



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Price, Anthony W. (2009) Are Plato's soul-parts psychological subjects?
Ancient Philosophy 29 (1), pp. 1-15. ISSN 0740-2007.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/2744/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Enabling open access to Birkbeck's published research output

Are Plato's soul-parts psychological subjects?

Journal Article

<http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/2744>

Version: Post-print (Refereed)

Citation:

Price, A. (2008) Are Plato's soul-parts psychological subjects? – *Ancient Philosophy* 29(1), pp. 1-15

© 2009 Wiley

[Publisher version](#)

All articles available through Birkbeck ePrints are protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

[Deposit Guide](#)

Contact: lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk

Are Plato's Soul-Parts Psychological Subjects?

A. W. Price

It is well-known that Plato's *Republic* introduces a tripartition of the incarnate human soul; yet quite how to interpret his 'parts' (a term, *meros*, that is neither recurrent nor emphatic)¹ is debated. On a strong reading, they are *psychological subjects* – much as we take ourselves to be, but *homunculi*, not *homines*. On a weak reading, they are something less paradoxical: *aspects* of ourselves, identified by characteristic mental states, dispositional and occurrent, that tend to come into conflict. Christopher Bobonich supports the strong reading in his *Plato's Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* (2002). In his *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (2006), Hendrik Lorenz agrees with Bobonich that the parts of the soul are 'the subjects or bearers of psychological states' (23). Any ascription to my *Mental Conflict* (1995) of the opposed, weak view needs qualification: my Plato is highly ambivalent (56-7).² But my intention here is less to defend an earlier self – though I predict failing to escape it – than to reconsider tripartition in the *Republic* in the light of Bobonich's virtuosity and Lorenz's lucidity. They persuade me of the inexhaustibility of the text, notably within Book 4 from 436 to 439. About these pages we may indeed disagree: they find them decisive in favour of their view, as I don't. When Socrates remarks, 'Let us have our understanding still more precise, lest as we proceed we become involved in dispute' (436c8-9), he was not anticipating the dissensions of interpreters.

I

In *Republic* Book 4, Socrates observes that various qualities found in cities must derive from their possession by the citizens (435d9-436a3). He continues:³

But this is hard. Do we do each of these things with the same thing or are there three things and we do one thing with one and one with another? Do we learn with one part of ourselves, feel anger with another, and with yet a third desire the pleasures of nutrition and generation and their kind, or is it with the entire soul that we act in each case once we begin? That is what is really hard to determine properly ... Let us then attempt to determine in this way whether they are the same as one another or different. It is clear that *the same thing cannot do or undergo contraries simultaneously with respect to the same thing, at any rate (kata tauton ge), and in relation to the same thing*. So that if we ever find these contraries in them we shall know that it was not the same thing but a plurality (436a8-c2).

I have added italics to identify what we may call 'the Principle of Non-Contrariety', or, for short, PNC. Here the placing of the *ge* (b10) gives it this emphasis: nothing can take

¹ It makes an appearance, somewhat late in Book 4, at 442b10, c4, and 444b3.

² All page references to Bobonich, Lorenz, and myself are to these books, unless otherwise specified. I shall also refer, but briefly, to Lorenz 2008.

³ I use Bobonich's own translations, when they are available; otherwise, I use Shorey's. My Stephanus references to the *Republic* are to the Slings OCT.

on contrary predicates in relation to the same thing if this is in the same respect. Unlike Bobonich, I take the final sentence to be referring back to the parts mooted (though without any explicit word for ‘part’) in a8-b6. PNC is indeed abstract; but the concrete question that introduced it was whether that by which we learn, that by which we feel anger, and that by which we feel physical pleasure are the same or different; if they are the same, we do these things ‘with the entire soul’.

We may proceed:

So is it possible for the same thing to be at rest and in motion simultaneously in the same respect? ...If anyone should say of a man standing still but moving his hands and head that the same man is at the same time at rest and in motion we should not, I take it, regard that as the right way of expressing it, but rather that a part of him is at rest and a part in motion ... Then if our interlocutor should carry the jest still further with the subtlety that tops at any rate stand still as a whole at the same time that they are in motion when, with the peg fixed in one point, they revolve and that the same is true of any other case of something moving around in a circle in the same place – we should reject the statement because such parts in respect of which they both stand still and move on such occasions are different parts of them. We would say that there was a straight line and a circumference in them and that in respect of the straight line they are standing still since they do not incline to either side, but in respect of the circumference they move in a circle; but that when they revolve they incline the upright to the right or the left or forward or backward, then they are in no way at rest (436c6-e5).

I read the phrase ‘in the same respect’ (*kata tauton* or *kata to auto*, 436b9, c6) as a continuing thread. One thing cannot be at rest and in motion at the same time *in the same respect*. So a man cannot now be at rest and in motion except qualifiedly: part of him may be at rest, and part of him in motion (d1). Alternatively (if *to men ti autou* ... *to de* are not nominatives, but accusatives of respect),⁴ *he* is at rest in respect of one part of himself, and in motion in respect of another.

Bobonich reads it all very differently. He takes 436b10-c2 to be making a sharp distinction (530), with the phrase ‘in them’ (*en autois*, c1) indicating a subject of predication of which the following contrast holds: if what is putatively a single thing turns out to be subject to ‘complete contraries’ – contrary properties, with respect to and in relation to the same thing – it is really not one thing, but a plurality; if it is only subject to ‘incomplete contraries’ – contrary properties, say, but with respect or in relation to different things – it may still be single. Yet we would then expect at c1 a singular ‘in it’ rather than a plural ‘in them’; and it is unclear that any *distinction* between two kinds of case is being made at all.

On Bobonich’s reading (which is also Lorenz’s, 22-5), when Socrates is applying PNC to particular cases, he always opts for one kind of formulation, *either* distinguishing subjects, as with the hands and head, *or* distinguishing respects, as with the spinning top. He reads this into repeated remarks, to the effect that we should speak precisely, or avoid saying certain things (436c9-d2, d8-9, 439b8-10), which I take just to emphasize that we must be careful to describe cases consistently with PNC. So he insists on ascribing motion to the man’s hands and head, and not to the man in respect of his hands and head. Which I take to be neither indicated by the context set by 436b9-c7, nor unambiguously confirmed by the content of c9-d2.

⁴ It is honest of Lorenz 23 n. 9 to point out this possibility, though without enthusiasm.

We come to the ‘subtler’ top example. For Bobonich, this case is the odd one out: in its applications to hands and head, to the archer (439b8-11), and (which is its real point) to hunger and thirst, PNC is to be respected, he maintains, by distinguishing subjects of physical or mental states; the top, by contrast, must be taken as a single subject of rest or motion, but of rest and motion that need to be qualified. A clear statement of the case is, after all, that the top is rotating around its axis, but not moving along any path (as if someone were to pick it up) or around any orbit (like a body revolving around some external point). Bobonich would have us and Socrates say that the top is moving in a way, for it is rotating, but stationary in another, for it is not revolving (or otherwise moving in a path). Is that what Socrates does say? According to Bobonich, ‘Plato introduces this as a case in which “tops stand still as a whole at the same time that they are in motion”’ (529, cf. 229). This overlooks the connotations of the Greek *kompseuomenos* (436d5), which carry a strong *suggestio falsi* (cf. *ho touto kompsesusamenos epseusato*, 6.489b8).⁵ Besides, Socrates explicitly comments, ‘We should reject the statement’ (436d8) – which is not the same as accepting it with a gloss, distinguishing modes of motion, that clarifies how it is consistent.⁶ We thus lack *any* clear indication in the text that this case differs in kind from all the rest in involving a subject that moves and doesn’t move, variously but ‘as a whole’.

One uncertainty is the meaning of the phrases *to euthu* and *to peripheres* (e1-2). In his translation Bobonich adopts the customary ‘straight line’ and ‘circumference’, without being happy about the latter. And indeed one might rather understand by *to peripheres* not just the top’s widest circumference, but *all* of the top outside the infinitely thin line that constitutes its geometrical axis; for all of this is carried round, at different speeds, by the rotation. However, Bobonich needs to be unequivocal. He must suppose that to move *kata to peripheres* is just to rotate, whereas to move *kata to euthu* is to follow a straight path, both phrases indicating nothing but a direction of motion. Yet this is doubly difficult: it fails to fit the clause ‘Such parts in respect of which they both stand still and move on such occasions are different parts of them’ (436d8-9); and it ignores that the movement that Socrates proceeds to contrast with rotation (‘When they revolve they incline the upright to the right or the left or forward or backward’, e3-5) is not movement along a path at all, let alone a straight one – since the lower tip of the top stays on the same spot (around which the top starts to tilt, until it tips over). I thus see no alternative to taking him to be specifying that the top is still in respect of its axis, and moving in respect of its circumference (or all of it outside its axis). And then it is surely permissible to add that the its axis remains still while the rest of it moves.

Other points that Bobonich makes merit attention. I select two. It would indeed be wrong to suppose that *any* of the qualifications to predicates using the phrase ‘the same thing’ could be adapted to form a new subject. If we did so suppose, then cases of apparent contrariety but not ‘at the same time’ could be handled by predicating states either of times or of temporal parts; which would be artificial. (However, Socrates may implicitly discourage *that* by saying not ‘at the same time’ but simply ‘simultaneously’, *hama*.) A more intriguing observation is that the solution that I am imputing to Socrates does *not* in fact hold of ‘any other case of something moving around in a circle in the same place’ (436d7). It does not apply to a rotating torus (a doughnut, say, or a polo

⁵ Lorenz 2008, 255 also ignores this when he now supposes that Socrates can ‘accept the imaginary interlocutor’s nice point that, at the same time, a spinning top is as a whole at rest and in motion’.

⁶ Lorenz 24 n. 14 claims that to deny that the whole of the top is at rest and in motion is ‘an incorrect analysis’, and ‘an entirely unwarranted rejection of the opponent’s pointed description of the top as being *as a whole* at rest and in motion at the same time’. On this, I incline to agree with him (and Bobonich), and disagree with Socrates (and maybe Plato).

mint) that rotates around a fixed axis; for the axis around which a torus may rotate is not a part of itself. It is indeed not easy to reconcile Socrates' generalization to all cases of rotation with the clause that I have already quoted ('Such parts in respect of which they both stand still and move on such occasions are different parts *of them*', d8-9, my italics). Yet it may be significant that the generalization comes within his statement not of a solution, but of a problem (d4-7). In the case of rotating toruses, we might well find ourselves having to say what Socrates tells us *not* to say about 'tops at any rate', viz. that they 'stand still as a whole at the same time that they are in motion' (d5-6). Presumably Plato had reason to focus on the special case of a top, and to offer a solution for that case in particular. And this solution permits alternative ways of preserving PNC.

Let us turn finally to a slightly later passage within Book 4 that makes the crucial psychological application, while offering yet another physical analogy:

The soul of one who is thirsty then, insofar as it thirsts, wishes nothing else than to drink, and yearns for this and its impulse is for this ... Then if anything draws it back when thirsting it must be something different in it from that thing which thirsts and draws it like a beast to drink.⁷ For it cannot be, we say, that the same thing, at any rate (*to ge auto*), with the same part of itself simultaneously acts in contrary ways about the same thing.⁸ ... Just as, I suppose, it is not well said of the archer that his hands at the same time push away the bow and draw it near, but we should say that there is one hand that pushes it away and another that draws it to ...

Would we assert that sometimes there are thirsty people who do not wish to drink? Certainly, it happens often to many different people.

What, then, should one say about them? Is it not that there is a something in the soul that bids them drink and a something that forbids, a different something that masters that which bids?

I think so.

Does not that which forbids in such cases come into play – if it comes into play at all – as a result of calculation, while what draws and drags them to drink is a result of affections and diseases?

Apparently.

Hence it is not unreasonable for us to claim that they are two, and different from one another. We shall name that in the soul with which it calculates the reasoning [part] and that with which it loves, hungers, thirsts and gets excited by other desires, the irrational and appetitive [part] (439a9-d8).

It is easy enough to read this as arguing that we should ascribe thirst rather to appetite than to the soul. The phrase 'that thing which thirsts' (b4), which must designate appetite, may be correcting the apparent ascriptions of thirst to the soul at a9 ('insofar as it thirsts') and b3 ('when thirsting'). Then the restatement of the archer example (it is not that his hands push and pull, but that one pushes and one pulls) can be

⁷ An ambiguity in the English corresponds (is it the soul, or appetite, that is being compared to a beast?) to the variant readings *thêriou* (mss., Galen, Slings), *thêrion* (Stobaeus, Burnet) within 439b4. Lorenz 31 n. 30 follows Slings. This is made tempting by the later comparison of appetite to a many-headed beast (9.588c7-8). Ferrari 2007, 171 n. compares the bad horse in the *Phaedrus* that 'drags' (*helkein*, 254d4, 7, cf. here 'draws', *agein*, 439b4, 'draws and drags', d1) the soul-chariot where it wants it to go. It is true that it is not precisely characteristic of a beast to compel *something else* to drink; this raises a difficulty that I discuss briefly at the end of § III.

⁸ It is a pertinent objection to the application of PNC to conflicting desires that it apparently confuses the relation of desiring to ϕ and desiring not to ϕ (which is a lack of co-satisfiability) with that of desiring to ϕ and not desiring to ϕ (which is one of contradiction). What now seems to me a plausible answer, which is that Plato is thinking of desire as a kind of psychic motion, is well stated by Lorenz 2008, 256-7.

read, like the earlier treatment of the hands and head example, as conveying that we are to multiply subjects *and not* adverbial modifiers. The apparent infringement of PNC at c3-4 ('Would we assert that sometimes there are thirsty people who do not wish to drink?') is corrected by distinguishing one part – not that the term *meros* actually occurs – that prescribes drinking, drawing and dragging the soul towards it, and another that prohibits drinking. Then the final statement puts the soul back into subject place, but respects PNC by adding datives, specifying that *with which* it calculates or thirsts, which may identify the *true* subjects of calculating and of thirsting.

On the other hand, it is also possible that Socrates is consciously permitting us to respect PNC *either* by changing the subject, *or* by qualifying the predicate, without, at least in the psychological case that primarily concerns him, privileging the former. I am with Lorenz when he disagrees (27 n. 21) with Bobonich's reading (530) of the restatement of PNC: 'For it cannot be, we say, that the same thing, at any rate (*to ge auto*), with the same part of itself simultaneously acts in contrary ways about the same thing' (439b5-6). Bobonich takes this to be distinguishing *subjects*, so that it is appetite itself that cannot be contrarily characterized; but then the phrase 'with the same part of itself' becomes not just 'otiose', as Lorenz remarks, but without application.⁹ And it is the predicate that is qualified in the final and climactic formulation (d5-8).¹⁰

What *is* as explicit and emphatic as we could wish is the use of metaphors of physical force ('draws back', 'drives', 439b3-4) to bring out Plato's conception of parts of the soul as psychic forces that impel or inhibit action. We have at least to recognize that, here as elsewhere, his attention is focused upon the efficacy and contrariety of soul-parts, and *not* upon the question that we are considering. And I would suggest that it is in order to convey the active power of the soul's parts, and in particular the brute force of appetite (which alone is described as drawing and dragging), *and not in order to answer our question*, that Socrates puts them, from 439c5 to d2, in subject-place. Plato's soul-parts are certainly *agencies*; more doubtful is whether they are *agents*.¹¹

My own view, therefore, is that the text of 436-9 does *not* clearly answer the question in debate. We can, and should, still reflect upon it on his behalf; indeed, this is precisely what the text leaves us free to do.

⁹ Bobonich 530 appeals to the placing of the *ge* within 439b5; which Lorenz 27 n. 21 counters adequately. Yet is he wise to reject Bobonich's reading? For he follows Bobonich in drawing a dichotomy between cases requiring that we qualify the predicate (e.g., by specifying the respect in which it applies to the subject, as with the top), and cases requiring that we multiply subjects (all the rest). Yet b5-6 are followed by a 'just as' (*hōsper*, b8) which introduces the example of the hands and bow, whose solution ascribes pushing to one hand and pulling to the other. I take this to confirm that their dichotomy of cases is not Plato's.

¹⁰ Within Book 9, it will be 'a man' who learns with one part, and is angry with another (580d9-10), and the tyrannized soul that 'will least do what it wishes – to speak of the soul as a whole' (577d13-e1). Already within Book 4, it was the soul that 'insofar as it wishes that something be supplied to it, nods assent to itself as if answering a question' (437c3-4). There is no need, in interpreting the analogy there of question and answer, to prefer extravagance to economy. *Pace* Carone 2005, 366-7, the question is hardly 'Shall I have an effective desire to ϕ ?' in a sense taken from Frankfurt 1971. It is rather 'Shall I ϕ ?' It is as if in reply to this that the soul, in appetitively desiring to ϕ , assents in respect of its appetite to 'I will ϕ .' Its desire has a propositional content, for what it desires is *that it ϕ* . That is why a desire can be fulfilled. (Bobonich 236-8 offers an interpretative *via media* that connects with issues I discuss below in § III.)

¹¹ John Cooper 1995 ignores this distinction (which I had not made explicit in the book he was reviewing). His complaint that my Plato is Procrustean, being stretched or squeezed to fit modern common sense, overlooks that he still neglects the role of intention; see my 146-7.

II

It might help to appeal to a passage in the *Theaetetus* cited in footnotes both by Bobonich (528-9 n. 14) and Lorenz (27 n. 22), both referring back to an old article by Myles Burnyeat (1976). The passage runs as follows:

Is it more correct to say that the eyes are that *with* which we see, or that *through* which we see? Do we hear *with* the ears or *through* the ears? ... It would be a very strange thing, I must say, if there were a number of senses 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* the senses, as if they were instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible (184c5-d5, tr. Levett).

Levett's 'with' renders a Greek dative, her 'through' a *dia* with the genitive. Burnyeat supposes that, on the option that is to be rejected, each sense would be a separate subject of perceiving, and the man would just be a receptacle. He cites not just the contrast with an instrumental *dia*, and the Trojan Horse analogy (for, despite the story of Pinocchio, nothing made of wood can be a psychological subject), but also the later correction that we perceive things 'with the soul' (185d3), that is, he argues, with the soul *as subject*. He thus reaches the following rule: 'To say that a man ϕ s with x is to say that x is that part of him (in the thinnest possible sense of "part") which ϕ s when he does, that in him which does his ϕ ing or by ϕ ing makes it the case that he ϕ s' (33).

It is unclear to me whether this is a *reduction*, or an *explanation*, of ϕ -ing as a property of the man: is the thought that, in these cases, for a man to ϕ is *nothing but* for x to ϕ within him, or that the fact that x ϕ 's grounds the *different* fact that *he* ϕ 's? Bobonich expresses Burnyeat's point as an entailment: 'The claim that a person ϕ s with x entails that x is what does the ϕ ing or is the subject of ϕ ing' (528-9n. 14, with Burnyeat's symbols). When he speaks of x as 'the ultimate subject' of ϕ -ing (226), or 'the thing that actually does' the ϕ 'ing, is this ultimacy in analysis, or priority in explanation? Lorenz puts the position as follows (28): 'We (and our souls) are (derivative) subjects or bearers of such motivating conditions in virtue of the fact that parts of our souls are the (proper) subjects or bearers of these conditions.' 'In virtue of' suggests a reduction; 'proper' rather suggests an *inaccuracy* to be avoided (cf. 'strictly and accurately speaking', 20) – which he does not intend, insisting that it does not follow that ϕ 'ing 'cannot be attributed to *the soul* at all' (21). Though I must leave such questions open, and shall not raise them again, we should bear them in mind when we come to *other* distinctively Platonic explanations in § IV below.

Whatever precisely is intended, I find multiple grounds for caution. Consider first the grammar. Burnyeat is well aware that Greek also has an instrumental dative, indeed many other datives; and the meaning of each has to be assessed in context. (As he nicely remarks, 'It is not as straightforward a matter as may appear to write a good dictionary entry for a preposition', 39.) In the *Theaetetus*, there is a contrast with an instrumental *dia*, and the Trojan Horse analogy. If we compare two formulations of PNC in *Republic* Book 4, we meet instead a variation between a dative and a *kata* with the accusative (cf. 436b9 with 439b5), with no Trojan Horse analogy to tell against a weak reading of that as involving an accusative of respect. Elsewhere, outside Plato but presumably within idiomatic Greek, there is Aristotle's famous correction, perhaps of Plato himself, that 'It is surely better to say not that the soul pities, learns, or thinks, but that the man does these with his soul' (*De Anima* 1.4.408b13-15, tr. Hamlyn). So it

must be an open question how the *Republic* datives are to be understood. One variation may be significant. That, as the *Theaetetus* has it, we really perceive ‘with the soul’ may indeed mean that the soul is the subject of seeing. But, when we read, almost analogously, in the *Republic* that, on a unified view that is there rejected, we learn, get angry, and desire ‘with the whole soul’ (436b2), the word ‘whole’ (*holos*, cf. *hoi ge strobiloi holoι*, d5) is surely not idle. We might paraphrase: the soul does these things *as a whole* – which is perhaps sufficiently corrected, as on the weak reading, by a thesis that, though *it* indeed does them, it does them only qualifiedly, or in respect of an aspect of itself.

Consider, next, the psychology. It surprises me that Bobonich and Lorenz attend to the *letter* of the *Theaetetus* passage but ignore its *ground*. Why does Socrates there insist that we see not *with* but *through* the ears? Burnyeat states the answer as follows (49): ‘What shows that there is just one element in us that does all our perceiving is precisely that there is something in us, the soul, which can think and reason about whatever we perceive.’ It follows that, on the Bobonich/Lorenz view, the *Theaetetus* and *Republic* cannot easily be brought together. For the *Republic*’s soul-parts are not separate compartments; rather, it is assumed that the soul enjoys a unity of consciousness which permits parts to disregard one another, but not to co-exist blithely in mutual unawareness. Equally, it is not an inference that the *Republic* draws from its tripartition that we cannot reflect rationally upon perceptual data. Thus I miss Burnyeat’s meaning when he writes, ‘What Plato is rejecting, then, is the view that the senses have the kind of autonomy that the parts of the divided soul have in the *Republic*’ (34). For the implications of treating senses as distinct subjects, which the *Theaetetus* rejects, have to be quite different from those of treating soul-parts as distinct subjects, if that is indeed what the *Republic* proposes.

We come to the question that is my title: are Plato’s soul-parts psychological subjects? Bobonich, at least, is forthright: ‘Plato characterizes each of these three parts in agent-like terms: each is treated as the ultimate subject of psychological affections, activities, and capacities that are normally attributed to the person as a whole’ (219). In a note, he adds that we should understand this as ‘the claim that psychic affections and activities stand to the parts of the soul in the same relation that we pre-reflectively think they stand in to the person who has them’ (526). Rightly, I think, he finds this view extraordinary (254):

The *Republic*’s partitioning theory commits Plato to denying the unity of the person ... What seems to be a single psychic entity is in fact a composite of three distinct and durable subjects ... We should not underestimate the conflict between such a theory and our ordinary intuitions. One important sign of this is the near impossibility of imagining what it would be like to be such a compound. It seems that one ends up either imagining possessing all the psychological states simultaneously (thus losing the idea that they belong to different subjects) or one imagines being each of the parts of the soul (thus losing the idea that they form a single person).

And yet what he says here is understated: at stake are not just ‘our ordinary intuitions’, but the facts of co-consciousness to which the *Republic* is fully alive. As is most vivid in the very passage in the *Phaedrus* that represents parts of the soul as different creatures, human or equine, each of the parts is alive to the workings of its two partners, and shares the same perceptual inputs. Bobonich proceeds to discuss the difficulties perceptively (254-7). I would focus on this one: the contents of each part are described

as being *automatically* open to view by the others.¹² Appetite can't escape the supervision of reason by being uncommunicative; and yet reason isn't aware of the contents of appetite by being their subject. How then does appetite lie open to rational scrutiny?

Lorenz agrees with Bobonich up to a point, writing as follows: 'It is clear, then, that Socrates conceives of the parts of the soul that he is arguing for as being responsible for various kinds of motivating conditions precisely by being the subjects or bearers of psychological states such as desire and aversion' (25). However, he does not agree that this denies the unity of the person (26 n. 18):

To deny that there is a single thing that is the proper, non-derivative subject of all of a person's psychic states ... is perfectly compatible with holding that the soul, or the person considered as the subject of psychological predicates, has unity in that it is one thing composed of a plurality of parts.

This strikes me as too abstract, and as failing to focus upon the question posed by Bobonich: if each of Plato's parts is the *psychological* subject of mental states, how is the mental life of a man not *really* like the mental lives of a set of Siamese triplets? The fact, of course, is that it isn't, either in truth, or in Plato's *Republic* – which can be got round neither by Lorenz's turning a Nelson's eye, nor by Bobonich's biting the bullet.

I take the fact of co-consciousness to be the central obstacle to construing Plato's soul-parts as distinct psychological subjects.¹³ Let me buttress it by a subsidiary one. We need to recall Plato's etiology of the tripartite soul (to be spelled out in the *Timaeus*, but already indicated, though cautiously, in *Republic* Book 10). Before incarnation, the soul is wholly rational in its operations. When it enters a body, it takes on lower levels of functioning, with the emergence both of two lower parts, and of reason *as a part*. Now it is doubtless true in a sense that reason is what each of us fundamentally *is*, as is symbolized by likening it to an internal figure that is itself a man (9.588d2, d8-e1). Yet a man cannot be literally identical to his reason. If he were, then it would correct to specify, when *he* is said to desire something appetitively (however we interpret that usage), that his reason does so. Whereas the facts are that *he* has an appetite by which to

¹² The limits are of comprehension, not privacy. If (as Bobonich puts to me) appetite 'has no access' to reason's judgements about overall well-being, this is not because they are hidden from it, but because they are beyond its capacity. He also nicely cites to me 'the felt otherness of certain desires and emotions'. Being rational, but only in part, one is familiar with how Musil's Törless feels (as Basini seduces him): 'Das bin nicht ich! ... nicht ich! ... Morgen erst wieder werde ich es sein!' ('It isn't me, not me; only tomorrow will it be me again'). Yet this too evidences mental 'parts' that have disparate repertoires, but are not distinct subjects.

¹³ However, the obstacle might be overcome by an account that spelled out psycho-physical mechanisms that ensure that parts of the incarnate soul, though distinct psychological subjects, replicate one another's contents in their own styles and to the limits of their own capacities. Materials for such an account are absent from the *Republic*, but present in the *Timaeus*, where different parts of the soul are located in different but interconnecting parts of the body (69c5-72d3). It is true that Plato's concern there is not my present one: he wishes to explain not how reason can *register*, but how it can *regiment*, the contents of spirit and appetite. However, suppose that a fuller account would reconcile differential localization with the phenomena of co-consciousness. It would then become a moot point how best to conceptualize the effect of such mechanisms. On the view of soul-parts as subjects, these mechanisms would ensure that the parts, though distinct subjects, are aware of one another's mental states. On the more commonsensical view, they would rather explain how these states share a single subject even though they are located in different parts of the body. (One might compare what we know about the central nervous system, which is extended through the body, and yet serves a single subject.) We would then have to reflect whether this is a difference with, or without, a difference. What is gained by positing distinct subjects of mental states if these states interact in just the ways one would expect if they belonged to a single subject?

hunger and thirst, and *it* does not. What of the time before incarnation? It can hardly be that the soul already contained a rational *homunculus*. Rather, the soul was then unqualifiedly the subject of all its operations, with no mental conflict of a kind to evidence the existence of any part within it. And surely, if it *was* then a subject, it was *essentially* a subject. So to suppose that, at the moment of incarnation, the soul ceases to *be* a subject, and instead becomes a receptacle of three subjects, would be to suppose that, for a soul, incarnation is death. It must rather be that, at incarnation, the soul becomes the subject of conflicting operations manifesting contrasting powers or capacities (*dunameis*, as Posidonius and Galen were to call them).¹⁴

However, to get closer to an *understanding* of Plato, we need to reflect further about the psychology of his tripartite soul, and about the semantics of his multiple predications.

III

More striking, to my mind, than the disunity of Plato's incarnate soul is its unity, despite the tripartition and the conflicts that he takes as evidence of that. I have argued this before (70-71, 102-3), but shall here raise some issues that arise for all of us concerning the objects of appetite. Some of these may really pose problems; yet they all confirm the unity. Common to all is a simple-seeming question: what does appetite desire?

Gerasimos Santas adopts a restrictive view. He defines appetite by its 'exclusive function', which is to be targeted upon 'the generic objects of food, drink, and sex' (2001: 122-3); and, like Lorenz (44), he infers from its description as 'unreasoning' (*alogistos*, 439d7) that it is incapable of extending its range through means-end calculation. What then of Plato's description of appetite as 'the money-loving part, because money is the chief instrument for the gratification of such desires' (9.580e5-581a1)? Bobonich (244) and I (60-61) agree in deducing that appetite has a grasp of the relation of means to ends that implies some capacity for instrumental reasoning.¹⁵ Santas (124) appeals instead to 'a mixture of pure appetites and learning' resulting in what, after Freud, I called compromise formations (72), complex desires or beliefs that come of inputs from different parts. That is excluded if each part is a distinct psychological subject. Lorenz suggests this: 'The satisfaction of [bodily] desires through money ... establishes, reinforces, and sustains patterns and habits of attention, response, and attachment' (47). It is unclear to me how this reinforcing works if appetite lacks the very concept of a means to an end.¹⁶

Less problematic, but of uncertain location, is the democratic's man *epithumia* for philosophy (8.561c6-d3). Is this an appetite (which the term *epithumia* may but needn't

¹⁴ Thus Posidonius, on Galen's report, granted 'that the powers of the soul are three in number, and that by them we desire, feel anger, and reason' (*PHP* 312.29-30, de Lacy). Galen's silence is evidence that Chrysippus did not read Plato more paradoxically, though *he* had a motive for doing so (since he rejected tripartition).

¹⁵ I qualify this, 61-2, by two connected suggestions: appetite cannot motivate unappetizing actions; and its 'primitive thinking', unworthy of *to logistikon*, tends to confuse the distinction between means and ends, so that money comes to be desired for its own sake.

¹⁶ Lorenz 2008, 263 now suggests, 'Appetite is at least somewhat attached to money as something that is, for it, in itself a source of pleasure.' Surely this calls for explanation. Part of Plato's explanation appears to be that money serves to satisfy our appetites – which needs supplementation (see my preceding note). Lorenz might appeal to mere association, but that seems too indeterminate. Why is it that appetite comes rather to love *having* money (which comes before spending) than to love *having had* money (which comes after spending)?

connote)?¹⁷ Some of us say it is, others say it isn't. Some of us are free to say that it is a compromise formation, offspring of reason *and* appetite. What is evident is that it is rational *in content* (the philosophy could even be Platonic), but appetite-like *in motivation* (being a response to the pleasure of the moment). This warns us not to over-separate the parts.

Lorenz (50) offers a nice example of a possibility troublesome for many of us. Suppose that I want to smoke, which is a pleasure proscribed by reason, and so go to a tobacconist's to buy some cigarettes, which is a chore. I suggested that there are two possibilities: either appetite makes shopping, at least *for* cigarettes, transiently attractive, and so a possible object of appetite; or reason is transiently suborned by appetite, so that *it* takes on a passing desire to shop for cigarettes (61-2). Santas might appeal to a compromise formation, offspring of reason and appetite; but would this be a *fourth* faction, here in alliance with appetite against reason? Lorenz ascribes to my appetite 'simply the desire to smoke, together with a complex, behaviour-guiding representation that depends, at least in part, on my judgement about how most easily to obtain cigarettes' (50-51). But this seems problematic to me: how, in a way intelligible to Plato, can such a representation be 'behaviour-guiding' except through generating a series of desires?¹⁸

Let us now return to a sentence from Book 4: 'The soul of one who is thirsty then, insofar as it thirsts, wishes nothing else than to drink' (439a9-b1). Whether the true subject of the appetitive desire be appetite or the soul, there is a problem. What precisely is its content? If I desire to drink, I desire that *I* drink. Here the 'I' in the 'that'-clause is reflexive, picking up the 'I' in the main clause. In the third person, the soul, or appetite, desires that *it* drink. Now what is it to drink? The *OED* definition runs as follows: 'To swallow down or imbibe water or other liquid, for nourishment or quenching of thirst'. But how can the soul, or one of its parts, perform the act of swallowing?

This problem may make us look back with regret to the *Phaedo*, where the thirst that reason may second or oppose was ascribed to *the body* (94b7-c1).¹⁹ And yet surely the solution must lie in understanding the *Republic* as a development, and not a repudiation, of the *Phaedo*. It is only *in* the body that the soul becomes, in part, spirited and appetitive. *Appetitive* desires are still conceived of as *bodily* desires. In desiring that my body drink, my appetite (or soul *qua* appetitive, cf. 439a9) desires an act in which it takes part, making, as we would say, a *movement* also an *action*, providing, in Aristotelian terminology, the *form* for which the body supplies the *matter*. (It is not, to be sure, an altruist.) Appetite is one thing that links a soul intimately to the human being that it animates, in its physical objects as in its mental operations.

¹⁷ Here Lorenz 45-6 is more careful than Burnyeat 2006, 16-17 appears to be – though Burnyeat must be familiar with the evidence.

¹⁸ Lorenz 2008, 261 would object that this may yield conflict *within* appetite: what if I desire to smoke, *and therefore* to go to the tobacconist's, and yet also desire not to go to the tobacconist's since it is a chore? I have offered Plato my best answer (which is that I shall have no *appetite* to go to the tobacconist if I don't feel like it). Lorenz has to deny not only that I desire to go to the tobacconist's *for the sake of smoking*, but also that my motivation to go to the tobacconist *is a desire*. I find this second denial neither evident, nor evidenced in Plato.

¹⁹ On the *Timaeus*, see Carone 2007, 109-11.

IV

Finally, and briskly, Plato and multiple predications. As I have already quoted, Lorenz writes (25), ‘Socrates conceives of the parts of the soul that he is arguing for as being responsible for various kinds of motivating conditions precisely by being the subjects or bearers of psychological states such as desire and aversion.’ I found the last clause problematic; yet I don’t want to deny that Plato intends the ascription of conflicting desires to different parts of the soul to be explanatory. We may even suppose this to hold: when I desire appetitively to drink, my appetite has a desire to drink, *and the second is prior in explanation*. What needs care is the phrase ‘has a desire’.

Recall all those Platonic predications that puzzled Aristotle, and still puzzle us. In the *Lysis*, hair that has whitened with age becomes white ‘by the presence of whiteness’, which it now resembles (217d7-e1). In the *Protagoras*, the sensible man is sensible ‘by good sense’ (332b1); and presumably good sense is sensible, just as justice is just, and holiness holy (330c4-e1). In the *Phaedo*, all beautiful things are beautiful ‘by the beautiful’ (100d7-8, e2-3), and ‘the beautiful’ is itself beautiful (c4-5). Slightly differently, Simmias overtops Socrates by the largeness he happens to possess (102b8-c3); and ‘the largeness in us never admits the small’ (d7-8) – presumably because, like the Large itself, it too is large. Most famous is the quickening of body by soul:

‘Tell me what it is, by whose presence in a body, that body will be living.’
‘Soul.’ ...
‘Then soul, whatever it occupies, always comes to that thing bringing life’
(105c8-d4, tr. Gallop).

From which it is inferred that the soul is *itself* alive, essentially and eternally.

And yet, of course, all these explanations are problematic. Take Simmias’s size, or more precisely, I take it, tallness. Simmias is tall not essentially, but in respect of his tallness. Of Simmias, but not his tallness, we can say *how* tall he is. This at once makes his tallness precise, but also relative: for Simmias shows up as short by comparison with Phaedo, if Simmias is 5 foot 8 and Phaedo 6 foot. Lacking a precise height, tallness may escape being relative. But then in what sense is it *tall*? Not measurably, and so hardly in the same sense as that in which Simmias is tall.

Often, as here, the effect of Platonic predications is to replace a contingent predication by a necessary one. This isn’t the case with parts of the soul: it is equally contingent that I am thirsty, and that my appetite is. However, there is an analogy. Appetite’s natural repertory contains thirst; if I am at times thirsty, this is *because* I have an appetite. And certain features of the natural appetites, such as their insistence and periodicity, may be explained as general features of appetite.

So let us agree on two things: thirst is characteristic of appetite, and it partly explains my thirst to place it within my appetite. We may even count it as true, and prior in explanation, that *my appetite is thirsty*. But what precisely are we then asserting?

Plato inclines not to answer such questions (though he at least poses them in the *Parmenides*). And yet something, surely, has got to change within the sense of the predicate. What I once wrote still seems to me to stand: ‘Mental parts should not be taken to be subjects of mental activities, for a subject of an activity cannot also be the

aspect of another subject in respect of which this subject performs it' (54).²⁰ It doesn't touch the impossibility to ascribe priority to soul, or to soul-part. What we need is something like the following: when I am a psychological *subject* of thirst, there is a part of my soul that *contains* thirst.²¹

I must apologize for ending with nothing that is new. This is just what I *would* say in failing to escape from *Mental Conflict* (where I characterized a part of the soul as being conceived of, centrally if not consistently, as 'the home of a family of desires and beliefs', 53). And my readers will have all heard too often about Pauline predications, tree-predications, and the rest. Anyway, this is what I now propose as the nub of our problem.²²

Department of Philosophy
Birkbeck College
Malet St
London
WC1E 7HX
U.K.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bobonich, Christopher. 2002. *Plato's Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bobonich, Christopher and Destrée, Pierre edd. 2007. *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy*. Leiden: Brill.
- Burnyeat, Myles. 1976. 'Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving' *Classical Quarterly* 26: 29-51.
- Burnyeat, Myles. 2006. 'The Truth of Tripartition' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106: 1-23.
- Carone, Gabriela Roxana. 2005. 'Plato's Stoic View of Motivation' 365-81 in Salles ed. 2005.
- Carone, Gabriela Roxana. 2007. 'Akrasia and the Structure of the Passions' 101-18 in Bobonich and Destrée edd. 2007.
- Cooper, John. 1995. Review of Price 1995, *Times Literary Supplement*, October 20.
- De Lacy, Philip ed. & tr. 1979-84. *Galen: De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis (PHP)*, 3 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Ferrari, G. R. F. 2007. 'The Three-Part Soul', 165-201 in Ferrari ed. 2007.
- Ferrari, G. R. F. ed. 2007. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fine, Gail ed. 2008. *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 1971. 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' *Journal of Philosophy* 68, 5-20.

²⁰ Of course, there is Bobonich's bold reply: it is a part of the soul, and *not* the soul itself, that is a psychological subject of mental activities. But that denies the facts of co-consciousness.

²¹ The same distinction appears to be present, but to contrasted effect, in Lorenz 2008. There, 257, he allows conflicting desires 'simultaneously to apply to the same thing', but counts only a soul-part as 'the proper subject' of either. I take this to mean that the soul has a desire only in the derivative sense of having a part that alone is strictly the subject of the desire. This reverses my proposal, for it conveys that appetite *is* thirsty, whereas a soul *contains* thirst.

²² This paper has benefited, imperfectly no doubt, from friendly but acute responses by Chris Bobonich and Hendrik Lorenz.

- Gallop, David tr. & com. 1975. *Plato: Phaedo*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hamlyn, D. W. tr. & com. 1968. *Aristotle: De Anima Books 2 and 3*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Levet, M. J. tr., Burnyeat, Myles rev. 1992. *Plato: Theaetetus*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Lorenz, Hendrik. 2006. *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lorenz, Hendrik. 2008. 'Plato on the Soul', 243-66 in Fine ed. 2008.
- Price, A. W. 1995. *Mental Conflict*. London: Routledge.
- Salles, Ricardo ed. *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought: Themes from the Work of Richard Sorabji*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Santas, Gerasimos 2001. *Goodness and Justice: Plato, Aristotle, and the Moderns*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Shorey, Paul tr. & com. 1937. *Plato: the Republic*, 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Slings, S. R. ed. 2003. *Platonis Rempublicam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.