of harmony (85c2–d4):

ἐμοὶ γάρ δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες, περὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἵσως ὅσπερ καὶ σοί τὸ μὲν σαφὲς εἰδέναι ἐν τῷ νῦν βιῷ ἢ ἀδύνατον εἶναι ἢ παραχάλεψον τι, τὸ μέντοι αὐτὰ τὰ λεγόμενα περὶ αὐτῶν μὴ οὐχὶ παντὶ τρόπῳ ἐλέγχειν καὶ μὴ προαρίστασθαι πρὶν ἢν πανταχῇ σκοπῶν ἀπείπῃ τίς, πάνυ μαλακοῦ εἶναι ἀνδρός· δεῖν γὰρ περὶ αὐτὰ ἐν γέ τι τούτων διαπράξασθαι, ἢ μαθεῖν ὅπῃ ἔχει ἢ εὑρεῖν ἢ, εἰ ταῦτα ἀδύνατον, τὸν γοῦν βέλτιστον τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λόγων λαβόντα καὶ δυσεξελεγκτότατον, ἐπὶ τούτου ὁχούμενον ὅσπερ ἐπὶ σχεδίας κινδυνεύοντα διαπλεῦσα τὸν βίον, εἰ μὴ τις δύνατο ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ ἀκινδυνότερον ἐπὶ βεβαιότερον ὀχήματος, [ἣ] λόγου θείου τινὸς, διαπορευθῆναι.
I believe, as perhaps you do, that precise knowledge on that subject is impossible or extremely difficult in our present life, but that it surely shows a very poor spirit not to examine thoroughly what is said about it, and to desist before one is exhausted by an all-round investigation. One should achieve one of these things: learn the truth about these things or find it for oneself, or, if that is impossible, adopt the best and most irrefutable of men’s theories, and, borne upon this, sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft, unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a firmer vessel of some divine doctrine.

Since knowledge about such affairs is either impossible or extremely difficult, one must keep examining the matter at hand thoroughly and not desist before investigating every possible aspect. The desired outcome of such an investigation is either acquisition of exact knowledge or, if this turns out impossible, the endorsement of the best and least refutable of human arguments. Using this argument as a raft, one will then be able to sail through the difficulties of life, unless a more secure vessel is found—a divine account, whatever that may be—that would make the journey safer and less dangerous. Following Simmias’ nautical metaphor, Socrates describes how he came to be dissatisfied with the teleological model of explanation and introduced, instead, his own hypothetical method, which he describes as his “second sailing” (99c9–d1). This method consists in positing the most compelling argument as the starting point and employing it as the standard against which other statements are to be judged: whatever matches with the hypothesis is considered true, and vice versa (100a3–7). Socrates considers hypotheses such as “all beautiful things become beautiful because of the Beautiful” to be the safest account (ἀσφαλέστατον, 100d8) one can give both to oneself and to others. The value of any such hypothesis lies in its ability to
explain aspects of reality that would otherwise remain incoherent. Indeed, to ascertain its validity is beyond the limits of human ability, and it would be absurd for Socrates to insist on its truthfulness. What one can do, however, is to believe that a hypothesis has been correctly assumed on the basis of its explanatory power.

To conclude, it seems preferable to interpret Socrates’ φιλονικία not as blind partisanship but as an attempt to defend the correctness of a theory that yields the best results upon repeated examination. Positing the Forms as real existents and explanatory causes gives Socrates a way out of the philosophical cul-de-sac that impossibility of knowledge would entail. Believing that Forms do not exist would jeopardize the philosophical quest as a whole and render the philosophical life inane. But the mere positing of the existence of Forms would not settle the matter of the attainability of knowledge. Thus, another hypothesis, namely the immortality of the soul, must be provided to allow for complete companionship with the Forms and the acquisition of pure knowledge.

1.4 Soothing the Inner Child

The philosophical method advanced by Socrates in his intellectual autobiography consists in positing a hypothesis that serves as the touchstone for any argument that purports to explain the nature of things. It serves as an indispensable tool in the attempt to acquire knowledge, but in the end it may turn out false. In such a case the hypothesis would have to be replaced by a new one so as to compensate for epistemic losses and keep the whole theoretical structure from collapsing. No

---

79 I concur with Rowe (1993) 215–6, who argues that Socrates’ remarks that he is like the completely uneducated people and that he will only differ slightly from the eristics are ironical: “Rather, he is as complete a philosopher, and therefore as skilled in argument, as anyone living. Something which appears true to him will therefore have passed the most exacting test available …”

80 Cf. Prm. 135b–c, where Parmenides argues that without Forms there could be no philosophy.
certainty can be achieved, however, as to the validity of the new hypothesis. Thus, the philosopher must always modify his claims with a modicum of skepticism, always remaining alert to the dangers of lapsing into hatred of arguments.\footnote{Dorter (1977) 1: “When once we take philosophy seriously we thereby take seriously the possibility of the disclosure of truth; and the affirmation of truth, to be meaningful, must reject the denial of what it affirms. As philosophers, we therefore inevitably reject, on the basis of our disclosure of truth, the philosophies that disagree with us, as they, in turn, reject ours. It soon becomes evident that philosophers of equal intelligence, sincerity, and good will mutually reject one another's positions, which renders suspect the claim of any of them to truth. Thus, our seriousness about truth and philosophy soon overcomes itself into its own negation: skepticism and mistrust of truth and philosophy.”} Since searching for the truth without recourse to arguments is as hazardous as looking at the sun with a naked eye (99d4–e6), it follows that the use of hypotheses is necessary for scientific research. Now, given that hypotheses are necessarily unverifiable in their synchronicity, how can the philosopher not lose hope and keep up the research? In other words, how can the philosopher trust his hypotheses?

I submit that there is an analogy between fear of death and fear of relying on false hypotheses, and that the remedy for these fears is to be sought through rational as well as irrational means of persuasion. Understanding the necessity of relying on necessarily unverifiable principles requires intellectual maturity, and, in a sense, constitutes an acknowledgement of the limitations of the most efficient scientific method. Yet, as I have argued above, the immortality of the soul—hence the eradication of fear about one’s own death—is predicated on the assumption that exact knowledge is possible; consequently, trusting this very assumption serves a double function since it both allows the philosopher to avoid extreme skepticism and eliminates the fear of death. But there is evidence that fear in the \textit{Phaedo} is a condition of the body and is thus always non-rational.\footnote{For the body as source of fear, see, for example, 66c3, 81a7, 83b7.} Consider the following passage, where fear of death in particular is ascribed to a non-rational source within the body and soul complex (77d5–e9):
However, I think you and Simmias would like to discuss the argument more fully. You seem to have this childish fear that the wind would really dissolve and scatter the soul, as it leaves the body, especially if one happens to die in a high wind and not in calm weather.

Cebes laughed and said: Assuming that we were afraid, Socrates, try to change our minds, or rather do not assume that we are afraid, but perhaps there is a child in us who has these fears; try to persuade him not to fear death like a bogey.

You should, said Socrates, sing a charm over him every day until you have charmed away his fears.

Simmias and Cebes’ objections to Socrates’ arguments were essentially based on the worry that death might be the end of existence because the soul might be dispersed at the moment of death. As there is a Homeric parallel that describes death in similar terms and Cebes identifies this
particular worry as the main source of people’s disbelief about the soul’s posthumous survival (70a1–6), one may assume that Simmias’ and Cebes’ represent a widely held reservation. And yet, Socrates insinuates two things: first, that whoever fears death, namely the majority of the people (77b3–5), is in fact troubled by a childish fear; and, secondly, that what seems to be a universal fear is as harmless as other imaginary objects of children’s fear. Cebes picks up laughingly on Socrates’ comment and asks him to think that there is perhaps a child within them that should be persuaded not to fear death like a bogey. Socrates suggests that one must sing charms over the inner child daily until the fears are charmed away. But what is the content of these charms? And how are we to account for the use of ἐπαίδευσιν in this context? Both these questions are directly linked to fear of death and the inability of children to understand reason.

The view that children are incapable of comprehending reason is advanced both in the *Laws* and the *Republic*. The most well-known is found in Book 3 of the latter work, where Socrates describes what myths should be told to children to serve as propaedeutic to the study of harder and more important subjects. Socrates proposes that poets and craftsmen must be forced to insert “the image of good character” in their works or else they should be banned from the ideal city (401b1–3). The dangers of allowing wickedness to creep into works of any sort of creation lie in that, by being brought up on images of evil as if in bad pasture, the guardians will gradually develop a large evil in their souls (401b8–c3). On the contrary, raising the young guardians in an environment where craftsmen imitate what is fine and graceful will lead them to unwittingly resemble and be in concord with the beauty of reason (401c4–d3). Having been brought up thus, the guardians will acquire harmonious souls and will rightly rejoice at what is fine and welcome it in their souls, all the while feeling disgust and hatred toward what is base and shameful, at a stage where they are

83 *Laws* 653b; *R*. 401d–402b.
still unable to understand reason (401d5–402a2). But when they reach the age of reason they will recognize it because of their intimacy with it and welcome it in their souls (402a3–4). To be sure, Socrates may be warning against any type of creation, but his main worry concerns \( \mu \omega \sigma \iota \kappa \eta \) because of its inherent value as an educational tool as well as its priority over gymnastics in the curriculum (377a1–10). First and foremost, it is a subcategory of \( \mu \omega \sigma \iota \kappa \eta \) that must be regulated, namely the “false kind of stories”: these are the myths told to children, and one should be extremely cautious about them because they are the first things told to children and, as such, the most prominent medium through which children get indoctrinated. Thus, one of the first things that has to be controlled in the ideal city is the mythmakers and their output, i.e. the poets and poetry, because the beginning of each process is most important, especially when it comes to anything young and tender (377a12–b1). In short, two general truths, which seem to entail one another, can be extrapolated from the above passages of the *Republic*: that children are not able to comprehend reason, and that the proper medium to communicate anything to children is myth.

Looked at from a different angle, there is an additional reason why myth-telling is the proper approach to educate children. As we read in the *Phaedrus*, in addition to knowing the truth and being an expert on the various types of speech that exist, any effective teacher of rhetoric will have to have studied with precision the nature of the soul since it is in it that conviction is generated (271a1–8). The next step in the generation of conviction is to adapt the subject matter to the needs and abilities of the audience: an elaborate and complicated speech will be effective when addressed to a complex soul, but to a simple soul a simple speech should be offered (277c1–3). From the standpoint of rhetoric, then, as well as that of didactics, we arrive at the same conclusion with regard to children: having simple souls that are not fully developed, complicated arguments will
not succeed in teaching anything to them; instead, their education should be based on simple and pleasurable activities.\textsuperscript{84}

Translated to the context of \textit{Phaedo}, the above remarks about the education of children suggest that in order to effectively charm away the fear of death of the inner child the charms sung over it must be myths or, at least, of mythological nature. One may object that, apart from the eschatological myth toward the end of the dialogue, what we find in the \textit{Phaedo} is not myths but intricate, demanding, and sophisticated arguments that would be fit not for a simple-minded but a highly educated audience. Indeed, to judge from Simmias and Cebe's participation in the conversation, the audience is far from being passive and intellectually inept. Still, though, we should not lose sight of the fact that the inner child and its fears are introduced as a simile, and it is as such that they should be treated. And there is textual evidence that, even though the arguments advanced by Socrates are elaborate philosophical ones, he himself, somewhat strangely, considers them to be of mythological nature. For twice before embarking on the exposition of the detailed arguments that purport to show the prenatal and posthumous existence of the soul, Socrates uses imagery that suggests the mythological nature of what is about to follow: first, when Cebe wonders at Socrates' remark that it is not right for the philosopher to commit suicide, even though he would willingly follow one who is dying, Socrates replies that it might be most fitting for one who is about to depart to the other world to examine thoroughly and mythologize about the nature of the forthcoming journey (61e1–2: διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν).\textsuperscript{85} Similarly, right before offering the Cyclical Argument to meet Cebe's objections that it still requires lots of παραμυθία and πίστις to show that the soul survives the death of the person and holds some power and

\textsuperscript{84} For references on children and learning through play, see Morgan (2000) 168.
\textsuperscript{85} I agree with Rowe (1993) 125 that the metaphor is not dead “especially not in connection with a subject like the present one, which may only by describable in imaginative terms.”
intelligence, Socrates invites him to participate in a discussion in which they would “spin tales” about the likelihood of what is being discussed (70b5–7: ἀλλὰ τί δὴ ποιῶμεν; ἣ περὶ αὐτῶν τούτων βούλει διαμυθολογῶμεν, εἴπε εἰκός οὕτως ἔχων εἴπε μή;).

Significantly, the image of Socrates the myth-teller accords well with the opening of the Phaedo, where he is presented as having turned to poetry: we read there that he put Aesop’s fables into verse and composed a proem to Apollo (60d1–2, where Aesop’s fables are strangely called λόγοι; cf. Grg. 523a1–3). Indeed, Socrates describes himself as not being μυθολογικός, something that lead him to put into verse whatever myths he knew and had at hand (61b2–7). Yet there is ample evidence that Socrates does indulge in myth-telling: leaving aside the dream that encouraged Socrates to practice and cultivate μουσικήν (60e4–7), which so suits the context of the dialogue that it does look like an invention,86 one may only think of the eschatological myth at the end of Phaedo. It is true that there as well he assigns the content of what he is about to relate to another source (107d4, 110b5: λέγεται). But, as Most has maintained, it is a standard feature of Platonic myths that they go back to older, real or fictional, oral sources from which they derive their authority.87 And this is exactly what Socrates says of the Cyclical Argument right before expounding it, namely that it is a παλαιὸς λόγος (70c5–6): whether this is a reference to Heraclitus or to the doctrines of metempsychosis in general,88 one cannot dispute the mythological background of the argument, especially since it is based on the definition of death as separation of body and soul, which itself is strongly suggestive of the Iliad.89 Thus, Socrates may not be creating

---

88 Hackforth (1955) 63 and Rowe (1993) 155, respectively.
89 Cf. Morgan (2000) 193: “The arguments that follow these two introductions are not myths, but they are associated with such material.”
his own fables, but he is a story-teller in the sense that he makes philosophical use of whatever mythological sources he has at hand.

Should we infer from all the above that the charms intended to soothe the inner child are Socrates’ philosophical arguments for the immortality of the soul? I believe there is a good case to be made that this inference is permissible, especially since there is an analogy between arguments and charms that occurs elsewhere in the Platonic corpus: philosophical arguments are explicitly called charms in the *Charmides* as well as the *Republic*.90 It is dialectic, then, that will serve as the magical incantation intended to soothe the inner child and charm away its fear of death.91 But there seems to be something contradictory in the claim that philosophical arguments and dialectic—the most conspicuous aspects of rational activity—function as spells that derive their power from an extra-rational, or magical, source. This seeming contradiction, however, will vanish as soon as we consider once again the necessarily hypothetical nature of arguments discussed above. Keeping in mind that all the arguments of the *Phaedo* are put forward by body and soul compounds and as such fall short of the ideal conditions of a divine account which would serve as a more secure vessel to sail safely through the troubles of life (85d2–4), let us consider another sense in which philosophical arguments and dialectic are defective and, thus, resemble the fictional nature of mythological discourse.

Apart from the inherent limitations of Socrates’ philosophical method as expounded in the *Phaedo*, namely the inability to verify the hypotheses on which any attempt at knowledge is based, there is also the risk of relying too much on arguments to acquire knowledge since arguments are

---

90 *Chrm*. 157a1–3: θεραπεύεσθαι δὲ τὴν ψυχήν ἐρη, ὦ μακάριε, ἐποδαίς τισιν, τὰς δὲ ἐποδὰς ταῦτας τοὺς λόγους εἶναι τοὺς καλούς. *R*. 608a. Baima (2015) 269–70 cites several passages of the *Laws* as evidence that ἐπωθὶ and ἐκόθεν are used to refer not to philosophical arguments but to myths and non-rational means of persuasion. However, this is no reason to downplay the significance of the *Charmides* as well as the *Republic*, which clearly equate charms with arguments.

based on language, and language may itself have a distortive effect. This view is put forward in the *Seventh Letter*, and the limitations of language are also mentioned in the *Timaeus*, but the most intriguing remarks about the unstable nature of language are to be found in the *Cratylus* (408c2–3): Socrates proposes a playful etymology for the god Pan, comparing language to his dual nature. Like the god Pan, who is a combination of human and goat form, language “signifies all things and keeps them circulating and always going about, and has two forms—true and false.” Thus, language should be treated with caution because of its dual nature, and one must always try to distinguish true and false speech. The philosopher will perhaps be more capable to locate the truth in speech, but it remains a bare fact that words are images which resemble—some more accurately, others less—what they represent (432b–d). Perhaps the best form of speech is achieved when there is a one-to-one correspondence between the image (word) and what it represents (reality); yet, this does not seem to be the norm but happens only κατὰ τὸ ὑπαρξεῖν (435c–d). In short, the skeptical ending of the dialogue reinforces the view that the conventional nature of language limits even the philosopher’s ability to distinguish true from false speech since Socrates concludes that it is not a feature of a sensible man to give himself and the cultivation of his soul to names (440c3–5).

To sum up: excluding the possibility of comprehending the truth without the mediation of language, arguments are the best available means to that end. Their usefulness notwithstanding, arguments are defective in two aspects: first, they rely on hypothetical first principles which are necessarily unverifiable; and, second, consisting as they do of words, they are at a second remove from reality since words are images and there is a gap between them and what they are images of. Thus, the description of philosophical arguments and dialectic as spells is less paradoxical than it

---

93 343e and 29b3–c1, respectively.
may at first seem and should not cause concern since it is merely a figurative way of suggesting their representational character and the axiomatic nature of their first principles. It is precisely the non-verifiability of their foundation that they have in common with Platonic myths and can thus be said to be mythological and to derive their force from an extra-rational source.\textsuperscript{94}

I submit that, in the special case of the \textit{Phaedo}, there is such an indemonstrable principle at play, which, if relied upon by the philosopher as an accurate representation of reality, it succeeds in assuaging the fear of death as well as the fear of lapsing into utter skepticism: the assumption that knowledge is possible. As I argued above, the immortality of the soul is predicated on this very assumption; deprived of it, not only the arguments advanced by Socrates but the whole philosophical endeavor would appear vacuous. Indeed, it may be no more than fiction, a useful falsehood in words of the sort that we read about in the \textit{Republic}. Yet, as Socrates asserts at \textit{Meno} 86b6–c2, it is the only assumption he would be willing to defend and is to be preferred to its contrary because it results in improving ourselves. Similarly, in the \textit{Phaedo} the inquirer must acknowledge his lack of sure knowledge without abandoning the philosophical project. Harboring the fear that this whole process might be in vain, the inner child will keep demanding the impossible, namely absolute certainty. But one should not succumb to this childish fear; what should be done instead is to come to terms with the limitations of human nature and encourage the child to venture on research that rests on shaky grounds.\textsuperscript{95} This encouragement consists in the actual practice of dialectical conversation, which is myth-like because of its non-verifiability and

\textsuperscript{94} For references on myth as non-verifiable narrative, see Morgan (2000) 179 n. 46.

\textsuperscript{95} This attitude involves risks, as Socrates admits, but they are noble ones (114d5-6: ἂξιον κινδύνεσσαί οἴομένῳ οὗτος ἔχειν—καλὸς γάρ ὁ κίνδυνος).
is thus fitting for educational purposes. It is also a repetitive process that requires perseverance: recall how Socrates prescribes singing the charms over the child on a daily basis.

In particular, two passages of the *Phaedo* indicate that encouraging the non-rational part of oneself to trust that knowledge is possible lies in the responsibility of each person. First, when Cebes insinuates that after Socrates’ death there will be no charmer left capable of accomplishing these things, Socrates responds by urging his companions on to keep searching for such a charmer among both Greeks and foreigners, sparing neither money nor trouble. He then concludes: “You must also search among yourselves, for you might not easily find people who could do this better than yourselves” (78a7–9). Secondly, toward the end of the myth of judgment, Socrates states that a sensible person would not assert that the things are exactly as he has described them (114d1–2). But he deems it worthy to risk the belief that what has been said about our souls and their dwelling places is either an accurate representation of the truth or an approximation of it, concluding that one must, so to say, sing such charms over oneself (114d6–7: χρῆ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὡσπερ ἐπάδειν ἑαυτῷ). Here, a parallel can be drawn with the *Gorgias*, where κατεπάδειν is used by Callicles to describe how children get indoctrinated to value equality and consider it to be just and fair (Grg. 483e4–484a2). The difference lies in that, whereas in Callicles’ view the inculcation of such beliefs is the result of the extrinsic force of society, Socrates suggests that one must condition oneself to believe such things, and thus the formation of the belief stems from an internal source.

Encouragement, myth-telling, and education are all brought together in the function of παραμυθεία: as Morgan has demonstrated, παραμυθεία can be associated with the tone proper to the philosopher when he encourages participants in philosophical conversations to reveal their true

---

96 Morgan (2000) 176: “Philosophy is the remedy for childish fears, and is thus analogous to tales told to children.”

97 Belfiore (1980) 135: “Here it would seem that the emotional effect of repetition is the effective ingredient of the charm.”
selves by voicing their true view. All four arguments on the immortality of the soul can be seen as Socrates’ attempt to encourage Cebes to believe that the soul survives the death of the human being as well as a response to Cebes’ indirect request for more encouragement and persuasive argument (70b1–2: ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δὴ ἵσως οὐκ ὀλίγης παραμυθίας δεῖται καὶ πίστεως). But the same seems to hold for Socrates as well: when Crito asks how they should bury Socrates, the latter replies that they should bury him however they wish, provided that they catch him. He then continues (115d2–6):

ὅτι δὲ ἐγὼ πάλαι πολὺν λόγον πεποίημαι, ὡς, ἐπειδὰν πίω τὸ φάρμακον, οὐκέτι ὑμῖν παραμενῶ, ἀλλὰ οἰχήσομαι ἀπιῶν εἰς μακάρον δὴ τινας εὐδαμονίας, ταῦτα μοι δοκῶ σὺτῷ ἄλλως λέγειν, παραμυθούμενος ἀμα μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἀμα δ’ ἐμαυτόν.

I have been saying for some time and at some length that after I have drunk the poison I shall no longer be with you but will leave you to go and enjoy some good fortunes of the blessed, but it seems that I have said all this to him in vain in an attempt to reassure you and myself too.

His lengthy speech may have been in vain, yet Socrates admits that it served the double purpose of offering encouragement both to his friends, but also to himself. We may thus infer that even Socrates was not immune to the childish fear of death and that the entire discussion was an attempt to offer παραμυθία through philosophical argument to himself no less than to the others. Whereas for his interlocutors the encouragement stemmed from an external source, i.e. Socrates, in his own

---

98 Morgan (2000) 165–6. Cf. 167: “Yet paramythia can be mythological, and it shares a function that overlaps to a significant extent that of Platonic myth, as a tool for indoctrination, teaching, and philosophy.”
case the source was internal, something that ties in well with his advice that they should search among themselves for a charmer capable of soothing the inner child.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined Socrates’ reasons for believing in his posthumous existence and adopting a courageous stance in the face of death. Noticing a discrepancy between the Socratic and ordinary conceptions of death, my analysis focused on Socrates’ belief that death should not be grieved because it does not constitute an evil: implicit in this belief is the idea that death is simply the separation of body and soul, an idea initially appearing innocuous because it is couched in metaphorical terms (death as a journey to the underworld, death as liberation from the prison of the body, philosophy as practice for death). Significantly, when questioned about the reasons that lead to his imperturbability, Socrates offers a number of arguments that seek to establish the immortality of the soul. Turning to a detailed examination of these proofs, I showed that they fail to persuade the internal audience and argued instead that Socrates’ courage stems from hope and expectation (ἐλπίς): apart from its relation to discourse, ἐλπίς, as we learn from the Timaeus and the Philebus, comes to be together with the appearance of the body and, as such, is subject to the same constraints. One such constraint is the unsuitability of the body to serve as the object of knowledge because it is in a state of flux, whereas knowledge must be one of entities that remain fixed owing to their inalterability. It follows, then, from the admission that hope has a bodily aspect, that Socrates’ courage in the face of death cannot be ascribed to a purely rational source.

Next, I turned to the inherent indeterminacy of the body which seems to plague the philosophical endeavor as a whole: the truth, Socrates explains, either cannot be found at all or can be found only in a disembodied state; but if continuation of posthumous existence cannot be
proven, then both knowledge is impossible and philosophy’s project is futile. Accordingly, I argued that Socrates’ courage stems from his trust in an implicit transcendental argument: in order for knowledge to be possible, the soul must outlive the body; and yet, knowledge is surely possible, therefore the soul outlasts the body. Immortality of the soul is thus based on the premise that knowledge is possible, proof of which is never achieved in the dialogue but always remains a desideratum. The ongoing attempt to attain knowledge is reflected in Socrates’ explication of his hypothetical method: if an explanation is needed, one ought to posit a hypothesis as an *explanans*; if the *explanandum* is not adequately explained, then either the initial hypothesis should be replaced or a higher-order hypothesis should be posited; and so forth. On this basis Socrates posits the Forms, which serve as explanatory and efficient causes: whatever is $F$, is so by virtue of participation in the Form of $F$. Socrates’ hypothesis that Forms exist grants him the entities required for the possibility of knowledge. This is, however, by definition unprovable and in this respect resembles non-rational means of persuasion such as myths and charms. The final stage of my analysis focused on precisely this aspect of scientific discourse and its potential employment as a remedy for the fear of death: according to Socrates, whoever doubts the soul’s immortality and fears death because of the axiomatic nature of the aforementioned hypothesis is troubled by childish fears and should keep repeating the arguments of the *Phaedo* as if they were charms to soothe the inner child. In short, I submitted that this elusive aspect of the hypothetical method is transformed into an appropriate mythological tool used to inculcate a courageous disposition into the part of ourselves that is impervious to reason and fears the risks associated with subscribing to potentially false beliefs.
It is commonly assumed that the Platonic self is to be identified with the rational part of the soul. Self-evident as this claim might initially appear, it is also subject to a great deal of controversy. For example, the soul is in some dialogues conceived of as an incomposite entity and at times as a composite unity of parts, some of which are not (at least fundamentally or entirely) rational and serve as the subjects of bodily states. One may ask whether even the soul conceived as an incomposite entity is completely rational and, if so, why it would be that non-rational functions are attributed to disembodied souls; conversely, in case the soul does contain non-rational elements, an account has to be provided in order to explain the compresence of opposite qualities in one and the same object. One such account presupposes at least a bipartite structure of the soul which enables it to function as the source of rational no less than non-rational desires. This psychological model, according to which it is no longer the body *simpliciter* but the soul that serves as the subject of bodily states, is more developed than the rudimentary intellectualism of the *Phaedo*, for which the soul in its purity is altogether dissociated from the body. This more sophisticated model is found in the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Timaeus*.¹ Whereas the latter two works present tripartition of the soul as if it were an already established dogma, the *Republic* attempts to arrive at tripartition through intricate philosophical arguments.²

---

¹ Both the *Republic*, however, and the *Timaeus* contain passages in which nothing is asserted outright about the exact nature of the soul. See, e.g., *R*. 611b9–612a6, which begins with the view that the soul might after all be a simple, incomposite structure—its multifacetedness being attributed to the restricted abilities of our embodied state—but ends in an agnostic note.

² The picture is hardly as straightforward as it first appears, mostly because the terms μέρος or εἶδος, which are translated as “part,” are perhaps deliberately avoided up until a later stage of the argument. In the beginning of the argument for tripartition in Book 4, Socrates uses a circumlocution to describe what is translated more conveniently in English as “part,” namely the instrumental dative (436a9–10: ἐτέρῳ … ἀλλῳ τῶν ἐν ἠμίν … τρίτῳ τινί). μέρος appears at 442b10, c4, and 444b3. Cf. Woods (1987) 24 n. 4; Price (2009) 1 n.1.
My purpose in this chapter will be to test various hypotheses about the nature of the self within the context of the *Republic*. I begin by revisiting the arguments on tripartition offered in Book 4, and I side with the view that the soul has parts only in a loose sense. As a result, I part ways with Bobonich’s suggestion that, in the *Republic*, the soul-parts are conceived of as agents. My second section is aimed at precisely showing that ascription of belief to the non-rational parts of the soul need not entail that they are independent agents: for one, ascription of beliefs to non-rational elements might be by analogy to the rational soul-parts and thus symptomatic of the metaphorical language that is endemic in any description of mental events; or it might be that the beliefs in question are of minimal intellectual content and thereby fail to raise the subject to whom they are ascribed to the status of a person. In section three, I turn to two passages that have been taken to imply that Plato meant to partition the soul in a strong sense, namely the mythological description of the human being in Book 9 and the comparison of the soul with the sea-god Glaucus in Book 10, and I argue that neither ultimately provides evidence for partition in a strong sense. In the fourth section, I argue that there are two different types of virtue at play in the *Republic*, correlated to two types of unity, and I explore their function within the dialogue’s overall educational plan. Section five concludes that the self in the *Republic* is seen as a dynamic rather than static entity: one becomes oneself, in the sense of achieving and maximizing internal unity, by assimilating oneself as much as possible to the unity that is characteristic of the eternal, changeless, and unitary objects that populate the intelligible realm.

2.1 Tripartition in Book 4

In Book 4, the discussion begins by Socrates’ and his interlocutors’ attempt to find out whether one learns, gets angry, and desires with the entire soul or whether a distinct part of the soul is
involved in each process, so that, for example, one learns only with the learning part of the soul, which then cannot be held accountable for one’s getting angry (436a8–b3). Socrates’ partitioning of the soul comes in stages: his strategy is to get the interlocutors to agree that the soul cannot be at variance with itself. This is achieved through appeal to the so-called Principle of Contraries (POC),3 which runs as follows (436b8–c1):

Δὴλον ὅτι ταῦτὸν τὰναντία ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταῦτὸν γε καὶ πρὸς ταῦτὸν οὐκ ἐθελήσει ἃμα, ὥστε ἂν ποι ἐνρίσκομεν ἐν αὐτοῖς ταῦτα γιγνόμενα, εἰσόμεθα ὅτι οὐ ταῦτὸν ἦν ἀλλὰ πλεῖο.

It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. So, if we ever find this happening in the soul, we’ll know that we aren’t dealing with one thing but many.

The practical value of the principle is that, if contrary actions and desires are assigned to the same thing simultaneously, one should conclude that either the contraries should be assigned to different subjects, thereby entailing at least two distinct parts within the same subject, or that the subject is incomposite, but it desires or acts in contrary ways, yet in different respects. Socrates assumes the validity of the principle (437a4–9), and goes on to establish the bipartition of the soul on the grounds of an example where the soul is said to undergo or desire opposites (439a9–b6): whoever both is thirsty, where this is cashed out as a desire to drink, but at the same time refrains from

3 For the relation of Plato’s principle with the Principle of Non-Contradiction, see Robinson (1970) 38–9.
drinking for prudential reasons is at variance with himself; thus, one may surmise that there are
two distinct parts in the soul, one that bids the agent drink and another that holds the agent back
from drinking (439c5–7). Before introducing the thirst example, he discusses two counter-
examples that supposedly pose a challenge to the POC (436c5–e6): the man who is said to be both
at rest and moving, and the spinning top. Additionally, the example of desiring to drink and
refraining from drinking is illustrated through the image of an archer who simultaneously pushes
away and draws near the bow (439b8–11).

There are two interpretations of the above examples, yielding two different pictures of the
soul. According to the first interpretation, they are meant to establish the partition of the soul in a
way that results in the existence of initially two and subsequently three independent parts in the
soul, conceived as independent agents and sources of motivation that serve as the proper subjects
of each desire, action, etc.\(^4\) This view may have as a consequence the negation of the existence of
a unified subject.\(^5\) On the other hand, the examples can be interpreted in such a way that the parts
of the soul are not independent sources of motivation but aspects of ourselves that can be at
variance with one another.\(^6\) This view has the merits of presenting a unified subject and solving
problems concerning the communication of the three parts with one another that possibly arise
from tripartition in the strong sense. In other words, the first view preserves the validity of the
principle by proposing a modification of the subject, whereas the second view preserves it by a
modification of the predicate.\(^7\) In the following I turn to an analysis of Socrates’ three supposed

\(^4\) Barney, Brennan, and Brittain (2012) 2–3; Bobonich (2002) 217, 219; Brown (2012); Burnyeat (2006);
references, see Wilburn (2013) 69–70 n. 15.


\(^6\) Anagnostopoulos (2006); Archer-Hind (1882); Cornford (1929); Price (2009) 1; Robinson (1971); Santas

counter-examples to the POC, namely the man who is simultaneously at rest and moving, the spinning top, and the archer. My examination shows that, even if we acknowledge the grammatical ambiguities that might lend support to the first interpretation, the absurdities that follow from it suffice to discredit it as the most promising approach. In addition, I adduce textual evidence from Republic Book 5 that weighs in favor of the second interpretation by resolving the aforementioned ambiguities through modification of the predicate rather than the subject.

Socrates introduces the first potential counter-example to the POC immediately after the first formulation of the principle. It concerns the question whether the same thing can or cannot be simultaneously at rest and moving (436c5–6: ἑστάναι, εἶπον, καὶ κινεῖσθαι τὸ αὐτὸ ἁμα κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ἄφα δυνατὸν;). He then provides a specific example (436c9–d2):

εἰ γάρ τις λέγοι ἄνθρωπον ἑστηκότα, κινοῦντα δὲ τὰς χεῖρας τε καὶ τὴν κεφαλήν, ὃτι ὁ αὐτὸς ἑστηκέ τε καὶ κινεῖται ἁμα, οὐκ ἃν οἱμαί ἀγιοὶμεν οὕτω λέγειν δεῖν, ἀλλ᾽ ὃτι τὸ μὲν τι αὐτοῦ ἑστηκεν, τὸ δὲ κινεῖται. οὕχ οὕτω;

If someone said that a person who is standing still but moving his hands and head is moving and standing still at the same time, we wouldn’t consider, I think, that he ought to put it like that. What he ought to say is that one part of the person is standing still and another part is moving. Isn’t that so?

According to Bobonich, there are two ways in which Plato could reconcile these apparent counter-examples with the POC: (a) by allowing that the contraries cointstantiated in the same subject are not, in fact, in the same respect or in relation to the same thing (these he calls “incomplete
contraries”), or (b) by taking the contraries to be in the same respect and in relation to the same thing, but denying the possibility of coinstantiation within one and the same subject (“complete contraries”).

This depends on how we interpret τὸ μὲν ... τὸ δὲ above: the view put forward by Bobonich and Lorenz is that they are nominatives serving as subjects of the verbs ἔστηκεν and κινεῖται, thus what Socrates argues for here is that a single thing cannot ever be the subject of complete contraries. Consequently, there must exist distinct parts within this single thing that will serve as proper subjects of the complete contraries. Alternatively, one may well argue that τὸ μὲν ... τὸ δὲ are accusatives of respect, and what Socrates proposes here is that, in order not to violate the POC, one would be prone to accept that someone can be both moving and at rest but in different aspects, so that the last sentence should be translated to the effect that “the man is at rest with respect to one part of himself, but in motion with respect to another.” Thus, there would be no need to divide the subject into two distinct parts, but it would suffice to merely distinguish two different ways of qualifying the same subject. Despite the grammatical ambiguity, which allows the text to be construed either way, it seems that the approach favored by Bobonich and Lorenz runs up against some real conceptual difficulties: indeed, we might say colloquially that “his head and hands are moving but his legs are still,” but surely we think that the principle that initiates motion in either the hands or legs is really located in one and the same agent. My hands do not operate independently of me. Let us turn the top example, which weighs against this reading.

Socrates’ imaginary interlocutor presents a second example that supposedly challenges the POC, namely the example of the spinning top (436d4–e6):

---

Οὐκοῦν καὶ εἰ ἔτι μᾶλλον χαριντίζοιτο ὁ ταῦτα λέγον, κομψευόμενος ὡς οἱ γε στρόβιλοι ὅλοι ἐστάσις τε ἁμα καὶ κινοῦνται, ὅταν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ πήξαντες τὸ κέντρον περιφέροντα, ἢ καὶ ἄλλο τι κύκλῳ περιμοῦ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἔδρᾳ τούτῳ δρῇ, οὐκ ἃν ἀποδεχοῖμεθα, ὡς οὐ κατὰ ταῦτα ἐαυτῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα τότε μενόντων τε καὶ φερομένων, ἄλλα φαϊμεν ἂν ἔχειν αὐτὰ εὐθύτερον τε καὶ περιφερέσθαι ἐν αὐτῶι, καὶ κατὰ μὲν τὸ εὐθὺ ἐστάναι – οὐδαμὴ γὰρ ἀποκλίνειν – κατὰ δὲ τὸ περιφερές κύκλῳ κινεῖσθαι, καὶ ὅταν δὲ τὴν εὔθυωρίαν ἢ εἰς δεξιὰν ἢ εἰς ἀριστερὰν ἢ εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν ἢ εἰς τὸ ὀπισθὲν ἐγκλῖνη ἁμα περιφερόμενον, τότε οὐδαμῇ ἐστάναι.

And if our interlocutor became even more amusing and was sophisticated enough to say that whole spinning tops stand still and move at the same time when the peg is fixed in the same place and they revolve, and that the same is true of anything else moving in a circular motion on the same spot, we wouldn’t agree, because it isn’t with respect to the same parts of themselves that such things both stand still and move. We’d say that they have an axis and a circumference and that with respect to the axis they stand still, since they don’t wobble to either side, while with respect to the circumference they move in a circle. But if they do wobble to the left or right, front or back, while they are spinning, we’d say that they aren’t standing still in any way.

This example resolves the problem by way of distinguishing different aspects in which the same subject is said to undergo or do opposites. The spinning top is presented as being fixed in a certain spot, and the question is whether it is at rest and moving at the same time as a whole (ὅλοι).
Socrates rejects this claim straightaway, and proposes that spinning tops are not characterized by contraries in the same respect (οὐ κατὰ ταῦτα ἕαντον), but that there are two different aspects of them and that they should be assigned motion only with respect to one of them: they should be said to be at rest with respect to their axis and in motion with respect to their circumference. In case the axis of the spinning top reclines to one side or the other, then one should entirely deny that it is at rest.10

Having explained how these putative counter-examples fail to undermine the POC, Socrates goes on to apply the principle to the special case of the soul. First, he posits as opposites the acts of assent and dissent, wanting to have something and rejecting it, as well as taking something and pushing it away (437b1–4). He includes all appetites as well as wishing and willing as cases that fall into the first category, and sorts the acts of not wishing and not willing into the opposite category (437b7–c10). After an extended digression on what exactly the thirsty person aims at, namely, a drink without qualification and not, e.g., a good drink (437d8–439a8),11 Plato has Socrates introduce a case in which both assent and dissent seem to be present in the same subject (439a9–b6): if the thirsty person, who wishes to drink simpliciter, is pulled away from drinking, then one should conclude that the source from which the pulling away originates is different from the source from which thirst originates. Socrates offers the additional example of the archer to illustrate the case even more clearly (439b8–11):

---

10 Lorenz (2006) 24; Price (2009) 4. It could be argued on the basis of ἔχειν αὐτὰ εὐθός τε καὶ περιφερές ἐν αὐτόις that the vertical axis and the circumference of the top are parts of the top, so that motion and rest could once again be attributed not to the top as a whole, but to distinct subjects within it. Cf. Lorenz (2006) 24 n. 14. However, the presence of the accusative of respect τὸ κέντρον as well as of the prepositional phrases with κατὰ suggest an attempt on Socrates’ behalf to distinguish between aspects, thus rendering this interpretation improbable.

In the same way, I suppose, it’s not well put to say of the archer that his hands at the same time push the bow away and draw it towards him. We ought to say that one hand pushes it away and the other draws it towards him.

The claim that the hands of the archer simultaneously push and draw near the bow might seem to violate the POC because it attributes opposing actions to one and the same subject; it thus has to be modified to the claim that the hand which pushes away the bow is different from the hand that draws it near. It might be thought that this modification would support the interpretation favored by Bobonich and Lorenz. It seems, however, that the idiom disguises the fact that it is the archer who ultimately pushes and pulls the bow simultaneously, albeit with different parts of himself (his two separate hands). That the parts are different need not entail that they are not parts of the same entity: for example, my legs and hands are different, but both are parts of me.

To sum up so far: Socrates offers three examples in which the POC is applied to resolve apparent contradictions: (a) the man who stands and moves his head and hands, (b) the spinning top, and (c) the archer who both pushes the bow away and draws it near. We have seen that in (a) the expression τὸ μὲν … τὸ δὲ leaves it open whether it is the subject that has to be subdivided into two separate subjects, each of which will serve as the respective subject of the contrary actions, or whether the opposing actions should be attributed to different aspects of the same subject. I have discussed the example of the spinning top as a clear case in support of the view that the principle
is meant to distinguish aspects of a unitary subject rather than distinct parts thereof. Consequently, I am inclined to construe τὸ μέν ... τὸ δέ in (a) as accusatives of respect. As for (c) the archer example, it has been taken as evidence that the POC should be applied to distinguish between different subjects and that, if used as a parallel, it disambiguates the text of (a), yielding the conclusion that τὸ μέν ... τὸ δέ are nominatives. I have argued in response that the idiom disguises the fact that it is one and the same subject that performs the opposing actions, albeit with different parts of himself. According to the line of interpretation put forward by Bobonich and Lorenz, when Socrates argues that we calculate with one part of the soul and that we desire with another part of the soul, we should take him to be arguing in support of the thesis that there are distinct parts within us that serve as the proper subjects of these opposing actions, and that we and our souls as a whole are only derivatively subjects of these actions. Alternatively, one may argue that all three examples are meant to illustrate a single way in which the principle should be applied, namely that of distinguishing aspects. As Price has maintained, Plato could have qualified the predicate instead of the subject in the first example and the subject instead of the predicate in the second example: thus he could have said that the man is in motion with respect to his head and hands but at rest with respect to his torso, and that it is the axis of the spinning top that is at rest, whereas its circumference is in motion. Likewise, in the archer example Plato could have qualified the predicate by saying that the archer pushes with one arm and pulls with the other or that he pushes the bowstring and pulls the bow-tree.

---

12 Bobonich (2002) 223; Lorenz (2006) 25. Cf. Brown (2012): “But the archer enters after Socrates has restated the principle of non-opposition and traded the more general “in the same respect” clause for the more specific “by the same thing of itself” clause.” The reference is to the first formulation of the principle at 436b8–c1 (κατὰ ταῦτα γε) as opposed to its restatement at 439b3–6 (τῷ αὐτῷ ἑαυτοῦ).

I am inclined to side with the analysis favored by Price for several reasons. First of all, Bobonich argues that the *Republic*’s partitioning theory denies the unity of the person: 14 each part of the soul is a distinct subject from which action originates, and there is no overarching entity over and above these three parts. It is beyond doubt that there is some degree of disunity at play in the *Republic*; but unification of the self seems to be exactly what the curriculum of the *Republic* is aimed at. Suffice it to say for now that Plato need not deny entirely the unity of the person, even if he considers these parts as distinct psychological subjects: the soul might still be said to have unity in that it is *one* thing composed of many constituents. 15 Denying the unity of the self on the basis of its being composed of parts tacitly assumes that a unitary self must be the non-derivative subject of the actions or passions that are ascribed to it. Additionally, it has been noticed that a division of the soul into parts in the strict sense would possibly generate more than three parts, for at least the appetitive part would then be liable to internal conflict and thus to further division. 16

Indeed, there is reason to think that, when it comes to distinguishing between parts, Plato’s language is deliberatively vague. As Robinson has noted, Plato never turned the instrumental datives used to talk about the three entities of the soul into a noun such as ὀργανόν, something that perhaps indicates that it was not his intention to distinguish between separate tools within the soul. As for the talk of γένη, εἰδη, and µέρη, the first two are too vague to be of any value with respect

15 Lorenz (2006) 26 with n. 18: “To deny that there is a single thing that is the proper, non-derivative subject of all of a person’s psychological states is not to deny the unity of the person.”
16 For example, an urge to drink may be in conflict with an urge to eat, two appetites that cannot be jointly satisfied; the application of the POC would then not allow us to say that the same person—in this case the appetitive part conceived as a person—both desires to eat and to drink at the same time; rather, thirst and hunger should be respectively assigned to separate parts thereof. But this is clearly not what Plato has in mind, for it neither corresponds to the social structure of the ideal city nor to the threefold classification of human motivation as he described it at 436a8–b3. See Annas (1981) 137–8; Woods (1987) 31; Anagnostopoulos (2006) 170. Cf. 443d7, where Plato’s language may allow for the existence of more than three parts of the soul.
to clarifying what these entities really are, whereas the last seems to be primarily reserved for use in spatial contexts—for example, in distinguishing between parts of the body—and thus becomes metaphorical since the soul lacks the capacity to occupy space.\footnote{Robinson (1970) 44–5. However, the \textit{Timaeus} seems to offer a different account, according to which the soul is an incorporeal, yet spatially extended entity. Cf. \textit{Ti}. 36b6–e5 and Johansen (2004) 138–42.}

One passage in Book 5 may be used as a parallel to support the view that, whether one acts on an appetitive desire or employs the calculative faculty, it is the soul as a whole that should be considered the ultimate subject of these actions. Consider, first, how Plato distinguishes between the appetitive and non-appetitive parts in Book 4: he uses the example of a man who desires to drink and something holds him back. Not only is here the soul of the thirsty man the subject of this particular desire,\footnote{439a9–b1: Τοῦ διψοῦντος ἄρα ἡ ψυχή, καθ᾽ ὃσον διψή, οὐκ ἄλλο τι βούλεται ἢ πιεῖν, καὶ τοῦτον ὀρέγεται καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦτο ὀρμᾷ. As Stalley (2007) 73 with n. 17 notes, in this whole section it is the soul or the human being that serves as the subject of verbs that denote desiring and wishing. The only instance in which it is the element of the soul that is described as thirsty occurs at 439b2–5.} but there is a special aspect of thirst \textit{qua} thirst that usually goes unnoticed, namely that thirst is a state of depletion (κένωσις).ootnote{585a8–b1.} If we were to use the terminology employed by Plato later on in Book 8, thirst would be classified as a necessary desire (554a5–8). But it seems also to fall into the category of παθήματα, which lead and drag the soul toward drinking (439d2). The term παθήματα is used in the \textit{Timaeus} to refer to exteroceptive bodily perception and is closely associated with Plato’s account of bodily pain and pleasure.\footnote{See \textit{Ti}. 69c5–d4, where it is stated that the inferior gods built another kind of soul, which is associated with the body and includes in it some dreadful and necessary affections (παθήματα), such as pains and pleasures (ἡδονήν … λύπας). Cf. Wolfsdorf (2015) 14.} What is relevant to my purposes here is not Plato’s psychology of pain \textit{per se}, but the repeated insistence with which Plato classifies thirst and hunger as cases of bodily pain in several dialogues.\footnote{Grg. 496c6–d3; \textit{Phlb}. 31e6; \textit{R}. 585a–b1.} The question Socrates posed at 436a9–b2, namely whether we learn, get angry, and desire by the same thing or whether these
three actions/passions are to be attributed to three different sources in us respectively, could be reformulated with respect to thirst in the following way: when one desires a drink *simpliciter*, is it the whole soul that desires it or merely a part thereof? And, given that thirst is a sort of pain, one may generalize even further and ask: when one feels pain, is it the whole soul that feels it or a part thereof?

Plato deals with this particular question in Book 5, where he discusses the reasons why having everything in common would result in the best management for a city. His argument is that the worst thing for a city is what threatens to dissolve it and divide it, whereas the best thing is what unifies it and makes it one (462a9–b2). He counts the sharing of pleasures and pains as a unifying factor, and he considers their privatization as a corrosive element (462b4–c1). He aims to show that, even when only one citizen enjoys something good or suffers something bad, the city, if unified, will claim that it was one of its parts that enjoyed or suffered the relevant passion and will share in it in its entirety (462d8–e2). To illustrate his point, he uses the human being as a parallel (462c10–d5):

Καὶ ἢτις δὴ ἐγγύτατα ἐνός ἀνθρώπου ἔχει; οὐ δὲν που ἡμῶν δάκτυλός του πληγῇ, πᾶσα ἡ κοινωνία ἢ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν τεταμένη εἰς μίαν σύνταξιν τὴν τοῦ ἄρχοντος ἐν αὐτῇ ἔσθετο τε καὶ πᾶσα ἢμα συνήληγεν μέρους πονήσαντος ὀλη, καὶ ὅπως δὴ λέγομεν ὃτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν δάκτυλον ἁλγεῖ· καὶ περὶ ἄλλου ὄτου οὖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, περὶ τοῦ λύπης πονοῦντος μέρους καὶ περὶ ἣδονῆς ῥαξοῦντος;

What about the city that is most like a single person? For example, when one of us
hurts his finger, the entire organism that binds body and soul together into a single system under the ruling part within it is aware of this, and the whole feels the pain together with the part that suffers. That’s why we say that the man has a pain in his finger. And the same can be said about any part of a man, with regard either to the pain it suffers or to the pleasure it experiences when it finds relief.

What this passage argues for is simple and straightforward: when someone’s finger is hurt, it is the whole organism that feels the pain, not simply the hurt finger. Interestingly, Plato here specifies the hurt member through an accusative of respect, whereas at the end of the passage it is the part that functions as the subject of the participle πονοῦντος. Were we to explain thirst by using this parallel, the result would be that the entire human being should be said to be in pain with respect to that part of it that is associated with thirst, presumably the appetitive part of the soul along with the body itself.

There are, however, differences in context: in Book 4 the discussion is about the soul, but here the focus is on the body and soul combination that comprises the human being. The language is complicated, but the meaning is clear: “the entire partnership that has been organized with respect to the body in relation to the soul so as to form one arrangement, namely that of the ruling part in it.” The partnership in question is not simply that of body and soul, but also of the different parts of the body with one another.22 Additionally, Plato’s intention in Book 4 was to examine whether conflicting desires and intentions derive their source from different aspects or parts of the soul, whereas his aim here is to point out the merits of unity, both in the communal form of ownership and within the human being. These differences notwithstanding, the discussion in Book

22 Adam (1902) I 306.
4 seems also to be about embodied souls since thirst is a physical need and it would make no sense to speak of a disembodied soul experiencing thirst. In short, I believe that the Book 5 passage provides a good parallel to help clarify the ambiguity of the counter-examples that were meant to challenge the validity of the POC of Book 4.

To conclude, let us consider the matter from two additional perspectives. First, there is a much-discussed passage of the *Theaetetus*, in which Socrates seems to favor the view that it is *through* rather than *with* the eyes that we see (184c5–7: ἀπόκρισις ποτέρα ὀρθότερα, ὃ ὀρῶμεν τοῦτο εἶναι ὄφθαλμοῦς, ἢ δὲ ὁ ὀρῶμεν, καὶ ὃ ἄκουόμεν ὑτα, ἢ δὲ ὁ ἄκουόμεν;).

The difference here turns on the question of whether the eyes themselves are what sees, the ears what hear, etc., or whether these organs of sense are instruments by means of which the soul perceives in various ways. Socrates poses to Theaetetus the question whether we see *through* rather than *with* the eyes, and the latter replies that one perceives things *through* rather than *with* the sense organs. That Socrates agrees with him is made clear by his answer (184d1–5):

Δεινόν γάρ που, ὃ παῖ, εἰ πολλαὶ τινες ἐν ἡμῖν ὀσπέρ ἐν δουρείοις ἱπποις ἀίσθησις ἐγκάθηνται, ἀλλὰ μὴ εἶς μίαν τινὰ ἱδέαν, εἴτε ψυχὴν εἴτε ὁτι δεῖ καλεῖν, πάντα ταῦτα συντείνει, ἣ διὰ τούτων ὁιν ὀργάνων ἀίσθησις ὀσμή ἀίσθησιν.

Yes, my son. It would be a very strange thing, I must say, if there were a number of perceptions sitting inside us as if we were Wooden Horses, and there were not some single form, soul or whatever one ought to call it, to which all these converge—something with which, through those things, as if they were

---

instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible.

If it were the case that we perceived things through each and every sense-organ without there being a unified locus of perception that would gather and process the sensory data, then we would resemble Trojan Horses, with a number of different perceivers (e.g., eyes, ears, etc.) sitting within us, as if they were distinct warriors. Socrates’ answer, then, strongly implies that the locus of perception ought to be sought in the soul as a whole rather than in separate agent-like parts. Additionally, ascription of agency to separate parts within the soul would seem to run counter to the account of moral responsibility that is at play in the Republic: if, as it is maintained in the Myth of Er (614b–616b, 617d–e), the disembodied soul is to be held responsible for the actions both of the previous as well as the future embodied existence of the person, then in certain cases it would be equally unjust to punish or reward the entire soul for actions that originated from one or other of its parts.\(^{24}\) It would thus be better to treat the entire soul as the locus of moral responsibility.

All the above point to the conclusion that partition of the soul was not intended in the strong sense of distinguishing between agents within each soul, but in the milder one that posits distinct aspects of one and the same object.\(^ {25}\) I would like, however, to anticipate a few objections: the claim that Plato’s intention was to distinguish between agents within the soul may be thought to be corroborated by textual evidence in Republic Books 4 and 10 that ascribes its own desires as well as its own beliefs to each and every part of the soul.\(^ {26}\) Additionally, tripartition in the strong sense falls in line with the mythological description of the human being in Book 9, according to

\(^{24}\) Brown (2012) 54–5. For example, if the disembodied soul of the Republic is essentially rational, then it would be unjust to punish it for past unlawful actions that originated from appetite.
\(^{25}\) Price (2009) 6–7. Robinson (1970) 47: “But Plato’s psychic entities cannot be real agents, any more than boxes printed on paper can be real officers. There is only one agent, the man. However much his passion excites him, overwhelms him, carries him away, it is not another agent carrying him away.”
\(^{26}\) So Bobonich (2002) 220.
which humans are comprised of three distinct animals and they are to identify with the human within the human. Finally, positing three distinct agents within the soul seems to suit Socrates’ reservations about the true nature of the soul in Book 10, as well as the implication that only the rational part of the soul will survive death. In the following sections, I will take these objections up in order with the intention of showing that (a) ascription of beliefs to non-rational elements of the soul is metaphorical and/or the beliefs in question are of negligible intellectual content,\(^\text{27}\) and (b) that the mythological description of the inner constituents of the human being does not suffice to justify tripartition in the strong sense.

2.2 Beliefs and the Non-Rational Soul

The view that non-rational parts of the soul behave as agents within the human being originates to a certain extent from evidence that seems to suggest that each soul-part has its own desires as well as its own beliefs. The beliefs in question are seemingly value judgments concerning the object of each soul-part’s desire: thus, the appetitive part, for example, would not simply desire bodily pleasures but would also believe that fulfilling these pleasures is good.\(^\text{28}\) Given, however, Plato’s insistence at 437d8–439a8 that thirst is directed toward drink \textit{simpliciter} and not toward good drink, it may be hard to resist Irwin’s analysis, according to which the non-rational parts of the soul are good-independent.\(^\text{29}\) One passage that seems to run counter to this interpretation occurs at 505d11–506a2:

\(^{27}\) Penner (1971) 101.

\(^{28}\) Cf. Burnyeat (1976) 35 n. 22: “In general, it is as mistaken to suppose the lower two parts of the soul incapable of thought or judgement as it is to deny desires and pleasures to the top part.”

Every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake. It divines that the good is something but it is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is or acquire the sort of stable beliefs it has about other things, and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give. Will we allow the best people in the city, to whom we entrust everything, to be so in the dark about something of this kind and of this importance?

One may be tempted to interpret Socrates’ words as implying that everyone always desires the good, and thus to see no break with Socrates’ intellectualism as it is put forward, for example, in the *Protagoras*. But to say that the entire (or every) soul desires the good and would do anything to achieve it does not necessarily entail an ability of the non-rational parts to comprehend reason. It may be, for example, that in non-virtuous souls the degenerate rational part regards the object of whichever part rules the soul as the good, or that the passage’s claim applies only to cases where motivation originates solely from the rational part. It may be safer to argue that non-rational parts can form beliefs only in an attenuated sense, taking the term “belief” as not necessarily implying

verbal or rational content. To see what these beliefs might be and how they are formed, let us briefly turn to Socrates’ analysis of the virtues.

Once Socrates has established that there are three parts in each of us that correspond to the three classes of the ideal city (441c4–7), he goes on to describe how the virtues can be analyzed through this psychological model. He claims that the term “just” applies univocally both to cities and their individual constituents (441c9–10), and that, as it had been previously agreed upon that the just city is the one in which each class minds its own business, justice comes about within the individual when each of the three parts does its own work (441d8–e2): thus, to be a just person one has to have a rational part that rules the entire soul; a spirited part that obeys, and allies itself to, the rational part; and an appetitive part that is subjugated and ruled over (441e4–442b3). Courage, on the other hand, comes about when the spirited part preserves through pains and pleasures whatever is declared as fearful or not (442b11–c3). Finally, temperance consists in the mutual agreement of the parts of the soul that reason ought to rule and as well as in the avoidance of civil strife (442c10–d1).

Even if Plato’s imagery may suggest an ability of the non-rational parts of the soul to form beliefs, it is far from clear whether the content of these beliefs is propositional. Let us start with the spirited part: when Socrates describes how music and gymnastics harmonize the rational and the spirited parts (441e8–442a2), he claims that the rational part of the soul was tensed and nurtured through fine speeches and instruction (τὸ μὲν ἄπειτανκαὶ τρέφουσα λόγοι τε καλοῖς καὶ μαθήμασιν), whereas the spirited part was relaxed and soothed through harmony and rhythm (τὸ δὲ ἀνείσα παραμυθομένη, ἣμεροῦσα ἁρμονία τε καὶ ῥυθμῶ). It is remarkable that in contradistinction to the education of the rational part, that of the spirited part is not conceived of

32 The problems of this argument are discussed by Williams (1973b). Lear (1992) 194–208 attempt to salvage Plato’s argument from Williams’ criticism. Ferrari (2003) ch. 2 discusses both approaches.
as occurring through purely verbal means: the usage of παραμονήθουμένη denotes a non-rational element that accords well with the remark at 441a7–b1 that spirit is present in human beings before the appearance of reason; additionally, the participle ἡμεροῦσα suggests the civilizing effect of education on the animalistic spirited part. We may, thus, surmise on the basis of the description of the spirited part’s education that this part does not respond to reason. Socrates continues, however, and argues that, having been nurtured and educated in the aforementioned way and having respectively learned what pertains to their role, these two parts will govern the appetitive part (442a4–5: ὡς ἀληθῶς τὰ αὐτῶν μαθόντε καὶ παιδευθέντε).

Is there a necessary association between learning and rational content? If so, the view that the spirited part can form reason-based beliefs would be correct. It seems, however, that no such necessary link exists: one may learn something without knowing that one learns or without knowing what one learns. Such could be the case when one learns something simply through habituation. In fact, it would be better not to overinterpret the role the spirited part plays in the constitution of the virtue of courage, but to consider it such a case of learning through habituation.33 Yet, the following passage seems to imply that this learning process might be based on rational persuasion (442b11–c3):

Καὶ ἀνδρεῖον δή οἶμαι τοῦτῳ τῷ μέρει καλοῦμεν ἕνα ἔκαστον, ὅταν αὐτῶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς διασῴζῃ διὰ τε λυπῶν καὶ ἤδονῶν τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων παραγγελθέν δεινόν τε καὶ μή.

And it is because of the spirited part, I suppose, that we call a single individual

---

33 For education by habituation, see 377a11–378e4, 522a3–9, 590b6–9. Cf. Section 2.4 of this chapter and Lorenz (2006) 47 n. 14.
courageous, namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declarations of reason about what is to be feared and what isn’t.

When Socrates says that in the courageous person the spirited part preserves the instructions of reason on what ought to be feared and what ought not, he need not mean that heeding the instructions involves reflection or any other active role on behalf of reason. In fact, as Stalley points out, the communication between the parts is described by the verb παραγγέλλειν, which is standardly used for passing on messages as well as for commands issued by military officers: the soldier must simply obey independently of having been persuaded. Additionally, in the argument that seeks to distinguish between the rational and spirited parts, spirit is brought to heel by reason like a dog by the shepherd (440d1–3), whereas the entire educational program of the young guardians has been compared to that of training dogs at 375a2–3. The dog comparison calls to mind an earlier passage where Glaucon describes civic courage as beastlike (430b6–9):

Αλλ’ οὐδέν, ἦ δ’ ὅς, λέγω· δοκεῖς γάρ μοι τὴν ὀρθὴν δόξαν περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων ἁνευ παιδείας γεγονούσαν, τήν τε θηριώδη καὶ ἀνδραποδώδη, οὔτε πάντοτε νόμιμον ἡγεῖσθαι, ἀλλ’ τε τι ἢ ἀνδρείαν καλεῖν.

---

35 Stalley (2007) 79: “The comparison of spirit to a dog which goes on blindly attacking a supposed enemy until it is called off suggests that it lacks any rational judgements and simply responds to instinct or its master’s orders.” Classen (1959) 26 n. 2 notes that the verb πραΰνω is used primarily for domesticated animals.
36 The analogy between the guardians and the dogs may be more than a play at the similarity of sound between φύλαξ and σκύλαξ. As Xenophon’s Cynegeticus shows, a young dog could have been named Φύλαξ (7.5.3). For the idea that a politician was “the people’s watchdog,” see Ar. Eq. 1015–20, 1030–4; D. Against Aristogeiton 1.40; Thphr. Char. 29.4; Plu. Dem. 23. The earliest parallel is perhaps Odysseus’ raging heart, which is compared to a dog in Odyssey 20.13–16.
I have nothing different to say, for I assume that you don’t consider the correct belief about these same things, which you find in animals and slaves, and which is not the result of education, to be inculcated by law, and that you don’t call it courage but something else.

This description indicates that the belief in question as well as its preservation have come about without the influence of λόγος since the association with θηρίον implies a process devoid of reason.37 Similarly, Socrates argues in Book 3 that only those should be chosen as guardians who guard throughout their lives the conviction that they must pursue what is good for the city and never give it up either through compulsion or magic spells (412e5–8): even though these men are said to hold a belief about what is beneficial to the city (δόγμα, δόξα), the means by which this belief may be discarded or forgotten, namely the use of force and magic, indicates that the subjects holding the relevant beliefs are perhaps not responsive to reason’s persuasion. Overall, we may say that they have been habituated into holding these beliefs without necessarily being aware of their propositional content and that in this sort of education reason is present in a passive and unanalytical way.38

Even if we manage to sidestep the problem associated with the verbal instructions passed on to the spirited part by reason, we are faced with the same problem in the description of the virtue of temperance. Attempting to redefine temperance in accordance to the proposed psychological model, Socrates argues that it consists in the mutual agreement of all the parts of

---

37 The dissociation of θηρίον from λόγος is brought out most clearly in Protagoras 324b1: ὡσπερ θηρίον ἄλογίστος.
38 Gill (1985) 9. For a related passage, in which Socrates is presented as drawing some parallels between the education of human beings and other animals (including dogs), see X. Mem. 4.1.3.
the soul that the part that is a ruler by nature should rule, whereas the rest should be ruled, without causing internal upheaval (442c10–d1):

Τί δέ; σώφρονα οὐ τῇ φιλίᾳ καὶ συμφωνίᾳ τῇ αὐτῶν τούτων, ὅταν τὸ τε ἀρχόν καὶ τὸ ἀρχομένῳ τὸ λογιστικὸν ὀμοδοξῶσι δεῖν ἄρχειν καὶ μὴ στασιάζωσιν αὐτῷ;

And isn’t he moderate because of the friendly and harmonious relations between these same parts, namely, when the ruler and the ruled believe in common that the rational part should rule and don’t engage in civil war against it?

If the non-rational parts of the soul are incapable of responding to reason, one may wonder in what sense they can be said to mutually agree about who should rule. But the force of ὀμοδοξῶσι seems to call for an interpretation that acknowledges their ability to harbor and share beliefs that can be communicated to the rational part. Given that the internal upheaval which could threaten temperance is cast in terms of civic unrest, one may after all be led to assume that the non-rational parts can and do act like citizens who form beliefs about the sharing of political power.

All these points notwithstanding, I believe that this interpretation should be resisted. There is enough evidence to suggest that the term ὀμοδοξῶσι in the passage above is used in a rather loose sense that does not necessarily imply rational content. First, ὀμοδοξεῖν is also used in the Phaedo to describe the process by which the soul comes to be body-like and thus loses its chance to enter Hades in a purified state (83d4–e3):

Ὅτι ἐκάστη ἡδονή καὶ λύπη ὀσπερ ἡλον ἔχουσα προσηλοί αὐτὴν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα καὶ προσπερονὰ καὶ ποιεῖ σωματοειδῆ, δοξάζουσαν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἀπερ ἃν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῇ. ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς χαίρειν ἀναγκάζεται ὁμαί ὁμότροπος τε καὶ ὁμότροφος γίγνεσθαι καὶ σοῦ μηδέποτε εἰς Ἀιδοῦ καθαρός ἀφικέσθαι, ἀλλὰ ἀεὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀναπλέα ἐξίεναι, ὡστε ταχὺ πάλιν πίπτειν εἰς ἀλλὸ σῶμα καὶ ὀσπερ σπειρομένη ἐμφύσεσθαι, καὶ ἐκ τούτων ἁμοιρὸς εἶναι τῆς τοῦ θείου τε καὶ καθαροῦ καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας.

Because every pleasure or pain provides, as it were, another nail to rivet the soul to the body and to weld them together. It makes the soul corporeal, so that it believes that truth is what the body says it is. As it shares the beliefs and delights of the body, I think it inevitably comes to share its ways and manner of life and is unable ever to reach Hades in a pure state; it is always full of body when it departs, so that it soon falls back into another body and grows with it as if it had been sewn into it.

Because of this, it can have no part in the company of the divine, the pure and uniform.

Pleasures and pains jeopardize the soul’s ability to judge for itself, independently of bodily passions, what should be considered true and false. If the soul succumbs to their apparent truthfulness, it runs the risk of believing as true whatever the body deems so. It thus comes to agree with the body, and gives itself over to its ways and manners of life. Unless one grants the body the ability to literally form opinions about the truth, this whole passage should be considered simply
an extended metaphor that personifies both soul and body. Indeed, the *Phaedo* as a whole seems to be directed precisely against the view that the body plays any active role in the formation of rational belief. Viewed from this angle, the mutual agreement of the soul-parts in the *Republic* should not be taken as implying the ability of the non-rational parts to partake in discussion and argue as to who should rule; their ὀμοδοξία should rather be seen as the result of a process by which the rational element exerts its controlling influence through the aid of spirit over the appetites so as to shape them and secure their conformity with its judgment.

Another important passage that pertains to the ability of the non-rational soul to form beliefs is part of Socrates’ extended criticism of the imitative arts in *Republic* Book 10. Having explained how imitative artists and arts in general are at a third remove from reality (597e3–4, 602c1–2), Socrates offers an argument to establish a bipartite structure of the soul so as to claim that there is a special part of the soul on which mimetic arts exert their influence (602c4–5). He initiates this section by appealing to the apparent incongruity of sensory data concerning the size of any given object as it appears when looked at from close at hand as opposed to when inspected from a distance (602c7–8), a theme that is discussed in similar terms both in *Phaedo* and *Republic* Book 7. He then gives some specific examples: some objects look straight when out of the water and crooked when immersed in water, while others look at times both concave and convex (602c10–12). When faced with such contradictory data, Socrates argues, the most welcome assistance is offered to us by means of calculation, measurement, and weighing, activities that are attributed to the rational element of the soul (602d6–e2). Yet, even after the rational part has estimated the situation numerous times, the results of these repeated calculations are still inconclusive, since some things are judged to be bigger or smaller or the same size as others, while

---

40 Bobonich (2002) 486 n. 26 accepts the view that in the *Phaedo* the body can form beliefs.
the opposite appears to be the case all the while (602e4–6). Thus, Socrates concludes that, by appeal to the Principle of Contraries, it cannot be the same part of the soul that both believes and disbelieves the results of the calculations, and that a division is called for (602e8–603a5): the part of the soul that forms a belief that defies calculations (τὸ παρὰ τὰ μέτρα ἄρα δοξάζον τῆς ψυχῆς) is an unworthy part of ourselves, not to be held identical to our best part, which believes in accord with calculations.42

We should not be troubled by the use of imagery that implicitly attributes the ability to form beliefs to the non-rational soul-part. A moment’s reflection would reveal that the belief in question is of minimal intellectual or non-existent propositional content: Socrates’ point is that the non-rational element is to be held responsible for a belief, which is impossible to discard, even after the rational part has performed its calculations and measurements and has proved it to be false. It is also essential to keep in mind that there is no need to ascribe to the non-rational part calculations of the sort that the rational part performs: one should not think that, just as the rational part calculates and reaches the conclusion that optical illusions should not be taken at face value, the non-rational part also forms its own belief after a similar process of rational reflection.43 On the contrary, the plain fact that the belief persists, even after it has been proven false by the measurements of the rational part, should be taken as an indication that the rational part has no access to the content of the non-rational part’s “belief.”44 Had it been so, the rational part would have had the ability to alter the belief so as to make the optical illusion vanish. Finally, there is one

42 I will not go into the details of whether this division maps onto the division put forward in Book 4, since all that is required for my argument is a distinction between rational and non-rational parts, irrespectively of whether the non-rational part is to be further subdivided to include a spirited element. For two persuasive expositions of the view that tripartition is here at play no less than it is in Book 4, see Moss (2008); Lorenz (2006) 71–3. For further bibliography, see Moss (2008) 36 n. 1.
43 Penner (1971) 102. As I will argue below, the non-rational element’s ability to form beliefs can be explained by considering its passive role in the process of sense-perception.
more reason to reject the view that the non-rational part of the soul can have rational beliefs: it is more than once described as ἀλόγιστον, and, even though the adjective can simply mean “foolish,” its application together with the adjective ἀνόητος to describe the intellectual abilities of the non-rational part indicate that its beliefs consist of negligible intellectual content.45

Before dealing with the nature of the content of these beliefs, I would like to anticipate a possible objection to the line of interpretation presented here: attention is often called to the description of the appetitive element as money-loving (φιλοχρήματον) to show that it has at least the capacity for means-end reasoning. One passage, in particular, justifies the greedy aspect of the appetitive element on the grounds that desires for food, drink, and sex are most of all fulfilled through money (580d10–581a1). If, on the other hand, the appetitive part concerns itself merely with appetitive desires and does not share in reason, Plato may be contradicting himself by attributing a rational faculty to the part of the soul which, by definition, ought to be entirely dissociated from reason.46 There are two ways out of the difficulty: either Plato denies that the appetitive element can engage in means-end reasoning, or he attributes to it such a capacity but does not hold this kind of reasoning to be a kind of λογισμός proper.47 In my view, the former interpretation seems more plausible because there are repeated allusions to the appetitive part’s consideration of money as a direct source of pleasure.48 Let us consider how.

In criticizing the tales and myths told to children as part of the traditional upbringing, Socrates focuses on their representation of gods and heroes as money-lovers and insinuates that presenting the youth with such role-models can have the effect of inculcating into children a

45 ἀλόγιστον: 439d7 referring to the appetitive part; 441c2 referring to the spirited part; 604c4 referring perhaps to the spirited part again. ἀνόητος is applied to the non-rational part at 605b8, but it can also modify a belief (466b7: ἀνόητος τε καὶ μερικώδης δόξα). Cf. Moss (2008) 39.
46 Cross and Woozley (1964) 124.
detrimental attachment to money (390e8–391c6). The dangers of such an upbringing lie precisely in the inability of children to critically assess any given situation, including the value placed on pleasures arising from satisfaction of appetitive desires.\textsuperscript{49} In other words, the hazardous effect of traditional mythology does not consist in that it habituates reason to performing actions not related to the acquisition of wisdom, but in that it engenders an excessive appreciation of money in minds malleable and undefended by reason (377b1–2).

It is important to bear in mind that Socrates’ criticism is not directed to the genre of mythological tales specifically but to false conceptions that were widely disseminated through the work of certain poets. A poet who fits the context of the present discussion is Simonides, whose conception of justice is appropriated by Polemarchus in Book 1 in an attempt to support Cephalus’ definition of justice. Simonides, according to Polemarchus, held the view that justice is giving everyone what is owed to them (331d2–e4).\textsuperscript{50} Socrates refutes this definition by providing a counter-example where paying back a debt appears both good and evil (331e8–332a8), and suggests that either the definition should be interpreted differently or that it should not be attributed to Simonides or any other wise person (335e7–9). What is of relevance here is the eagerness with which Polemarchus sided with Simonides’ conception of justice (331e3–4: Ὅτι, ἦ δ’ ὃς, τὸ τὰ όφειλόμενα ἑκάστῳ ἀποδίδοναι δίκαιον ἐστι· τοῦτο λέγον δοκεῖ ἐμοὶ γε καλὸς λέγειν).

But there is reason to believe that, apart from being partly responsible for influencing the youth with his false conception of justice, Simonides may in fact be indirectly criticized for his

\textsuperscript{49} Socrates will later on offer as example the non-rationality of children to show that the functions of spirit are present at an age when rationality is not (441a7–b1). In fact, he argues that spirit makes its appearance at the moment of birth (θυμοῦ μὲν εὐθὺς γενόμενα μεστά ἐστι), and, given that it would be absurd to claim that spirit predates appetite, one may infer that both spirit and appetite coexist at an early age, when reason is not present.

\textsuperscript{50} This view of justice was so widespread that its ascription to Simonides should not be given much weight; rather, Simonides is perhaps picked up here as the representative of this predominant view because his work was influential in the traditional upbringing of children. See Adam (1902) I 12.
love of money. It may be worthwhile to recall the earlier discussion between Socrates and Cephalus in Book 1: Cephalus related his experiences of old age and his view that it is the character of the person that determines how one bears aging, something which gave Socrates the impression that Cephalus does not love money excessively (328d6–330c2). Socrates then notices how those who have made money for themselves are twice as fond of it as those who have inherited it, and how, just as poets love their poems and fathers love their children, money-makers brag about their property, not because it is something useful, but because they have made it themselves (330c3–6). The comparison here would have us expect that poets would normally brag about the quality of their work and that would presumably be a source of pleasure for them. But, according to an anecdote, preserved by Plutarch, when criticized for his love of money, Simonides used to say that he had been deprived of all other pleasures on account of aging except for one that had been left to cherish him in old age, namely the pleasure of making a profit:

ἐν δὲ τῇ ψυχῇ παρασκευαστέον ἡδονάς οὐκ ἀγεννεῖς σοῦ ἀνελευθέρους, ώς Σιμωνίδης ἔλεγε πρὸς τοὺς ἐγκαλοῦντας αὐτῷ φιλαργυρίαν, ὅτι τῶν ἄλλων ἀπεστερημένος διὰ τὸ γήρας ἡδονῶν ὑπὸ μιᾶς ἐπὶ γηροβοσκεῖται τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ κερδαίνειν.52

Pleasures are to be prepared in the soul but not ignoble and servile, as [the ones of] Simonides [who] said to those who accused him of his avarice that, having been

51 Reading ὴ κατὰ instead of καὶ τὴν χρείαν at 330c6.
52 Plu. An seni respublica gerenda sit 786b4–9. According to some sources, Simonides was the first poet to work for pay. See Robbins (1997) 245 n. 10. Cf. Hibe Papyrus 17 (c. 250 B.C.), which attributes to Simonides the saying that “all things grow old except for money-making.”
deprived of pleasures on account of aging, only one had been left nurture him in old age, namely the pleasure of profit making.

No distinction is being made here between pleasures and money making; on the contrary, making a profit seems itself to be considered a pleasure and to be valued *per se* as such. This non-instrumental appreciation of money making attributed to Simonides ties in well with Socrates’ description in Book 9 of the person who values money above all else (581c10–d3):

{o te xepmatistiko$ pro$ to kerdainevi tiv tou tima$thei hdovin$ h tiv tou manvthanevi ou$denov$ a$xiav phi$sev eivai, ei mh ei ti avton argyriov poive;}

Won’t a money-maker say that the pleasure of being honored and that of learning are worthless compared to that of making a profit, if he gets no money from them?

The moneymaker is presented as desiring money for its own sake, as if it were itself a pleasure, while disregarding all pleasures associated with being honored and acquiring learning, unless they yield a profit. Thus, it could be plausibly claimed that the appetitive part does not have to engage in means to end reasoning to satisfy its appetites since money making is itself a pleasure and is appreciated directly as such; and that a connection exists between the non-instrumental appreciation of money making as pleasurable activity and patterns of behavior that are instilled and reinforced by the surrounding culture since it is likely that unreflective members of communities in which excessive value is placed on money making will end up subscribing to these values just as easily as Polemarchus endorsed Simonides’ conception of justice.
So far I have argued that the claim that the non-rational parts of the soul can forms beliefs should either be understood metaphorically rather than literally or that it should be accepted with the qualification that the term “belief” should be construed as involving non-discursive data. To close off this section, I would like to turn to latter alternative and examine the content of the beliefs held by the non-rational part of the soul. We have already seen how the non-rational part of the soul is said in Republic Book 10 to believe certain illusory appearances and is, thus, already associated with sense-perception. For a more detailed insight into the non-rational part’s involvement in the process of perceiving, we may turn to the Timaeus. Admittedly, this work focuses more on anatomical rather than psychological matters, yet it unambiguously denies that the non-rational part can reason and attributes to it a conspicuous, albeit passive, role in the process of sense-perception. First of all, its non-rational nature is implied by its metaphorical association with a wild beast at 70e2–5: it is settled as if in a manger (οἷον φάτνη) in the area between the midriff and the navel, it is tied down as a wild beast (ὡς θρέμμα ἄγριον), and it is placed as far away as possible from the deliberative part so that its clamor and noise may not cause disturbance (θόρυβον καὶ βοήν ὡς ἐλαχίστην παρέχου). More importantly, this part is described as having a strong preference for images and apparitions (71a3–71b5):

εἰδότες δὲ αὐτὸ ὡς λόγον μὲν οὖτε συνήσειν ἔμελλεν, εἴ τε πῆ καὶ μεταλαμβάνοι τινὸς αὐτῶν αἰσθήσεως, οὐκ ἐμφυτὸν αὐτῷ τὸ μέλειν τινὸν ἐσοίτο λόγων, ὑπὸ δὲ εἰδώλων καὶ φαντασμάτων νυκτὸς τε καὶ μεθ’ ἡμέραν μάλιστα ψυχικόνωσιν, τούτῳ δὴ θεὸς ἐπιβουλεύσας αὐτῷ τὴν ἡπατος ἰδέαν συνέστησε καὶ ἐδήκεν εἰς τὴν ἐκείνου κατοίκησιν, πυκνὸν καὶ λείον καὶ λαμπρόν καὶ γλυκὸ καὶ πικρότητα ἔχον

53 For a persuasive argument that the non-rational part functions in the Timaeus as the seat of perception, see Moss (2008) 46–9.
They knew that this part of the soul was not going to understand the deliverances of reason and that even if it were in one way or another to have some awareness of them, it would not have an innate regard for any of them, but would be much more enticed by images and phantoms night and day. Hence the god conspired with this very tendency by constructing a liver, a structure which he situated in the dwelling place of this part of the soul. He made it into something dense, smooth, bright and sweet, though also having a bitter quality, so that the force of the thoughts sent down from the mind might be stamped upon it as upon a mirror that receives the stamps and returns visible images.

The gods who created it knew that the non-rational part would not be able to understand reason. Communication with it is achieved through non-discursive media, consisting of images and apparitions: its ability to comprehend only such analogical elements was what lead its creators to fashion the liver and settle it in the appetitive part’s dwelling place so that thoughts may be sent down to it from the mind and stamped upon it as if upon a mirror.

Thus, there is no indication of this part’s involvement in rational processes. On the contrary, the description of the communication between it and the mind implies that the rational content of the mind’s thoughts can be communicated to, and comprehended by, the appetitive part only when translated into images and apparitions. The comparison to a mirror that receives stamps

---

54 Also 71d4: ἐπειδὴ λόγου καὶ φρονήσεως οὐ μετέχε.
and can merely reproduce the received data emphasizes the passive role assigned to the liver in this process of communication. Additionally, the association of the appetitive part of the soul with the liver suggests the metaphor of hepatoscopy: like the liver which includes signs that are on their own unintelligible and acquire meaning only after inspection and interpretation by a rational agent, the appetitive part of the soul functions like an inner oracle and, even though in a way connected to the truth (71e1–2), resembles the divinely inspired who cannot by themselves interpret their divinatory pronouncements but stand in need of a sane and sensible person to carry out this task (71e3–72a6).

Overall, then, we may conclude that there is insufficient evidence to warrant the inference that the non-rational part of the soul engages in rational activities and thus behaves as an independent agent with the individual. Indeed, it is said numerous times to be able to hold beliefs. Yet, as both the Republic and the Timaeus seem to suggest, the beliefs in question are imagistic and non-discursive: they are essentially raw data, incomprehensible by themselves, calling for interpretation by a rational agent, which within the individual is presumably to be identified with the deliberative part of the soul.

2.3 Reason and Separation

In this section, I will focus on the hypothesis that the parts of the soul are separable and that one of them, namely the rational part, survives death.\(^{55}\) While post mortem survival is a separate and thorny issue that merits attention on its own, this hypothesis gains in plausibility when bolstered by two additional and interrelated assumptions: first, that tripartition of the soul is meant to be taken at face value as involving distinct elements in the soul, and, second, that the person is not an

\(^{55}\) On separation in Plato, see Annas (2003) 252–300.
entity over and above the parts of the soul but is to be identified strictly with its rational part.\textsuperscript{56} I have already attempted to show in the previous sections that tripartition is better explained without conceiving of the parts of the soul as separate agents or distinct subjects. There are, however, two influential passages of the Republic that would seem to support tripartition of the soul in the strong sense and complete separability of the rational part: (a) the description of the inner constituents of the human being as a mythological monster in Book 9, and (b) the comparison between the soul and the sea-god Glaucus in Book 10. Before proceeding to discuss them in more detail, let us consider a few preliminary points relating to the assumption that the person is essentially the rational part of the soul.

In several passages Plato seems to draw a distinction between the person and the soul, a distinction that is perhaps modeled on and encouraged by the corresponding distinction between the person and the body. Consider, for example, the terms in which Socrates discusses fear of death in the Gorgias (522e): he argues that only an irrational and cowardly person would fear death itself; it is rather what is unjust that should be the object proper of fear because there is nothing worse than to arrive in Hades with a soul filled with injustice. Socrates does not say that the ultimate misfortune for a soul is to arrive in Hades filled with injustice; he makes the rather different claim that the worst thing possible for someone is to arrive in Hades with a soul filled with injustice (πολλῶν γὰρ ἀδικημάτων γέμοντα τὴν ψυχήν). The implication is that two distinct entities have survived death, the soul and presumably the person to whom the soul belonged to prior to his death.

Similar expressions that seem to distinguish between the soul and the person can also be found in the Republic: in his discussion of the emergence of the timocratic character in Book 8, 

Socrates describes the internal processes that result in the psychological transformation of a young man. Being raised in a city that is not well governed (549c3), the young man is influenced both by his father—a good man who minds his own business and shuns offices, lawsuits, and generally prefers to avoid trouble (549c4–6)—and by his father’s detractors—including his mother, the servants as well as people out on the street, who go at all lengths to devalue his father as unmanly and cowardly (549c8–550a4). The son is thus torn in opposite directions since his father nourishes his rational part, whereas the rest nourish his appetitive and spirited parts (550b1–2). As a result, he settles in the middle and surrenders control over himself to the part of the soul that lies in the middle, namely the spirited and victory-loving part (550b5–6: καὶ τὴν ἐν ἐαυτῷ ἀρχὴν παρέδωκε τῷ μέσῳ τε καὶ φιλονίκῳ καὶ θυμοειδεί).

What is of interest here is that the young man is presented as if he were an impartial arbiter who adjudicates on internal psychic disputes and, keeping his own best interests in mind, decides to hand over control over himself to one of his parts: the imagery strongly suggests that the one who makes the decision is distinct from the soul-parts. However, such a conception of the person would render redundant the explanatory power of tripartition. Hence, commentators have preferred either to downplay the force of the passage as loose language or to interpret the passage in such a way as to explain away the reference to the person as a distinct entity on the grounds that it should be understood as a reference to the special role of one of the soul’s parts. Irwin opts for

---

57 Irwin (1995) 285: “If Plato does not mean that the agent handing over power is a part of the soul, perhaps he means that it is the person or the soul composed of these three parts. But where does this agent fit into Plato’s tripartite analysis of the soul? The tripartition is meant to explain the choices that we attribute to a person; if the explanation reintroduces the choices of the person without further explanation, the tripartition seems to fail in its explanatory task.” Cf. Johnstone (2011) 143 n. 12.

58 See, for example, Bobonich (2002) 531 n. 27: “Despite occasional loose language suggesting that the person is something over and above the three parts of the soul (e.g. Rep. 443c9–444a2, 550a4–b7, and 553b7–d7), the Book 4 account does not allow for such an entity and we can explain the claims that Plato makes without invoking it …”
the latter alternative and attributes this special role to the rational part of the soul.\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, in making a decision on behalf of the entire soul the young man resembles the rational soul, which is described in Book 4 as being able to exercise forethought on behalf of the whole soul and as having knowledge of what is beneficial both for each part as well as for the entire soul (441e3–4, 442c5–7). It also appears that the young man’s decision to surrender control of himself includes some features of rational deliberation: he is described as listening to his father’s speeches and observing from close at hand his father’s ways of life in comparison to those of others (550a4–7).

Irwin’s thesis that the person should be identified to the rational part of the soul has the advantage of making sense of this particular passage of the Republic without appealing to an entity that transcends the tripartite soul, while also retaining the explanatory power of tripartition. Yet, by bringing to the fore the rational elements of this psychological transition it obscures its non-rational aspects, and it has been suggested that the emergence of the timocratic character can be explained without appeal to decision making and rational deliberation.\textsuperscript{60} Be that as it may, one may be disinclined to believe that rationality, even if it is conceived as a part rather than an aspect of the soul, can ever be wholly detached from the rest of the parts, for a host of problems would then arise: suppose, for example, that someone acted unjustly during their embodied life because of avarice—a character trait that originates from the appetitive part of the soul—and that the person survives posthumously qua rationality and is presented with punishment that is appropriate and proportionate to the crime committed while embodied. In such a case we may safely conclude that

\textsuperscript{59} Irwin (1995) 286.

\textsuperscript{60} Johnstone (2011) challenges Irwin’s analysis, which he terms “rational choice” view, and offers an alternative explanation of the psychological transitions that result in the emergence of new character types. According to his “power struggle” view, the choice to hand over control is not the outcome of rational deliberation but is to be understood mostly as the result of a struggle for control within the young man’s soul by competing parties, namely the preceding form of inner control (through the influence of the father) and the corrupting influences to which the person is exposed while still young. In each individual case the result is determined by the strength of the opposed parties.
the culprit would avoid punishment, since the surviving soul-part, the one suffering the punishment, would not be the same as the one that committed the crime. In other words, if only reason survived death, posthumous punishment would be rendered redundant, especially since most of the crimes committed during embodied life would presumably have to be traced back to the needs and wants of the appetitive element, i.e. not the person that survived death. But Plato’s myths of judgment treat disembodied souls as ethically responsible.\(^{61}\) Moreover, the complete detachment of any one of the parts from the others would entail the maximum degree of discord and variance within the soul, an extreme psychic condition that Socrates conceives of as complete injustice in Book 1 and argues that it cannot ever exist (cf. 351c7–d3, 351e9–352a3).

In the rest of this section, I will deal with the description of the soul in Book 9 as a mythological beast since it involves the milder claims that the human being consists of three completely heterogeneous parts and that the person is to be identified solely with the inner human, who represents the rational part of the soul. If taken at face value, this passage would also seem to suggest that Plato introduced the use of homunculi in his discussion of psychological behavior, something which has as a corollary the view that each soul-part is a separate agent, against which I argued in the previous section.\(^ {62}\) My analysis is based on the metaphorical features of this description, more specifically on the synecdoche, underlying the entire passage, which sees rationality as the distinctive feature of humans as opposed to animals.

---

\(^ {61}\) Brown (2012) 55: “But many actions for which an embodied human being is responsible are motivated by appetitive or spirited desire, and holding the rational part responsible for such actions seems to blame an innocent bystander or, worse, a victim.”

\(^ {62}\) See, for example, Keyt (2006) 351, for the view that Plato conceives of the parts of the soul as homunculi.
2.3.1 Reason and the Inner Human

Toward the end of Book 9, Socrates proposes to offer an image of the soul in words in order to show more clearly what occurs within the soul when someone acts unjustly (588b10–11). First, he invites the interlocutors to imagine a multicolored beast of many heads—some from tame, others from wild beasts—which it can grow and change at will (588c7–10); this part is the largest (588d4–5). Next come the images of a lion and a human being (588d3–4). These three parts are to be joined into one, and a human being is to be fashioned around this whole so as to give the impression to anyone who is not able to look inside that it is a single unitary being (588d10–e1). Socrates then explains that whoever claims injustice is beneficial is in fact arguing that the multicolored beast and the lion should be nurtured at the expense of the human being, who would thus starve to death and leave the opposed parts in their ongoing feud (588e3–589a4). On the contrary, anyone claiming that justice is beneficial is in fact maintaining that the inner human (ὁ ἐντὸς ἄνθρωπος) should have most control and should exercise his power to care for the entire composite and reconcile the previously opposed parts both with one another and with himself: in the fashion of a farmer he should prevent the savage parts of the many-headed beast from growing and nurture the gentle ones, while also making the lion’s nature his ally (589a6–b6). It is clear that each of these animals corresponds to a distinct aspect of the human being: the many-headed beast stands for appetites, the lion for spirit/emotions, and the human being for rationality.63

Despite its novelty, the image is full of mythological resonances. Before depicting it, Socrates compares the entire image to certain composite mythological monsters, namely the Scylla, the Chimaera, and the Cerberus (588c2–5).64 Important in this regard is that the latter two

64 For ancient “rationalizing” interpretations of these beasts that go back at least to the time of Plato, see Hunter (2012) 84 with n. 148.
were fathered by Typhon, the monster that opposed Zeus in the *Theogony*. Thus, the multi-headed beast that changes forms at will might be an elaboration on Typhon, who is described by Hesiod not as having heads of many different animals but as having only snake-heads, which nevertheless can speak with the voices of various animals (bull, lions, dogs) or the wind; or it might have been inspired by the Hydra, which together with Cerberus call to mind the labors of Heracles. Either way, to confront the monster one will have to take up the role of Zeus or Heracles. To uphold justice, then, is not simply to nurture the inner human through functioning rationally but also to behave akin to a god or a demi-god: Socrates argues that fine things are those that subordinate the beastlike parts of ourselves to the human or, better perhaps, to the divine, whereas shameful things are those that enslave our tame to our savage part (589c7–d2). Thus, when it comes to rationality, the distinction between human and divine either collapses or is not easy to be made.

Significantly, a number of widely used metaphors is at play in the association of rationality with something entirely or partly divine and the connection between disregard for rationality and dehumanization. Consider how Socrates describes those who have never experienced reason or virtue (586a1–b4):

> Οἱ ἄρα φρονήσεως καὶ ἄρετής ἀπειρι, εὐωχίας δὲ καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις ἀεὶ συνόντες, κάτω, ὡς ἔοικεν, καὶ μέχρι πάλιν πρὸς τὸ μεταξὸν φέρονταί τε καὶ ταύτῃ πλανῶνται διὰ βίου, ὑπερβάντες δὲ τοῦτο πρὸς τὸ ἄληθῶς ἀνω οὔτε ἀνέβλεψαν πώποτε οὔτε

---

67 Self-examination is couched in similar terms at *Phaedrus* 230a2–6, where Socrates wonders whether the examination of himself will reveal him to be a monster more intricate and furious than Typhon or a tame and simple animal that shares in a divine nature.
Therefore, those who have no experience of reason or virtue, but are always occupied with feasts and the like, are brought down and then back up to the middle, as it seems, and wander in this way throughout their lives, never reaching beyond this to what is truly higher up, never looking up at it or being brought up to it, and so they aren’t filled with that which really is and never taste any stable or pure pleasure. Instead, they always look down at the ground like cattle, and, with their heads bent over the dinner table, they feed, fatten, and fornicate. To outdo others in these things, they kick and butt them with iron horns and hooves, killing each other, because their desires are insatiable. For the part that they’re trying to fill is like a vessel full of holes, and neither it nor the things they are trying to fill it with are among the things that are.

As Glaucon immediately notices, this is a description of the life of the majority:68 they are brought down and back to the middle, and they never look up to what truly exists but always look down at the ground in the fashion of cattle. We are dealing here with a dramatization of orientational

---

68 Cf. 493a9–c8, where the wisdom offered by the sophists is equated to the convictions of the many, who are compared to a beast.
metaphors that are based on up-down spatialization: “rational is up” and “emotional is down.” Additionally, Socrates’ choice to represent the life devoted to thoughtless self-indulgence with the image of a beast falls within a tradition of thought extending as far back as the *Homeric Hymns*: θηρίον is emphatically used to describe a wild animal in contradistinction to ζῷον, and together with the cognate adjective θηριώδης it applies to a way of life and behavior that is primitive, underdeveloped, brutal, and irrational. That this θηριώδης βίος is closely associated with attachment to desire and its gratification is suggested by the description of the beast as multicolored (ποικίλος), a word that is used in the *Republic* and elsewhere to describe pleasure.

As for the inner human, it synecdochically represents rationality as the proper and distinct function of humans. Consider the following example that illustrates the function of synecdoche: if one asks you to show them a picture of your mother and you show a picture of her face, they will have formed an idea as to who your mother is. This is a case of synecdoche, where the part (face) successfully represents the whole (person). On the contrary, were you to produce a picture of your mother’s leg, you would not have managed to convey the desired information. This would also be a case of synecdoche but would fail to get the message across because we are accustomed to looking at another person’s face to get some basic information about them. The difference in the Platonic passage is that the whole (human being) represents a part (the rational faculty). However, we may still understand Plato as implying that of all three aspects of behavior that a

69 See Lakoff and Johnson (1980) 17.
70 In the *Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus* (1–4) the Muse is invoked to sing of Hephaestus to celebrate him together with Athena for having taught noble things to humans, who previously dwelled in mountainous caves like beasts (ἥρτε θηρεῖς). For references to other ancient sources, see Classen (1959) 24.
71 R. 559d9; Philb. 12c4. Cf. Classen (1959) 25 with n. 1 and 2, who draws attention to two parallels in the *Sophist*: interestingly, the sophist is described as a multicolored beast at Sph. 226a6–7 because of the difficulties the interlocutors face in their attempts to provide a definition that captures the essence of the term “sophist,” whereas at 240c4 he is described as multiheaded (ὁ πολυκέφαλος σοφιστής).
72 Lakoff and Johnson (1980) 37.
human can exhibit only rationality can successfully represent the whole: philosophy reveals the
distinct nature of humans since it is the rational activity par excellence that ties them to the divine
and as such distinguishes them from the animal kingdom.73

2.3.2 Reason and the Sea-God Glauce

I hope to have shown that the description of the soul in mythological terms should not be viewed
as evidence that Plato sought to explain psychological conflict and behavior through the use of
homunculi, but that it should rather be understood as a case of synecdoche, where the whole
(human being) represents the part (rational faculty). Could, however, the inner human escape the
association with the other animalistic parts of the soul? A passage in Book 10, where the soul is
compared to the sea-god Glauce, seems to imply this much. For this reason, it may be taken as
indicating that the rational part of the soul is separable from the rest. In this brief section, I show
why such a literalist interpretation is to be rejected and argue, instead, that this passage belongs to
the broader theme of the distinction between types of virtue.

The analogy in question comes toward the end of the Republic and is sandwiched between
an argument for the immortality of the soul and the concluding Myth of Er. The immortality
argument is based on the premise that everything is destroyed only by its own vice and purports to
show the indestructibility of the soul on the grounds that its own vice, namely injustice, cannot
destroy it (608d3–611a2). Socrates argues that the soul is in truth not mired in the companionship
with the body and its real nature can only be grasped through the intellect: after inspecting it in its
pure state one will appreciate the soul’s beauty even more and will be able to tell justice from

73 Cf. 611e1–3. Aristotle straightforwardly identifies rational activity with what is most naturally akin to
human nature (EN 1178a6–7): τὸ γὰρ οἰκεῖον ἑκάστῳ τῇ φύσει κράτιστον καὶ ἠδιοτόν ἐστιν ἑκάστῳ· καὶ
tὸ ἀνθρώπῳ δὴ ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος, εἶπερ τούτο μᾶλλον ἀνθρώπος, οὗτος ἀρα καὶ εὐδαιμονέστατος.
injustice more easily (611b10–c5). What has been said in the entire present discussion, Socrates continues, concerns the embodied soul, while in our inability to behold the soul in its unadulterated state we are like those who look at “Glaucus of the sea” but cannot easily discern his ancient nature because parts of him have been broken off and others entirely destroyed by the waves, while barnacles, seaweed, and rocks have grown onto him, making him look more like a beast rather than what he was by nature (611c6–d8).

Artful as it may be, this analogy raises several problems. To begin with, Socrates introduces it to emphasize the shortcomings of the preceding investigations about the soul: what has been said about it is true but applies only to the damaged condition of embodiment, whereas the soul as it truly is can sufficiently be inspected solely by means of reason. Just like those who look at Glaucus cannot easily discern his pristine state because of the additional encrustations that did not originally belong to him, the methods employed thus far allowed consideration of the soul only in its present, embodied condition. One cannot but wonder what this reference to Glaucus’ ἀρχαία φύσις accomplishes: according to the version of the myth that has come down to us, Glaucus was originally a fisherman who was transformed into a sea demon after consuming a magical herb.74 Does this mean that Glaucus’ ἀρχαία φύσις should be associated with his mortal nature? Clearly not, for thus construed the analogy accomplishes the exact opposite of what it ought to: the overall tone of the passage would have us expect an illustration of how the soul lost its simplicity upon its embodiment, becoming thus subject to the troubles of internal conflict. What we get, instead, is a reference to a creature whose transformation into a god is associated with a polymorphous nature.

---

74 Paus. 9.22.7. For a lucid discussion of the Glaucus passage, see Woolf (2012).
Significantly, Socrates avoids any explicit reference to Glaucus’ godly status and, quite unexpectedly, likens his present condition to a beast. Indeed, the analogy to a beast may owe its presence to Aeschylus’ play *Glaucus Pontius*, in which Glaucus is described as a “beast in human form that dwells in the water” (ἀνθρωποειδὲς θηρίον ὠδατὶ σωζόν, Fr. 26 Radt). Be that as it may, the question invites itself: why is the embodied soul likened to a god of complex and beastlike nature, whereas the disembodied soul is likened to that same god’s pristine, i.e. human, state? Additionally, we may assume that Glaucus’ state is not static since the force of the waves will keep on adding encrustations around him while breaking off others. If so, then we will be dealing with an ever-changing god, something that contravenes the assertion in Book 2 that god’s nature is immutable: since whatever is composite, be it utensils, houses, etc., is in a better state and less likely to undergo change when its parts are well-arranged and since the god is perfect in all respects, it follows that the god would not acquire many forms (380d1–b6). Are we, then, to understand that Glaucus is not really a god and, consequently, the soul is not as divine as initially thought, or that once again the boundaries between human and divine are not easy to define?

Finally, by interpreting this passage as implying that reason is separable from spirit and appetite, one would also have to accept the unwelcome conclusion that emotions and appetitive desires can exist separately. At least, this is what the analogy would suggest: prior to growing onto other sea objects, seaweed and shells enjoy a separate existence of their own. If we are to accept that the functions of spirit and appetite grow onto the soul as marine encrustations grow onto sea objects, then we must accept that they can exist independently of the essentially rational, disembodied soul. Rather than admitting such an absurdity, it is preferable to see the analogy as

---

75 Socrates refers to Glaucus through the adjective θαλάττιος. This does not necessarily rule out the meaning “god of the sea,” but it is not explicitly stated as, for example, at *Smp.* 185b5: ὁ τῆς οὐρανίας θεοῦ ἄρως, and *Lg.* 828c7: θεοῦς οὐρανίους.

a rhetorical trope which implies that the faculty of reason is such as to characterize the soul essentially, whereas the rest of our mental features build upon the fundaments of reason.

2.4 Types of Virtue

The sentiment that reason characterizes the soul essentially is present in both the description of the soul as a mythological beast in Book 9 as well as in its comparison to the sea-god Glaucus in Book 10, while it may not be extravagant to claim that reason as the soul’s essential characteristic informed the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge. In this section, I begin by discussing a passage that describes the virtue of reason as being ever-present in the soul, and hence different from the rest of the virtues. Subsequently, I draw a distinction between natural and artificial virtue and argue that, in its pre-reflective version, φρόνησις is a type of natural virtue that corresponds to minimal psychic unity and the ability to acquire full-fledged virtue. Finally, I explore further the distinctions that can be made within artificial virtue itself, distinguishing between pre- and post-reflective versions of the virtues, mostly on the basis of whether they are imparted through the first or the second educational stage of the Republic.

In Book 7 of the Republic, Plato draws the following distinction between the virtue of reason and the rest of the virtues (518d9–519a1):

Αἱ μὲν τοῖν μὲν ἄλλαι ἀρεταὶ καλοῦμεναι ψυχῆς κινδυνεύουσιν ἐγγύς τι εἶναι τὸν τοῦ σώματος – τῷ ὤντι γὰρ οὐκ ἐνοῦσαι πρῶτον ὑστερον ἐμποιεῖσθαι ἐδει καὶ ἀσκήσειν – ἢ δὲ τοῦ φρονῆσαι παντὸς μᾶλλον θειοτέρου τινὸς τυγχάνει, ὡς ἔοικεν, οὕτα, ὅ τὴν μὲν δύναμιν οὐδέποτε ἀπόλλυσιν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς περιαγωγῆς χρήσιμον τε καὶ ὑφέλιμον καὶ ἀχρηστὸν ἀν καὶ βλαβερὸν γίνεται.
Now, it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren’t there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However, the virtue of reason seems to belong above all to something more divine, which never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned.

The virtue of reason is presented here as an imperishable, godlike capacity that becomes useful and beneficial or useless and harmful depending on the way one uses it. It is a mental power that appears to have always been present in the soul. The contrast is with the rest of the virtues, which seem to be more akin to those of the body: they are not initially present in the soul but appear afterwards through habit and practice. The implication is that wisdom predates the rest of the virtues, which are associated with birth and the body, and do not essentially characterize the soul in the way that reason does.\textsuperscript{77} This relation of the virtue of reason to the rest of the virtues is sometimes misinterpreted as implying that upon embodiment the soul acquires some parts that it lacks when disembodied.\textsuperscript{78} Let us see why this interpretation is widely off the mark.

The description of the virtue of reason as being present from the first in the human soul resembles the description of the immortal soul in the \textit{Timaeus}, where the immortal part of the soul is said to predate the mortal soul that is associated with the body (69c–d). True, if the disembodied soul is simple, then there is no room, say, for self-control, as it is defined in the \textit{Republic} (432a6–9): whereas the soul can exercise forethought for the advantage of the entire soul, there are no parts

\textsuperscript{77} Adam (1902) II 99.

\textsuperscript{78} Brown (2012) 55.
that can mutually agree as to who should rule and be ruled.\textsuperscript{79} However, this account of the simple soul seems to be at odds with what we read in the \textit{Phaedrus}, where the pre-embodied soul is presented through the image of a charioteer who drives a two-horse chariot, thereby suggesting at least a bipartite division.\textsuperscript{80} Such a bipartite structure would allow for the development of all virtues, even though it suggests nothing as to which one would naturally come first. Yet, the main problem of the view that the soul develops in birth parts that it lacks while disembodied concerns what is said in \textit{Republic} Book 10 about the faculties of disembodied souls: the Myth of Er strongly suggests that they are not devoid of the capacities to desire something appetitively or to feel emotions of pity and fear. Consider, for example, how the punished souls are described as weeping in the recollection of their sufferings (614e6–615a2: τὰς μὲν ὀδυρομένας τε καὶ κλαούσας) or what happens to the first soul to choose the next life, once the patterns of life have been laid out (619b7–c4): out of gluttony and folly he selects the most tyrannical life, but when he realizes the misfortunes attached to it he beats his breast and bemoans his choice (κόπτεσθαί τε καὶ ὀδύρεσθαι τὴν αἰρέσιν). Significantly though, indulging in sorrow does not originate from the rational soul but is ascribed instead to the part of the soul that is described as mournful (606b1: τοῦ ὀθηρώδους τοῦτου) and hungers after tears and lamentations.\textsuperscript{81} There is additional evidence that disembodied souls do not lack a spirited element: we read that by far the greatest among their many and various fears was that the opening in the heavens would refuse to let them in and they would thus suffer a fate similar to that of Ardiaeus (616a4–7). Finally, the first soul’s rush to choose a tyrannical life suggests that he was presumably blinded by the splendor of the pleasures of tyranny and that he

\textsuperscript{79} There is, however, the indication that the preembodied soul is divided even in the \textit{Timaeus}: at 35a2–3 we read that one component of the soul is “the essence that becomes divided around bodies.” Since the circle of the Different that was divided into seven subcircles is related to this essence, one may describe the preembodied soul as already divided. See Sedley (2000) 95.
\textsuperscript{80} Cf. Woolf (2012) 154 with n. 6.
\textsuperscript{81} Cf. Moss (2008) 42.
made the choice by following the appetitive part, which is elsewhere called money-loving and is responsible for the development of oligarchic character (553c5).

The above remarks about the Myth of Er tell against the idea that the prenatal and posthumous soul is simply rational. I submit that the above passage about the preexistence of the virtue of wisdom does not entail that, when embodied, the soul develops parts that it otherwise lacks; what is being suggested, instead, is that the rest of the virtues seem to be similar to bodily virtues (ἐγγύς τι εἶναι τῶν τοῦ σώματος [sc. ἀρετῶν]). Let us examine what such a bodily virtue might be, so that the difference between wisdom and the other virtues might be further illuminated.82

2.4.1 Natural and Artificial Virtue

We may start by considering the functional conception of virtue, as it is expounded by Socrates in Republic Book 1 (352d8–354a11).83 The virtue of each thing, argues Socrates, consists in its ability to perform its function: a sharp knife, for example, is more virtuous than a blunt one because it is better at performing its function, i.e. cutting. Likewise, the virtue of the soul consists in its ability to perform its functions to a satisfactory degree. These functions include its ability to take care of things, to deliberate, to rule as well as to live (353d3–7, 9–10). The better a soul performs these functions, the more virtuous it is (353e4–5). Yet, while Socrates is quite specific about the functions of the soul, he does not refer to the functions of the body until the end of Book 4: having established that justice is an internal psychic affair, he proceeds to illuminate the nature of injustice and draws a parallel between just and unjust actions, on the one hand, and healthy and unhealthy things for the body, on the other (444c5–6). It is here that he comes closest to offering a definition

82 For bodily virtue, see Szaif (2009).
of “health” as the production of that state in which some bodily elements rule, while others are ruled over in accordance with the principles of nature (444d3–6). Taking the analogy one step further, Socrates suggests that producing justice in the soul is the process of establishing the natural relation of control among the soul-parts and concludes that virtue might be a sort of health, beauty and good condition of the soul (444d8–e2). Moreover, the uniformity of virtue is emphasized toward the end of the book, where Socrates says that the form of virtue appears to be one in contrast to the seemingly infinite forms of vice (445c4–7). This conclusion appears to collapse the distinction between the virtue of wisdom and the rest of the virtues: instead of clarifying the sense in which the latter are similar to bodily virtue and thus different from wisdom, we find here an account that seeks and locates common ground between psychic virtue in toto and bodily virtue.

It might be worthwhile to analyze the distinction under discussion in light of what we find in the Gorgias, where Socrates draws a parallel between medicine and justice in order to argue that whoever does wrong and avoids punishment resembles those who have contracted a disease but avoid treatment because of their fear of pain (478a8–b1, 479a5–b1). He explains this sort of behavior by invoking their ignorance of what health and bodily virtue are like (479b3–4: ἡ ὑγίεια καὶ ἀρετὴ σώματος). The next concrete remark about bodily virtue occurs later in Socrates’ discussion with Callicles: classifying pleasures into good and bad, Socrates calls beneficial the bodily pleasures associated with eating and drinking that produce health in the body, or strength, or some other bodily virtue (499d4–e1). Health and strength are also identified as what appears in the body because of arrangement and order (504b7–9: ἐκ τῆς τάξεως τῶν καὶ τοῦ κόσμου). Then, Socrates generalizes that the virtue of each thing, be it an artefact, a body, a soul, or a living being, does not come about haphazardly but consists of whatever arrangement, correctness, and craft has

84 Cf. Men. 72c7–d1.
been bestowed upon it (506d7: τὰξει καὶ ὀρθὸτητι καὶ τέχνη). Bodily virtue, then, as well as psychic virtue is a special sort of arrangement. Once again, this grouping of virtues makes it difficult to understand what Socrates’ point may have been in the passage of the Republic discussed above, which sought to differentiate between wisdom and the rest of the virtues on the grounds that the latter resemble bodily virtue. It might be the case that the key to the problem lies exactly in this conception of virtue as a sort of arrangement.\textsuperscript{85}

In the Gorgias, Socrates argues that the political craft, which is set over the soul, corresponds to a craft, for which he cannot give a single name, that is set over the body (464b2–c3). He divides the political craft into legislation and justice and the other craft into gymnastics and medicine, his point being that as gymnastics is to the body so is legislation to the soul, and as medicine is to the body so is justice to the soul. He then introduces the idea that for each of these four crafts there are four corresponding forms of flattery (464c3–d3), explicitly rejecting the view that whatever lacks reason can be called a τέχνη (465a5–6: ἐγὼ δὲ τέχνην οὐ καλῶ ὁ ἀν ἂλογον πρᾶγμα). In conjunction with the claim that health, for example, is a virtue, this statement may sound paradoxical, for we normally do not consider health as the product of some craft. Yet, it does not appear so, when we take into account Plato’s teleological conception of the universe, according to which even the physical world was a product of deliberation: in the Philebus, for example, Socrates argues that the intelligence we use to produce health or other types of order on a small scale is part of the intelligence that orders the universe (30a–c).\textsuperscript{86} Accordingly, when Socrates says at Republic 444d3–6 that health is the production of that state in which the bodily elements that by nature ought to rule do in fact rule, he probably also believes that the minimum degree of this natural condition, i.e. the minimum amount of health that is necessary for a body to

\textsuperscript{85} I am following here the analysis offered by Santas (2010) 208–11.

function, is god’s creation. Even though health will unavoidably deteriorate resulting in the cessation of bodily activities, one may make use of additional, albeit artificial crafts, such as medicine and dietetics, to delay this outcome and, occasionally, to improve one’s health. This leads us to the conclusion that, in so far as it is conceived as a bodily virtue, health is the product of the combined forces of a natural and a man-made virtue: in one sense, people are born bodily virtuous because they have minimally functioning bodies; in another sense, they have to attend to their bodies in accordance with the prescriptions of medicine and gymnastics to remain virtuous, i.e. healthy.

We arrive thus at a twofold notion of bodily virtue, namely the natural and the man-made. It should be clear by now that this distinction, if applied to psychic virtue, renders the difference between wisdom and the rest of psychic virtues more comprehensible. The latter, Socrates argues, resemble bodily virtue in that they are not present from the start but develop afterwards through habit and practice (518d10–e2: τῷ ὄντι γὰρ οὐκ ἐνοῦσαι πρῶτερον ὀστερὸν ἐμποιεῖσθαι ἔθεσι καὶ ἀσκῆσεσιν). Indeed, this description resembles the artificial virtue of health, which is not present in the body from the beginning, and whose presence in the body requires the agent to follow a certain regimen, namely to be trained in, and habituated to, a certain mode of living. We can, thus, venture the suggestion that wisdom stands in the same relation to the soul as natural health stands to the body, whereas the rest of the psychic virtues stand in the same relation to the soul as man-made health stands to the body. If we press the parallel further, however, we would have to accept that, just as people are born with a minimum amount of bodily virtue, so too are they born with a minimum amount of psychic virtue that allows their soul to complete its function to a minimal extent.

87 Adam (1902) ad loc. mentions the theory of disease found in the Hippocratic corpus. See De natura hominis 4, which basically explains that health and disease are based on the balance and imbalance among the four bodily fluids (i.e. blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile).
degree. Here, then, arises a potential problem with this suggestion: are we to suppose that all humans are born wise? The answer, I think, is “yes,” provided we add the qualification that all humans who have not suffered an Aristotelian loss are born minimally wise in the sense that they have the potential to acquire knowledge and thus, after proper strenuous exercise and education, achieve the full-fledged virtue of wisdom.  

Unsurprisingly, there are objections to be met. First of all, as the Noble Lie seems to suggest, not all individuals have the same capacities. Seeking a way to secure and promote social cohesion within the classes of the ideal state, Socrates relates a creation myth (414d1–415c7): the overall education of the citizenry proposed by Socrates and his interlocutors was something like a dream, whereas in reality the citizens were fashioned within the earth by the god who put gold into those fit for ruling, silver in those destined to serve as guardians, and bronze and iron in the farmers and the rest of the craftsmen. Socrates describes this myth as nothing novel, as a lie that resembles other creation myths found elsewhere in poetry. He proposes it as a tale meant to replace these traditional accounts so as to persuade the citizenry that their social differences are due to religious and quasi-historical grounds. Translated into the context of the presence discussion about virtue, this myth seems to entail that only one portion of the population is wise. After all, this view would be in keeping with Socrates’ later comment that some humans will never share in reason, thereby

---

88 I borrow the term “Aristotelian loss” from Wilkes (1988) 62: “The “Aristotelian principle,” broadly, claims that every creature strives after its own perfection, and thus that any member of kind K which is not a perfect instance of kind K is in some sense to be pitied or deplored.”

89 Cf. Reeve (1988) 7: “Plato himself will resolve the problem Cephalus poses for intellectualist moral theories by a doctrine of degrees of virtue, and by making allowances for the inherent differences in people's characters, abilities, and interests.”

90 See, however, Ti. 41e, where the Demiurge assigns to all souls one and the same initial birth.
denying any possibility that they can be wise (441a9–b1). Additionally, it may be argued that, if the virtue of wisdom is present in all humans, the analogy between the city-classes and the soul-parts would have us expect the presence of wisdom within appetite and spirit, a thesis against which I argued in detail in section 2.2 of this chapter.

It seems, though, that such an interpretation of the Noble Lie is incorrect because it is based on a problematic aspect of the analogy between the city and the individual. First of all, the moral of the story cannot be that certain people are born wise, others spirited, and others appetitive, for this would cancel the entire curriculum of the Republic: if one is born fit for ruling, then there is no need to train them in the art of ruling. Additionally, the point about reason’s absence from some people confutes, rather than corroborates, this interpretation: recall that Socrates’ basic argument is that all children can display behavior that originates from spirit right away in contrast to their inability to function rationally (441a7–9). Rather than supposing that some children lack the ability to reason because they lack the relevant faculty, i.e. they are made of silver rather than gold, it might be better to construe the myth of the metals as implying that all humans possess at least to a minimal degree the ability to reason but only those who are made of gold have the capacity to achieve full-fledged wisdom. Moreover, the interpretation of the myth should allow for the fact that having the inborn ability to function rationally does not necessarily mean that one will end up wise. In fact, Socrates warns against the dangers of an ingenious, yet corrupt nature and is quite explicit that, apart from being a rarity, philosophical nature will become corrupt because of inappropriate instruction, unless some god intervenes to protect it (491a8–b2, 492a1–5). Attainment of full-fledged wisdom thus becomes a matter of joint responsibility between talent (natural virtue) and correct upbringing (man-made virtue).

91 Cf. 431c5–8, where it is agreed that only those who are best by nature and have been educated in the best possible manner will have simple and moderate desires.
Significantly, the view that the human soul is inherently at least minimally virtuous can also be extracted from Socrates’ comments about the nature of justice in Republic Book 1. Toward the end of his discussion with Thrasymachus, Socrates wants to challenge the view that injustice is more powerful than justice on the premise that justice is a form of wisdom and virtue (εἰπερ σοφία τε καὶ ἀρετή ἐστιν δικαιοσύνη), whereas injustice is ignorance (351a3–6). He elicits from his angered interlocutor the response that a city is unjust when it attempts to subjugate neighboring cities or has succeeded in doing so (351b1–3). Socrates then argues that a city which becomes stronger than another does so when acting justly rather than unjustly, and Thrasymachus responds cautiously that things would stand so, if one followed Socrates’ definition of justice as wisdom, but not otherwise (351b6–c3). Finally, Socrates pushes the point that no city, army, band of robbers or thieves, or any group whatsoever that shared a common unjust purpose would ever achieve it by acting unjustly toward one another (351c7–d3, 351e9–352a3).

Here is the first appearance of the metaphor that sees justice as concord and injustice as internal civic unrest, a motif which will be dramatized later on in the deterioration of state and character types in Books 8 and 9. Injustice affects both complex and simple entities, for which reason it is presented as self-contradictory, and, being the source of discord and dissent, threatens to plunge the agent into inactivity (351e6–7, 352a5–8). It may sound paradoxical, but this is exactly what Socrates argues for: even in those cases where a group of unjust people are said to have achieved something through cooperation, what is asserted is not entirely true, for they would never have been able to keep their hands off one another, had they been completely unjust (352c1–4). The conclusion Socrates draws is that unjust agents appear to be wholly unable to act with one another (352b8, c7–8), a claim milder than the assertion that completely unjust agents do not and cannot exist. Yet, to attribute to him such an assertion would not involve an outright distortion of
his view because (a) he is unwilling to accept that, even in cases of factual injustice, the perpetrators of the crime are wholly unjust (352c4–6: δῆλον ὅτι ἐνήν τις ἀυτοῖς δικαιοσύνη ... δι' ἣν ἔπραξαν ἃ ἔπραξαν); and (b) it is explanatorily redundant to posit the existence of completely unjust, yet inactive agents, for they would serve no role in accounting for the existence of unjust acts. Thus, I take Socrates’ thesis that unjust agents are not altogether unjust to be an alternative way of expressing the view that all humans are to a certain, presumably minimum, extent just, i.e. virtuous. This virtue that even the unjust ones possess must correspond to the natural virtue discussed above.

The proposed distinction between natural and artificial virtue can also make good sense of a passage in the Myth of Er that describes the process by which the souls choose their next incarnation. According to Er’s testimony, a herald puts the souls in order and explains to them the procedure according to which they will choose their next life. In his speech, he clarifies that virtue has no master (ἀρετῇ δὲ ἀδέσποτον) and that the degree to which someone will partake of virtue depends on how much one values or depreciates it, concluding that responsibility belongs solely to the chooser and not to the god (617d6–e5). Then, the souls receive the lots, and the models of life to be selected for their next life are placed before them (617e6–618a2). These are of all possible sorts: among them are lives of illustrious men, some of whom earn their fame on account of their looks and strength (καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἵσχυν τε καὶ ἄγωνίαν), others on account of their descent and the virtues of their ancestors (τοῦς δὲ ἐπὶ γένεσιν καὶ προγόνων ἀρεταῖς). What these models of life altogether lack is the arrangement of the soul (ψυχῆς δὲ τάξιν ὦ κ ἐνεῖναι) because it is necessary that the soul change depending on the pattern of life it chooses (618b2–4). But here we are faced with a contradiction, unless we apply the distinction between natural and artificial virtue: if, as I

92 McPherran (2010) 136 states that the lot episode is an attempt on Plato’s behalf to absolve the gods from the responsibility of each soul’s life choice and subsequent attainment of virtue.
have argued above, virtue is in fact a special arrangement of the soul, then what this passage implies is that virtue is and is not intertwined with the life model one chooses prenatally.

The contradiction, however, evaporates once we construe the myth as implying that the models of life contain merely natural virtue: this is perhaps no more than arguing that one’s genetic constitution as well as the environment in which one is born are of paramount importance for the development of virtuous character and behavior. In fact, Socrates almost explicitly says so, when he describes as things that belong to the soul naturally the effects of high birth and low birth, physical strength and weakness as well as ease and difficulty in learning (618d2–5). Obviously, this potential for virtue does not necessarily entail the attainment of the arrangement of the soul that corresponds to full-fledged virtue, for which two additional components are required: the habituation in ethically virtuous behavior (ἕξις),93 and the achievement of ethically objective knowledge through a realization of the reasons why the beliefs inculcated during the earlier educational stage result in virtuous behavior and character. In contrast to the traits that are part of the soul naturally, these two components are acquired (618d4: τῶν ἐπικτήτων). Thus, the statement that the life patterns do not include “the arrangement of the soul” should be taken to mean that neither of these additional components are included in the life-patterns or, as it was stated by the herald, that the responsibility for achieving virtue lies with the chooser.

---

93 Cf. R. 619c6–d1, where the first soul to choose a life pattern blames everyone except for himself, an attitude which is attributed to his having been virtuous by habit and not through the practice of philosophy. Cf. Ph. 82a10–b3, where those who have practiced demotic and civic virtue through habit and studying but without philosophy are called most blessed and are wittily destined to become, in the next incarnation, members of a civilized race, namely bees, wasps, ants, or mediocre human beings.
2.4.2 Pre- and Post-Reflective Artificial Virtue

So far, I have focused on the differences between natural and artificial virtue and argued that natural virtue is present in the soul in a minimum degree and represents a potential for the acquisition of artificial virtue. My analysis, however, still has not explained the sense in which wisdom is different from the other virtues. In order to bring out more clearly this distinction, we will have to distinguish between two versions of artificial virtue, namely pre- and post-reflective (or pre- and post-dialectical) virtue.\(^94\) I now turn to discussing the virtue of courage because it provides the best candidate for a virtue that can presumably exist separately from wisdom but also serves as an excellent means of illustrating the difference between pre- and post-dialectical virtue.\(^95\)

As mentioned above, Socrates seems to have accepted the thesis that the virtues are inseparable, according to which virtue lacks non-cognitive elements and is coextensive with wisdom, i.e. knowledge of good and evil, that can be applied to different areas: for example, knowledge about what is and what is not to be feared is courage, knowledge about the appropriate behavior towards others is justice, etc.\(^96\) This view is probably present in the *Republic* as well, even though for reasons different than those that led Socrates to accept it: Plato reinstates the non-rational elements in the soul and thus allows for the possibility of incontinence. Yet, it is not clear

---

\(^{94}\) Pre-reflective virtue is the outcome of the first educational phase of the *Republic* as described in Books 2 and 3, whereas post-reflective virtue corresponds to the second educational stage as described in Book 7. See Gill (1996) 266–87.

\(^{95}\) Irwin (1995) 231 argues that the thesis that knowledge is necessary for virtue is present in the *Republic*, but, as Gill (1996) 260–6 stresses, he tends to devalue the results of the *Republic*’s first educational phase because he is influenced by Kant’s conception of autonomy, according to which virtue requires rational and reflective deliberation. For the view that courage can exist apart from wisdom, see Gill (1996) 269–70; Deveraux (2006) 336–7.

\(^{96}\) Here we may distinguish between the Identity Thesis, which claims that the virtues are essentially identical, and the Reciprocity Thesis, which claims that the virtues are not identical but inseparable from one another. For the unity of the virtues, see Penner (1971); Vlastos (1972); Irwin (1995) 223–39; Brickhouse and Smith (2000) 157–72; Devereux (2006).
how the different virtues interrelate: do they entail one another or can they exist separately? Is there a different account to be given for the relationship among the virtues depending on whether the first or second educational phase of the *Republic* has been carried out?

Indeed, courage is said to be present in the city independently of wisdom. Socrates defines it as the power of preserving through all circumstances the true and lawful belief about what is fearful and what is not (430b2–5). Thus, if a certain class of citizens—in our case, the class of the guardians—holds this power of preserving the appropriate beliefs, the entire city is rendered courageous without necessarily being wise. There are, however, indications that the account of courage offered here is incomplete: it is described as beastlike and slavish by Glaucon, and Socrates suggests that a more appropriate term for it would be civic courage (430b6–c6). Presumably, its slavish and bestial character are due to its unreflective nature since, if this is what courage is, one does not need to engage in rational activity in order to be courageous. What is necessary instead is to be naturally capable of being habituated to a specific type of behavior, something that I described above as natural virtue. Socrates uses the analogy of wool dyeing to illustrate this point: the dyer chooses wool that is naturally white and processes it in various ways so that the desired color stays fast (429d4–e5). Similarly, in selecting soldiers for their city, Socrates and his interlocutors seek children naturally fit for being educated through music and gymnastics (429e7–430a1). As the analogy suggests, no rational involvement is required on behalf of the guardians to become courageous. Finally, it is exactly this feature of courage that Socrates emphasizes when he describes it as “civic,” namely its non-rational nature. He does not draw a distinction between courage in the city as opposed to courage in the soul, since it is granted that

---

97 Cf. Ph. 69b5–8, where virtue without wisdom is also called slavish (ἀνδραποδόδης).
98 The non-discursive nature of courage is also emphasized by the Athenian Stranger of the *Laws*, who argues that the soul becomes courageous by a natural process without the aid of reason (963e5–6: ἄνευ γύρ λόγου καὶ φύσει γίγνεται ἀνδρεία ψυχῆ).
the former exists because of the latter (435e1–3). He rather acknowledges that this type of courage is to be distinguished from full-fledged courage that is acquired only through the study of dialectic: recall that the virtue of non-philosophers in the *Phaedo* comes about through habit and is, presumably for this reason, called “demotic and civic” (82a11).

It is evident, then, that pre-reflective courage does exist apart from wisdom and that it is perhaps in the sense of being the outcome of habituation that the ethical virtues are said to arise in the soul through habit and practice. But how are we to conceive of the differences between the pre- and post-reflective versions of courage? The easiest way to account for them is to emphasize the automatic and responsive nature of the former in contrast to the self-aware character of the latter: whereas both types of courage would yield ethically virtuous behavior, a pre-reflectively courageous agent would be unable to explain why such behavior is virtuous. This is so because his courage is based on true belief rather than knowledge, which, as we learn from *Meno* 98a, is true belief accompanied by an explanatory account.99 On the other hand, having obtained objective ethical knowledge, the philosopher-king will be able to validate and dialectically reassert the values that served as the basis of the development of virtuous disposition during the first educational phase.100 Thus, the development of courageous disposition is first and foremost based on exposure of young children to appropriate educational material, such as myths and tales in which heroes are presented as fearing slavery more than death (386a6–b2, 387b5–6). After repeated imitation the desired behavioral patterns become fixed in the character and the nature of

99 Cf. Gill (1996) 294: “Both types consist in the possession of ‘reason-ruled’ psycho-ethical harmony, but, whereas the first depends on beliefs, including beliefs about human life and its place in the *kosmos*, acquired by participation in conventional discourse, the second depends on knowledge, yielded by the kind of systematic dialectic that (for Plato) constitutes the only mode of reflection that is capable of achieving knowledge of objective truth.” See also *R.* 506c6–9.

100 In Aristotelian terminology, we may say that, whereas the first educational phase of the *Republic* aimed at instilling the pre-reflective ethical “that” or “fact” (τὸ ὅτι), the second stage provides the “why” (τὸ διότι). See *EN* 1095b3–8, 1098a33–b4 with Burnyeat (1980) 71–3 and Gill (1996) 273.
the young children (395d1–3). But to comprehend the affinity between this upbringing and objective ethical truth, one must possess—and make appropriate use of—one’s rational faculty (402a4–5). In other words, post-reflective differs from pre-reflective courage in that the former is an analytical version of the latter. If so, it follows that full-fledged courage requires the presence of wisdom.

To sum up, we may distinguish between natural and artificial virtue, a distinction which does not so much stem from an inherent qualitative difference between two different essences of virtue as from an attempt to differentiate between means through which virtue is attained. We encounter the former in Republic Book 1, where it is argued that even unjust people are to a certain extent just and that justice is a form of virtue and wisdom. This view seems to once again collapse the distinction among the virtues and to be closer to the Socratic thesis about the unity of the virtues. In general, the account of virtue that emerges from Book 1 is that virtue is to a certain, presumably minimum, extent innate, a view which may seem to run counter to the Republic’s overall educational scheme but is not all that far from the argument, expressed most forcefully in the Meno, that virtue, in essence, is recollection of knowledge that was already present in the soul. It may, in fact, be the case that all virtue is innate but only its smallest possible amount is actualized at the moment of birth, whereas the rest of it remains dormant, until it is “recollected” through education. The myth of metals discussed above may not mean more than that the amount of virtue that is actualized at the moment of birth is different for every individual. Consequently, artificial

---

101 According to this interpretation, virtue is essentially the same in its pre- and post-reflective versions. Alternatively, one could argue that the post-reflective version of virtue is substantially different and corresponds to an altered and transformed psycho-ethical state. Gill (1996) 289–97 finds evidence in the Republic that support both interpretations. Cf. Armstrong (2004) 178–9, who draws attention to Leg. 967e2–968a4, where the Athenian says that, in addition to the popular virtues (πρὸς ταῖς δημοσίαις ἀρεταῖς), the guardian should be able to provide an account of customs and practices of character; otherwise he would be merely an assistant of the rulers.
virtue would correspond to virtue recovered through education, namely through artificial means. In its turn this artificial virtue is further subdivided into pre- and post-reflective virtue because it is acquired through different educational means. For example, pre-reflective courage is the disposition acquired through habit and practice and as such exists apart from wisdom. Wisdom, however, is a necessary condition for post-reflective courage because it provides an analytical understanding of the reasons why courageous disposition counts as such. Overall, the difference of wisdom lies precisely in that it is present in the soul before the ethical virtues and, being the soul’s essential characteristic, it does not come about through practice. This view about wisdom entails both that it is always present in the soul in a dormant state and that it has a pre-reflective version.\(^{102}\) It is clear, however, that the objective of the Republic as a whole cannot ever be achieved without the acquisition of full-fledged wisdom: the latter is a necessary condition for the existence of that psychic state that would result in the emergence of philosopher-kings in the city and requires extended learning on a wide array of topics, culminating in the study of dialectic and knowledge of the Form of the Good. In the next section I examine how this type of wisdom effects these changes and promotes the unity of the individual as well as the state.

2.5 Maximizing Unity

As it has been mentioned, the Republic seems to waver between two seemingly incompatible accounts of the soul. On the one hand, there are the extended arguments of Books 4 and 10 that seek to establish a tripartite, or at least bipartite, structure of the soul. On the other hand, Socrates is reluctant to give up the intuition, present also in the Phaedo, that the soul is an undifferentiated unity. My purpose here is to examine how the twofold conception of the soul maps into the twofold

\(^{102}\) That virtue is present in the soul is a thesis familiar from the Meno as well as the Phaedo. For pre-dialectical wisdom, see R. 441e4–6.
conception of virtue and how the educational program of the Republic, aimed at attaining full-
fledged virtue, contributes to the fashioning of a unitary self.

Let us briefly turn to the evidence suggesting that every soul as well as constitution is, to a
certain extent, fragmentary. Initially, one might simply think of the entire endeavor of Book 4 to
prove the soul’s diverse nature: having established the tripartite nature of the soul, Socrates returns
to the concept of justice to show that it does not concern the agent’s outward behavior in relation
to others, but it is, in fact, an internal condition of the soul that determines one’s own behavior
toward oneself (443c9–d1). The just agent, according to Socrates, will not allow the soul-parts
from meddling in one another’s affairs but will attempt to confer structure on himself (443d1–5).
The imagery used here is the familiar one that sees the unity of the soul as harmony: it is as if the
soul-parts were notes to be harmonized by the agent (443d3–7). Socrates, however, states most
conspicuously that the just person binds all his parts together and “becomes entirely one out of
many” (443e1: παντάπασιν ἑνα γενόμενον ἐκ πολλῶν). Consequently, we may assume that, unless
educated according to the curriculum of the Republic so as to acquire the desired disposition and
unless striving to validate and dialectically reinforce the acquired disposition, one is bound to have
a fragmentary self. Indeed, the discussion of the corrupt character types indicates as much: the
oligarchic character, the first one to have dethroned the spirited element in him and to have
surrendered control over himself to the appetitive element (553b7–c7), is described as satisfying
solely his necessary desires, while keeping down the unnecessary ones through force and fear
(554c11–d2). As a result, Socrates notices that such a person would not be free of internal civil
strife and would not be one but in a sense two (554d9–10: οὐδὲ εἰς ἄλλα διπλοῦς τις).103 Similarly,

103 Cf. Lear (1992) 188–9: “For Plato, being double is a way of not being an integrated person: it is a divided
and conflicted existence.”
the oligarchic city is divided into two classes, namely the wealthy and the poor citizens, for which reason it is two rather than one city (551d5: Τὸ μὴ μίαν ἀλλὰ δύο ἀνάγκη εἶναι τὴν τοιοῦτην πόλιν).

This piece of evidence notwithstanding, there are passages in the Republic that attest to a unitary nature of the soul. For example, in his remarks immediately following the immortality argument of Book 10, Socrates expresses reservations about the soul’s complex nature and warns us against believing that, in its truest nature, the soul is such as to be filled with much variety and dissimilarity and to differ with respect to itself (611a10–b3). Clearly, Plato worried that the arguments about tripartition of the soul in Book 4 as well as of the state in the preceding books would be construed as implying that the soul is not a unity: for if the soul is composed of parts, then its immortality may be contested because of a principle specifying that anything consisting of parts would be bound to disintegrate to its constituents, unless put together in the best possible way (611b5–7, cf. 546a). Additionally, as I have already attempted to show, Socrates’ argument in Book 1 that every soul and, consequently, every city is to a minimum extent virtuous, i.e. minimally structured and organized, seems to corroborate the view that the soul is, in fact, a unity.

It is reasonable that Plato would want to retain the unitary nature of the soul because in this way he would, for example, run into no problems in explaining “the felt unity of consciousness.”

On the other hand, a non-unitary soul would allow for the description and explanation of conflict between rational concerns and desire. But if Plato claims that the soul is and is not a unity, is he then not caught up in a contradiction? Not necessarily. For Euclid may have defined number as a multitude of units, with unit being anything considered as being one, but Plato is aware that an

---

104 Bobonich (2002) 254; Price (2009) 10. The citation is from Brown (2012) 54. Brown cites Descartes to support the view that consciousness is unitary, but see Wilkes (1988) ch. 6, in which she argues that the concept of consciousness is itself too vague to be employed as a tool fit for scientific investigation, concluding that (197): “(1) unity and continuity are needed, and found, at levels that nobody would wish to call ‘conscious’; and (2), that all of us tolerate a substantial amount of disunity and discontinuity without wanting to withdraw the title ‘person’.”
object may be considered as many depending on one’s perspective: one book is many pages.¹⁰⁵ Thus, one way to tackle this problem is to posit two types of unity, namely unearned and earned unity: the first one is simply there for each soul and represents the deepest level of analysis, whereas the second depends on the amount of virtue a soul earns.¹⁰⁶ A thesis immediately following from such a distinction is that unity, similarly to virtue, is a matter of degree. Unearned unity corresponds to the minimum amount of unity any $F$ must possess in order to be $F$, and may be correlated with natural virtue, which I described above as the minimum amount of virtue any $F$ must possess in order to be able to perform its distinct function. We may, thus, say that the soul possesses unearned unity simply in virtue of its being a soul, and that it is minimally virtuous in the sense that it can minimally perform its functions, namely to deliberate, to control and to live (353d3–10). Earned virtue, on the contrary, is not something that comes about spontaneously but depends on the education a soul has received.¹⁰⁷ I will be mostly preoccupied with this latter type of unity, assuming that unearned unity is a precondition for earned unity just like natural virtue is a prerequisite of artificial virtue. My aim is to show how the educational program of the Republic leads to the maximization of unity for the individual, whether the latter is a philosopher-king or a defective character type. I begin by examining the latter.

2.5.1 Non-Philosophers

As already indicated, Plato has Socrates say that any constitution other than the ideal state does not deserve to be called a city and that the oligarchic character is somehow not one but two (551d5, ¹⁰⁵ Euc. Elementa 7.1–2. Burnyeat (1999) 75. At R. 525d8–526a7, Socrates and Glaucon discuss the reaction of those skilled in mathematics, who would laugh at anyone attempting to divide the one itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἕν) on the basis that it is a conceptual unit that cannot be further divided. ¹⁰⁶ I borrow the terms from Brown (2012). ¹⁰⁷ Brown (2012) 70: “The minimal structure is required for living, its perfect fulfillment for living well. But not even the most corrupt dissolves to the points of inactivity.”
554d9–10). In general, we may assume that (a) any character other than that of the philosopher-king is, in a sense, not one; and (b) the farther away from the philosopher-king in the character spectrum, the less unified the character is, so that the tyrant, who occupies the furthest extreme, is least unified, most at variance with himself, and most unjust—not to mention living a life 729 times less pleasant than the philosopher-king’s (587d12–e4). So, for example, the democrat, who holds all his desires on a par and does not distinguish among them, is in such a fragmented state that he is described as being filled with all sorts of characters (561e3–4: παντοδαπόν τε καὶ πλείστων ἠθῶν μεστόν): he is subject to internal civil war, which is an indication that he suffers from psychic injustice (560a1–2); he leads an erratic life, jumping from one thing to the next without a pattern (561c6–d7): now he revels, now he is on a strict diet; sometimes he works out, others he remains completely idle; occasionally he takes up philosophy; many times he is politically involved; or he may be interested in military affairs or in money making. Could such a disunified person achieve internal unity and trace backwards the steps to become, if not as unified as the supremely just person, at least as unified as the oligarch or the timocrat?

We may suppose that such a person would be beyond rescue because he has been corrupted to an irreversible degree and has not been habituated to behavioral patterns such as those suggested in Republic Books 2 and 3, which are sufficient to make an agent pre-reflectively virtuous and necessary for the development of full-fledged virtuous character. We should, however, keep in mind that, in all likelihood, the description of the democratic character, as of all defective characters, is meant to capture and criticize the temperament of Plato’s fellow citizens. And, although Plato is generally not fond of the people (δῆµος), it would be highly pessimistic to assume that he sees no room for ethical improvement in any given adult raised in a democracy. Additionally, such an assumption would nullify the force of the concluding note of the Republic,
which is essentially an exhortation to abandon all other lessons and take up philosophy, so as to be able to recognize and pick out the best possible life (618b6–c6): if people cannot improve their psycho-ethical consistency, then why extol the merits of studying philosophy? It stands to reason to assume that Plato’s project in the Republic is rooted in practical no less than theoretical concerns and that it aims, at least partly, to the ethical betterment of his fellow-citizens.¹⁰⁸

The democrat, therefore, or any other defective character type for that matter, was born with at least a minimum amount of virtue and is thus to a minimum extent unified. I take this description to be another way of stating that the democrat is one individual (unearned unity) that has, at least, the potential to acquire full-fledged virtue. Granted, he skipped the classes on habituation that would have allowed him to develop a virtuous disposition; or he may have attended them but failed to make it to the next educational stage because of his forgetful nature. Be that as it may, he will presumably never acquire full-fledged virtue because he lacks the basis upon which such knowledge could be built. His natural shortcomings notwithstanding, there is something in his behavior that inhibits his potential to be unified to the extent that he can: in the eagerness and zest with which he jumps from one state to another, be that from philosophy to politics or from physical training to idleness, this colorful person distributes his mental faculties to all areas indiscriminately. Later on, Socrates will liken desires to a stream which can be diverted to various channels with the result that, when one’s desires incline strongly toward one thing, they are thereby lessened toward other things (485d6–8). Instead of channeling his mental stream as much as possible on philosophy, the democrat wastes valuable amounts of his resources on worthless affairs. In doing so, he resembles the lovers of sights and sounds of Book 5, comparison

¹⁰⁸ Pace Hoerber (1944); Guthrie (1986); Annas (1999); Blössner (2007).
with the cognitive habits of whom will reveal how the democrat’s behavior leads to internal disunity, illustrating at the same time how philosophy can lead to a more unified self.

The lovers of sights and sounds have in common with the democrat an indiscriminate desire for all sorts of learning, for which particular reason they are to be dissociated from the class of philosophers: this is precisely Glaucon’s concern, when Socrates seemingly defines the philosopher as “the one who readily wishes to taste every kind of learning, who turns gladly to, and is insatiable for, learning” (475c6–8). If these are to be called philosophers, Glaucon retorts, then many strange people will have to be counted among them, such as the lovers of sights (φιλοθεάμονες), who take pleasure in learning, as well as the lovers of sounds (φιλήκοοι), who may scorn serious discussions but eagerly attend all the festivals of Dionysus (475d1–9). Unsurprisingly, Socrates narrows down his definition to the “lovers of the sight of truth” (474e4) and goes on to explain the difference between the real philosophers and those who are like them through appeal to the theory of Forms: getting Glaucon to agree that the beautiful is the opposite of the ugly and that each of them is one, Socrates generalizes and asserts that the same holds for all the Forms, namely that each of them is in itself one but appears to be many because it manifests itself in many instances through association with actions, with the body or with one another (476a4–7). Whereas the philosophers direct their attention to, and can grasp the nature of, say, Beauty, i.e. the entity that renders beautiful whatever is beautiful, the lovers of sights and sounds can only appreciate a particular instantiation of beauty and remain oblivious of the nature of Beauty itself (476b4–8). In other words, the lovers of sights and sounds as well as the democrat divert their attention from, or outright deny the existence of, the unitary, changeless, and eternal Forms, which are the proper objects of knowledge. They are thereby reduced to merely holding beliefs,
which are set over contextually ambiguous instantiations of Forms and are thus of lower epistemic status.¹⁰⁹

How does the cognitive behavior common to the democrat and the lovers of sights and sounds contribute to the fragmentation of the unified self? The connection becomes apparent as soon as we recall the notion of “assimilation” that is present in numerous Platonic dialogues and has been expressed in its most influential form in the Theaetetus as ὀμοίωσις θεῶ (176b1). Socrates’ suggestion in this passage has been traditionally interpreted as an exhortation to flee from the mortal world, where the source of evil is to be located, to the world of the gods by way of assimilating oneself to god to the extent that it is possible.¹¹⁰ This assimilation, Socrates continues, is achieved when one becomes just and pious with understanding (176b2–3: ὀμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὁσιὸν μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι). The phrase “with understanding” is far from being coincidental: we have already seen that one can develop a just disposition through exposure and habituation to just behavior—what is described elsewhere as demotic and civic virtue. In contrast, Socrates here stresses the point that one must acquire post-reflective virtue to become like god. And if we adopt, as I think we should, the line of interpretation according to which Plato equates god with νοῦς or intelligence,¹¹¹ then to become like god is essentially to acquire, and become like, post-reflective virtue: recall that, when Adeimantus notices that the majority of people will not be convinced by the argument put forward in the Republic, Socrates responds that

¹⁰⁹ These are the steps of Socrates’ argument: knowledge, belief, and ignorance are different powers (477b5–478a1, 478c8); knowledge is set over what is (476e7–477a1, 478a10–11); ignorance is set over what is not (478c3–4); belief is between knowledge and ignorance (478c13–d4); τὰ πολλὰ are between being and not being (479c6–d5); belief is set over τὰ πολλὰ (479d7–9).


¹¹¹ See Hackforth (1936). Cf. Armstrong (2004) 174: “We find more clarity in the Timaeus, Philebus, and Laws, where Plato embraces a conception of god as νοῦς or intelligence. As an ethical virtue, intelligence appears throughout the dialogues, especially if one understands it to be identical or closely similar to wisdom (φρόνησις, σοφία).”
this happens because they have never seen a person who rhymes with, and has been made similar
to, virtue (498c3: ἄνδρα δὲ ἀρετῆ παρισωμένον καὶ ὁμοιωμένον).

Likewise, Socrates argues
that the true philosopher, as opposed to the impostors who give philosophy a bad name, will not
have the leisure to engage in trivial human affairs but will imitate and assimilate herself as much
as possible to things that are ordered and always the same with respect to themselves (500c5: ταῦτα
μιμεῖσθαι τε καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἁφομοιώσθαι).

What is relevant here is not so much the implication this interpretation carries for Plato’s
conception of immortality as the principle that underlies the process of assimilation, namely that
the thinking subject is influenced by the object of its thought and is accordingly transformed.

Even though I will return to this topic in more detail momentarily, suffice it for now to say that by
studying, and yearning after knowledge of, the Forms, that is of unitary, changeless, eternal, and
real beings, philosophers assimilate themselves to them in the sense of becoming more unified,
less liable to change, and (whatever this might mean) more eternal and real. Conversely, it is
reasonable to suppose that, in neglecting the pursuit of such knowledge, the defective character
types take up features that characterize the objects of their study, namely the particular instances
of Forms. As we have seen, one such feature is their multiplicity: whereas Beauty itself or Justice
itself are each one, they appear to be many because of their association with acts, bodies, or with
one another (476a4–7). We may, therefore, assume that the democrat as well as the lovers of sights
and sounds are characterized by internal plurality because they have assimilated themselves to
congenitally disunified objects, or rather appearances of objects. Additionally, by denying the
existence of Forms (480a1–4), they miss the only chance to assimilate themselves, to the extent

---

112 Adam (1902) ad loc.: “The Many have had quite enough of παρίσωσις etc. in words; but they have never
seen a Man παρισωμένον τῇ ἀρετῇ.”
113 Cf. Ti. 90d4–5: τὸ κατανοομένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἔξομοιωσαι κατὰ τὴν ἄρχαιαν φύσιν …
114 See Vlastos (1973) 58–75.
possible, to unitary objects and assist, thus, in increasing their psychic unity. Instead, they limit themselves to the visible realm of the opinable and deprive their ethically impoverished dispositions from expanding so as to encompass to a greater degree the benefits of full-fledged virtue.

2.5.2 Philosophers

So much for non-philosophers. In the remaining of this chapter, I will examine how the educational stage described in Republic 6 and 7 contributes to the unification of the philosopher’s soul. A question of particular interest concerns the objects of the philosopher’s study: how are they different from τὰ πολλά and in what sense do they promote unification? I have already discussed the multifarious nature of the instantiations of Forms and its role in the fragmentation of character. Could it not be likewise argued that, since there exists a number of Forms which serve as philosophy’s subject matter, philosophy also leads to disunity? My answer will be in the negative: as the analogy of the Divided Line and the Sun shows, philosophy does study Forms but has as its ultimate goal the comprehension of the Form of the Good.\(^{115}\) To illustrate my view, I will discuss the content of the ten-yearlong mathematical studies the philosopher is required to go through before taking up dialectic.\(^{116}\) Let us start by considering the entire educational program through the simile of the Divided Line.

As described in Republic 2 and 3, the class of the guardians has been as a whole habituated to virtuous behavior through education in music and gymnastics. The further distinction between auxiliaries and philosopher-kings will be primarily based on whether one is fit for the greatest

\(^{115}\) Alternatively, we may say that contrary to the others, philosophers have a single purpose at which all their actions aim (519c1–4).

\(^{116}\) For two illuminating discussions of these issues, see Burnyeat (2000); Kouremenos (2015) 71–102.
lesson, which is the Form of the Good (503e1–504a1, 505a2). Socrates does not discuss the content of this part of the curriculum in more concrete terms until later and is reluctant to express his view on the nature of the Good because he lacks knowledge about it (506b2–d5). He thus resorts to an analogy between the Good and its offspring in the visible world, namely the sun (506d6–e5): there are, he says, things that are visible but unintelligible and things that are intelligible but invisible (507b9–10). The former correspond to perceptible objects, perception of which requires the presence of the sun, whereas the latter group refers to Forms themselves, comprehension of which requires the presence of the Form of the Good. In short, what the sun is in the visible realm, the Good is in the intelligible (508b12–c2). The distinction between visible and intelligible objects is also drawn in the immediately following Divided Line analogy (509d6–8): the stages that lead to knowledge of the Form of the Good are here likened to a line that is divided into two unequal parts, corresponding to the visible and the intelligible realm, that are further subdivided in the same ratio as the line. The lowest part of the visible realm—corresponding to a condition in the soul that is termed εἰκασία (511e2: “imagining” or “illusion”)—is populated by shadows and images of objects that are immediately perceived by the senses (509e1–510a3). The upper part of the visible realm—corresponding to the state of πίστις (511e1: “commonsense”)—is made up of the originals that previously served as models, namely the animals, the plants, and the manufactured things around us (510e5–6). Given that the elements that constitute the lower part of the visible realm are images of the objects found in its upper part, the cognitive state associated with commonsense is more reliable than that of imagining with respect to the truth (510a8–10).

In terms of the Divided Line, we may describe the education the guardians have received in Books 2 and 3 as corresponding to the upper part of the visible realm and the psychological state

---

117 For the translations of the terms that correspond to each of the segments of the Divided Line, see Smith (1996) 28.
of πίστις. Yet, the philosophers aspire to knowledge, which is of higher epistemic reliability and should under ideal conditions lead to certainty and infallibility. To acquire knowledge, however, one must focus on the objects of the intelligible realm, which are, presumably, Forms and investigate them by using two converse, and perhaps complementary, methods: the first method—corresponding to διάνοια (511d8: “thinking”)—is that which uses the objects of the upper part of the visible realm as images and derives conclusions about intelligibles through hypotheses that rest on problematic assumptions (510b4–6); the other method—corresponding to νόησις (511d8: “understanding”)—makes no use of problematic hypotheses and representations but relates the objects of the intelligible realm to a first principle that does not rely on any hypothesis (510b6–9). Despite the somewhat cryptic language, Socrates’ aim here is basically to distinguish between the mathematical sciences and dialectic: the former depend on problematic hypotheses, namely axioms such as “numbers are either odd or even” (arithmetic) or “there are only three types of angles” (geometry), and make use of representations to reach the desired conclusions, as when, for example, a geometer draws a square to illustrate the incommensurability of one of its sides to its diagonal (510c1–511b2). Dialectic, on the other hand, relies on neither problematic axioms nor visual representations of objects and proceeds only by means of Forms to reach an unhypothesized first principle, presumably the Form of the Good (511b3–c2). Glaucon, who realizes that the lower part of the intelligible realm consists of the objects studied by “geometry and its sister-sciences” (511b1–2), succinctly summarizes the entire analogy by mentioning that Socrates wishes to define more clearly the intelligible being studied by dialectic as opposed to that which is studied by the so-called sciences (511c3–6).

118 The description of the mathematical sciences as members of a family may go back to Philolaus of Croton, who described geometry as the mother-city of all other branches of mathematics (DK44A7a). Archytas of Tarentum had also conceived of the branches of mathematics as kindred sciences (DK47B1). See Kouremenos (2015) 73–4.
Indeed, the superiority of dialectic to the mathematical sciences will be mentioned again later on (533b–d, 534e), but let us not lose sight of the fact that they bear many more similarities than differences. Apart from the fact that they all concern themselves with intelligible objects (510e3–511a1), Socrates explicitly states that realization of their affinity distinguishes the dialectician from the rest (537b8–c7):

Μετὰ δὴ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον, ἣν δ’ ἐγὼ, ἐκ τῶν εἰκοσιετῶν οἱ προκριθέντες τιμάς τε μεῖζους τὸν ἄλλων οἴσονται, τά τε χύδην μαθήματα παισίν ἐν τῇ παιδείᾳ γενόμενα τοῦτος συνακτέον εἰς σύνοψιν οἰκειότητος τε ἁλλήλων τὸν μαθημάτων καὶ τῆς τοῦ ὄντος φύσεως.

Μόνη γοῦν, εἴπεν, ἡ τοιαύτη μάθησις βέβαιος, ἐν οἷς ἂν ἐγγένηται.

Καὶ μεγίστη γε, ἣν δ’ ἐγὼ, πεῖρα διαλεκτικῆς φύσεως καὶ μὴ ὁ μὲν γὰρ συνοπτικὸς διαλεκτικὸς, ὁ δὲ μὴ οἷον.

And after that, that is to say, from the age of twenty, those who are chosen will also receive more honors than the others. Moreover, the subjects they learned in no particular order as children they must now bring together to form a unified vision of their kinship both with one another and with the nature of that which is.

At any rate, only learning of that sort holds firm in those who receive it.

It is also the greatest test of who is naturally dialectical and who isn’t, for anyone who can achieve a unified vision is dialectical, and anyone who can’t isn’t.
So far, Socrates had only mentioned that philosopher-kings should be fit for learning the greatest lesson, namely the Form of the Good (503e1–504a1, 505a2), and that the entire educational plan should culminate in dialectic, a method superior to mathematics that occupies the highest position in the curriculum, as if it were a coping stone (534e2–535a1). This passage comes after the extended discussion of the benefits mathematical sciences confer on the learner’s soul by turning its attention upwards to see the Form of the Good (521c1–531d6) and is the first concrete remark concerning the timetable of the Republic’s second educational phase (cf. 537d3: ἐπειδὰν τὰ τριάκοντα ἐκβαίνωσιν). Socrates’ suggestion is that those who have successfully made it through the first educational stage should be promoted to bring together what they were taught as children in a disorderly fashion so as to form a synoptic overview of the affinity between the branches of mathematics with one another and with the nature of being. He also claims that the ability to form a synoptic overview of what has already been learned serves as the best criterion to tell which natures are fit for dialectic since whoever has this ability is evidently a dialectician. We are told, then, that mathematics is akin to the nature of being and that this affinity is of the same quality as that which relates the branches of mathematics to one another. It is reasonable to suppose that the ten-yearlong education in mathematics will lead to understanding the affinity between its branches, providing at the same time an intuitive grasp of their affinity with the nature of being—the subject-matter of philosophy which will become explicitly known only after having studied dialectic for five additional years (539e2). Since Plato does not specify in what exactly the affinity between the branches of mathematics lies, the kinship between them can, and has been, variously understood.

Initially, it may be thought that the branches of mathematics are akin in virtue of possessing the two features that were set out in the Divided Line analogy, namely that they rely on problematic
hypotheses and that they make use of visible representations (510b4–6). But this cannot be what Plato means when he talks of a synoptic comprehension of their affinity because (a) even those not really experienced in such matters would easily agree that geometry does not study the shape itself but seeks knowledge about the intelligible object of which the shape is a likeness (527a1–b1), and (b) a decade seems needlessly long a period of study, if the objective is merely to understand that all branches of mathematics rely on axiomatic premises.\footnote{Kouremenos (2015) 71–4.} Alternatively, it has been suggested that the affinity between the branches of mathematics is to be understood as unity achieved through the indispensability of arithmetic to the rest of them. According to this view, which goes back to Archytas of Tarentum, arithmetic is superior to geometry because certain classes of their problems, the study of incommensurability being one, are ultimately explained through number theory;\footnote{Knorr (1975) 93. In his Harmonics or On mathematics, Archytas argued that “logistics” completes the proofs of geometry (DK47B4).} for example, supposing that the side of a square and its diagonal are commensurable leads to the conclusion that even numbers are odd.\footnote{Arist. APr. 41a21–32 with Knorr (1975) 22–4.} This view, however, is subject to the same objection about the ten-yearlong study of mathematics, not to mention that arithmetic’s superiority over all other branches is not supported by its place early in the curriculum: it is the first mathematical science to be taught, but, if it were indeed superior, one would expect it to be the last, just as dialectic—explicitly said to be superior to mathematics—comes last in the curriculum and is likened to a capstone of learning.\footnote{Kouremenos (2015) 81–5.} According to another interpretation, getting an overview of the kinship of the branches of mathematics is nothing more than seeing them in the order that Plato presents them in Republic 7: arithmetic, geometry, stereometry, astronomy, and harmonics.\footnote{Gaïser (1986) 101; Burnyeat (2000) 67–70.} This order reflects an hierarchy of increasing complexity (from extensionless to
extended magnitude, from two to three dimensions, from motionless solids to moving spheres) in which the prior branches serve as the basis for the development of more complex, and thus superior, sciences. In this sense, the hierarchy between the branches of mathematics is propaedeutic to the comprehension of the hierarchy between Forms and the Form of the Good. Finally, there is the view that the unity of mathematics is derived not by the superiority of one of its members over the rest but by the mutually benefitting connections that exist between one another: in the example of the incommensurability of a square’s side and its diagonal, arithmetic helps complete a geometrical proof, rendering thus geometry a service, which the latter reciprocates since the conclusion about the square bears consequence for arithmetic as well by revealing that odd and even numbers fail to describe everything. According to this line of interpretation, the ten-yearlong education in mathematics leads to an understanding of the mutually benefitting points of contact between its branches and is propaedeutic to the study of the Form of the Good, which is not to be understood as a separate entity but as the mutually beneficial interrelations of Forms within a perfectly structured abstract universe.

The view common to all interpretations is that mathematics forms a unified whole, be that through the superiority of one of its branches over the others, through the existing hierarchy among them, or through their mutually beneficial interdependence. According to the first two interpretations, the unity of mathematics is achieved through the superiority of one of its branches over the rest. A common underlying assumption is that the objects that make up the lower part of the intelligible realm are those studied by the branches of mathematics as distinct from Forms.

---

125 This view presupposes that Plato held a coherentist account of knowledge. See Fine (2003) 98–9. For the Good as a Form or as something substantially different from a substance, see R. 508e3 and 509b6–10, respectively. Cf. Schindler (2008) 107–17. As Aristoxenus relates, the identification of the Good with unity seems to have featured in Plato’s lecture On the Good (Harm. 39.8–40.4 da Rios). For this lecture, see Gaiser (1980).
Studying mathematics would then contribute to increasing the soul’s earned unity since it would focus on the unity imparted on mathematics through the superior role of one of its branches. Subsequently, the role of dialectic would be to discern and bring out explicitly what was previously intuited, namely that in the case of Forms unity is the consequence of relating each of them to the superordinate Form of the Good. Thus, dialectic would also promote the maximization of the soul’s unity by directing the student’s attention to one—the best—unitary, eternal, and changeless object, namely the Form of the Good.

The third interpretation has the merit of providing the best analogue for the achievement of unity within the soul: the models of superiority and hierarchy also render a soul unitary but downplay the role of the lower parts of the soul in the process of unification. True, under ideal conditions the rational element is assigned a superior function, but the cooperation of the other parts of the soul is no less required: recall that temperance requires the mutual agreement of all parts of the soul as to who should rule (442c10–d1). This view assumes that the objects populating the lower part of the intelligible realm are those that make up its upper part. The distinction between mathematical objects and Forms is thus extrinsically determined by the method through which they are each time studied: for example, if studied by means of axioms, they would be considered as mathematical objects. But in so far as they are studied dialectically, i.e. in a way that rises above the problematic assumptions and relates them to a starting-point, they would be considered as Forms. If so, mathematics would still contribute to the maximization of the soul’s unity, albeit without providing the analytical skills imparted by dialectic: it would serve the purpose of comprehending the unity of the intelligible objects, conceived of as a nexus of mutually benefitting relations, providing at the same time an intuitive grasp of the unity that characterizes the Forms. In this case, however, the Form of the Good would not be a separately existing
substance but the unity that characterizes the objects of the intelligible realm. The additional five years of the curriculum would then be aimed at exploring and analytically understanding the mutually benefitting relationships that exist between Forms.

To conclude, we may safely assume that immersion in the study of mathematics would invariably promote the individual philosopher’s fashioning of a unitary self: by the principle of assimilation discussed above the philosopher becomes more unified because she is assimilated to the object of her studies.\textsuperscript{126} As it turns out, the object of these higher studies is in all cases related to unity, regardless of whether we accept that the Form of the Good is a separate entity or that mathematics and dialectic have special objects of study. Since, as we have seen, Plato relates virtue with unity, we may conclude that by maximizing the unity of the soul, the second educational stage of the \textit{Republic} produces agents who are maximally virtuous.\textsuperscript{127}

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued against the view that tripartition of the soul in the \textit{Republic} is meant to be understood as distinguishing between parts that function as separate agents within the individual soul. My suggestion is that conceiving of tripartition as an attempt to distinguish between different aspects does away with all the problems posed by the tripartition in the strong sense and that the account of the soul is thus more unitary in that it at least allows for maximization of unity among the soul-parts. In my attempt to show that tripartition aims at distinguishing between aspects, I have dealt with the view that the non-rational soul holds beliefs: my analysis

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{126} Burnyeat (1999) 70: “For Plato, as for Aristotle, knowledge and understanding depend on receptivity. You submit your soul to be in-formed by the world as it is objectively speaking. A soul that assimilates the vast abstract system of the mathematics on the curriculum is in turn assimilated to it. \textit{You} come to be like, akin to, of the same family as, the nature of what is (in the sense of unqualified context-invariant being).”

\textsuperscript{127} Maximally need not imply perfectly: by assimilating himself to what is orderly and divine, the philosopher becomes so to the extent that is humanly possible (500c9–d1; cf. 501b9–c2).
\end{quote}
allows for this possibility, provided that the term “belief” does not imply involvement on behalf of the non-rational part in deliberative and reflective processes but is mostly related to imagistic and non-discursive content. Additionally, I focused on two images that seemingly support the view that the soul is comprised of separable parts: namely the description of the soul as a mythological beast in Book 9 and the analogy of the soul with the sea-god Glaucus in Book 10. I attempted to show that construing either image as implying tripartition in the strong sense as well as the ability of at least reason to exist separately is the result of overinterpretation: in the first case of a synecdoche that sees a part of human behavior (reason) as being represented by the whole (human), in the second of an analogy that dramatizes the superiority and seniority of (a) reason over spirit and emotion and (b) the related virtue of wisdom over the rest of the virtues. Exploring the relation of wisdom to the rest of the virtues I arrive at the conclusion that a distinction between natural and artificial virtue seems to be at play in several Platonic dialogues and that natural virtue corresponds to the minimum amount of unity within the soul that is innate and is a prerequisite for the acquisition of artificial virtue. Then, I further subdivide artificial virtue into its pre- and post-reflective versions depending on how they have been implanted: pre-reflective virtues are the result of habituative education as described in Books 2 and 3 of the Republic and are necessary for the attainment of their post-reflective counterparts. Post-reflective virtue, on the other hand, requires attending the second educational stage of the Republic, as described in Books 6 and 7, and results in the analytical understanding of pre-reflective virtue. Lastly, I focus on two issues related to the acquisition of full-fledged virtue and the corresponding maximization of unity within the individual: (a) what are the cognitive habits that prevent non-philosophers from maximizing unity within the soul? (b) how does the second educational phase of the Republic promote the unification of the philosopher’s soul? I conclude that their decade-long education in mathematics helps
philosophers become more unified by assimilating them to the unity that characterizes the objects studied by mathematics.
In Plato’s *Timaeus* we hear what remained an unfulfilled wish in the *Phaedo*, namely an account of how the cosmos was teleologically crafted by the *νοῦς* in accordance with what is best. Timaeus, the main narrator of the dialogue, starts by making a fundamental ontological distinction between unborn, undifferentiated Being—grasped by understanding through reason—and Becoming, that which never fully achieves Being but is always coming to be and perishing—the object of opinion and unreasoned perception (27d5–28a4). After postulating the metaphysical presupposition that everything created necessarily has a cause (28a4–6, c2–3), Timaeus embarks on a detailed description of how the benign demiurge created the world as a living animal by imitating the model of the perfect intelligible animal (30b5–d1). We are told repeatedly that whatever is born necessarily has a cause, that anything which has an unchanging model is by necessity beautifully accomplished (28a8–b1), and that our visible universe is the best possible world and thus necessarily a likeness of an eternal and unchanging model (29a1–b2). Additionally, Timaeus explicitly states that the universe requires the existence of all the mortal species in order to be as complete a copy of the eternal model as possible (41b6–c2). But if human beings are necessary components of the universe, then one could venture the inference that the components of human beings are also necessary components. Thus, we may think that the human body is as necessary as the human soul for the universe to be complete. Indeed, this sounds like an odd thesis to be found in a Platonic treatise, especially when one considers not so much the pairing of the body and the necessary but even more so of the soul and Necessity: for, as we shall see, even though there are many ways in which something can be said to be necessary, there is an implicit link between the body and Necessity. And yet, Necessity seems to be characteristic of the state of affairs that...
obtained in the precosmos, i.e. before the imposition of order by the demiurge and the consequent emergence of the body. Thus, saying that the soul is necessary might also imply that it is subject to the same conditions as the body because they share common ancestry since soul, no less than body, is a product of the imposition of order on the precosmos.

Our connection to the realm of Necessity is hinted at relatively early in the *Timaeus*: after providing an elaborate account of the creation of the world’s body from the four Empedoclean elements, the narrator turns to the theme of the creation of the cosmic soul, adding the caveat that the sequence of the narrative should not trick us into thinking that the body is accorded any sort of prerogative over the soul. Timaeus glosses over his decision to narrate the creation of the body before that of the soul with the following remark (34b10–c4):

Τὴν δὲ δὴ ψυχὴν οὐχ ὡς νῦν ὑστέραν ἐπιχειροῦμεν λέγειν, οὕτως ἐμηχανήσατο καὶ ὁ θεὸς νεωτέραν – οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄρχεσθαι πρεσβύτερον ὑπὸ νεωτέρου συνέρξας εἰάσεν – ἄλλα πως ἡμεῖς πολὺ μετέχοντες τοῦ προστυχόντος τε καὶ εἰκῆ ταύτῃ πη καὶ λέγομεν …

Now this soul, though it comes later in the account we are now attempting, was not made by the god younger than the body; for when he joined them together, he would not have suffered the elder to be ruled by the younger. There is in us too much of the casual and random, which shows itself in our speech …

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all *Timaeus* translations are from Cornford (1937).
To what part of ourselves does “the casual and random” correspond? There seem to be three candidates that can serve as the source of our haphazardness: (a) the body; (b) the immortal part of the soul; (c) the mortal soul-parts. That the first option should be ruled out is immediately evident, for, as we learn from the *Phaedo*, matter is unable to initiate action on its own (91a4–b6): recall how Socrates’ bones and sinews would have already fled for Megara, if it were up to them.

On the other hand, it is clear that the lower soul-parts are more intimately associated with the body and its needs, making their appearance in tandem with the body and being, therefore, subject to the same bodily conditions; but in the present context there is no indication that Timaeus’ inadvertent reversal of the chronological details of his narration is motivated by considerations of appetite or spirit. By process of elimination, then, we arrive at the immortal part of the soul: the present chapter aims at establishing thesis (b) and showing that world soul and world body are made of the same stuff and as such share certain features.

I start by providing some background on the concept of Necessity and its role in Timaean metaphysics. I first examine its role in the creation of the universe to show that it is accorded a more positive role. Then, I turn to a discussion of the Receptacle to show that it fulfills two functions that are similar to the ones executed by the metaphysical principles of Sameness and Difference. Countenancing the possibility that the immortal part of the human soul is also made of the same stuff as the world soul (even though the soul-stuff used for humans is said to be second or third in degree of purity at 41d7), I move on to the description of the world soul’s creation and attempt to spell out the functions of two of the constituents of the soul, namely Sameness and Difference. My analysis of the *Timaeus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Parmenides* evidences a

---

2 Cornford (1937) 59 n. 1 comments: “Because we are not wholly rational, but partly subject to those wandering causes which, ‘being devoid of intelligence, produce their effects casually and without order’ (46e).”
correspondence between, on the one hand, Sameness and the function of the Receptacle as permanent qualitative substratum and, on the other hand, Difference and the function of the Receptacle as source of motion and change. Lastly, I conclude by briefly evaluating Aristotle’s testimony on the creation of the soul in the *Timaeus* vis-à-vis my findings.

### 3.1 Necessity as a Cause

It is rather remarkable that Necessity figures so prominently in a teleological account of the creation of the world. Yet it is important to notice, right from the outset, that ἁνάγκη does not have for Timaeus the sense it has for a modern reader, namely that of the unfaltering and unfailing precision with which a certain event always occurs due to a specific cause: it is necessary that when one adds acid to a base, there will be a reaction producing salt. On the contrary, Timaeus seems to associate Necessity with chance and accident: hence the appellation “errant cause” to refer to the workings of Necessity (48a7: πλανωμένης εἴδος αἰτίας). In what sense is Necessity a wandering cause? Is it an independent source of motion? If so, can it also be said that through its link to the body the latter also appears to have a power to move independently of soul? Finally, what is the relation of Necessity to motions generated by soul?

In the first part of the *Timaeus* we were told all about the role of Reason in the creation of the world. In the second part the focus shifts from Reason to another cause that contributes to the world’s creation, namely Necessity (47e3–5). Timaeus explains that the visible universe is the result of the combined efforts of Reason and Necessity and that a true account of its creation should include reference to both causes. Even though the *Timaeus* as a whole is more generous than the *Phaedo* in the significance it assigns to the so-called material cause, it displays a similar tendency to downplay its role in the process of creation. For example, once Timaeus has explained the
workings of Necessity, he embarks on the final part of his exposition, which is the account of the cooperation of Reason and Necessity (69a–end). In the summary immediately preceding the introduction of this last account, Timaeus stresses the subservient role of the things constituted of Necessity and acknowledges their indispensable, yet intrinsically inferior nature: we must distinguish, he explains, two types of cause and search out what is divine in order to achieve to the extent possible a life of happiness. Inquiry into the nature of Necessity is made only for the sake of the divine, but one should concede the brute fact that it is impossible to understand or grasp the objects of our serious study by themselves independently of Necessity (68e6–69a5). We arrive thus at a paradoxical notion according to which Necessity is to be both valued and regretted: valued because it is the only path that leads us to appreciation and apprehension of the plan of the divine craftsman, regretted because, had it been otherwise, the craftsman would have been entirely unimpeded in the creation of the world and the result would have been even better.3

The regrettable nature of Necessity is brought out most conspicuously in the narrative of the creation of the human skull (75a–c).4 Timaeus explains teleologically that the purpose of the bone is to protect the marrow (73d–74a), which is the most fundamental substance in that it binds the soul to the body (73b2–5). A second layer, this time of flesh, was provided to protect the bones from decaying through repeated heating and cooling (74b7–c5). It so happens though that the bones that envelop large quantities of marrow are ill-protected by flesh, whereas those that have

---

3 In Aristotelian terms, one would talk of hypothetical or teleological necessity (Metaph. 1015a20–6): a thing is called necessary on the grounds that its presence is required for the attainment of a goal. See Adamson (2011) §6–8. Aristotle distinguishes between this type of necessity and two others: (b) a thing is called necessary when it comes about through compulsion (τὸ βίαιον καὶ ἡ βία), and (c) a thing is called necessary when it could not have been otherwise (Metaph. 1015a26–b9). Aristotle explains that this last type of necessity is implicit in the other two: something is necessary in the sense of (a) or (b) because the presence of a goal or compelling condition eliminates the possibility that it could have been otherwise. We may thus also draw a distinction between Timaeus’ persuaded and unpersuaded Necessity depending on whether things could or could not have been otherwise.

small amounts of marrow are covered with most flesh (74e1–3). As a result, parts of the body that belong in the latter group, such as thighs and arms, are better protected but devoid of intelligence, whereas those of the former group are most intelligent. The reason for this, Timaeus continues, is that it is impossible for anything that comes about through Necessity to enjoy simultaneously the benefits of thick bone surrounded by much flesh and the keenness of perception (75a7–b2). Had such a combination been possible, our heads would instantiate it, and humans would live twice or many more times as long, happier and less troubled by pain (75b2–7). As is the case, however, our creators were faced with the dilemma whether humans should live longer and be worse off or the other way around, and having weighed out the options they concluded that a better, albeit shorter life, is in all respects more choiceworthy (75b7–c3). All things considered, Necessity places certain regrettable constraints upon the work of the god.

Even so, the status of Necessity is more venerable than that accorded to the necessary conditions in *Phaedo*: distinguishing between a real cause and that without which a cause would not be a cause (*sine qua non*), Socrates inveighs against those who regard mere matter as associated with νός and thus capable of initiating action (91a4–b6). He explains that the reason why he has not fled to Megara or Boeotia is not to be traced back to his bones and sinews, for surely if they had the power to initiate action, they would have already escaped and saved themselves. It is rather because of his choice of what is best, he continues, that he does what he does (99b1: τῇ τοῦ βελτίστου ἁθέσει). On the contrary, Timaeus seems to elevate Necessity to the status of a cause, but not without some qualifications: before introducing Necessity Timaeus draws a distinction between causes and contributory causes (46d1: συναιτία), the latter being used by the god as subservient in order to achieve the best possible result (46c7–d1: ὑπηρετοῦσιν. Cf. 68e4–5: ὑπηρετοῦσας), but destitute of intelligence they produce haphazard and unorderly results (46e5–
To take an example already mentioned: the bone is both brittle and hard, but only its hardness can be considered a case of persuaded Necessity. While its brittleness is mere contingency, contributive to nothing, its hardness is a contributory cause that serves the protection of the marrow and hence the soul. Timaeus explicitly states that the lover of truth must first seek the causes of the intelligent nature, but the formulation of this exhortation implies the indispensability of Necessity: “it is necessary that the lover of reason and science should investigate first the causes of the intelligent nature” (46d7–e1: τὸν δὲ νοῦ καὶ ἐπιστήμης ἡραστὴν ἀνάγκη τὰς τῆς ἔμφρονος φύσεως αἰτίας πρώτας μεταδιώκειν). It appears that we are faced with the same conundrum: the lover of truth must seek out the teleological principles that underlie the processes of the universe but, in order to do so she must rely on, and start from, the necessary.

But how does Timaeus conceive of the relationship between Reason and Necessity? In his synoptic description of how the world came to be, he seems to ascribe a subordinate role to Necessity (48a2–5):

νοὺ δὲ ἀνάγκης ἀρχοντος τῷ πείθειν αὐτὴν τῶν γιγνομένων τὰ πλεῖστα ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον ἀγείν, ταύτη κατὰ ταὐτὰ τε δι᾽ ἀνάγκης ἡττομένης ὑπὸ πειθοῦς ἔμφρονος οὕτω κατ’ ἀρχὰς συνίστατο τὸδε τὸ πᾶν.

Reason overruled Necessity by persuading her to guide the greatest part of the things that become towards what is best; in that way and on that principle this universe was fashioned in the beginning by the victory of Reasonable persuasion over Necessity.

---

The description of power relations between the two causes is overtly politicized and covertly sexualized: in typical Platonic fashion, “male” Reason (νοῦς) rules over “female” Necessity (ἀνάγκη), while the tool through which Reason exercises his power and control is persuasion, which originally stood for erotic persuasion and was thus associated with Aphrodite. The power to persuade casts Reason tacitly into the role of the active principle of creation, whereas Necessity, being related to unreasoned matter, is presented as a passive participant. Given, however, that persuasion involves more than one party and depends on the willingness of both sides to cooperate, it is to be expected that Necessity’s role in the process of creation might not be completely passive after all.

In anthropomorphized terms, the passive role of Necessity is once again suggested by the description of the recipient of Becoming as a nurse. Commenting on the basic ontology he has so far presented, Timaeus notices that Being and Becoming sufficed to describe creation hitherto, but a fuller account of the universe would require the introduction of yet another term, corresponding to a third ontological principle, i.e. the Receptacle (48e2–49a6). This principle, at times conceived of as the underlying substratum common to all four Empedoclean elements, at times represented as space or the place into which whatever comes to be occupies, is first compared to a nurse (49a5–6: πάσης εἶναι γενέσεως ὑποδοχὴν αὐτὴν οἷον τιθήνην) and then to a mother (50d2–3: καὶ δὴ καὶ προσεικάσαι πρέπει τὸ μὲν δεχόμενον μητρὶ…). It prima facie seems that the imagery used for the Receptacle is intended to undermine its role in the process of creation: one, for example, may

---

7 Persuasion as daughter of Tethys and Oceanus (Hes. Th. 349); associated with the making of Pandora (Hes. Op. 73); worshipped together with Aphrodite Pandemos in Athens (Paus. 1.22.3); paired with necessity (Hdt. 8.111).

8 The father of Becoming seems to be identified here with the Forms (50d3: τὸ δ’ ὀνομ πατρί); yet, in the beginning of his account, Timaeus refrains from affirming without hedging that the creator and father of this universe can be easily found or, if found, communicable to everyone. Cf. Strange (1985) 31.
recall that in sexual reproduction the mother is traditionally relegated to the status of a receptacle into which the embryo is nurtured, whereas what we would describe as genetic material is determined solely by the father’s sperm.9 Things, however, may be more complicated: indeed, Socrates does claim at Republic 454d–e that the woman bears (τίκτειν) and the male begets (ϕεύειν), and it would seem that this distinction, if taken conjointly with Timaeus 73b–c, 86c and 91c–d, would support the view that for Plato the mother simply functions as a receptacle for the seed, which originates from the real parent, i.e. the father. Yet, it is not at all improbable that Plato was aware of an alternative explanation of childbirth that involved both a male and a female seed, such as the one found in the Hippocratic Corpus.10

The imagery of persuasion appears to ascribe metaphorically to Necessity the capability of responding to reason. The metaphor personifies both Reason and Necessity, couching them in terms of parties in a relationship that involves certain expectations and mutual reciprocity. Following Mourelatos’ analysis of πείθειν,11 we may understand this relationship as follows: in any occasion where A πείθει B, the agent of persuasion exerts his influence not by means of threats or exertion of force and physical violence but through the promise of rewards and gratification. Since A must present conditions that seem agreeable and desirable to B to elicit from the latter the desired outcome, whether A achieves his aim largely depends on the willingness of B to accept the conditions offered by A.12 The agent of persuasion seems on the face of it to be the active party in the sense that the persuader initiates the action; and yet, the participation of the persuaded party in the persuasive act is by no means insignificant or merely passive since it is a necessary

11 Mourelatos (2008) 138: “… the causality of πείθειν is that of positive teleology.”
12 Cf. Pl. Phlb. 58a8–b3, where Protarchus tells Socrates that he heard Gorgias multiple times saying that the art of persuasion is far different than, and superior to, the rest because it overpowers everything not through force but by eliciting their consent (πάντα γὰρ ὃς' αὐτῇ δούλα ἂν' ἐκόντων ἄλλ' οὖ διὰ βίας ποιοῖτο).
component for the attainment of a successful and desired outcome. As Mourelatos put it, “if A πείθει B, and B πείθεται τῷ A in one respect, it may still be the case that, in another respect, B πείθει A, and A πείθεται τῷ B.”\(^{13}\) The eagerness of Necessity to comply with the rewards promised by Reason is illustrated at 56c5, where we read concerning the configuration of the Empedoclean elements that god adjusted them in due proportion “to the most exact perfection permitted by Necessity willingly complying with persuasion” (ὦ πηπερ ἢ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἐκοῦσα πεισθεῖσα τε φύσις ύπεϊκεν).

An additional aspect of the benign nature and responsiveness of Necessity to Reason’s injunctions may be detected in the Receptacle’s metaphorical conception as the recipient of Becoming: in raising a few preliminary questions about the nature of the four Empedoclean elements and the difficulties they give rise to if traditionally conceived, Timaeus introduces the third ontological principle that serves as the qualitative substratum that provides the elements with a level of permanence and identity (e.g. 49a–50a). This principle is envisaged as the “nature that receives all bodies” (50b6: τῆς τὰ πάντα δεχομένης σώματα φύσεως).\(^{14}\) Yet, within the context of πείθειν, “receiving” carries a whole new significance, for it has accrued, on top of its original connotations of physicality, the additional meaning of prehension as act of assent: one receives what one judges good to receive, one accepts to receive.\(^{15}\) If we probe below the surface of the metaphor of the Receptacle as simply a vessel in which matter moves, we encounter the metaphorical attribution to it of similar psychological powers in that it is visualized as a party that agrees to the conditions of a proposed contract.


\(^{14}\) See also 51a7 (πανδεχές) and 50b8, d3, e1–3, for various forms of δέχεσθαι applied to the Receptacle.

\(^{15}\) Redard (1954) 355.
We see, therefore, that Necessity is not univocally reduced to an utterly passive principle that awaits the intervention of Reason to contribute to the creative act. Indeed, passivity appears to be deeply entrenched in this notion, and the female imagery associated with it could be taken as an indication that Necessity cannot by itself engage into purposeful activities but requires the mediation of Reason to do so. Even though its unruliness provides some hindrances to Reason, it also possesses a benevolent aspect that allows it to be persuaded to cooperate, in which case it is subordinated to teleology and aims at what is best. And yet, as the imagery of persuasion has brought out, persuasion does not simply amount to subjugation since the Receptacle’s active consent is required for the cooperation of the two causes. On the other hand, to consider it a cause on a par with Reason would be an overstatement since it merely provides the conditions under which Reason can exercise its power: left on its own, it does not suffice to produce orderly results.

In sum, we may conclude that Necessity, downgraded in the context of the *Phaedo* to a mere *sine qua non*, is given a place in the Timaean hierarchy of causes: being extrinsically valued owing to its providing us with the sole means of apprehending the divine plan, Necessity is elevated in the Timaean account to the status of a contributory cause.

3.2 Receptacle and Sameness

In other works, Plato ascribes necessity, chance, nature, or a combination thereof, to the materialists who seek to explain change in the natural world through appeal to depersonalized forces.\textsuperscript{16} The *Timeaus*, on the other hand, finds some room for compromise between Reason as a personalized explanatory principle and Necessity. Still, Necessity or expressions that denote what is necessary feature prominently in the narratives of the creation of the body and the mortal kinds

of soul.\textsuperscript{17} Whatever precisely its relationship with Necessity, the body as it appears in the visible world seems to be yet another example of Reason persuading Necessity: the geometrical constructions that manifest themselves in the physical world as the four Empedoclean elements are the result of teleology since the demiurge created them according to what is best—in this case, the best choice was expressed as the selection of the best types of triangles to fashion the elements. Necessity, then, predated the emergence of the body. Yet, we hear of traces of the elements in the time before the intervention of Reason and the creation of the cosmos as an orderly construction (53b2: ἱχνη). These traces appear to be somewhere: not exactly in space because they are not yet bodies and therefore cannot occupy place; but they are somehow part of the third ontological principle, introduced at 48e2–49a6, namely the Receptacle (identified with space at 52a8).

Examination of the nature of the Receptacle seems thus to be the safest route to find out about the nature of Necessity at a stage when it had not been ordered by Reason. I will start by considering the reasons that lead Plato to the introduction of this concept, reasons that must partly be tied to the structure of the \textit{Timaeus}. I will continue by focusing on the features of the Receptacle, arguing that it might be identified with two of the ingredients the demiurge used to create the world soul. I will conclude this section by attempting to establish a link between Necessity as a constituent of the world soul and motion: my suggestion is that, even though the soul is conceived as a principle of higher explanatory value, the raw elements that will be used to make up the body temporally predate the emergence of the world soul and as such provide it with the power of motion.

Consider first the structure of Timaeus’ exposition. Its first part, from 29d to 47e, is an account of the creation of the visible world based on the works of Reason. We are told how the demiurge created the cosmos by copying an eternal model, hence the basic ontology referred to

\textsuperscript{17} For example, 42a3–6, 69c5–d1, 70d7–e5.
above. In the second part of his exposition, from 47e to 69a, Timaeus shifts the narrative perspective and narrates the creation of the world not from the top down but from the bottom up: he refers to the indispensability of the wandering cause for the world’s creation (48a5–7), he acknowledges the insufficiency of the rudimentary ontological distinction between model and copy (48e4–492), and he gives in to the compelling force of the argument to attempt to reveal a third king of being that is hard to deal with because of its obscurity (49a3–6). The role of the demiurge is here suppressed—and, perhaps, subsumed under the function of the Forms—until the point when he creates the cosmos by imposing order on the random conditions characteristic of Necessity. Timaeus, however, is explicit that Being, Space (Receptacle), and Becoming existed separately before the creation of the universe (52d3–4: ὃν τε καὶ χώραν καὶ γένεσιν εἶναι, τρία τρικῆ, καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι). We have gained an idea about Being and Becoming in the first section of the exposition, but what can be said about the Receptacle?

In the beginning of his account of the works of Necessity, Timaeus is cautious to stress that he will not be offering the first principle of everything and that what follows will still have the restricted status of a likely account (48c2–e1). The various descriptions of the Receptacle are indicative of the inherent difficulty anyone is faced with when it comes to asserting anything about it: its very appellation suggests a spatial metaphor that connects it to the body since the latter is envisaged as a vessel that encompasses the soul, an association that foreshadows the likening of the Receptacle to the mother of Becoming. But other metaphors are also employed to allow some insight into the nature of this ontological principle: it is compared to a mass of gold that someone continuously molds into various transient shapes (50a5–b6), to a characterless matrix that receives the imprints of Being (50c2, e8–11), and to the odorless base of scented ointments (50e4–8).
Timaeus’ bewilderment can be summed up in his description of the Receptacle as most difficult to apprehend (51b1: δυσαλωτότατον).¹⁸

Before dealing with the particulars of the precosmic Receptacle, it may be worth asking: what is the reason for introducing a principle whose nature is almost unintelligible? First, one may think commonsensically: anything that exists must occupy some place, for if it does not exist either on earth or in the heavens, then it is nothing at all (52a8–b5). But the answer to the above question seems also tied to the fluctuating nature of the phenomenal world and the received notion of the transformation of the elements into one another: one must, Timaeus says, consider the nature of fire, water, air, and earth as well as their condition before the creation of the universe (48b3–5). His criticism is that, though philosophers have taken the existence of the elements for granted, no one ever provided an adequate explanation of their nature and creation, and that these bodies do not deserve the designation they traditionally have as elements, i.e. entities as irreducible as the letters of the alphabet, since even a least intelligent person would not even rank them so low as syllables (48b3–c2). It was a common strand of early Ionian thought that the visible world could ultimately be reduced to one basic element that was the origin of everything. Instead of identifying one basic substance that could account for the emergence of all the rest, Empedocles had identified four basic elements that were irreducible and immutable and could combine to create the objects of the phenomenal world. Timaeus’ introduction of the Receptacle seems to be aimed precisely at criticizing these early accounts: first, the thought—expressed more radically by Heraclitus and his followers—that the elements are constantly transforming, then the Empedoclean idea that at the deepest level of analysis there were only four basic elements to be found. The Receptacle, then, is

¹⁸ Commentators share Plato’s perplexity about the Receptacle and are roughly divided into four interpretive camps that conceive of it as (a) matter (Aristotle; see references in Miller (2003) 20–4); (b) space (Prince (2011), Mohr (2005), Johansen (2004), Robinson (2004), Brisson (1998), Cornford (1937), Taylor (1928)); (c) both (Algra (1995)); (d) neither (Sayre (2003)).
an attempt to dig deeper in order to identify a principle that is even more basic than the so-called elements, something that serves as the precondition for the existence of higher-order compounds. But what was it exactly that Timaeus found lacking in the earlier accounts?

The thesis that the elements are continuously transforming must have been appalling to Timaeus because of the implications it carried for the nature of reality and, correspondingly, of language: if everything is in a state of constant flux, then language becomes indeterminate because it picks up continuously changing referents. We learn from Aristotle that Cratylus espoused this radical theory and argued that in case anyone wished to refer to something one should refrain from using language and should merely point with the finger.\(^{19}\) This sort of extreme Heracliteanism comes under attack in the *Theaetetus* (182c–183b), where Socrates attributes to the proponents of this theory the thesis that everything is always changing both in place and in quality and argues that, if that is so, then nothing can be said of them.\(^{20}\)

It seems that the Receptacle is introduced precisely to avoid this undesired indeterminacy: Timaeus raises the importance of dealing with a difficulty about the elements, for if the elements constantly change into one another, then it becomes difficult to use language in a trustworthy way and to describe any of them as really fire or water (49a6–b5). Additionally, whoever uses the deictic ‘this’ to refer to any element would make a fool of oneself (49c7–d3). Rather, he continues, the safest way to talk about them would be the following (49d4–50a4):

\[
\text{ἀεὶ ὅ καθορᾶμεν ἄλλοτε ἄλλη γιγνόμενον, ὡς πῦρ, μή τοῦτο ἄλλα τὸ τοιοῦτον}
\]
\[
\text{ἐκάστοτε προσαγορεύειν πῦρ, μηδὲ ὅδωρ τοῦτο ἄλλα τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ, μηδὲ ἄλλο}
\]


\(^{20}\) For a discussion that reconciles, successfully in my view, the skeptical result of this passage with the more positive account presented in the *Timaeus*, see Gill (1987).
What we see always coming to be different at different times, for instance, fire, [it is safest] on each occasion not to call fire "this" but "what is such," nor water "this" but always "what is such," nor anything else ["this"] as though it had some permanence, among the things we point to using the expression "that" and "this," and think we indicate something; for it slips away and does not await the charge of being "this" or "that" or any expression which indicts them of being permanent. No, [it is safest] not to call each of them these [i.e., "this" or "that"] but, concerning each and all of them, to call [them] thus: "what is such, always moved around and like," for example, to call fire "what is altogether such," and so with anything else that comes to be. But that in which each of these appears always to be coming to be and from which they are again destroyed, that alone [it is safest] to address using the expressions "this" and "that," but what is some sort, hot or white or any one of
the opposites, and all the things composed of these, to call none of these that [i.e., "this" or "that"]. 21

According to Timaeus, we are not being precise when we use demonstrative pronouns to refer to ever-changing natures, for the referent has already changed and what we end up with is merely a vacuous signifier. Instead, the use of deictic pronouns should be reserved only for that whose nature is permanent. 22 To illustrate this point, Timaeus compares the Receptacle to a mass of gold (50a5–b5): supposing someone molded all kinds of figures out of it and another person wanted to know what any of the figures was, the safest answer he could give would pick up the material out of which the shapes were fashioned, not the shapes themselves. Similarly, it is asserted of the nature that receives all bodies that “it must always be called the same” (ταὐτόν) because it never departs from its own power (50b5–8).

We may, for the time being, reach the tentative conclusion that the Receptacle serves as the qualitative substratum that is free of the impermanence characteristic of the elements that always come to be in and perish out of it. Its introduction as an ontological principle is part of an attempt to respond to the extreme Heraclitean thesis that the phenomenal world we experience, conditioned as it is by the combined effort of Intelligence and Necessity, is in extreme flux. By never departing from its nature the Receptacle emerges as a sufficiently homogeneous and self-identical cause that provides the necessary conditions upon which the linguistic enterprise is

---

21 Omitting καὶ τήν τῷ ὅνε at 49e3 (Cornford (1937) 179 n. 3). Translation is by Gill (1987) 34–5.
22 This is the so-called “traditional” interpretation of this troublesome passage, according to which “this” should not be used for fire but should be reserved for the underlying Receptacle; for fire (or any other element in general), one should use adjectival forms. See Zeyl (2000) lvi–lix for a clear exposition of this and other alternative interpretations. See also Gill (1987). The rival interpretation, going back to Cherniss (1954a) and (1954b) and defended by Silverman (1992), argues that what serves as the referent of these expressions is not the phenomenal world but “self-identical characters” or Forms. For extended discussion, see Hunt (1998).
On the other hand, it stands to reason that whatever amount of impermanence exists in the ordered cosmos in the end goes back to Necessity, at a time when it had not yet been taken up by the demiurge to serve the needs of teleology. For otherwise it would fall within the purview of either νοῦς or the Forms—conceived of as efficient causes—to account for the presence of indeterminacy in the world, something impossible because as efficient causes they should be the cause of merely what is good, i.e. determinate, regular, numerable, etc. Given that the agent through which Necessity manifests itself in the cosmos is the Receptacle, it is only conceivable that this principle is given the additional and perhaps contradictory function of the source of all change. Let us now turn to an examination of the Receptacle in the precosmos to illustrate the sense in which it can be conceived of as the cause of difference in the world.

3.3 Receptacle in the Precosmos

As already noted, Timaeus introduces the Receptacle as the third ontological kind in the second beginning of his exposition (49a), having already mentioned that, before being organized by the demiurge, “whatever was visible” was in a state of disorderly motion (30a4–5: κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως). Two questions immediately arise: (a) What was visible? (b) How could there be motion at a time when soul did not exist? The first question relates to whether the four elements enjoyed a separate existence of their own independently of any intervention of Intelligence on the Receptacle. The issue of the motion of the Receptacle is the first major interpretive problem we stumble upon because it seems to run counter to the standard Platonic

---

23 Gill (1987) 52: “The crucial point is that even within the confines of necessity there is sufficient permanence that true statements about the physical world are possible.”

24 That the Receptacle is not to be identified with difference on account of its being called “always the same,” see Cherniss (1954aSources) 25 n. 22. For criticism on the identification of matter and non-being (for which Zeller was based on Aristotle Ph. 192a6-8), see Cherniss (1944) 92–6.
doctrine, found in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, that soul is the source of all motion. Rather than dismiss it as mere mythology and thus seek to subordinate it to the aforementioned doctrine, I suggest that thinking harder about the insistence with which Timaeus describes the motions that existed in the precosmos repays scrutiny. I start by examining the status of the four elements before the first creative act of the demiurge, namely the world’s body, and I argue that the Empedoclean elements cannot have existed before the imposition of geometrical order on space. I then examine the evidence for the existence of motion uncaused by soul in the precosmos and, having established that, I attempt to show that all change and motion in the end should be ascribed to the irregular motions of the Receptacle.

3.3.1 Protoelements

In his account of the creation of the world’s body, Timaeus deduces the existence of the traditional elements, initially fire and earth, then air and water. Starting from the premise that whatever comes to be must be bodily, visible, and tangible, attributes which cannot exist separately from fire and earth (31b4–6), Timaeus offers an argument to the effect that the existence of the four elements is not arbitrary but dictated by certain mathematical requirements. That the body of the visible world was made up of the four traditional elements is straightforwardly affirmed in the concluding statement of this section (32b8–c2: καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ἐκ τε δὴ τούτων τοιούτων καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τεττάρων τὸ τοῦ κόσμου σῶμα ἐγεννήθη δι’ ἀναλογίας ὁμολογήσαν) and conspicuously repeated at the beginning of the next section, which informs us that the creator used up all fire, water, air,

---

25 These are that, if two things are to be harmoniously joined, a third one is needed to serve as a bond between them; that the best unity of three numbers is achieved through geometrical proportion (31b8–32a7); and that the three-dimensionality of the visible world suggests the existence of an additional element which serves as the second mean because solids are joined together not by one but by two means (32b2–3).
and earth in the creation of the world’s body so that the resulting cosmos might be perfect, ageless, and free from sickness by being immune from external affections (32c5–33a6).

It seems sufficiently clear that the building blocks of the visible world are the four Empedoclean elements. What invites reflection, however, is whether they existed as such before the intervention of the demiurge. Summarizing the developments that followed the introduction of the third kind, Timaeus casts his vote that Being, space, and Becoming preexisted the creation of the cosmos (52d3–4: ὄν τε καὶ χώραν καὶ γένεσιν εἶναι, τρία τριχῇ, καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι), and seems to hint at the independent existence of the elements: the nurse of Becoming, we are informed, becomes watery and ignified and receives the shapes (μορφάς) of earth and air, and, on account of being filled with unlike and imbalanced powers, she is not in balance in any part of her but, being shaken by them, shakes them in return and oscillates irregularly at all directions (52d4–e5). As a result, the elements—or however they are to be called at this stage—start separating from one another, a process that is likened to cleaning corn by means of a winnowing-basket, which by being shaken moves the heavy and dense particles to one side, the light and rare to another (52e5–53a2). And, then, Timaeus continues, the four kinds (τὰ τέτταρα γένη), being shaken by the moving Receptacle, were separated according to the Democratean principle “like attracts like” and occupied separate regions in space, “even before the creation of the ordered cosmos out of them” (53a2–7).

Timaeus has so far created the expectation that, by having taken up their distinct regions in space, the elements have been utterly separated from one another. This is the closest he ever gets to attributing independent existence to them by implying that they arose from the blind forces of Necessity. And yet, he immediately qualifies his account by calling attention to the deficient character of this separation (53a7–b5):
καὶ τὸ μὲν δὴ πρὸ τοῦτο πάντα ταῦτ’ εἶχεν ἀλόγως καὶ ἀμέτρως· ὅτε δ’ ἐπεχειρεῖτο κοσμεῖσθαι τὸ πᾶν, πῦρ πρῶτον καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γῆν καὶ ἀέρα, ἴχνη μὲν ἔχοντα αὐτῶν ἄττα, παντάπασὶ γε μὴν διακείμενα ὡσπερ εἰκὸς ἔχειν ἄπαν ὅταν ἀπὴ τίνος θεῶς, οὗτω δὴ τὸτε πεφυκότα ταῦτα πρῶτον διεσχήματισε εἰδεσί τε καὶ ἄριθμοῖς.

Before that, all these kinds were without proportion or measure. Fire, water, earth, and air possessed indeed some vestiges of their own nature, but were altogether in such a condition as we should expect for anything when deity is absent from it. Such being their nature at the time when the ordering of the universe was taken in hand, the god then began by giving them a distinct configuration by means of shapes and numbers.

All these, we are told, were without proportion and measure in the precosmos (ἀλόγως καὶ ἀμέτρως), whereas the protoelements, possessing only certain traces of themselves (ἵχνη μὲν ἔχοντα αὐτῶν ἄττα) and being in a haphazard state characteristic of anything from which god is absent, were formed by means of “shapes and numbers” (εἰδεσί τε καὶ ἄριθμοῖς), when order was brought into chaos.

This characterization of the elements has led certain scholars to infer that the elements exist in their own right and the only aspect in which they were found lacking before the creation of the

26 Taking πῦρ πρῶτον καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γῆν καὶ ἀέρα as apposition to τὸ πᾶν, and πρῶτον to apply to πῦρ as well as the rest of the elements.
27 It is not clear who is responsible for stabilizing the natures of the elements. It has been noticed that in the second part of Timaeus’ exposition the demiurge recedes to the background and the Forms start functioning as efficient causes. As Johansen (2004) 82–3 and Broadie (2012) 194 n. 49 argue, the demiurge seems to be reserved only for the creation of the cosmos.
cosmos was that they did not have definitive shapes. I believe this interpretation is not entirely off the mark but not entirely accurate either. To the extent that it implies the objective weight of the particles, it should be resisted, the most compelling reason against it being the likely account Timaeus proceeds to give of the geometrical nature of the elements (53d5–6). According to this geometrized conception of space, the elements are bodies and as such have depth, which is necessarily bounded by surface that is ultimately analyzable into triangles (53c4–8). The two types of triangles deemed most fit to serve as the basis out of which all elementary particles will be shaped are the half-equilateral and the half-square (54b2–5). The half-equilaterals constitute the faces of three regular solids that can transform into one another—the tetrahedron (fire), the octahedron (air), and the icosahedron (water)—, whereas the half-squares make up the face of the fourth regular solid, namely the cube (earth), which alone is excluded from elemental transformation (54b5–c5). Plato has Timaeus refrain from giving the entire account of why things are so (54b1: διότι δέ, λόγος πλείων), but it becomes clear that what he has in mind is the construction of the four regular solids, each of which will later on be assigned to an element. What is important to keep in mind is that the particles of the elements come into being only once space has been so configured as to be able to receive in it the projections of the four regular polyhedra. These geometrical constructions do not come about of their own accord and are composed of two-dimensional figures which cannot as such be perceptible and, a fortiori, cannot be ascribed the regular properties that ordered cosmic matter would possess.

Rather than conceiving of the elements as independently existing in the precosmos it might be preferable to interpret the statement that before the imposition of order they had certain traces of themselves in light of what is said about them at the third beginning of Timaeus’ exposition,

Mohr (2005) 121–45, for example, argues that the elements cause the motion of the Receptacle because of their weight.
which is meant to describe the world by viewing it as a joint creation of Intelligence and Necessity. In a summary of what preceded, Timaeus once again states the disorderly state of the precosmos and the divine intervention that endowed, to the extent that it was possible, the elements-to-be with internal and relative symmetry (69b2–5). Before that, he continues, none of them partook in proportion and analogy, unless by chance (τότε γὰρ οὐτε τούτον, ὅσον μὴ τύχη, τι μετέχειν), and hence none was worthy of being designated with the current appellations of the elements (69b5–8).

The picture we draw may thus be the following:29 the raw material of the Receptacle seems to have consisted of erratically moving substance-like qualities that served as ultimates.30 On their own, these ultimates would not be entitled to the status of matter, for which the intervention of the creator is needed. It is not inconceivable that in their indeterminate and random motions these ultimates would sometimes, albeit entirely haphazardly, give rise to the compounds and configurations that resemble or exactly match the configurations of the elements of the present world, but it was not until the god intervened to select the two best types of triangles that the elements took their determinate shapes. Consequently, we may infer that the first divine intervention aimed at stabilizing the ultimate and unanalyzable components of the Receptacle, which we may call protoelements, so as to use them latter as constituents of the elementary particles.

---

29 This view is advanced by Gill (1987) 52.
30 For the view of the traces as qualities, see Cornford (1937) 198–9. It also seems to be the view of Robinson (1970) 94 (cited in Mohr (2005) 125).
3.3.2 Receptacle, Motion, and Difference

Of all the evidence in the *Timaeus* that there existed motion in the preordered world, the most compelling is found at 52e–53a, where he hear that the nurse of Becoming is filled with unlike and imbalanced powers (μήθ᾽ ὤμοιών δυνάμεων μήτε ἰσορρόπων ἐμπίπτασθαι), that she is not equipoised in any part of herself (κατ᾽ οὐδὲν αὐτῆς ἰσορροπείν), and that, being shaken and moved by the protoelements (κινομένην), she oscillates disorderly to all directions (ἀνωάλως πάνῃ ταλαντομένην σείσθαι μὲν ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνων αὐτήν). In the same passage, she is likened to a winnowing-basket that causes a commotion (σεισμόν) which shakes the four kinds (σειόμενα) and moves them to settle, although not entirely, into different regions according to the principle “like is attracted to like.” The precosmic motion of the Receptacle has caused considerable perplexity among commentators because it stands in stark contrast to the notion of the soul as the ultimate cause of corporeal motion.\(^{31}\) This latter notion is most clearly expressed in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*: in the former dialogue the soul is “source and origin of motion for all other things that are in motion” (245c9: τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσα κινεῖται τοῦτο πηγή καὶ ἀρχὴ κινήσεως), whereas in the latter work it is considered as proven that the soul is “the cause of every change and motion for everything” (896b1: μεταβολῆς τε καὶ κινήσεως ἀπάσης αἰτία ἀπασίν).\(^{32}\) Even though the *Timaeus* does not seem to contain any straightforward references to this tenet, its presence in the dialogue can be inferred from the description of the cosmos as “that which is moved by itself” (37b5: ἐν τῷ κινομένῳ ὑπ᾽ αὑτοῦ).\(^{33}\)

---

\(^{31}\) A similar idea is found in the myth of the *Politicus* (272e–273e), where the steersman of the cosmos lets go of the cosmic helm and the world, left on its own and characterized by “commotion” (σεισμὸν πολὺν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ποιών), is identified as the source of evil and injustice (παρὰ δὲ τῆς ἐμπροσθεν ἔξως, ὅσα χαλεπὰ καὶ ἄδικα ἐν ὑφρανότι γίγνεται, ταῦτα ἔξ ἐκείνης αὐτῶς τε ἔχει καὶ τοῖς ζῷοις ἐνσωματώζεται).

\(^{32}\) For this doctrine as standard tenet that can be traced even in Plato’s earlier works, see Cherniss (1954a) 26 n. 24.

\(^{33}\) Cherniss (1954a) 26 n. 24 *contra* Cornford (1937) 95 n. 2.
One way out of the difficulty is to tone down the importance of the passages that involve motion in the precosmos and seek to subordinate these motions to the overarching influence of soul. It is important to point out that the admission that precosmic motion is ultimately due to the presence of soul implies that the passages under discussion are not to be taken literally but only as parts of an extended metaphor: we are to think of the precosmic state not as having truly existed, but as a thought experiment that invites reflection on what the worldly conditions would have been, if the intelligent cause were absent. Given, though, that the precosmic motion is explicitly identified as disorderly and anomalous, its causation by a soul would entail either (a) the disorderly—and as such irrational—state of the soul in question or (b) the existence of an irrational soul, to serve as the cause of disorderly motion, as opposed to the rational soul, to which all orderly motion evidently goes back. Yet, these views are not devoid of problems: for one, attributing irrational functions to the cosmic soul of the Timaeus contradicts its description at 36e4–5, where it is said of it that “it initiated its divine beginning of ceaseless and intelligent life for the entire time” (θείαν ἀρχῇν ἑξετο ἀπαύστου καὶ ἕμφρονος βίου πρὸς τὸν σύμπαντα χρόνον). As for the second alternative, no indication exists in the Timaeus to warrant the inference that motion in the

---

34 Cherniss (1954a) 25–6: “Erratic or random motion must therefore, as motion, have its primary source in soul just as much as orderly motion has …”

35 There is a long debate about whether the Timaeus should be interpreted literally or as a myth. Aristotle seems to have favored the former view, whereas Xenocrates, the third scholarch of the Academy, and his student Crantor stood for the thesis that the Timaeus presents a myth. Plutarch, in his On the Psychogony in the Timaeus, inveighs against them and prefers to take the whole matter literally. In recent literature, some supporters of the mythical interpretation include Taylor (1928), Cornford (1937), Cherniss (1944), Tarán (2001). Literal interpretation: Vlastos (1939) and (1964), Hackforth (1959), Easterling (1967). For a summary, see Zeyl (2000) xx–xxv.

36 For (a), see Cornford (1937) 176–77; Morrow (1950) 162–3. For (b), see Laws 896d10–e6 with Willamowitz-Moellendorf (1919) 320–1; Dodds (1947) 21. The latter is the view of Plutarch, for a criticism of which see Hackforth (1959). The issue is sometimes tied in the bibliography to the existence of evil in the world, which in the latter view is due to the presence of an evil world soul. For an explanation of how evil comes about in the world, even though through the operation of perfectly good souls, see Cherniss (1954a) 28.

37 In the words of Mohr (2005) 121: “The Timaeus has been combed and no traces of irrationality in the World-Soul have been found.”
precosmos is due to workings of an evil soul. Additionally, to import such a notion from the Laws would presuppose that the Laws passage is itself free of interpretive difficulties, which is not the case.

A different interpretive approach takes the description of the precosmic state literally and attempts to reconcile precosmic motion with the aforementioned dogma that soul is the cause of all motion. Vlastos, for example, draws a subtle distinction between different types of motion that correspond to different types of time: starting from Taylor’s remark that it cannot be consistently maintained both that time and the world began together and that there was a state of affairs before the creation of the world, Vlastos proffers an argument to show that the time the demiurge created is not to be identified with time as it existed in the precosmos. Indeed, as Cornford maintained, Timaeus conceives of created time as being inextricably linked to periodicity: that is, time comes to be as “an image, proceeding according to number, of eternity that dwells in unity” (37d6–7: μένοντος αἰῶνος ἐν ἑνί κατ’ ἀριθμὸν ιούσαν αἰώνιον εἰκόνα), a statement that becomes intelligible only when one has come up with something to measure a continuous magnitude like time. Timaeus finds his “temporal yardsticks” in three uniform periodic motions: day and night, determined by the diurnal rotation of the celestial sphere (identified with the circle of the Same), is the first unit (31c1–2), months and years, corresponding to the motions of the moon and the sun, are the other two (39c3–5). This, according to Vlastos, is

38 Vlastos (1939) 390; Herter (1957) 331.
39 See Hackforth (1936) 6 for a relevant discussion of the Laws passage. Cherniss (1954a) 26 n. 29 suggests that the passage is not meant to establish the existence of two distinct souls but of two aspects or kinds of soul.
40 Vlastos originally considered the contradiction between the two theses resolvable (1939) but then recanted (1964). See Easterling (1967) for an attempt to reconcile them. Contra Tarán (2001) 331–2 n. 131.
41 Taylor (1928) 69; Vlastos (1964) 409–14.
42 Cornford (1937) 103.
43 Vlastos (1964) 411.
the sort of measurable time that the demiurge created, and it is not to be confused with the state of affairs that obtained before this creative act. For it may reasonably be thought that, despite the absence of universal periodic motions, temporal passage can exist without being measurable if conceived of as the irreversible succession of events: if we say that A happened before B, we simply assert that A is in B’s past, dispensing with the need to specify the distinct temporal point at which A took place. We thus reach a different temporal notion that predates universal periodic time and is associated with the conditions that obtained in the precosmic chaos. As Vlastos is ready to point out, there is nothing in the *Timaeus* to prove or disprove that Plato actually had Timaeus draw such a distinction. In his view, Plato was capable of drawing it, since he mentions the latter type of time in *Parmenides* (151e–157b), but refrained from doing so because it would be tantamount to tacitly admitting that there existed some sort of order in the precosmos, clashing therefore with his conviction that the precosmos was utterly disordered and characterless before the intervention of νοῦς.

What seems sufficiently clear, however, is that there is a sense in which disorderly motion could have predated the creation of the soul, something which removes the need to trace all motion back to the soul and either posit an irrational soul-element or a distinct evil soul that would serve as the cause of disorderly motion. It rather seems that things are the other way around: after shaping the world’s spherical body, the creator administered to it the motion that was akin to its shape and mostly associated with intelligence and knowledge, namely uniform revolution in the same place around itself (34a1–4). This he accomplished by subtracting six out of the seven motions that existed in the precosmos and by bringing the world’s body to a standstill with respect to them.

---

44 Cf. Skemp (1942) 111; Hackforth (1959) 22.
45 Vlastos (1964) 411–14.
If this description is a veiled reference to the creation of the soul, then we may infer that precosmic motion is a component of the soul and that the latter comes to be as the source of uniform and regular motion. To say this is not to introduce a material element in the soul, for, as already shown, matter did not yet exist in the precosmos but resulted from the imposition of geometrical order on characterless space; it rather amounts to admitting that soul emerges in tandem with the universe and its denizens as a feature of the ordered cosmos.

To summarize my analysis so far, I have argued that if we take the creation of the cosmos literally there seem to follow two unavoidable consequences: (a) pre- or protomatter existed in its own right but, lacking the regularity of shape and determinacy of behavior that was later imposed on it by the creator, was insufficient to lead on its own to the creation of matter. Accordingly, we may understand its description as “traces” of the elements as referring to the haphazard formation of the shapes later assigned to each Empedoclean element: in their disordered and irregular motions these ultimate protoelements may at times form the correct type of right-angled triangles and assemble so as to form a regular solid. Yet, without the quantitative restrictions set by the creator, these protoelements seem to waver between existence and non-existence: at times they seem to belong to a peculiar ontological class of quality-substances, what Mourelatos has called “character-powers,” at times they seem to be simply erratic motions. Which brings us to the second point, (b) that the precosmos should be conceived as being in disorderly motion that has not been caused by soul. On the contrary, the presence of all seven types of motion in the precosmos is explicitly

46 The six motions in question are the motions that will later on be associated with the human body, i.e. up and down, forward and backward, to the right and to the left. For the motion of reason as regular and uniform rotation, see Lg. 897d–898b.
47 Herter (1957) 342–3.
49 See his updated version of the Naïve Metaphysics of Things (2008).
commented upon at 34a and suggests that, rather than seeking a psychic cause of precosmic motion, the regularity of the motions of the cosmic sphere may ultimately go back to one type of motion that preexisted in the realm of Necessity. If this approach is correct, we may venture the additional assumption that soul’s motion is also due to the preexistent motions of the precosmos, the difference being that, whereas motion in the precosmos was erratic and irregular, the distinguishing feature of the soul’s motion is its circularity and periodicity.

Finally, it remains to be seen how the Receptacle functions as source of all change. There seems to be sufficient evidence to advance the thesis that the contents of the Receptacle have a source of motion that is independent of soul and anything related to demiurgic activity. True, Timaeus remarks that the principle of attracting like to like has effected a certain sort of regularity among the protoelements in the sense that each type (γένος) tends to occupy a distinct place so that the hot resides with the hot, the moist with the moist, etc. (53a2–7). If carried out to the extreme, this tendency would result in the complete separation of the protoelements and, consequently, cessation of motion in the precosmos. But Timaeus is careful to point out that many troubles will stand in the way of the entire account of elemental configuration and transformation, unless agreement is reached concerning the conditions from which motion and rest arise (57d7–e1). Furthermore, he is explicit in attributing rest to complete homogeneity and motion to the heterogeneous state of irregularity and unevenness (57e6–58a1: οὕτω δὴ στάσιν μὲν ἐν ὁμαλότητι, κίνησιν δὲ εἰς ἀνωμαλότητα ἀεὶ τιθόμεν· αἰτία δὲ ἀνισότητις αὖ τῆς ἀνωμάλου φύσεως). The key terms here are ἀνωμαλότης, which is spelled out as ἀνώμαλος φύσις, and ἀνισότης, which is viewed as the cause of the irregular nature: what sort of nature is essentially characterized by irregularity and is caused by inequality? If we revert for a moment to the winnowing-basket analogy we see there that inequality and irregularity refer to the disorderly motions that shake the
Receptacle (52e1–5): this time envisaged as the nurse of Becoming, the Receptacle is filled with unlike and imbalanced powers and is never in equipoise (διὰ δὲ τὸ μὴ θ' ὁμοίων δυνάμεων μήτε ἰσορρόπων ἐμπίμπλασθαι κατ' οὕδεν αὐτῆς ἰσορροπεῖν), but it moves erratically and irregularly (ἀνωμάλως) in all and any directions. The inference, then, seems warranted that the separation of the protoelements was never carried out completely because the precosmic state of the Receptacle was such as to be characterized by an amount of irregularity that allowed the continuation of the differentiating process or, conversely, was potent enough to disrupt the leveling effects of complete homogenization of protomatter.

I have argued so far that the main agent of Necessity, namely the Receptacle, is assigned in the Timaeus two antithetical functions: on the one hand, it serves as the permanent, self-identical qualitative substratum that is free of the impermanence characteristic of the Empedoclean elements; as such, it is the proper referent of deictic expressions when one wishes to refer to what remains unaltered during elemental transformation. Contrasted to this function is its conception as the cause whose inherent irregularity allows for the process of differentiation in both the precosmos and the ordered world. Admittedly, these opposed functions may be the reason why Plato has Timaeus describe the Receptacle as “difficult and obscure” (49a3) and “hardest to comprehend” (51b1), and it may be the case that the notion of the Receptacle is so utterly confusing that the aforementioned descriptions indicate Timaeus’ honest perplexity about the subject at hand.50 Be that as it may, the Receptacle seems to be at the same time the Parmenidean response that salvages the phenomena from the Heraclitean challenge of total flux as well as the Heraclitean differentiating principle that undermines the Eleatic postulate of univocal and unchanging Being.

50 For the Receptacle as a failed experiment and its replacement by the principles of the Limit and the Unlimited in the Philebus, see Sayre (2003).
I have already argued that there is an indirect reference to the creation of the soul in Timaeus’ account of the attribution of circular motion to the cosmic body: the demiurge is envisaged as subtracting six out of seven motions from the disorderly precosmos so as to assign to the cosmic sphere its proper motion. In this section, I turn to the creation of the soul by the demiurge, and I attempt to show that a careful analysis of the constituents of the soul reveals a connection between them and the precosmic Receptacle. More specifically, it is my contention that the constituents of the soul, especially the natures of Sameness and Difference, correspond to the two aforementioned functions of the Receptacle.

Immediately following his account of the creation of the world’s body, Timaeus embarks on a detailed description of how the creator fashioned the cosmic soul. Uneasy about misunderstandings the sequence of the narrative could help spark off owing to the unanticipated narration of the creation of the body before that of the soul, he is careful to stress that soul was first both in birth and in virtue (34c4: καὶ γενέσει καὶ ἀρετῇ προτέραν), while, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, he attempts to justify the order of the narrative by appealing to a considerable amount of “the casual and random” as a constitutive part of ourselves (34c2–4). He then goes on to describe the creation of the world soul (35a1–b4):

τῆς ἀμερίστου καὶ ἀεί κατὰ ταύτα ἐχούσης οὐσίας καὶ τῆς αὖ περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένης μεριστῆς τρίτον ἐξ ἀμφοίν ἐν μέσῳ συνεκεράσατο οὐσίας εἴδος, τῆς τε ταύτων φύσεως αὖ πέρι καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἐτέρου, καὶ κατὰ ταύτα συνέστησεν ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ τε ἀμεροῦς αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὰ σώματα μεριστοῦ· καὶ τρία λαβὼν αὐτὰ ὄντα συνεκεράσατο εἰς μίαν πάντα ἰδέαν, τὴν θατέρου φύσιν δύσμεικτον οὖσαν εἰς
Between the indivisible Existence that is ever in the same state and the divisible Existence that becomes in bodies, he compounded a third form of Existence composed of both. Again, in the case of Sameness and in that of Difference, he also on the same principle made a compound intermediate between that kind of them which is indivisible and the kind that is divisible in bodies. Then, taking the three, he blended them all into a unity, forcing the nature of Difference, hard as it was to mingle, into union with Sameness, and mixing them together with Existence. And having made a unity of the three, again he divided this whole into as many parts as was fitting, each part being a blend of Sameness, Difference, and Existence.

The demiurge prepares the ingredients which he will blend to create the world soul: first, he makes the intermediate mixtures of indivisible and divisible essence, indivisible and divisible Sameness, and indivisible and divisible Difference;\(^5\) then he combines them into one form and proceeds to divide the resulted blend according to the intervals of a musical scale. Using up the entire mixture, the creator splits it into two strips which he joins at their centers so as to form the letter X; he then bends each of the strips round into a circle, and each meets itself and the other at a point

---

\(^5\) Taylor’s interpretation of the passage is flawed by his omission of αὐτὰ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ ἕκ τε ταύτω καὶ θατέρου καὶ τῆς οὐσίας μεμειγμένην. The demiurge prepares the ingredients which he will blend to create the world soul: first, he makes the intermediate mixtures of indivisible and divisible essence, indivisible and divisible Sameness, and indivisible and divisible Difference;\(^5\) then he combines them into one form and proceeds to divide the resulted blend according to the intervals of a musical scale. Using up the entire mixture, the creator splits it into two strips which he joins at their centers so as to form the letter X; he then bends each of the strips round into a circle, and each meets itself and the other at a point

---

\(^5\) Taylor’s interpretation of the passage is flawed by his omission of αὐτὰ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ ἕκ τε ταύτω καὶ θατέρου καὶ τῆς οὐσίας μεμειγμένην. The demiurge prepares the ingredients which he will blend to create the world soul: first, he makes the intermediate mixtures of indivisible and divisible essence, indivisible and divisible Sameness, and indivisible and divisible Difference;\(^5\) then he combines them into one form and proceeds to divide the resulted blend according to the intervals of a musical scale. Using up the entire mixture, the creator splits it into two strips which he joins at their centers so as to form the letter X; he then bends each of the strips round into a circle, and each meets itself and the other at a point
diametrically opposed to their initial point of contact (36b5–c5). Having thus created the two great circles of the cosmic sphere, the equator and the ecliptic, he names the outer one motion of Sameness and the inner one motion of Difference (36c2–5).

Our interpretation of this much contested passage is of paramount importance for understanding the nature as well as the limitations of the soul. It presents anomalies on a number of fronts, such as that, with its blatant assertion that the soul was created, it seems to run counter to the well-established Platonic thesis that soul is ungenerated (Phaedrus 245c–246a). But the most pressing difficulty pertains to the obscure nature of the ingredients that make up the soul: even if ὑσία is somehow intelligible on its own, the terms divisible, indivisible, Sameness, and Difference cause considerable perplexity, and, unless we somehow clarify what exactly these constituents are, the resulting account of the soul will remain hopelessly uninformative. My first aim, therefore, will be to disentangle the nature of these terms by offering a close reading of the passage. I will reveal that these are not merely vacuous locutions but may be assigned the role of the most fundamental categories of Plato’s later metaphysics.

First of all, we must distinguish between the raw materials the demiurge uses to create his intermediate mixtures: he is working with ὑσία (essence or Being) and φύσις (nature). The first

52 The thesis that soul is ungenerated plays an important part in the proof for the immortality of the soul in the Phaedrus: for it may be that soul is always in motion but only as long as it exists. To prove the soul’s immortality a stronger version is needed to the effect that what moves itself forever. This is achieved through identifying what moves itself with the original source of motion, which cannot be annihilated because it cannot be regenerated. See Blyth (1997) 196. The incompatibility between the Phaedrus and the Timaeus on this point may perhaps be resolved by arguing that the soul was not generated in time. Cf. Hackforth (1936) 5.

53 For a summary of ancient interpretations, see Taylor (1928) 109–24. The three most prominent ones may be summarized as follows: (a) The soul is made out of mathematical principles (Aristotle); (b) the soul is made out of numbers and some kinetic principles so as to constitute a self-moving number (Xenocrates); (c) the soul’s main function is to make judgments about both intelligible and sensible objects and is thus somehow a blend thereof (Crantor); (d) the soul is made out of the mathematicals and is a form of the extended (Posidonius).
intermediate blend he prepares consists of two types of essences, namely one that is “indivisible and always in the same state” and the other that “divisible and comes to be in bodies.” Now, if we revert back to the rudimentary dualistic ontology of 27d5–28a4, it becomes clear that the first type of essence maps onto the Being that always is (τὸ ὤν ἀεί), that has no birth (γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον), that is comprehensible through understanding by means of reason and is always in the same state (τὸ μὲν δὴ νοῆσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεὶ κατὰ ταύτα ἄν). Thus, we may safely assume that the first type of essence used for the intermediate mix comes from the intelligible realm.

Contrasted with this type of essence is the divisible one that comes to be in bodies. Here the focus has been shifted to the world of Becoming, namely the second ontological class of 27d5–28a4: this essence is generated, i.e. it partakes of the world of Becoming by being distributed in bodies. Yet, some caution is advised: that it comes to be in bodies should not be construed as implying that bodies predate the creation of the soul nor that they are in any sense coeval with the constituting essence, but rather that this type of essence is identified and determined extrinsically. This does not mean that divisible essence is dependent on indivisible essence, but that the presence of the former in the world of Becoming can only be deduced by noticing it in generated bodies. Recall the sticks and stones of the Phaedo: if this stick is equal to that stick, we can then infer that they both are equal, i.e. that equality is distributed among them. But in order to draw this inference, it is necessary that the sticks must have been generated: namely they have to have acquired spatial and temporal parts which one can then measure by using the indivisible yardstick of the intelligible

54 Cornford (1937) 25–6 argues here for a predicative as opposed to an existential sense of becoming as that which is constantly in a process of change. Contra Hackforth (1959).

55 Brisson (1998) 272 notices that περί with accusative is the equivalent of a genitive or an adjective, something that would yield the oddity “divisible essence of the body” or “divisible corporeal essence.” He suggests that the focus should rather be on γνώμενης, which links the essence to the world of Becoming that is visible, i.e. has a surface, and is to this extent mathematically divisible.
realm, i.e. the Form of equality.\textsuperscript{56} To be sure, there is a certain awkwardness to the description of the second type of essence as deriving from the bodily world at a time when the body did not exist. Let us for the time being ignore this seemingly slight mishap as an infelicitous locution on Plato’s behalf and consider it as merely a counterfactual *hysteron proteron*: if bodies existed before the creation of the soul, their constitutive essence would be a constituent of the soul.\textsuperscript{57}

Next, the demiurge creates a mixture intermediate between indivisible and divisible identity or Sameness (ταὐτόν). This step should be readily intelligible: we are meant to understand that the soul is created in such a way as to be able to utter and comprehend statements about both the intelligible and the perceptible world. Thus, it must have the ability to understand what a Form is: an entity that is always the same with respect to itself (self-identical) and hence indivisible, for its divisibility would make it liable to change and jeopardize its identity.\textsuperscript{58} On the other hand, the soul’s capacity of comprehending divisible identity is required if it is ever to make correct judgments about—and thus properly categorize—the perceptible world: a visible chair must fall under the conceptual umbrella of the Chair itself, but so must any other perceptible chair. It is in virtue of sharing the same (identical) property of being likenesses of the relevant Form that they are alike and yet distinct.\textsuperscript{59} Being part of the perceptible realm, instances of Forms are subject to

\textsuperscript{56} Alternatively, one may be reminded of *Philebus* 23c-30e, where mind combines πέρας and ἀπειρον into a mixture called γένεσις εἰς ουσίαν or γεγενηµένη οὕσια. The analysis found in the *Philebus* resembles Aristotle’s description of Plato’s theory, according to which the Forms are caused by the application of the One (πέρας) to the Great-and-Small (which Aristotle elsewhere identifies with the Receptacle of Becoming), whereas phenomenal particulars are generated by the application of Forms to the Great-and-Small. See *Metaph*. 988a7–17 with Gill (2004) 155.

\textsuperscript{57} The “traces” of the Empedoclean elements in the precosmic chaos mentioned at 53b2 show that even in that disorderly state prematter was in a sense already divided.

\textsuperscript{58} This is the familiar problem of how the indivisibility of Forms squares with Plato’s methods of collection and division as presented in the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*. The *Timaeus* also seems to tacitly endorse the divisibility of the Forms: the Eternal Living Being is conceived of as having within it parts of intelligible animals (30d1–a1). The thesis comes under attack by Parmenides, in the first part of the homonymous dialogue, and seems to be abandoned by Socrates because of the whole-part problems that it entails.

\textsuperscript{59} At *Parmenides* 132c–132a (the second version of the so-called Third Man Argument), Socrates tries to avoid Parmenides’ objections by conceiving of participation as imaging: particulars stand in the same
the flux that characterizes phenomena: they are identical to themselves—this chair, for example, is the same as itself and thus reidentifiable; it is a κατὰ ταῦτα ὁν but not an ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ὁν—and yet they are divisible insofar as they occupy different places and have temporal parts. In short, the inclusion of divisible and indivisible Sameness within the soul is what enables it to grasp both the existence of self-identical entities as well as the occurrence in the perceptible realm of ontologically dependent images that are distinct, hence divisible, but share an identical quality in virtue of which they are identifiable as members of the same class.

Before moving on to the extended discussion required for illuminating the third component of the soul, it may be fruitful to recall a relevant aspect of the Receptacle. As already pointed out, the Receptacle appears to be the necessary condition for the emergence of language in that it provides the permanence needed for the reference to phenomena to be meaningful. This function is succinctly captured by Timaeus’ description of the Receptacle as what must always be called ταὐτόν (50b6–7). Similarly, in the account of the soul’s composition ταὐτόν furnishes the soul with the capacity for apprehending eternally self-identical entities and appears to provide it at the same time with the ability to recognize perceptible items that share an identical quality insofar as they instantiate the same concept. To the extent that, as Aristotle notices at De Anima 404b and as discussed in the last section of this chapter, the soul is composed on the basis of the principle “like

---

relation with Forms as copies do to their originals. Parmenides responds by arguing that sameness is a reciprocal relation so that, if the perceptible instances are like the Forms in which they participate, the Forms must also be like their instances. Cf. Gerson (2004) 307. However, the conception of Forms as patterns and of instances as likenesses seems to preclude reciprocity and thus offer a way out of the regress: a portrait of Socrates is like Socrates, but Socrates is not like his image. See Gill (2004) 167–70; Patterson (1985) 51.

60 As we learn from Aristotle Metaph. 987a, Plato was influenced by the Heracliteanism of Cratylus and thought the sensible things to be in flux, for which reason he separated the universals and argued that knowledge could be only of these separate entities. There should still, though, be some room left for sensible objects to retain and display certain characteristics that render them (re-)identifiable. The extreme thesis that perceptible objects are in total flux is ascribed to Protagoras and refuted in Theaetetus.
is attracted to like,” it is conceivable that Sameness as a component of the soul is identical to the aforementioned function of the Receptacle.

3.4.1 Being, Sameness, and Difference in the Sophist

The third ingredient of the soul proves to be the most mysterious. Telling in this respect is Timaeus’ remark that, having created the intermediate mix between indivisible and divisible Difference and proceeding to combine the three newly-formed ingredients into a homogeneous blend, the demiurge uses force to incorporate the nature of Difference with that of Sameness because it was hard to mingle (τὴν θατέρου φύσιν δύσεικτον οὖσαν εἰς ταύτὸν συναρμόττον βία). The unruliness of Difference shows that there might be something inherently confusing about this notion, especially when one recalls that it is matter and the works of Necessity that display force and violence in the *Timaeus*. In view of this peculiar analogy between Difference and Necessity, two questions emerge that need to be addressed: What is it precisely in the nature of Difference that makes it recalcitrant? And why does Plato need such a troublesome notion? I suggest that, in order to comprehend the metaphysical and epistemological reasons that lead Plato to introduce it, we must turn to Plato’s *Sophist* and *Parmenides*.

As described in the *Sophist*, there are three fundamental elements that comprise reality, namely Being, Sameness, and Difference (254d–259b). Therefore, anything that is must be, i.e. must exist, and as such must have some sort of identity which it maintains by being different from

---

61 See, for example, 42a, where souls are by necessity sowed into bodies, and sensation arises from violent affections (ἐκ βιαίων παθημάτων).
62 The “great kinds” of the *Sophist* also include Rest and Motion, which at least Xenocrates sought to identify with Sameness and Difference, correspondingly. See Taylor (1928) 112–13 with n. 3. Cornford (1937) 61 remarks that anyone unfamiliar with this part of the *Sophist* would be unable to make sense of this part of the *Timaeus*. Philip (1969) 98–103 refers to the former dialogue to illuminate concepts occurring in the latter, but adds the *caveat* that a notion that functions in a certain way in one dialogue does not necessarily have the same function in the other.
all that it is not. One should keep in mind, though, that in the *Sophist*, where the relation of Forms with one another is discussed, Difference serves to introduce true negative statements: in agreement with the historical Parmenides’ injunction, τὸ μὴ ὄν as non-existence is ruled out and denotes instead that which *is not* the same, i.e. that which is different. Yet, contrary to its description in the *Timaeus* as “hard to mingle,” Difference seems to pervade the entire realm of Forms, and there is no allusion to its unruliness (259a1–b7): it is true even of Sameness itself that it is different from the rest of the Forms since, for example, it is not the same as Being (255c3, 256d–257a). Difference, then, is employed in the *Sophist* as an all-pervading notion that serves a differentiating function, even when associated with the Form of Sameness, since the statement “Sameness participates in Difference” is spelled out as meaning “Sameness is not the same as any other Form.”

Unlike Sameness, however, there is something paradoxical in the self-referential function of Difference. Sameness seems to be self-directed as well as other-directed: the statement “Sameness is the same as itself” is no more problematic than the statement “Being is the same as itself.” Given the equally all-pervading nature of Sameness, one would expect that Difference could be said to be the same as itself. And yet, the Stranger proceeds to draw a distinction between things that are said to be what they are on account of themselves and things that are said to be what they are only through reference to others (255c12–13: τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά, τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄλλα). Contrary to Being, he continues, Difference is what it is solely through reference to others and thus should be counted among the latter group (255d1–7). By this classification, the Stranger appears to restrict the scope of Difference and to strip it of its self-referential status. But if Difference is never self-directed, it does not enjoy the self-identical status that is characteristic of the rest of the

---

64 257b3–4: Ὅποταν τὸ μὴ ὄν λέγομεν, ὡς ἐσοκεν, οὐκ ἔναντίον τι λέγομεν τῷ ὄντος ἄλλ' ἑπερον μόνον.
Forms. I suggest that herein lies the peculiarity of Difference, and that there is a perhaps irresolvable tension between, on the one hand, the need to posit Difference itself as a real existent and, on the other, its explanatory function. It is important to explicate what the distinction between “by itself” and “in relation to others” is meant to accomplish in order to elucidate the function of Difference.

The complication arises from the way Plato treats Difference and Sameness. Whereas we consider these to be relations or incomplete predicates that involve more than one subject, Plato takes them to be properties or complete predicates. In other words, a statement such as “Socrates is different than Simmias” is understood by Plato as attributing to Socrates the property different than. The problem arises because the equally true statement “Socrates is the same as himself” attributes to Socrates the opposite property same as. The challenge becomes even more formidable when translated into the intelligible realm: the statements “Being is the same as itself” and “Being is different than itself” attribute contrary properties to the Form of Being. Although perceptible objects could co-instantiate contrary properties, this would be inconceivable in the case of Forms which have to be informed solely by their own nature: if the Form of Beauty turns out to be both beautiful and not-beautiful, then it loses its explanatory power since it is subject to the same contradictory conditions objects of the perceptible realm find themselves in. On the other hand, it is necessary that Forms somehow interrelate, for otherwise the entire philosophical endeavor rests on shaky grounds (Sph. 251e7–252b7).

Cornford attempted to resolve the problem by arguing that Plato distinguished between different senses of the verb “to be” but denied that it functions predicatively when describing relations between Forms.65 In his view, Plato only distinguishes between the meanings “to exist”

65 Cornford (1935) 256–7, 266.
and “to be identical with,” so that the statement “Being is” would either mean that “Being exists” or “Being is identical to itself.” Yet, his analysis has been challenged by scholars, who argued that Plato did not distinguish two senses of the verb “to be” but two uses: the focus of the debate shifted on addressing the function of the phrases αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλα, and, despite their differences, Frede and Owen found common ground in the view that Plato uses “being” only as an incomplete predicate. There are, however, sentences in the *Sophist* that contest this view: “Change is, because it partakes of Being” (*Sph.* 256a), for example, shows that “is” functions as a complete predicate. Relatley, Plato does not distinguish between two Forms that would correspond to the two senses of the verb, namely one for existence and one for the incomplete “is,” because the distinct uses “X is F” and “X is” do not imply a sharp semantic distinction and as such do not call for a distinction between two senses of “is.”

Significantly, the dichotomy between αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλα in the *Sophist* may not be exhaustive. According to a distinction—allegedly going back to Aristotle—preserved by Diogenes Laertius, Plato used to divide things based on whether they are said to be “by themselves” or “in relation to.” We may thus subdivide relational properties into those that are πρὸς ἑαυτόν and those that are πρὸς ἄλλα. What emerges from this analysis is that Being can

---

66 Cornford (1935) 296.
67 See Frede (1967) and (1992) 400–1, who argues that Being πρὸς ἄλλα is the being expressed in non-essential predications, whereas Being αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὐτό is designated by the “is” of identity in uninformative self-predications such as “beauty is beautiful” and in tree-predications that classify species under genera such as “man is animal.” Owen (1971) 252–8 believes that the “is” of identity designates Being αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὐτό, whereas the copula designates Being πρὸς ἄλλα. See also Ackrill (1957); Brown (1986). For a summary of the various theses, see Gill (2012) 173–6.
68 This is the view of Brown (1986) 54–5. She argues that in “X is” the “is” is complete but can also accommodate a supplement: “Jane is teaching” (complete predicate) can be perfectly understood by itself as intransitive, but it also allows for further additions, such as “Jane is teaching French” (incomplete predicate). The problem of this analysis is that it takes whatever is describable as existing. For criticism, see Malcolm (2006).
69 Dancy (1999); Gill (2012) 164.
function in two ways: (i) independently (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό), by attributing to the subject an essential property or by situating it within a genus-species tree,\(^{71}\) (ii) by relating a subject to its own self through Sameness (πρὸς ἑαυτόν) or to something else through Difference (πρὸς ἄλλα).

Now consider the following statement: “Difference is.” If, in line with the above analysis, the verb “is” is taken to designate a relation, then we have two ways to construe it: (i) relation through Sameness, in which the copula introduces an identity statement (“Difference is the same as itself”\(^{72}\)), or (ii) relation through Difference, in which the copula relates the subject to something else (“Difference is different than \(X\)”). Alternatively, if the “is” is taken to function independently, then it links Difference to its own nature, and the entire sentence can be spelled out as “Difference is different in virtue of itself” (\(Sph.\ 259e–b, 255e, 258c\)). Apparently, we are to construe this statement as involving self-predication of the sort “Difference is different.”\(^{73}\) But what sort of self-predication is here at issue? Is this a type of Pauline predication, according to which the property “different” is attributed to all the instances that participate in Difference, as Vlastos would have it?\(^{74}\) Or are we dealing with ordinary predication, according to which the property “different”

\(^{71}\) For example, in the statement “change \textit{is by itself}” one need not look outside the subject since Being links change to its own nature: change is what it is in virtue, or because, of itself. Similarly, in the statement “man is animal,” Being links the subject to a genus.

\(^{72}\) Cf. \(Sph.\ 256b1–2\): ἄλλη ὀπόταν μὲν ταύτων, διὰ τὴν μέθεξιν ταύτον πρὸς ἑαυτὴν οὕτω λέγομεν, (“but whenever [we say change is] the same, we speak in that way because of its participation in the same relative to itself” trans. Dancy).

\(^{73}\) There is no consensus on how exactly self-predication is to be understood. According to the most common interpretations, “the Form of \(F\)-ness is \(F\)”: (1) should not be taken to mean that the Form of \(F\)-ness is itself an \(F\) thing, because (i) “is” expresses identity, and the second \(F\) must be understood as a proper name (Allen), or (ii) “is” expresses identity, but the second \(F\) must be understood as a description (Nehamas), or (iii) the copula is predicative, and it attributes \(F\) not to the Form itself but to the things that participate in the Form (Vlastos’ Pauline predications); (2) expresses a relation that is like that between a model and its copy; (3) implies that the Form of \(F\)-ness is superlatively or absolutely \(F\), in contrast to the objects that participate in it, which are deficiently \(F\) (Vlastos, Owen). See Malcolm (1991) 65–123; Keyt (2008).

\(^{74}\) Vlastos (1973).
would be attributed to Difference itself? There is sufficient reason to think that self-predication functions in the *Sophist* in the latter way.\textsuperscript{75}

The case of Motion as discussed in the *Sophist* shows most conspicuously that self-predication seems to attribute the property \( F \) to \( F \)-ness and thus to suggest that \( F \)-ness is itself an \( F \) thing (or \( F \)-ing). In his discussion of the great kinds and their combinations, the Stranger identifies Motion as a separate Form that would never admit to blend with the Form of Rest, and *vice versa* (252d2–11). For such a combination would entail the impossible conclusions that “Motion rests” or that “Rest moves” and thus run counter to what fundamentally characterizes Motion and Rest, respectively.\textsuperscript{76} Perhaps, as Vlastos argues, by “Motion is moving” Plato has in mind not the Form of Motion but every object that participates in Motion. Likewise, “Motion is resting” would apply not to the Form but its instantiations. But if this were the case, then the Stranger would have no reason to find the instantiation of contrary properties unacceptable since there are numerous occurrences in Plato’s dialogues where perceptible objects are said to be both \( F \) and not-\( F \) (*Smp*. 211a; *R*. 479a–c; *Prm*. 128e–130a). Quite the contrary: as the *Parmenides* shows, it would be monstrous to find out that the Forms are subject to the same contrary conditions that characterize the sensible particulars (129b1–3). There is, thus, no reason to suppose that in the part of *Sophist* that deals with Motion and Rest Plato has in mind their instances rather than the Forms themselves.\textsuperscript{77}

It may be argued that in a statement such as “\( F \)-ness is \( F \)” the second \( F \) applies to the Form itself but it does not do so predicatively. Following Frede, one may distinguish between two uses of “is” and argue that “Motion is resting” is true of the Form of Motion insofar as it is a Form since

\textsuperscript{75} Following Heinaman (1981).
\textsuperscript{76} At 248c–e the Stranger argues that Forms are changed by being known.
\textsuperscript{77} Heineman (1981) 56–60.
Form Motion must be changeless (call that “is_2”). Additionally, “is resting” does not inform us about the essence of the Form of Motion _qua_ Motion: such information we could derive from a different use of “is” such as in the self-predicative statement “Motion is moving,” which would be true of Motion because it states definitionally the essence of Motion (call that “is_1”). Yet, the following argument that seeks to establish that Difference is not identical with Rest tells against the idea that in the statement “Motion is resting” the verb introduces a tautology (_Sph_. 255a4–b6):

1. Suppose that Rest = Difference.
2. Motion participates in Difference.
3. By (2), Motion participates in Rest.
4. Thus, Motion rests.
5. But, for (4) to be true, Motion must change into the nature opposite to its own.

The nature of Motion, according to Frede, is described in the statement:

6. Motion is_1 moving.

Thus, changing into the opposite nature would mean that:

7. Motion is_1 resting.

---

which is the same as (4). But (4) is directly derived from (2), which is clearly not to be construed as “Motion is different” but as “Motion is (predicatively) different.” What Plato wishes to prove, then, is that “Motion rests” cannot be true, not because it is a false identity statement, but because Motion is moving qua Motion and thus cannot be resting.79

In sum, the Sophist teaches us that one ought to steer a middle course between the univocal Being of the Eleatics and the total flux of the Heracliteans: when one seriously entertains the latter possibility, devastating difficulties come to light concerning the possibility of knowledge. And surely for Plato knowledge must somehow be possible. The Eleatics, on the other hand, put forward a conception of Being that did not allow for any intrinsic differences, and which was as such completely separate. But complete separation, according to the Eleatic stranger of the Sophist (259e4–6), would amount to the equally undesired outcome of complete annihilation of discourse, which involves predicating one thing of another and seems to be a necessary condition for knowledge. Plato appears to have sought a way to compromise between the two positions by allowing Being to admit of relations so that Forms can commune with one another through participation in predication and thus be exempt from the utter characterlessness of Parmenidean Being. This he accomplishes by introducing the concept of Difference and thus locating the source of each Form’s difference from, and relations to, the rest beyond its essence.80 True, Plato hesitates to allow Difference to exist by itself because in such a case the statement “Difference is different in virtue of itself” would be construed as ascribing to Difference the property of being different than itself. And yet, as principle of differentiation, that in virtue of which all that is different is

---

79 For this refutation, see Heineman (1981) 61–3.
80 Eslick (1953) 17.
explained, Difference should be minimally self-identical and different from the rest of the Forms, a property it would acquire simply by being itself.81

In its seeming to be both the same as itself and different from itself, Difference invites comparison with the aforementioned antithetical functions of the Receptacle, which appeared to be both the changeless substratum that secures the minimal identity of the referent of language as well as that in virtue of which the contents of the precosmos keep being differentiated from one another. Significantly, Plato’s reluctance to attribute independent existence to Difference relegates it to a dubious ontological status, which defies accuracy of analysis and is in this regard also reminiscent of the description of the Receptacle in the Timaeus as “hardly an object of belief” that is “apprehended without the senses by a sort of bastard reasoning” (52b2: μετ’ ἀναίσθησιας ἄπτόν λογισμῷ τινι νόθω, μόνις πιστόν).

3.4.2 Difference in the Parmenides

Just as in the Sophist Difference, when taken in relation to itself, appears to split and thus become indeterminate, so it seems to serve a similar role in the generation of number in the Parmenides. In the first part of the dialogue, young Socrates attempted to explain the compresence of opposites in sensible things by appeal to the theory of Forms. Unable to meet a series of formidable

81 The peculiarity of Difference also comes to light, if looked at from the following perspective: in the Sophist (257e–258a), the Stranger notices a similarity between Difference and knowledge in that both are intensional: just as we speak of the knowledge of something, so do we say that one thing is different than another (Greek uses the genitive both for of something and than something. This structural similarity is missed in the English translation. On the parts of Difference, see Lee (1972)). However, knowledge is not dependent on its subject-matter to derive categorial content (that is, it can be classified in genus-species categories), yet its branches are distinguished from one another by the objects they study (Gill (2012) 159). On the other hand, Difference by itself is empty of content, but its branches derive categorial content from the items they negate (such as largeness, beauty, etc.). But if, as Aristotle seems to imply at Metaph. 990b, there are Forms of negations, such as the not-large and the not-beautiful (see Sph. 258d for the Form of Not-Being; cf. Plt. 262a, where the Form of barbarian as non-Greek speaker is rejected), then there is no limit to the scope of Forms, and, consequently, to the range of Difference.
objections posed by old Parmenides, the latter implies that the existence of Forms is necessary if there is to be philosophy and locates Socrates’ inability to defend his theory in his inexperience on account of his youth. He then suggests that Socrates should undertake a philosophical exercise in which he should weigh results obtained by the hypothesis that something exists against results obtained by the counter-hypothesis that the same thing does not exist. The rest of the party find it hard to understand what Parmenides has in mind and ask him to offer an illustration of the exercise. As a result, we get eight hypotheses related to whether Unity (by itself or in relation to others) exists or not and the consequences that correspondingly follow for Unity itself and for the others (i.e. what is “other than Unity”).

The first hypothesis advanced by Parmenides shows that if Unity (One: τὸ ἕν) is not a whole of parts, then it can admit no characteristic whatsoever. The failure to admit any character comes as a direct result of the assumption that this sort of hypothesized Unity exists solely in relation to itself. In other words, we are dealing here with a type of Unity that enters into no relationship with Difference and thus cannot be differentiated at all. In the second hypothesis, Parmenides starts over by assuming that Unity in relation to others exists, an assumption which allows Unity to admit initially one characteristic and consequently all characteristics. By following Parmenides’ reasoning in this hypothesis, we get a glimpse at the indispensability of Difference in separating Unity from Being and in the consequent generation of numbers. The main point is that if Unity exists, its being must be distinct from its oneness since “to be” and “to be one” are different.

83 Gerson (2004) 312: “A one thing that is nothing but one cannot exist.”
predicates and as such specify two relevant characteristic of Unity.\footnote{Allen (1997) 247.} To put it differently, if something exists and is one, then its existence must be differentiated from its unity \((Prm. 142b5-c2, 146a9-d1)\). But how is this differentiation to be accounted for if not by means of a differentiating factor that is already distinct both from Being and Unity?

One might argue that there is no need to posit Difference as a property shared by things that are different. According to this line of argument, the fact that \(A\) is different from \(B\) is ultimately reduced to facts about other properties that the relevant items possess, without it being necessary to posit a further property of “being distinct.”\footnote{For the following analysis, see Wheeler (1999) 1000–2.} There are, however, reasons to think that Plato introduced Difference to address the challenge of the historical Parmenides, according to whom only Being and Unity existed, and thus to enable a distinction between Being and Unity.\footnote{The view that in the \textit{Parmenides} Plato sides with the Pythagoreans against the Eleatics’ attack that plurality is impossible is advanced by Sayre (2005) 49–61.} We have already seen that the absolute Being of the first hypothesis of the \textit{Parmenides} drove out every property other than Being on account of its incapability of admitting any other character. Thus, in the absence of Difference, one ends up with the existence of the monolithic sort of univocal Being that was put forward by the historical Parmenides. Furthermore, there is reason to think that the latter argued for the existence of his absolute Being as follows:\footnote{An argument similar to the following is attributed to Parmenides by Aristotle at \textit{Metaph.} 1001a29–b1.} suppose that two things \(A\) and \(B\) exist, i.e. are real beings. Insofar as they are different, there must be some property that \(A\) has and \(B\) lacks. But if this property is real, then it must also exist, i.e. it must itself be a real Being. As such it would fail to accomplish its differentiating function, since to do so it would have to already be distinct from the things that it sought to distinguish.
If Plato understood the historical Parmenides to have argued in a way similar to the above for the existence of undifferentiated Unity, then he must have realized that in order to distinguish Unity from Being he needed an entity that was already distinct from, and metaphysically as well as ontologically prior to or at least coeval with, both of them. Yet, as the second hypothesis of the Parmenides shows, the decision to introduce Difference comes at the cost of producing an indeterminate plurality: since Unity and Being are distinct through the application of Difference (143b3–6), the original existing Unity would have them as two constituents (142d5). At the same time, however, each of these two constituents will also exist and be one, which means that it will also have Unity and Being as its constituents, each of which will also exist and be one, etc. ad infinitum, with the result that every constituent necessarily becomes two and thus yields an unlimited multitude (142e7–143a1). It is important to notice that each of the constituents of the ἄπειρον πλῆθος that has just been generated by the application of Difference on Unity and Being lacks essential characteristics in that it lacks identity: it is not a set with an indefinite amount of members, for its members cannot be specified since they do not participate in Unity.89

One may also compare Parmenides 158c6–7, where the ἄπειρον πλῆθος is referred to as “the nature other than the Form” (τὴν ἔτεραν φύσιν τοῦ εἴδους): in his third hypothesis, Parmenides argues that Unity exists and examines the consequences of this hypothesis for what is other than one with reference to Unity. One of the conclusions that he reaches in this intricate argument is that without Unity no collection of things could be conceived of as unified but both the whole class as well as its members would be indistinguishable from sheer unlimitedness: suppose it were possible to conceive of a collection of members that were entirely dissociated from Unity and that we wanted to subtract from this collection the smallest member (158c2–4); if not a participant in

Unity, this smallest member would have to be other than one, i.e. many, and, consequently, we would end up subtracting not one member but a multitude (158c4–5). Unless Unity intervenes by being imposed as limit, each and every member of what is different than one will be many and thus indistinguishable from the collection into which it belongs (158c5–7: Οὐκοῦν οὕτως ἀεὶ σκοποῦντες αὐτὴν καθ' ἀυτὴν τὴν ἐτέραν φύσιν τοῦ εἰδοὺς ὡς οὐν ἀὐτῆς ἀεὶ ὑρὸμεν ἄπειρον ἔσται πλήθες). In other words, by being a member of a class of things that are more than one and by being itself more than one, each member of the class ends up being a member of itself.90

Some sort of participation in Unity is necessary in order to transform this unlimited and unidentifiable multitude into the series of infinite positive integers. This is achieved through the operation of multiplication. Parmenides notices that the various combinations of the members of this multitude presuppose the existence of number (144a4): if A and B together form a pair, it is necessary that each of them is one as member of the pair (143d1–5). In addition, by combining a pair with another member we arrive at three, and, finally, if two and three exist, so too must twice and thrice (143d5–9). Parmenides, thus, generates the numbers through combinations of multiplication sets of odd and even: starting from the one of Unity, he arrives at the notions of two and three and consequently he generates all numbers by multiplying even times even, odd times odd, and even times odd (143e7–144a1).91 The generation of numbers leads Parmenides to suggest the falsity of the outcome of the second hypothesis because it leads to the undesired conclusion that Unity is many. Based on the ground that, since number exists, all number participates in Being, and so does, by consequence, every part of number (144a5–9), Parmenides takes this relationship to be symmetrical and proceeds to show that, since each part of Being is also one (144c5), then

91 Sayre (2005) 57 notices the deficiency of this account and suggests that addition be supplied as a generative relation to enable the derivation of prime numbers. Thus, five can be derived by the sum of two and three, seven by the sum of five and two, etc. For a slightly different account, see Miller (1995) 612–15.
Unity is distributed to infinitely many characters (144e3–5: Τὸ ἐν ἄρα αὐτὸ κεκερματισμένον ὑπὸ τῆς οὐσίας πολλά τε καὶ ἁπειρά τὸ πληθὸς ἑστιν).

Despite the unattractiveness of this conclusion, the entire second hypothesis of the Parmenides proves to be valuable in that it provides an insight into the workings of Difference and its involvement into the generation of a set of infinite entities. Indeed, one might object that, even though Difference is necessary to separate Unity from Being, its role in the generation of numbers is on a par with that of Unity and Being in that each of them is simply a one which can then be associated in different ways to the others taken as individuals or as a pair. Yet, Difference is a catalyst in enabling the emergence of a type of Being that can enter into relations and incidentally has as consequence the generation of a limitless multitude. This latter outcome points toward an implicit connection between the function of Difference as spelled out in the analysis of the Sophist and the Receptacle of the Timaeus. I have already pointed out that Difference conceived of as existing by itself reveals a resistance to analysis owing to the indeterminacy inherent in its recalcitrant, yet indispensable nature: if Difference is to exist independently, then it surely must be identical to itself; but if Difference is to execute its explanatory function, then it should be what is different par excellence, just as the Form of Beauty is paradigmatically beautiful. Being thus altogether different, Difference is linked to indeterminacy. In this regard, it can be compared to the Receptacle, which in the Timaeus is implicitly likened to a mirror: even though never straightforwardly asserted, the conception of the Receptacle as mirror underlies the entire model/copy imagery since, in order for a model to be reflected and for the image to be a reflection, there must be a reflecting medium.92 To bring out the connection between the mirror-like features of the Receptacle and the function of Difference in the Parmenides as the cause of the generation

of the infinite series of numbers, we may push the analogy further and imagine the endless chain
of ever-smaller reflections brought about by placing a mirror in front of a mirror.

3.5 Aristotle’s Testimony

I hope that my analysis so far has revealed a similarity of function between the Receptacle of the
Timaeus and Sameness and Difference as discussed in the Sophist and the Parmenides. In order to
reach a more direct identification of the Receptacle with Difference, we should turn to Aristotle’s
testimony with the proviso that the argument from this point onward becomes more speculative.93

In Metaphysics A6, Aristotle attributes to Plato certain theses that have not ceased to spark
debate among scholars because they are extremely hard to reconcile with what we find in Plato’s
own works.94 Offering a concise summary of the development of Plato’s thought, Aristotle remarks
that, besides the influence of Heracliteanism, Plato for the most part followed the Pythagoreans
(987a29–31) and argued that, since Forms are the causes of other things, the elements of which
Forms consist must be the elements that constitute everything (987b18–20). Aristotle, then, goes
on to specify in terms borrowed from his own philosophical system that these fundamental
elements are “the Great and the Small” and “the One” (corresponding to Aristotle’s material and

---

93 For this proposed identification, see also Derrida (1998) 236; Sallis (1999) 113.
94 This is the well-known problem of Plato’s so-called “unwritten doctrines.” Simply put, Aristotle’s
description of Plato’s later metaphysics has lead certain scholars to the conclusion that Plato’s dialogues
were exoteric works, intended for circulation among a wider and uninitiated audience, whereas true Platonic
doctrine was reserved for being orally transmitted to Plato’s close associates. See Krämer (1959); Gaiser
(1963); Findlay (1974). On the opposite side of the spectrum stand scholars who think that Aristotle’s
criticism of Plato does not rely on unwritten Platonic theses but on the extant Platonic dialogues. According
to this line of interpretation, Aristotle, as is his wont, misrepresents Plato’s theses. See Cherniss (1945). I
take it that Sayre ((2005) originally published in 1983), has sufficiently shown that the above theses
represent a false dichotomy and there is middle ground between them: in his lucidly written book, he argues
that Plato’s later metaphysics as described by Aristotle can be found with minor differences in terminology
in an inchoate state in the Parmenides, especially the second part, and in a full-blown state in the more
formal causes, respectively), and that numbers are generated by participation of the former element in the latter (987b20–2). That the element termed “One” by Aristotle should correspond to Unity as presented in the Parmenides should cause no problem. Independently of whether Aristotle’s description represents accurately the Platonic method of generation of number, he is almost explicit in identifying the principle of “the Great and the Small” with Difference.\footnote{It is important to mention that what Aristotle refers to as “Great and Small” or as the “Dyad” does not figure in the same sense in any of Plato’s dialogues. Yet, it is plausible that Aristotle used a variety of designations to refer to the same entity of Plato’s ontology, a supposition that gains in plausibility both because of its interpretive fertility and the occurrence of similar terminology in the ancient commentators (the Indefinite Dyad occurs frequently in Simplicius and is found also in Alexander of Aphrodisias and Theophrastus. Other expressions used by Simplicius include “the Unlimited” (ἄπειρον), “the Unlimited Nature” (ἄπειρον φύσιν), “the Indefinitely Unlimited” (τὸ τῆς ἄπειρας ἄσχημον), and “the Indefinite and Unlimited” (τὸ ἄπειρον καὶ ἄσχημον)). For differences in terminology and references to ancient commentators, see Sayre (2003) 96–8. The most promising variant that supports the thesis that the “Great and Small” is simply one among many designations of Plato’s principle is found in Simplicius, who relates the views of Porphyry that Plato “makes the more and less to be of unlimited nature” (453.32–3) and that along the terms “greater and smaller” Plato also uses “the Great and Small” (453.35–6). To the extent that Porphyry’s testimony is to be relied upon, we may understand Socrates’ remark at Philebus (24e3–25a4), namely that the sign of the unlimited nature is to become more or less, as an occurrence of the principle that Aristotle calls “the Great and Small” or “the Dyad.” In short, we may proceed on the plausible assumption that the Great and Small, the greater and smaller, the more and less all refer to the same entity.

The sense in which Plato’s principle becomes more or less, greater or larger, etc. also needs some clarification. Aristotle himself seems to associate the Dyad with the principle of numerical doubling at Metaphysics 1082a13–15: this view, endorsed by Cornford and Taylor, is found lacking because, among other reasons, multiplication by the number two would account only for numerical increase, whereas what is needed here is something that includes decrease and corresponds to the “small(-er)” function of the principle. See Cornford (1939) 144; Taylor (1927) 22; contra Sayre (2005) 98. According to an alternative interpretation, the Indefinite Dyad is “great and small” in that it diverges indefinitely from the unit 1/1 through the pair of the series 1/2, 1/3, 1/4, …, 1/n (decreasing), and 2/1, 3/1, 4/1, …, n/1 (increasing). Cornford also conceives of the Indefinite Dyad as a variety of different continua, which are quantitative when it comes to magnitudes and qualitative when it comes to sensible qualities. See Cornford (1939) 155, 178, 209. This interpretation provides an insight into the role of the Indefinite Dyad in the generation of both numbers and sensible things but fails to specify the manner in which limit is imposed on any such continuum. To see what role limit plays in the production of number, we may turn to Taylor’s mathematical interpretation: based on a passage in the Epinomis, in which the sciences that purportedly lead to wisdom are described, Taylor concludes that the Great and the Small is related to the mathematical problem of incommensurable numbers such as 1 and √2 and to an arithmetical solution that was known to Pythagoreans. Through the so-called technique of “sides and diagonals,” one could approximate the value of √2 by generating two series of fractions that approach √2 as limit from both sides, one of the series becoming progressively larger, the other smaller. This is, according to Taylor, what the Indefinite Dyad is: two series of fractions that approach an irrational number by way of limit. See Taylor (1926) 432; Heath.
One point of divergence between Plato and the Pythagoreans, Aristotle says, is that, even though both thought that numbers are the causes of the essence of other things, Plato thought that mathematical entities occupied a place intermediate between intelligible and sensible things and modified the Pythagorean theory by innovatively conceiving of the limitless not as one, but two, which consisted of the Great and Small (987b25–7: τὸ δὲ ἄντι τοῦ ἀϕείρου ὡς ἐνὸς δυάδα ποιῆσαι, τὸ δ᾽ ἀϕείρον ἐκ μεγάλου καὶ μικροῦ, τοῦτ’ ἵδιον). Effectively, Aristotle here identifies the principle “Great and Small” with the Dyad, elsewhere referred to as Indefinite Dyad. He then continues (987b29–988a1):

tὸ μὲν οὖν τὸ ἕν καὶ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς παρὰ τὰ πράγματα ποιῆσαι, καὶ μὴ ὀσπερ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι, καὶ ἢ τῶν εἰδῶν εἰσαγωγὴ διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἐγένετο σκέψιν (οἱ γὰρ πρῶτοι διαλεκτικῆς οὐ μετέχον), τὸ δὲ δυάδα ποιῆσαι τὴν ἐτέραν φύσιν διὰ τὸ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς ἔξω τῶν πρώτων εὐφυῶς ἐξ αὐτῆς γεννᾶσθαι ὀσπερ ἐκ τινος ἐκμαγείου.

His divergence from the Pythagoreans in making the One and the numbers separate from things, and his introduction of the Forms, were due to his inquiries in the region of definitory formulae (for the earlier thinkers had no tincture of dialectic), and his making the other entity besides the One a dyad was due to the belief that the numbers, except those which were prime, could be neatly produced out of the

(1921) 91–3. Sayre (2005) 103–12 suggests that the function of the Indefinite Dyad becomes more intelligible when taken within the context of Eudoxus’ theory of proportions.

96 For example, Metaph. 1082a13 (ἀόριστος δύας).
dyad as out of a plastic material.\(^97\)

The importance of this passage lies in the proposed association of Difference (τὴν ἐτέραν φύσιν) with the Dyad and in that it couches them both in terms familiar from Timaeus’ description of the Receptacle. By using the distinctly peculiar phrase τὴν ἐτέραν φύσιν Aristotle essentially identifies the element of Dyad, previously referred to as the limitless that arises from the “Great and Small,” with Difference. Given that Difference is explicitly mentioned as a distinct entity at the generation of the limitless multitude of the second hypothesis of the Parmenides (143b3–6) and that it also figures prominently in the generation of a similar limitless and characterless multitude in the seventh hypothesis, we may assume that Aristotle is justified in essentially linking Difference with the indefiniteness that characterizes the second element of “Great and Small.” Relatedly, the phrase τὴν ἐτέραν φύσιν echoes Parmenides 158c5–7, where the unlimited multitude is referred to as “the nature other than the Form” (Οὐκοῦν οὖτως ἂεί σκοποῦντες αὐτήν καθ’ αὐτήν τὴν ἐτέραν φύσιν τὸν εἴδους ὅσον ἂν αὐτῆς ἂεί ὀρθῶμεν ἀπειρον ἔσται πλήθει).

What is more important for my analysis is the remark with which Aristotle concludes this short passage. Plato, according to Aristotle, was led to making Difference a Dyad because of his belief that the numbers could be produced out of it as if “out of a plastic material.” Significantly, one of the metaphors employed in the Timaeus to describe the Receptacle likens it to a matrix or plastic material (50c2–4):

έκμαγεῖον γὰρ φύσει παντὶ κεῖται, κινούμενόν τε καὶ διασχηματιζόμενον ὑπὸ τὸν εἰσιόντων, φαίνεται δὲ δὲ! ἐκείνα ἄλλοτε ἄλλοιον …

\(^97\) All Aristotle translations are from Barnes (1984). It is not clear whether τῶν πρώτων should be understood as “primes” or “primaries.” See Miller (1995) 614 n. 18.
By nature it is there as a matrix for everything, changed and diversified by the things that enter it, and on their account it appears to have different qualities at different times …

Timaeus here discusses the characterlessness of the Receptacle, which is such as to never depart from its own power and to receive everything without ever assuming the character that is like the things that enter it (50b8–c2). There are two conspicuous similarities of the Receptacle with Difference: the latter is said to be a matrix by nature, whereas the former is described in both the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* as a nature (*Ti*. 35a5; *Prm*. 158c6); the evasiveness of both becomes manifest in that they constantly change according to the relations they develop with the items they come into contact with.

By applying to Difference a metaphor that in the *Timaeus* is reserved for the Receptacle, Aristotle seems to essentially characterize the former in terms of the latter. Given that Aristotle is explicit in treating the Receptacle as his material cause, it stands to reason that he also associated Difference with matter. Indeed, there seems to be a shared feature between Aristotelian matter and Difference: just as the latter, as we learn from *Sophist* 255d1–7, is such as to always be other-directed, so is the former something relative. The relativity of Aristotelian matter is also reflected in its grammar since Aristotle never talks of “matter as such” but uses the term by implying or

---

98 For the Receptacle as matter, see Miller (2003) 20–1. On the identification of Difference with *Timaeus* matter and *Sophist*’s non-Being, see Brochard et Dauriac (1902) with Vlastos (1939) 389 n. 2. See also Festugiére (1949) 29 (cited in Cherniss (1954a) 25 n. 21): “Sous un premier aspect, elle [sc. matter] apparaît comme une transposition physique de la notion dialectique de l’Autre: elle est un non-être relatif. Sous un second aspect, étant mue spontanément de mouvements désordonnés …, la χώρα matière apparaît comme un principe autonome de désordre …”

explicitly stating a genitive to indicate that matter is always matter of something. Similarly, the Stranger of the *Sophist* (257c–258a), remarking on the intensionality of both Difference and knowledge, notices that, just as we speak of the knowledge of something, so do we say that one thing is different than another, grammatical constructions for both of which Greek uses the genitive. In short, we may conclude that Aristotle notices a material aspect in Difference, which expresses itself in its inherent relativity.

3.6 Conclusion

The presence of Sameness and Difference in the immortal part of the soul has led me to examine the function of these notions within the context of the *Timaeus* as well as the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*. Setting out from the premise that the state of affairs that obtained before the creation of the cosmos was such as to be subject mostly to the influence of Necessity, I entertained the possibility that soul may owe its emergence as uniform circular motion, or at least the potentiality thereof, to the subtraction of the six rectilinear motions that shake the Receptacle. At the same time, I sought to bring out the nature of these motions as substance-like protomatter as well as the function of an underlying principle of the precosmos, i.e. the Receptacle, which manifested itself in a twofold way: (a) as the cause of permanence and homogeneity, and (b) as the principle of differentiation. Insofar as it is conceived of in the former manner, the Receptacle might be said to correspond to Aristotelian matter, i.e. that-out-of-which (ἐξ οὗ), that affixes meaning to the linguistic enterprise by never departing from its own nature, a feature that entitles it to always be designated as “the same” (50b6–7: ταύτον αὐτὴν ἀεὶ προσρητέον), underlining thus its association with the metaphysical principle of Sameness. On the other hand, the Receptacle appears to function as space, i.e. that-in-which (ἐν ὧ), and to account for the existence of change both in the conditions
that obtained in the precosmos as well as after the organization of protomatter by the cosmic mind into a coherent whole. In this regard, it seems to be intimately connected with the metaphysical principle of Difference.

My examination of the role of Sameness and Difference in the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides* has also brought to light certain similarities between them—especially Difference—and the Receptacle. I believe I have sufficiently shown that of all the three “great kinds” identified in the former dialogue, Difference is the most peculiar in that it is bound by its own nature to partition and thus generate an indeterminate amount of parts. In a similar vein, my analysis of the *Parmenides* has revealed that Difference is indispensable in the separation of Being from Unity, which leads initially to the generation of a characterless multitude and then, through participation of each member of this multitude in Unity, to the emergence of number through imposition of structure that yields the infinite order of positive integers. In both works, therefore, Difference emerges as an elusive notion because of its association with the indeterminacy that characterizes infinity and as such calls to mind the hardly comprehensible status of the Receptacle.

If my interpretation is correct, then the Receptacle finds its way in the soul through the presence of Sameness and Difference. By being thus invested with contrasted powers, the soul no less than the Receptacle emerges as a notion arresting hard to comprehend. At the same time, the antithetical functions of the Receptacle may endow the soul with an amphibious status that allows it to act as an intermediary between Being and Becoming. This seems to be Aristotle’s interpretation of the creation of the soul in the *Timaeus*: at *De Anima* 404b16–18 he remarks that Plato, like Empedocles, fashioned the soul out of the elements (τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ Πλάτων ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ τὴν ψυχήν ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων ποιεῖ). As mentioned above, these elements are not the traditional Empedoclean elements but the denizens of the precosmic state of affairs, i.e. Timaeus’
protoelements, which may collectively be identified with the Receptacle. Additionally, Aristotle implies that the soul is crafted on the basis of the principle “like is attracted to like,” a principle that exerted its influence primarily in the precosmos, when the protoelements tended to separate according to kind and occupy distinct places in space. Taken together, Aristotle’s remarks suggest that this mechanism of attraction enables the soul to interact with the world because things are also formed out of the principles (404b18: τὰ δὲ πράγματα ἐκ τῶν ἀρχῶν εἶναι). Significantly, what Aristotle calls “elements” (στοιχεῖα) is not hard to identify with what he calls “principles” (ἀρχαί), both of which seem to refer to the Receptacle: recall that the latter is introduced in the Timaeus as a more promising candidate than the traditional Empedoclean roots for the status of an element. Despite his reluctance to specify the principle(s) of everything (48c2–4) and the iteration that he will stick to the probability of his account (48d2,6), Timaeus eventually classifies the Receptacle as a sort of ἀρχή at 48e4, when he identifies it as a third kind of cause on a par with the causes he had introduced in the beginning of this account, namely Being and Becoming. According to a probable interpretation of Aristotle’s view, then, the soul in the Timaeus is formed out of the principles, at least one of which may be identified with the Receptacle, and it is on account of their manner of composition that the soul and the perceptual world share a certain affinity that enables them to interact.
FINAL CONCLUSIONS

There is hardly a need to mention that the Timaean notion of the soul as self stands in stark contrast to the model of the incomposite soul that is put forward in the *Phaedo* and the *Laws*. Putting aside the latter work on the grounds that it seems to promote a bipartite conception of the soul, I conclude that there is a developmental story to be told about Plato’s conception of the self: beginning with a rather rudimentary account of the self as soul in opposition to the body, Plato gradually became less of a somatophobe and accorded the body a more significant role both in his metaphysics as a whole and, more specifically, in the constitution of personal identity. This conclusion seems rather unsurprising, especially if we grant that the theory of Forms underwent modifications in Plato’s later career: alteration of one of “the twin pillars of Platonism” would inevitably entail differences in the account of the soul, and vice versa.

Contrary to what would be *prima facie* expected, the account of the self that emerges from my analysis of the *Phaedo* accords an influential role to the body: the locus of the self is still envisaged as the essentially rational soul, but, given the constraints of embodiment, complete identification with it is presented as an ideal. True, the impossibility of fully actualizing that ideal is predicated on the negative influence of the body; however, the scientific method adopted by Socrates is itself reminiscent of the indeterminacy characteristic of body in that it rests on hypothetical, hence shaky grounds. At the same time, it endows the inquirer with the alloplastic capacity for psychic alteration: founded on unverifiable axiomatic assumptions, the intellectual self is subject to change inasmuch as the hypotheses one endorses to comprehend the world may be replaced with others, which are explanatorily more satisfying.
My analysis of the *Republic* reveals a conception of the self that is far removed from the received view that identifies the self solely with reason. Having excluded the possibility of a literal separation of reason from the rest of the psychic parts, I attempted to show that each soul-part plays an equally important role in the constitution of the self, which is conceived as a dynamic rather than static notion: the distinction between natural and artificial virtue suggests that every person is born minimally a *person*, i.e. minimally virtuous, and that two successive educational stages are required in order to unify the character through acquaintance with the realm of Forms. Admittedly, the *Republic* seems to be more optimistic than the *Phaedo* about the possibility of complete knowledge. If, however, the Form of the Good is eventually the totality of interrelations among Forms, then knowledge might prove to be an ongoing, perhaps never fully actualized process, and, consequently, the extent to which one has become *oneself* might ultimately correspond to the amount of truth recovered in this attempt to acquire complete knowledge.

A few concluding remarks are in order about the account of the soul that arises from my examination of the *Timaeus*. First, it may seem strange that soul consists partly of the Receptacle, especially when the latter is thought of as space or matter. And yet, a conception of the soul that involves either space or matter is neither original nor foreign to Plato’s thought: Heraclitus, for instance, seems to have partly conceived of the soul in spatial terms, as in fragment DK22B45 he refers to the impossibility of discovering the boundaries of the soul and implies its description in terms of extension, when he says that it has a deep *logos*. As for the presence of the Receptacle *qua* matter in the soul, its seeming incongruity with received Platonic doctrine may be palliated by focusing on certain aspects of matter that can be more readily transcribed to the soul: the Receptacle *qua* matrix, for example, a metaphor intended to illuminate the indeterminacy and relativity of matter, may serve to read into the soul the relevant aspects of plasticity and
malleability. Overall, then, the model of soul advanced in the *Timaeus* positively reinforces what in the *Phaedo* was merely suggested, namely that each individual soul has the capacity for alteration owing to the presence of a quasi-material principle in it.

---

1 Socrates employs in the *Philebus* a metaphor that sees memory and perception as the works of a scribe who inscribes words in the soul (39a1–7). The possibility that the mind possesses some sort of materiality is also entertained at *Theaetetus* 191c, where Socrates advances a model of mind as lump of wax that receives impressions but finds it lacking because of its inability to account for intellectual mistakes. Cf. *Phdr.* 276a5–6. Similar parallels can be found in the earlier literary tradition (e.g., A. *Ch.* 450: “ἐν φρεσίν γράφου”; *Eu.* 275: “δελτογράφω δὲ πάντ’ ἐπωπᾶ φρενί.” Cf. Arist. *de An.* 429b29–430a1; D.L. 7.45).
APPENDIX A: BODY AND THE PROBLEM OF SOUL INDIVIDUATION

One fundamental problem associated with the soul’s complete separation from the body at the time of death concerns the individuation of the self: as hinted at in the *Phaedo* and explicitly stated in the *Laws*, the self should be identified with the soul. Plato’s answer to the question “What am I?” is thus tied to his dualist metaphysics: I am a combination of body and soul. And yet, the Platonic thesis that emerges from dialogues such as the *Phaedo* seems to be that I am only contingently a body and that my soul, which provides my essence, will survive its separation from the body. I, therefore, will survive my death. This, however, does not mean that the referent of the personal pronoun has always been present in the soul: in other words, if the personal pronoun picks up the person that I presently am, we should not infer from this that the person was prenatally present in my soul. The reason for this is that Plato conceives of the concept of the person in normative terms: we are only potentially persons, and becoming a person is a soul state we should aspire to. Now, there is evidence in the Platonic corpus for the conclusion that, even if none of us was born a person, some of us will go on posthumously to exist as persons. And this seems to be the crux of the matter because it appears to give rise to a number of irresistible contradictions: assuming I have led a virtuous life and managed to cross the threshold of personhood, what is there to distinguish me from any other person? After all, death has stripped me of any accidental bodily properties, and, insofar as I have acquired personhood to a sufficient degree, I have to this extent become indistinguishable from any other entity who has earned the tile “person.” I submit that

---

1 See, for example, *Laws* 959a4–b4. The idea that we are to be essentially identified with our souls is put forward more straightforwardly in the spurious *Alcibiades* I (130c1–3).
2 On the referent of the personal pronoun, see Olson (1997) 89–90 and (2002).
4 Perry (1975) 23 calls this principle “the indiscernibility of the identical”: if *A* and *B* are identical, every property of *A*’s is a property of *B*’s and vice versa.
this poses a problem for the notion of the self we encounter in Plato’s *Phaedo* and that no sensible account of the individuation of the person can be found without the body.  

First, a few methodological points: given that Plato insists on the immateriality of the soul and that memory plays an important role in his epistemology, it would seem that a criterion of psychological continuity of sorts should be used as the *definiens* of personhood. That is, for Plato as for others, a person’s persistence through time should perhaps be sought in the mental connectedness and continuity of that person’s successive stages. One such plausible account of personhood, which in its archetypal form perhaps goes back to Locke and is defended and expanded upon by Quinton and Grice, accords pride of place to memory as the unifying factor of the person’s mental life. According to the Memory Criterion,

\[
[MC] \text{ soul- or person-stages are stages of the same person if and only if there is a sequence of person-stages, } A \text{ being the first and } B \text{ the last, such that (i) earlier members of the sequence either contain (or could contain) a memory contained in the next, or (ii) contain (or could contain) an experience the memory of which is (or could be contained in the next soul-phase).}
\]

This criterion would have us conceive of the individual soul as a person and of its combined presence in a body as a person-stage.

---


6 See, for example, Lewis (1976).

7 See Perry (1975) 13 with chapters 3 and 4. For similar definitions, see Olson (1997) 22–7.

8 Perry (1975) 19. If at all, these conditions seem to correspond to Dennett’s sixth condition of consciousness ((1976) 178).
It should be noted from the outset, however, that there are two conceptions of the soul at play at least in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*: souls as independently and separately existing entities or souls as parts of a generic, universal soul. It might be thought that the problem of individuation could be resolved by simply asserting that, in Plato, the person is the soul (ψυχή) conceived of as an entity distinct and separable from the universal soul: there is evidence in the Platonic corpus corroborating the view that souls exist separate from one another and that, consequently, there is no further need to clarify how their individuation might be possible. For example, the disembodied souls of the eschatological myths near the end of the *Phaedo* as well as the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* are presented as distinct from one another in the beginning of their posthumous wanderings. Most prominently, the eschatologies of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* make it clear that each soul will remain separate and some sort of deity will be assigned to preside over each one of them. Call the thesis according to which individual souls never merge with a higher-order entity the “Distinct Souls” thesis (DS).

On the other hand, the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus* include evidence which suggests that each individual soul is part of a universal soul. First, the individual souls of the *Phaedo* appear to somehow originate from a sort of generic soul to which they presumably return once separated from the body. At least, this seems to be the conception of the soul at play in Socrates’ Final

---

9 The Cyclical Argument seems also to support such a conception of the soul. The fate of the extremely pious ones in *Phaedo* might be taken to be an example of merging with a cosmic soul since they “are freed from the regions of the earth as from a prison.” It is not clear, however, since we are immediately told that they “make their way up to a pure dwelling place and live on the surface of the earth” (114b6–c2). What is beyond question is their disembodied existence. The example of the *Gorgias* is of considerable interest because Rhadamanthys is presented as examining each disembodied soul without knowing whose it is (524e2, 526b4–6). For differences in the myths, see Annas (1982).

10 R. 620d8–e1; Ti. 90a3–4, c5.

11 This conception of the relationship between individual souls and Forms is what Prince (2011) 3–5 calls “Imitation Theory.”
Argument which suggests that each individual soul is immanent in the human body. In a similar vein, we get to hear in the *Timaeus* about the perfect intelligible animal, which presumably corresponds to the Form of Life referred to at *Phaedo* 106d5–7 (αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς εἴδος). And yet, when Timaeus proceeds to describe the future rewards and punishments that await each individual soul, he fails to mention their merging with the perfect Living Animal. He does, however, explicitly state that there exist as many souls as stars (41d8–e1), something that may be construed as implying that the number of separate souls is finite and that, therefore, the Form of Life consists of a finite amount of parts. Call the thesis according to which individual souls do merge with a higher-order entity the “Generic Soul” thesis (GS).

Whichever conception of soul we adopt, the problem of individuation will nonetheless arise. In the following analysis, I will focus primarily on DS for the reason that, even if only the GS were to obtain, one would still hark back to the DS in an attempt to individuate among soul-parts. Let me explain why: suppose that Pythagoras, a composite consisting of the combination of Soul₁ and Body₁, dies. This will inevitably entail the separation of Soul₁ from Body₁, but Pythagoras, or so we are meant to infer from the *Phaedo*, will go on living as Soul₁. It is hard to see how this is possible if the GS obtains because Soul₁ will presumably merge with the universal soul, thereby ceasing to exist as a separate soul. Grant, however, that it continues to exist as a part of the generic soul and suppose, furthermore, that Soul₁ goes on to animate Body₃ after Pythagoras’ death, the resulting soul and body composite being Socrates. Admittedly, as it is impossible to show that the soul animating Socrates is exactly the same part of the generic soul which animated Pythagoras and which we named “Soul₁,” this identification has to follow ex hypothesi. Now, let

---

12 Even though this interpretation has been contested, it falls perfectly in line with the overall metaphysics of the *Phaedo*, which specifies that any F is F by virtue of participation in the Form of F-ness, and I see no reason to abandon it. See Prior (1985) 12–17.
us assume that Soul$_2$, a different part of the generic soul, animated successively a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, a mute fish in the sea, and finally Empedocles.\textsuperscript{13} We may generalize as follows:

\[ \text{[GS]} \quad \text{Soul}_1, \text{Soul}_2, \text{Soul}_3 \ldots \text{Soul}_\nu \text{ are parts of the generic soul such that each of them successively animates separate bodies and any group of soul-parts cannot animate the same body.} \]

The generic soul is thus a superset consisting of individual soul-sets each of which is to be associated with a unique series of bodies.\textsuperscript{14} If we wish, therefore, to find out what in Socrates’ and Pythagoras’ essence differs from that of Empedocles, we must resolve the generic soul into the life stories of its various soul-parts. In that respect, GS may be modified in the following way to accommodate for DS as well:

\[ \text{[DS]} \quad \text{Soul}_1 \text{ was tied to Body}_1 \text{ from } t_1 \text{ to } t_2, \text{ then existed separately in the Platonic heaven from } t_2 \text{ to } t_3, \text{ when it entered Body}_3 \text{ at } t_3 \text{ and remained therein until } t_4, \text{ and so forth.} \]

\[ \text{Soul}_2 \text{ was tied to Body}_2 \text{ from } t_1 \text{ to } t_2, \text{ then existed separately in the Platonic heaven from } t_2 \text{ to } t_3, \text{ when it entered Body}_4 \text{ at } t_3 \text{ and remained therein until } t_4, \text{ and so forth.} \]

In the rest of this section, I argue that, unless we take the body into account, the above formulation would fail to distinguish not only between any two individual souls but also between any two

\textsuperscript{13} See Empedocles fr. DK31B117.
\textsuperscript{14} More formally expressed: consider a set of souls $\mathcal{S} = \{S_n\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ indexed by the set of positive integers, defined by $\mathbb{N}$. Also, define by $B$ the set of all bodies and $\mathcal{B}$ the set of all subsets of $B$. Consider a function $f : \mathcal{S} \rightarrow \mathcal{B}$, i.e., a mapping between the set of souls to the set of subsets of $B$. We have that for all $i \in \mathbb{N}, f(S_i) = B_i$, where $B_i \in \mathcal{B}$ and for all $i \neq j$ we have that $B_i \cap B_j = \emptyset$, and $\bigcup_{n=1}^{\infty} B_n = B$, where $\emptyset$ is the empty set, $\cap$ denotes the intersection and $\cup$ the union operator.
person-stages of the same soul: if the memory criterion obtains, then the composites $\text{Soul}_1 + \text{Body}_1$ and $\text{Soul}_1 + \text{Body}_3$ are person-stages of the same person by virtue of (potentially) having the same memories. If so, there is no essential difference between Pythagoras and Socrates. Even more strikingly, as I will try to show, should Empedocles acquire exactly the same memories as either Pythagoras or Socrates, then any distinction between $\text{Soul}_1$ and $\text{Soul}_2$ would collapse. It is thus imperative that we begin with an examination of how memories can persist between any two person-stages.

The Myth of Er provides the first indication that DS fails to present a coherent account of personal identity as conceived by Plato: we are informed that after the souls choose the life patterns of their next incarnation they are led to the Plain of Forgetfulness and are made to drink from the water of the River of Heedlessness (621a2–b1). We are next told that those who drank more than a certain measure ended up forgetting *everything*. We may infer on this basis that at least these souls *will not* and *could not* contain memories of their previous embodiments, hence the unifying factor among their various incarnations vanishes. It follows, then, that none of the compounds they generate would be stages of one and the same person.

What about those souls, however, that were reasonable enough not to drink exceedingly from the water of Heedlessness? Is there any way to find out which memories are retained and which are discarded? There is reason to suppose that the memories that get erased before each embodiment pertain to the particular details of the life lived: for example, Odysseus chooses an Epicurean lifestyle for his next incarnation because of the memories of his past sufferings (620c3–7). It stands to reason that, after drinking from the water of Heedlessness, Odysseus’ memories of his previous life—presumably the life we get to hear about in the *Odyssey*—will be erased since
love of honor would interfere with a life withdrawn from politics. In addition, we are told that the arrangement of the soul is not included in the life patterns “because the soul is inevitably altered by the different lives it chooses” (618b2–4). It would seem then that memories that are related to character likewise do not pass down to the next embodiment. Let us turn to the Phaedo to see whether it provides any indications as to which memories are retained posthumously.

The so-called Recollection Argument, which aims at proving the prenatal existence of our souls, provides a hint about a kind of knowledge that persists through successive reincarnations: Socrates argues that when objects seem to be equal, for example a stick to a stick or a stone to a stone, it is always the case that upon closer inspection (a) they turn out to differ, however slightly, and/or (b) the predicates “equal to” and “unequal to” can both be applied to them insofar as a stick might be equal to another stick but unequal to a stone. Furthermore, the notion of equality never appears to be unequal, for which reason Socrates infers that we cannot have acquired it through sense perception because the latter always presents us with cases that approximate but never perfectly instantiate equality (74a9–c5). But how did we get the ability to make comparisons and intuit that some two things may be equal? Socrates concludes that our souls were equipped with knowledge of equality before our birth but lost it at birth, and that learning is in fact recollection and retrieval of this knowledge through the help of the senses (75e2–7). What persists then through successive incarnations seems to be some sort of latent knowledge. What are the objects of this knowledge? Socrates provides a list of extrinsic and intrinsic properties (such as the Equal, the Greater and the Smaller, the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, etc.) and concludes by extending the

---

15 In the Phaedo Socrates countenances the possibility of psychological continuity with his posthumous self: the idea is that after his death he will join the company of fine men (63b; cf. Ap. 41a–c). From this we may infer that a person’s essential memories are retained. But this must be true only for the interval between anyone’s death and the next incarnation (let us ignore for the time being the possibility that Socrates, in particular, will not be reincarnated because of his paradigmatically virtuous life). For memory in Plato, see Chappell (2017).
range of the objects of knowledge so as to include whatever answers the question “what it is,” i.e.
Forms (75d). We may venture the inference, therefore, that the unifying factor of all the successive
person-stages of DS is indeed to be found in the faculty of memory since earlier person-stages can
or actually do contain an experience (or a memory thereof) that is contained in the next phase.

The idea that the true self is dependent upon activation of latent knowledge of the Forms
chimes well with Socrates’ views as expounded in other dialogues. Consider, for example,
Socrates’ and Callicles’ conversation in the Gorgias: Socrates finds a parallel between his own
situation and Callicles’, in that they are both in love—Socrates with Alcibiades and philosophy,
Callicles with the Athenian people (δήμος) and Demos the son of Pyrilampes—and in that both
end up agreeing with their beloved ones because neither can oppose them (481d1–e1). Yet there
is a conspicuous difference, Socrates argues, between the two cases: whereas he himself is in the
fortunate position of associating with philosophy, which always argues for the same things,
Callicles more often than not has to shift his opinions because his beloved ones—in particular the
Athenian people—have volatile and mercurial views (481e1–482b2). Socrates challenges Callicles
to refute philosophy’s argument that doing injustice without being punished is the ultimate of evils;
if not, Socrates concludes (482b5–c3; cf. 495e1):

μᾶ τὸν κύνα τὸν Αἰγυπτίων θεόν, οὗ σοι ὀμολογήσει Καλλικλῆς, ὁ Καλλίκλεις,
ἄλλα διαφωνήσει ἐν ἀπαντὶ τῷ βίῳ. καῖτοι ἔγογγε οἷμαι, ὃ ἑλπίστητε, καὶ τὴν λύραν
μοι κρεῖττον εἶναι ἀνάρμοστόν τε καὶ διαφωνεῖν, καὶ χορὸν ὃ χορηγοῖν, καὶ
πλείστους ἀνθρώπους μὴ ὀμολογεῖν μοι ἄλλα ἐναντία λέγειν μᾶλλον ἢ ἕνα ὅντα ἐμὲ
ἐμαυτῷ ἁσύμφωνον εἶναι καὶ ἐναντία λέγειν.
[T]hen by the Dog, the god of the Egyptians, Callicles will not agree with you, Callicles, but will be dissonant with you all your life long. And yet for my part, my good man, I think it’s better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune and dissonant, and have the vast majority of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself, to contradict myself, though I’m only one person.

Two interrelated Socratic theses may be extracted from this passage: (a) consistency is essential for anything to persist through time, and (b) every person possesses deep beliefs which are always right and hence irrefutable.\textsuperscript{16} Personal identity thus becomes a matter of adherence to the same set of beliefs: no single person can simultaneously believe both $P$ and not-$P$. Such self-contradictions arise only when the person in question has not yet been able to unearth the deep beliefs that constitute the prenatal knowledge of the Forms. Once this knowledge has been recollected, the self earns its persistence through the presence in the mind of a complete system of interrelated and coherent beliefs that prevent contradictions.

In light of all the above, the following reconstruction seems plausible: when Soul\textsubscript{1} was tied to a particular human body, the resulting being—call it Mr. Hankey—was presumably born minimally a person and led a life in which becoming a full-fledged person was proportionately related to the amount of latent knowledge recovered. As it turned out, Mr. Hankey ended up approximating, but never fully instantiating, a person in absolute terms. Once relieved from the shackles of the body, Soul\textsubscript{1} resided in Platonic heaven, awaiting its next incarnation and either (i) retaining the amount of knowledge it had previously recovered as a body and soul compound, or

\textsuperscript{16} See McCabe (1994) 277, 285.
(ii) regaining complete knowledge since it could now commune with the Forms without the limitations of the body. Whatever the case was, MC specifies that Mr. Hankey was a person-stage in the life story of Soul\(_1\) because his memories or part thereof would or could be included in the next person-stage, i.e. the next incarnation of Soul\(_1\). Now suppose that Soul\(_2\), while tied to another particular human body together with which it constituted R.P. Oliver, approximated the concept of personhood to exactly the same degree as Mr. Hankey. Since in such a case both Mr. Hankey and R.P. Oliver would have exactly the same memories, how would we be able to distinguish between the two? Additionally, what reason would there be to think of Mr. Hankey as a person-stage of Soul\(_1\) and not Soul\(_2\)?

The above schema is infected with a most pressing difficulty: if the memory that actually does or potentially could survive from each soul-phase to the next is knowledge of universal terms, then any two souls that have managed to recover the same amount of knowledge will be exactly similar. They will be numerically distinct, yet qualitatively the same, and it will be impossible to tell which is which (recall the principle of “the indiscernibility of the identical”).\(^{17}\) I submit that this problem vanishes if we assign to the body a distinguishing role between any two qualitatively similar souls: to revert to the previous example, Soul\(_1\) will differ from Soul\(_2\) in that Mr. Hankey’s tanned complexion suffices to distinguish him from R.P. Oliver, despite their having exactly the same memories. Any two separate souls, therefore, might be qualitatively exactly similar, but they will still differ because their life stories will include different person-stages which were different on account of their having been connected to different bodies. Conversely, any two free-floating souls of the Platonic heaven that never made it down to earth will be clones of each other, and any attempt to distinguish between them on the basis of either internal or external qualities would fail.

\(^{17}\) See above n. 4 and McCabe (1994) 266, 290.
Some objections might be raised at this point: why appeal to the body as criterion of individuation and not invoke the non-essential memories of each person-stage? To wit, Mr. Hankey’s peripheral memories will indeed have to be erased before his next incarnation, but reference to those memories can surely be made to distinguish him from any other body and soul compound that has recovered the same amount of universal knowledge. For example, instead of individuating through the bodily property “having a tanned complexion,” one may refer to the psychological property “having a memory of wearing a Christmas hat on December 17, 1997.” This objection, however, has certain problems of its own.

First of all, any memory claim of the sort “Mr. Hankey remembers event $X$” entails that $X$ happened and that Mr. Hankey experienced the event. It being an indisputable fact that sometimes people misremember things, it would be advisable, instead of taking his word for it, to check Mr. Hankey’s account against the accounts of other observers of the event: the more witnesses who observed Mr. Hankey wearing a Christmas hat on 17 December 1997, the better reason we have to believe that his memory claim is true. But to observe anyone wearing a hat—as even Descartes would concede—requires seeing a body wearing a hat. If no additional observer of the event can be found, it becomes nearly impossible to confirm or reject Mr. Hankey’s memory claim. Unless there is a piece of evidence confirming the existence of inessential memories that were later erased, appealing to them as distinguishers seems somewhat paradoxical, precisely because their distinguishing value depends on their actually existing or having existed.

It might be thought that the problems pertaining to inessential memories would trouble the proposed account of body as a means of individuating souls: after the corpse’s disintegration and lacking the testimony of any posterior mark such as a tombstone or a confirmation of its existence from an observer, how will it be possible to make sure that a body has actually existed? Luckily,
Socrates has provided an answer to that by asserting that some parts of the body are nearly immortal: in a section where he expounds on the similarity of the soul to the Forms, Socrates describes how, when a human being dies, the corpse does not perish immediately but lasts for a considerable amount of time (80c2–d3). The purpose of the argument is to show that, if the body, which is bound to perish, survives death for a while, then the soul, which is invisible and thus less likely to undergo the same process of decomposition that befalls the corpse, would be all the more so immune to outright annihilation. He adduces mummification as a parallel and concludes that certain bodily parts, such as bones and sinews, are almost or practically immortal (80d1–2, ἔνια δὲ μέρη τοῦ σώματος, καὶ ἂν σαπή, ὀστὰ τε καὶ νεῦρα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, ὦμως ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀθάνατα ἐστίν). Indeed, the remark that the body is more or less immortal is an astonishing one, especially within the context of a dialogue which seemingly aspires to prove the immortality of the soul in contrast to the body. As this textual evidence suggests, however, there is nothing inherently impossible in the claim that, barring extremely unfavorable conditions, the body can last forever and can serve as a permanent basis for individuating among souls.

Let me conclude this brief section with a few parallels that attest to a positive evaluation of the body and the senses. Even though the Phaedo assumes an overall somatophobic stance, the Recollection Argument leaves room for assigning to sensory experience a somewhat more integral role than usually acknowledged. The clearest indication of this comes at 75a5–8, where we learn that the body is indispensable for recollecting the Forms: we first wonder about, for example, the

---

18 Socrates makes it clear, however, that bones and sinews are not themselves causes but mere necessary conditions (99b2–4). He perhaps has in mind something similar to Herodotus’ description of the stages of mummification in Book 2 of the Histories or the more familiar practice of burning the deceased and interring their bones as described by Thucydides (Hdt. 2.87: τὰς δὲ σάρκας τὸ λίτρον κατατίθει, καὶ δὴ λείπεται τοῦ νεκροῦ τὸ δέρμα μόνον καὶ τὰ ὀστέα. Th. 2.34: τὰ μὲν ὀστὰ προτίθενται τῶν ἀπογενομένων πρότριτα σκηνὴν ποῦσαντες).

19 See the references in Olson (1997) 150.
concept of equality through seeing or hearing or touching. The senses in this instance function in precisely the same way as the thought stimulators of the *Republic* 7: there are some cases, Socrates argues there, in which sense perception itself suffices to pass adequate judgments about phenomena and thus does not incite the involvement of reason: for example, when one looks at one’s own fingers, the senses report accurately about reality by properly categorizing the inspected items as fingers (523c11–d6). When it comes to properties, however, the senses offer conflicting accounts because the same thing appears to be both large and small, thick and thin, hard and soft, etc. (523e3–524a4). In these latter cases, Socrates continues, the senses lead the soul to a state of *aporia* and summon reason to resolve the issue (524a6–b5). It is rather surprising that a state of perplexity ensues from the mediation of the senses, especially when one keeps in mind that, for Plato as for Aristotle, *aporia* and wonder mark the beginnings of philosophy.20

In the *Timaeus* also bodily senses are heralded as integral to our understanding of the universe.21 Recall, first, that the circle of Sameness is the constituent of the human soul most affected by birth: as soon as the lower deities enwrap the soul in a body, the circles of the soul are distorted because they are caught up in the violent stream of sensations (43a6–b2). Being entangled in a struggle against the linear motions of the body, the circle of Sameness initially comes to a complete halt, then starts moving erratically and almost disconnects from the circle of Difference, which is also severely disfigured (43c7–e4). Like a person who has been turned upside down and confuses left with right, the newly-born infant cannot distinguish between what is “the same as” and “different from” any other thing (43e4–44a5). Restoration of the uniform revolution of the circle of Sameness comes gradually with aging and renders the human being “wise” (44b7:


21 Even though the *Phaedo* refuses to elevate the body to the status of a cause and restricts it to a mere *sine qua non*, the *Timaeus* includes the body in the workings of the so-called Necessary cause.
ἔμφορονα). Should this natural process be accompanied by a proper education, the person will end up “perfectly whole and healthy” (44c1: ὀλόκληρος ὑγίης τε παντελῶς). If it goes without saying that this “proper education” will consist of philosophical studies, it may come as unexpected that the senses are presented as a necessary condition for the emergence of philosophy. The following passage is worth quoting in full for its rather favorable assessment of the sense of sight (47a1–c4):

δή κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον αἰτία τῆς μεγίστης ὑφελίας γέγονεν ἡμῖν, ὅτι τὸν νῦν λόγον περὶ τοῦ παντὸς λεγομένων οὐδεὶς ἄν ποτε ἔρρήθη μήτε ἀστρα μήτε ἡλιον μήτε οὐρανὸν ἱδόντων. νῦν δ' ἡμέρα τε καὶ νῦξ ὁφθείςαι μηνές τε καὶ ἐναυτῶν περιόδων καὶ ἰσημερία καὶ τροπαὶ μεμηχάνηται μὲν ἀριθμὸν, χρόνου δὲ ἐννοιαν περὶ τὴν παντὸς φύσεως ζήτησιν ἐδοσαν· ἐξ' ὅν ἐπορισάμεθα φιλοσοφίας γένος, οὐ μείζων ἀγαθὸν οὐτ' ἤλθεν οὔτε ἤξει ποτὲ τῷ θυητῷ γένει δωρηθέν ἐκ θεῶν. λέγω δὴ τούτῳ ὀμμάτων μέγιστον ἀγαθόν· τάλλα δὲ ὅσα ἐλάττω τί ἄν ὑμνοίμεν, ὅν ὁ μὴ φιλόσοφος τυφλωθεὶς ὁδυρόμενος ἄν θρηνοί μάτην; ἀλλὰ τούτου λεγέσθω παρ’ ἡμῶν αὕτη ἐπὶ ταῦτα αἰτία, θεὸν ἡμῖν ἀνευρέθεν δωρήσασθαι τε ὅπως, ἵνα τάς ἐν οὐρανῷ τοῦ νοῦ κατιδόντες περιόδους χρησαίμεθα ἐπὶ τὰς περιφορὰς τὰς τῆς παρ’ ἡμῶν διανοήσεως, συγγενεῖς ἐκεῖναις οὐσίας, ἀταράκτους τεταραγμένας, ἐκμαθήνες δὲ καὶ λογισμὸν κατὰ φύσιν ὁρθότητος μετασχόντες, μιμούμενοι τάς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντως ἀπλανεῖς οὐσίας, τάς ἐν ἡμῖν πεπλανημένας καταστησαίμεθα.

As my account has it, our sight has indeed proved to be a source of supreme benefit to us, in that none of our present statements about the universe could ever have been
made if we had never seen any stars, sun or heaven. As it is, however, our ability to see the periods of day-and-night, of months and of years, of equinoxes and solstices, has led to the invention of number, and has given us the idea of time and opened the path to inquiry into the nature of the universe. These pursuits have given us philosophy, a gift from the gods to the mortal race whose value neither has been nor ever will be surpassed. I’m quite prepared to declare this to be the supreme good our eyesight offers us. Why then should we exalt all the lesser good things, which a non-philosopher struck blind would “lament and bewail in vain”? Let us rather declare that the cause and purpose of this supreme good is this: the god invented sight and gave it to us so that we might observe the orbits of intelligence in the universe and apply them to the revolutions of our own understanding. For there is a kinship between them, even though our revolutions are disturbed, whereas the universal orbits are undisturbed. So once we have come to know them and to share in the ability to make correct calculations according to nature, we should stabilize the straying revolutions within ourselves by imitating the completely unstraying revolutions of the god.

Absent the sense of sight, no one would be able to observe the sun, the light of the universe placed there by god in order to shine and lead the animals for which it was appropriate to grasp the concept of number. More specifically, the sun is the cause of the “wisest revolution,” i.e. the period of a single circling of a night-and-day, which corresponds to a single revolution of the circle of the Same and is the prime example of the number “one” (39c1–2: ἡ τῆς μιᾶς καὶ φρονιμωτάτης
κυκλήσεως περίοδος). By being able to observe the sun, therefore, human beings acquire their ability to count, something which leads to that godly gift of unsurpassed value, philosophy.

As the preceding excursus on the relevant passages of the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and the *Timaeus* has revealed, there is sufficient textual evidence to support the claim that sensory experience constitutes the first step in the endeavor that leads to apprehension of the Forms and can, therefore, assume a positive role in the Plato’s epistemology. The conclusions seem warranted that, in *Phaedo* no less than the *Republic*, recollection of knowledge requires the mediation of sensory experience and that the body is a necessary condition for MC to obtain. Finally, given Socrates’ observations in the *Phaedo*, it can be plausibly claimed that the near everlastingness of the body suggests it as a viable candidate for a criterion of individuation among qualitatively identical souls: it is perhaps not a coincidence that Aristotle’s principle of individuation eventually finds its roots in the Platonic corpus.


