Two Kinds of Mental Conflict in *Republic* IV

“[T]he assumption which underlies this argument is that a man cannot simultaneously desire to do something and desire not to do it [… but] the incompatibility belongs to the possibility of satisfying both desires, not of having both desires.”

-Alasdair MacIntyre, (1966: 37)

One of the most famous and oft-discussed arguments in the history of Western philosophy is Plato’s so-called ‘partition argument.’ It first appears in Book IV of the *Republic* and it aims to establish that the soul consists of parts.[[1]](#footnote-1) Many have seen the argument as critical to understanding Plato’s moral psychology.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nevertheless, the argument has not won over many people. In fact, many take it to be deeply flawed.[[3]](#footnote-3) The purpose of this paper is to consider one worry that has received little attention in the literature: that the argument is invalid because it trades on an ambiguity in ‘opposites’.

To consider this worry more clearly, and why it is potentially fatal to the partition argument, it will helpto put the argument into the following simple two-premise form to start.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. If opposites co-exist in a thing, then that thing is not simple.
2. Opposites co-exist in the soul during mental conflict.
3. Therefore, the soul is not simple.

Premise (A) is the so-called ‘Principle of Opposites.”[[5]](#footnote-5) As Socrates puts it: “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” (436b9-11).[[6]](#footnote-6) To illustrate this principle, he uses an example of a person who is both moving and standing still:

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. 436c8-d3

In what sense are opposites incompatible in a simple thing? This is, of course, a complicated question.[[7]](#footnote-7) But it seems, at least on its face, that the incompatibility of opposites in a simple thing involves something like *logical* incompatibility, i.e., their co-presence in a simple thing generates or entails a logical contradiction. This isn’t to say that the principle is the Law of Non-Contradiction by another name. It pretty clearly is not. [[8]](#footnote-8) After all, the Principle of Opposites concerns the *properties* of simple things, whereas the Law of Non-Contradiction concerns *propositions* and their truth. But which properties a thing instantiates affects which propositions are true, and the most natural way to understand a violation of the Principle of Opposites is to understand it as a scenario that involves a contradiction. [[9]](#footnote-9) That violations of the Principle entail contradictions becomes clearer when one considers that a thing undergoes opposites only in very specific circumstances: namely, when the opposites belong to the same subject at the same time in relation to the same thing, and in the same respect. Consider Socrates’ example of something which both moves and stands still. Standing still is equivalent to not moving, and so a simple thing that both moves and doesn’t move (at the same time, relative to the same frame of reference, in the same respect, etc.) would entail a contradiction: it is both true and false that the thing is moving (at the time t, relative to the frame of reference f, and in respect r).[[10]](#footnote-10) So far, so good. Let’s turn to premise (B), i.e., the mental conflict premise. Given (A), a simple soul in conflict must entail a contradiction of some sort in order for (B) to be true, i.e., in order for mental conflict to count as an instance of undergoing opposites. As an example, consider Socrates’ example of “thirsty people who don’t wish to drink” (439c2). These people both want to drink, given their thirst, and want to avoid drinking, due to a rational calculation (e.g., that drinking would be bad for them) (439c9-d1). If such people undergo opposites, as Socrates says they do, then the scenario in which such people are *simple* souls – the scenario in which they set out after something with “the whole of [their] soul” (436a10) – must be one which entails a contradiction. In other words, we should be able to point to a contradiction that a simple soul in conflict would generate, just as we can point to the contradiction which would be generated by the existence of a simple object that is both moving and standing still simultaneously.

This is where the problem arises. What seems on its face impossible about, say, wanting to drink and wanting not to drink is not the presence of those desires themselves, but rather their joint *satisfaction*.[[11]](#footnote-11) In other words, the conflict in question seems to lie not in the soul itself, not in the soul’s desires,[[12]](#footnote-12) but instead in what the soul’s desires are *about* or what they are desires *for*, i.e., their content. That the conflict is in the content is largely confirmed by Plato’s use of the Principle of Opposites in Book X, where he argues that a simple soul cannot “believe opposites *about* the same thing at the same time” (602e-7, our emphasis).[[13]](#footnote-13) As MacIntyre highlights in the quote above, it is one thing for a pair of desires *themselves* to be logically incompatible with each other, and quite another thing for a pair of desires to be forthings whose *satisfaction* is incompatible. Plato’s examples of mental conflict seem to only be examples of the latter, and yet, it is unclear how the presence of those desires could be grounds for a partition in the soul if the desires are not jointly satisfied. So, Plato faces a dilemma. For ease, we’ll call it ‘MacIntyre’s dilemma’. The dilemma is this: either ‘opposites’ has the same meaning in both premises of the partition argument or it does not. If it doesn’t – because the ‘opposites’ in (B) refers to the impossibility of joint satisfaction – then the argument is invalid. If ‘opposites’ does have the same meaning in both premises, then the argument is valid, but not obviously sound. It is not obviously sound because wanting jointly unsatisfiable things does not seem to generate a contradiction when it occurs in a simple soul. So, interpreters sympathetic to Plato must explain how a simple soul that wants jointly unsatisfiable things would generate a contradiction regardless of whether its desires are in fact jointly satisfied.

We propose a potential solution to it which uses the concept of a disposition to explain why a simple soul that wants jointly unsatisfiable things would in fact generate a contradiction. The solution is roughly as follows. Souls are disposed, other things being equal, to do the things they want to do. So, if a simple soul were in mental conflict and wanted inconsistent things, then it would be disposed, other things being equal, to do those things. But other things *are* equal where a simple soul is concerned, so a simple soul would *do* logically incompatible things. Since doing logically incompatible things would entail a contradiction, the soul in conflict must not be simple.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section I, we consider an objection to the distinction between attitude and content that underlies MacIntyre’s dilemma. We argue that the objection is misguided and that the dilemma can be motivated by the text. In section II, we apply the attitude-content distinction to the conflict cases of *Republic* IV and X, and re-examine the dilemma facing Plato. In section III, we outline a simple, toy version of the dispositionalist strategy and highlight its fatal flaw. Finally, in section IV, we propose a more complicated version of the dispositionalist strategy which we argue avoids the flaw in the simple version.

**I. Attitude and content**

Essential to MacIntyre’s dilemma is a distinction between a soul’s attitudes (its desiring, believing, etc.) and the contents of those attitudes (what the soul desires, believes, etc.). The distinction between attitude and content roughly maps onto the well-known ambiguity in the English terms “belief”, “thought”, and “desire”. On the one hand, these terms can refer to the acts that are expressed with the present continuous: believing, thinking, and desiring. These are the attitudes. On the other hand, they can refer to what is being believed, thought of, or desired. These are the contents. Content, as we use the term, refers to what it would take for the attitude in question to be satisfied. In the case of beliefs and other assertoric attitudes, the content is what it would take for the belief to be true, i.e., its truth conditions.[[14]](#footnote-14) In the case of desires and other attitudes with a non-assertoric direction of fit, the content is the satisfaction conditions for the attitude*.* For example, my desire for a glass of water has drinking a glass of water as its content since it is that which would satisfy the desire.[[15]](#footnote-15)MacIntyre essentially accuses Plato of conflating the distinction between content and attitudes: treating a content fact (that some desires cannot be jointly satisfied) as if it were a fact about attitudes (that the desires are incompatible independent of their satisfaction).[[16]](#footnote-16) But it is an open question whether the attitude-content distinction is faithful to Plato’s view of desire. On the view of desire behind the attitude-content distinction, a desire is an internal state of an agent with certain conditions for satisfaction. But Plato often describes desire not so much as an internal state of an agent, but rather as a *relation* between an agent and a thing.[[17]](#footnote-17) For example, he writes that “the soul of someone who has an appetite for a thing wants what he has an appetite for” (*ephiesthai… ekeinou ou an epithumei*) (437c2-4) and that thirst ought to be included “among things that are related to something” (*toutōn…* *tōn tinos einai*) since it is related to drink (*pōmatos*) (439a1-2). This relational characterization of desire is also front and center in the initial presentation of the Principle of Opposites. For example, the Principle itself is put in terms of opposite relations: something cannot do or undergo opposites “in relation to the same thing” (*pros tauton*) (436b7). Furthermore, Socrates describes desires and aversions as psychic versions of being pushed and pulled, relational properties if there ever were any: to have a desire is “to draw towards oneself” (*prosagesthai*)[[18]](#footnote-18) what one desires (437c3), whereas to have an aversion is for the soul to “push and drive away” (*apōthein kai apelaunein*) (c9-10). If mental conflict is best understood as undergoing opposite *relations*, rather than having opposite internal states, then the ambiguity in ‘opposites’ that MacIntyre is highlighting—between opposite attitudes and opposite contents—likely disappears. The true basic form of the partition argument is therefore not (A)-(C) above, but (1)-(3) below:

(1) No simple thing can stand in opposite relations to the same thing.

(2) In cases of mental conflict, x stands in opposite relations to the same thing.

(3) Therefore, x is not simple.

If (2) is unambiguous in the way that (B) above is not, then MacIntyre’s dilemma cannot even get off the ground.

MacIntyre’s dilemma cannot be so easily side-stepped, however. There is a trivial sense in which all desires are relations: desires are *for* things, and so a desire is a relation between an agent and the thing desired, whether an object or a state of affairs or a proposition. Even the picture of desire underlying the attitude-content distinction can accommodate this fact: desires are relations to the states of the world which would satisfy them. So, pointing out that, for Plato, mental conflict involves a soul undergoing opposite relations is not sufficient to defang MacIntyre’s dilemma. The question is whether or not Platonic desires are relational in a sense that MacIntyre *cannot* accommodate. We can get a graspof what this stronger sense of relationality might be by comparing two very different kinds of relations: what are sometimes called ‘internal’ and ‘external’ relations. The basic idea is this: a relation between x and y is internal if the fact that the relation between x and y holds is somehow fixed by the intrinsic natures or states of x and y.[[19]](#footnote-19) For example, the relation ‘contains more parts’ is internal because the fact that x contains more parts than y is fixed by the intrinsic natures of x and y (you get the relation for free once you tally the respective parts). A relation is external, however, if the fact that it holds is *not* determined solely by the intrinsic natures of the relata. For example, the relations ‘left of’ and ‘offspring of’ are external relations, because the intrinsic natures of the relata are insufficient to determine that relation.

MacIntyre’s reading of Platonic desires views them as *internal* relations: once the content of a desire is fixed, the relation to the thing desired is determined automatically.[[20]](#footnote-20) So, if Platonic desires are *external* relations, then MacIntyre’s dilemma rests on an un-Platonic assumption. The question, then, is whether Platonic desires ought to be understood as internal or external relations. For ease, call the view of Platonic desires as external relations the ‘External Relations View’ of desires (‘ERV’). To be *physically* pushed or pulled is to stand in an external relation to that which does the pushing or pulling, since merely accounting for the intrinsic states of the objects in question would not determine which object was pushing or pulling the other.[[21]](#footnote-21) If desires are analogous in this way to physical pushings and pullings, as Plato sometimes suggests, then they are also external relations. [[22]](#footnote-22) Nevertheless, we will offer three reasons to doubt ERV. The first intends to show that ERV undermines the plausibility of the Principle of Opposites. Insofar as Socrates describes the Principles of Opposites as obvious (436b6), a view that makes it unobvious is to that extent flawed. To see how ERV potentially undermines the Principle of Opposites, consider the following scenario. There exists a simple body, P, that is acted on by two equally strong forces, F and G, such that Pdoes not move.[[23]](#footnote-23) P does not move because though the forces originate from the same direction, they have opposite directionalities: one is a pushing force and the other a pulling or gravitating force. There are at least two things worth highlighting about this scenario. First, forces are generally conceived to be external relations. The fact that F and G are applied to Pis a relational fact, but not one that is fixed by the intrinsic states of F, G, and P. Second, the scenario described is at least logically possible, since there’s no contradiction entailed by it. Furthermore, it is very likely physically possible for Plato, since he places no prohibition on multiple forces acting on one and the same part of a body.[[24]](#footnote-24) So, if the opposites that are under consideration in the discussion of the Principles of Opposites are opposite external relations, then the Principle of Opposites faces counterexamples, and hence is less plausible. This is not a knockdown argument against ERV as an interpretation – the Principle of Opposites very well might be false. But insofar as Socrates describes that principle as obvious, it is a flaw of the interpretation.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The second reason to doubt ERV comes from Plato’s choice of examples when discussing the nature of opposites. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates gives as an example of opposite relations being smaller and larger (70e7). This is notable because size relations are paradigmatic instances of *internal* relations: once the intrinsic sizes of some x and y are set, so too is the relative smallness or largeness of x to y. In addition, Plato gives the following examples of pairs of forms: the tall/short (*Phd.* 102e6), likeness/unlikeness (*Prm.* 129a1), double/half, big/small, and light/heavy (*Republic* 479b1-8). Though these are opposing *forms*, each suggests a corresponding opposing relation––i.e., taller/shorter, like/unlike, double/half, bigger/smaller, lighter/heavier––all of which are plausibly internal relations. Plato seems more than happy, therefore, to give examples of opposites, including or suggestive of opposite relations, which are in fact opposite internal relations. So, the mere fact that the Principle of Opposites is articulated in terms of relations is not evidence that it should be understood as involving *external* relations. At the very least, this undercuts one of the main pieces of textual support for ERV.

The third reason to doubt ERV concerns not so much its merits as an interpretation of Plato, but rather its plausibility as an account of desire. Put simply, the view of desires as external relations is not one that many contemporary readers will find tenable. First of all, it flirts with obscurity in its construal of desire as a pushing and pulling. Of course, there *are* many senses in which desire may seem like pushing and pulling. For example, many desires are experienced as if they arise from something external to us, in the same way that a push arises from a force external to the body pushed. Likewise, desires may be like pushings and pullings in the sense that, other things being equal, the presence of a desire affects what one does: like when pushed or pulled, having a desire causes changes in a person’s behavior. But neither of these senses is at issue in the partition argument. In order for the pushing and pulling comparison to be considered evidence for ERV, it must be taken relatively literally (or else the external nature of *physical* pushing/pulling won’t transfer). But the sense in which desires are experienced as external is not literal: all desires are internal to the agent if they are desires at all. In addition, the fact that desires have a tendency to cause action is not the sense relevant to ERV. According to ERV, desires are pushings and pullings *prior to even considering changes in behavior*. After all, ERV needs to say that the person in mental conflict is pushed and pulled in opposite ways even though at most one of the desires can be acted on. So, ERV’s claim about the nature of desire begins to appear obscure. Second, the part of ERV that is definitely *not* obscure – that all desires are external relations, regardless of their specific nature – will strike many readers as simply false. Many of us find that we can desire things that do not exist, now or ever, and yet it is impossible to stand in an external relation with something non-existent. For instance, one cannot be to the left of something non-existent, or be visually acquainted with something non-existent, or be the offspring of something that never existed.[[26]](#footnote-26) Importantly, the internal view of desires does not suffer from this problem: to desire something is to possess an attitude with a specific set of satisfaction conditions. Whether those conditions are precluded from being met, due to the non-existence of a key constituent of those conditions, does not affect the existence of the conditions themselves.[[27]](#footnote-27) Insofar as ERV renders Plato’s view of desire both obscure and false, it risks making the partition argument of merely historical interest. So, moving forward, we will tentatively set aside ERV and assume that Platonic desires are internal relations.

**II. The Dilemma Revisited**

The aim in this section is to apply the attitude-content distinction to the conflict cases of Book IV and then re-articulate MacIntyre’s dilemma in light of them. At the heart of the distinction between attitude and content is the idea that desires and beliefs have satisfaction conditions. For a desire, the satisfaction conditions are those states of the world that satisfy the desire. For a belief, the satisfaction conditions are those states of the world that make the belief true. Plato highlights the content of belief when he says in Book X that belief can be either “contrary to measurements” (*para ta metra*) or “in accord with measurements” (*kata ta metra*) (603a1).[[28]](#footnote-28) A belief is true when it is ‘in accord’ with the world. Mental conflict occurs when a soul has attitudes that cannot be jointly satisfied, e.g., multiple beliefs that cannot simultaneously be true or multiple desires that cannot simultaneously be satisfied. Socrates describes a case of belief conflict in Book X: “Didn’t we say that it is impossible for the same thing to believe opposites about the same thing at the same time?... Then the part of the soul that forms a belief contrary to the measurements couldn’t be the same as the part that believes in accord with them” (602e7-603a1). In this example there are two attitudes that are type-identical (two beliefs) but which have logically incompatible content: that the stick is straight and that the stick is bent.[[29]](#footnote-29) At most only one of the beliefs can be true at a time. [[30]](#footnote-30)

The Book X example is slightly different from what Socrates describes as cases of conflict in Book IV. There he gives as examples of mental opposites “assent and dissent, wanting to have something and rejecting it, taking something and pushing it away” (437b1-3).[[31]](#footnote-31) This suggests, at least on its face, that mental conflict occurs when the attitudes are *not* distinct: assent vs. dissent, desire vs. aversion, and so on. [[32]](#footnote-32) But there are at least two reasons to think Plato is being loose here and that even the Book IV conflict cases mirror the structure of the Book X example. First, in the Book X example of belief it is possible to put the conflict in terms of having two beliefs towards incompatible contents *or* of having a belief and disbelief towards one and the same content. This choice is available because within classical doxastic logic it is possible to infer that a person disbelieves that *p* from the fact that they believe that not *p* (and vice versa).So, at least in in the Book X example there is no substantial difference between the two choices of description. They are two ways of saying the same thing. The second reason to think that the Book IV characterization of conflict in terms of opposing attitudes is loose lies in the nature of the Book IV cases of conflict. Consider the thirsty man who nonetheless is averse to drink:

Now, would we assert that sometimes there are thirsty people who don’t wish to drink? ...What, then, should we say about them? Isn’t it that there is something in their soul, bidding them to drink, and something different, forbidding them to do so, that overrules the thing that bids? ...Hence it isn’t unreasonable for us to claim they are two, and different from each other. 439c2-d3

Parts of the surface grammar may seem to suggest that the attitudes are non-identical attitudes towards one and the same thing: an *aversion* to drink and a *desire* for drink. But there is good reason to think that this too is equivalent to having type-identical attitudes towards incompatible contents (a desire to drink and a desire not to drink). After all, Socrates describes the aversion to drink in terms of a desire not to drink: “there are thirsty people who *don’t* *wish* *to drink* (*ouk ethelein piein*)” (439c2, emphasis added). This is not a mere slipof the pen. [[33]](#footnote-33) Rather, there is strong reason to think that aversion to drink is equivalent to a desire not to drink. Specifically, aversion to drink has a rational source—“that which forbids [drink] in such cases come[s] into play…as a result of rational calculation” (c9)—and this rational calculation is what generates a desire *not to drink* (given the effects drink will have).[[34]](#footnote-34) So, the thirst case mirrors the Book X case: both are plausibly type-identical attitudes to incompatible contents. [[35]](#footnote-35) This doesn’t mean that it is *mistaken* to interpret conflict as involving type-distinct attitudes to one and the same thing. Rather, in the context of the *Republic* this description is equivalent to interpreting them as type-identical attitudes to logically incompatible contents.

What the preceding confirms is that mental conflict is fundamentally about a soul having incompatible contents—to say that a soul is in conflict is first and foremost to say that its contents can’t be jointly satisfied. And it *is* true that a simple soul in conflict cannot satisfy incompatible contents. But this is not sufficient to partition the soul. What the partition argument needs to establish is that a simple soul cannot even *have* those contents. MacIntyre’s dilemma is therefore apt: the fact that a simple soul cannot satisfy those contents doesn’t mean, on its own, that it can’t *possess* those contents.Plato must instead explain why the mere possession of incompatible contents entails a contradiction. In the next two sections we will outline how he might do this.

**III. The Dispositional Strategy**

The dispositional strategy attempts to solve the dilemma by conceiving of Platonic attitudes as involving dispositional properties. Dispositional properties are properties a thing has that cannot be characterized except by reference to what changes the thing will undergo in certain circumstances.[[36]](#footnote-36) For example, the fragility of the vase is a dispositional property because one cannot characterize its fragility except by reference to the fact that the vase will break when dropped from a relative short height onto a hard surface, other things being equal. Dispositional properties stand in contrast to categorical properties. A categorical property of the vase is its shape since, in order to characterize that shape, we do not need to reference what the vase will do when tossed, dropped, yelled at, painted, and so on. Attitudes very plausibly have both categorical and dispositional features. Consider desire. Desires have durations, and duration can be characterized without reference to what the agent with the desire would do in the relevant circumstances. But desire also has dispositional features: the desire that *p* has the dispositional property that someone with the desire will attempt to make *p* true when given the opportunity, other things being equal. [[37]](#footnote-37)

Plato seems to be aware of both the categorical and dispositional features of attitudes. For example, in the *Philebus* Socrates proposes that being empty (*kenoutai*) is a categorical property of desire, or the “common feature whose recognition allows us to address all these phenomena, which differ so much, by the same name” (*Phlb.* 34e3-4).[[38]](#footnote-38) This clearly echoes *Republic* 585b1-c4 where “hunger, thirst, and the like are empty states (*kenōseis*) of the body” that are satiated by food and drink, whereas “ignorance and lack of sense are [emptiness] (*kenotēs*) of the soul” that are filled upby true belief, knowledge, and understanding. Yet Plato conceives of desire not merely in terms of its categorical properties but as also involving dispositions to think or act in certain ways. For example, in the *Philebus* he claims that desire gives rise to an impulse (*hormē*) which leads (*agousa*) one toward the condition opposite to emptiness, namely fullness or satiety (35c9). The language of the *Republic*’s thirsty man argument closely parallels this description: a soul that wishes (*bouletai*) to drink both “yearns for this *and* is *impelled* towards it” (*kai toutou orgetai kai epi touto hormai*) (439b1, emphasis ours).[[39]](#footnote-39) Earlier in the argument, Socrates claims that the soul of a person who has an appetite for something is “striving for this to come about” (*eporegomenein autou tēs geneseos*) (437c5).[[40]](#footnote-40) Here, the desire to drink clearly involves a disposition to drink. The dispositional features of desire are also clear from Plato’s anxieties about imitative poetry. In Book X, “the part of the soul… that hungers for the satisfaction of weeping and wailing” (606a4-5), viz. the spirited part, if it is strengthened by continually indulging in the pity of characters, “won’t be easily held in check when we ourselves suffer” (b7-8). The reason Plato worries about continually satisfying these desires is that they involve dispositions to act: those with a desire to wallow in pity, when given the chance, will wallow in pity. The same is apparently true “in the case of sex, anger (*thumou*), and all the desires (*tōn epithumētikōn*), pleasures, and pains that we say *accompany all our actions* (*pasē praxei hēmin hepesthai*)” (606d1-2, emphasis added).[[41]](#footnote-41) While Platonic desires are not characterizable solely in terms of dispositions, it is clear that they at least *have* dispositional properties (even if only contingently). [[42]](#footnote-42)

The Principle of Opposites requires that violations in a simple thing entail a contradiction. Towards this end, the dispositionalist strategy aims to use the dispositional features of attitudes as a bridge for transferring contradictory content (*p* and not *p*) to the soul’s attitudes themselves, thus allowing the simple soul in conflict to generate a contradiction. If successful, this strategy would make the *possession*, and not merely the satisfaction, of contradictory desires impossible. Dispositions have the potential to play this bridging role because the dispositional features of attitudes already link attitudes and content in various mundane ways, e.g., a desire that *p* involves the disposition to try to satisfy *p* when given the opportunity. So, while MacIntyre is right that there is a difference between a pair of desires’ being impossible to jointly *satisfy* and their being impossible to jointly *possess*, the dispositional features of desire can potentially allow an inference from the former to the latter (at least in the case of a simple soul). Though it is of course true that not *all* features of content get inherited by attitudes in this manner. In other words, the following inference is generally invalid: the content of token attitude A has property F, therefore A has F. When you think about the American Civil War, the content of your thought, the Civil War, is dated to the nineteenth century, despite the fact that the act of thinking itself is dated to the twenty-first century. So, one cannot, as a general rule, infer properties of attitudes straightaway from properties of content. Plato himself notes the invalidity of this kind of inference:

I said of all things that are related to something, those that are merely themselves are related to things that are merely themselves, while those that are of a particular sort are related to things of a particular sort. However, I don’t mean that the sorts in question have to be the same for them both. For example, *knowledge of health or disease isn’t healthy or diseased, and knowledge of good and bad doesn’t itself become good or bad*. (438e1-5, our emphasis)

For at least some properties of contents—i.e., being healthy, diseased, good, or bad—the properties are not also properties of the constitutive attitudes. But the fact that the *general* inference from contents to attitudes is invalid does not mean specific versions of the inference are also invalid. The goal of the dispositionalist strategy is to argue that in the case of a simple soul, one can use the dispositional features of attitudes to infer from logically incompatible contents to logically incompatible attitudes.

For the rest of this section, we outline how exactly this is done and one major problem with the strategy. This is best accomplished by considering an overly simple analysis of dispositional features of desire and belief. For desire: if an agent desires that *p* and has the opportunity to bring it about that *p,* then she will bring it about that *p*.By an ‘opportunity,’ we mean only that satisfying *p* through a relatively limited series of actions is not impossible due to some physical obstacle. For example, one has the opportunity to satisfy their desire for a glass of orange juice if there is juice in the fridge, there are ways to get to the fridge, and so on. Call this the *simple analysis* of desire’s dispositional features.[[43]](#footnote-43) Let’s apply the simple analysis to the man who both wants to drink and wants not to drink. According to it, the following two conditionals are both true:

C1: if the man has the opportunity to drink, then the man will drink

C2: if the man has the opportunity not to drink, then the man will not drink

C1 and C2 are logically consistent.[[44]](#footnote-44) But suppose a situation arises where the man has the opportunity both to drink and to not drink. On the simple analysis, the antecedents of C1 and C2 are true, and entail the following claim:

C3: the man will drink and will not drink

C3 is a contradiction. But it is not simply the impossibility that MacIntyre highlights, namely the impossibility of satisfying both desires. Rather, the contradiction results from the dispositional features of desire, which are features of attitudes rather than of their contents. The content of the desire (i.e., to drink or to not drink), while it furnishes the details of what the disposition is for, does not itself *possess* a disposition. So, on the simple analysis, the dispositional features of desire allow for an inference from the existence of inconsistent content to the existence of desires which themselves entail a contradiction.

The same strategy can be applied to the Book X cases. Beliefs, like desires, have dispositional properties. For example, beliefs bear some connection to action such that people tend to act on their beliefs. Plato recognizes these dispositional features of belief. For instance, in the Book III discussion of poetry, he writes that people should not believe stories about heroes who are impious or bad because “these stories are harmful to people who hear them, for everyone will be ready to excuse himself when he’s bad” (391c7-e7). Similarly, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates warns:

[I]f you think what I say is true, agree to it, and if not, oppose me with every argument you can muster, that I may not in my eagerness deceive myself and you alike and go away, like a bee, leaving my sting sticking in you. 91c1-5

That is, assenting to a falsehood disposes one to think and act in harmful ways.[[45]](#footnote-45) Let’s suppose the following overly simple dispositional analysis of Platonic belief: if an agent believes that *p* and is capable, then the agent will act as if *p.* For example, if one believes that it is raining and is capable, then one will act as if it’s raining (such as by staying indoors or carrying an umbrella if one doesn’t want to get wet). Being ‘capable’ here corresponds to having an opportunity to act on a desire: a person who’s capable in this context is not physically prevented from doing the thing in question. According to the simple analysis, the following two conditionals (or something like them) are true of the man in Book X:

C4: if the man believes the stick is straight and he’s capable, then he’ll act as if the stick is straight

C5: if the man believes the stick isn’t straight and he’s capable, then he’ll act as if the stick isn’t straight

C4 and C5 are not negations of each other and so their conjunction is not a contradiction. But a situation might arise which generates a contradiction on the basis of C4 and C5. For example, suppose a situation arises, such as in a conversation, where to act as if the stick is straight requires answering “yes” when asked whether the stick is straight, and to act as if the stick is not straight requires answering “no” to the same question (rather than “yes”). In this case, the man will be disposed both to answer “yes” when asked and not to answer “yes” when asked. We have our contradiction:

C6: the man will both answer and not answer “yes” when asked if the stick is straight

As with the case of desires, the contradiction in C6 is not a result of features of the content of the beliefs. Rather, it arises from the dispositional features of the attitudes. So, if we grant the simple analysis, Plato has a way to bridge the gap between attitudes that cannot be jointly satisfied and attitudes that cannot be jointly *had*.

The simple analysis is of course much too simple. For example, just because someone desires (or believes) that *p*, it doesn’t follow that they’ll bring it about that *p* (or act as if *p*), even if the opportunity arises and even if they’re capable. For instance, people are sometimes practically irrational: an addict might want to be sober and nonetheless fail, even though opportunity to practice sobriety arises. It is just these kinds of cases that lead Stalley (1975: 127) to reject the simple analysis:

It is widely agreed that the relationshipbetween a desire or want and the behaviour which characteristically stems from it is not a purely contingent one. The difficulty is to know how exactly this non-contingent relationship is to be construed. Superficially the most attractive version is that which treats a desire as a disposition to behave in a certain way. Dispositional statements are usually construed as disguised conditionals and so a simple version of this theory would treat the statement ‘Smith wants to drink’ as equivalent to ‘'Smith would drink if he had the opportunity’. The trouble with this theory is that it meets the same sort of difficulty which Plato encountered in dealing with conflicting wants. To say that a person wants to drink and also is unwilling to drink would be to say that he would drink if he had the opportunity and would refrain from drinking if he had the opportunity. It would follow that when such a person has the opportunity either to drink or refrain from drinking he will do both, but this is obviously absurd.

Stalley is here highlighting that dispositions can have their activation blocked not simply by circumstances external to the agent, but also by something internal to the agent. For example, a desire that *p* might not lead an agent to bring it about that *p* for the simple reason that there is a competing and stronger desire that not *p.* This is a feature of desire that Plato clearly recognizes. For example, in his Book VI discussion of the ideal characteristics of rulers, Socrates says:

when someone’s desires incline strongly for one thing, they are thereby weakened for others, just like a stream that has been partly diverted into another channel… Then, when someone’s desires flow toward learning and everything of that sort, he’d be concerned with the pleasures of the soul itself by itself, and he’d abandon those pleasures that come with the body… 485d4-8

Once we admit that a disposition’s activation can be prevented by something which is also internal to the agent, then the dispositional strategy begins to fall apart, at least on the simple analysis. For once competing attitudes are admitted to sometimes block the activation of dispositions, contradictions like C3 and C6 do not obviously result from having attitudes towards inconsistent contents. After all, those are cases where a stronger desire or a stronger assertoric attitude are present. It is our aim in the next and final section to improve upon the simple analysis in a way that makes the dispositionalist strategy promising again.

**IV. *Ceteris Paribus* Dispositions**

Stalley’s objection makes clear that dispositions have many conditions for their activation beyond the main triggering condition. For example, the vase’s disposition to break when dropped—its fragility—has as its main triggering condition *being dropped.* But for the vase to break it is not enough that the vase be dropped. In addition, the distance fallen must be sufficiently high, the landing surface sufficiently hard, the rate of acceleration sufficiently fast, there must be no intervening divine beings, and so on. It is unlikely one could list every single condition necessary for the activation of the disposition. Instead, the conditions over and above the main triggering conditions fall under a general *ceteris paribus* umbrella: the vase will break if dropped, *other things being equal.* The problem with the simple analysis of the previous section is that it failed to take account of the *ceteris paribus* nature of dispositions, especially those involving desire and belief. Contrary to what the simple analysis claims, the presence of a desire together with an opportunity to act on it is not sufficient to trigger the disposition to bring it about that the desire is satisfied. Rather, additional conditions must be met, including the absence of stronger, competing desires.We can modify the simple analysis by adding a *ceteris paribus* clause. For desire: if an agent desires that *p* and the opportunity arises, then they will bring it about that *p*, *other things being equal*. For belief: if an agent believes that *p* and is capable, then she will act as if *p, other things being equal*. Call the dispositional analysis that includes a ceteris paribus clause the *complicated analysis*.

Plato does not *explicitly* hold anything like the complicated analysis. He does, however, at various points gesture at the *ceteris paribus* nature of the dispositions involved in desire and belief. First, as was noted above, the strength or intensity of a desire often seems to affect one’s inclination to satisfy it, especially in the face of a stronger competing desire (cf. 392a1 442a7, 485d5, 561b1). Second, how longstanding an attitude is seems relevant to its dispositional features, i.e., beliefs formed at a young age are potentially more efficacious since they “are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable.” (378d7-8) Third, background beliefs and desires also appear to impact the dispositional features of an attitude. For instance, Socrates rationale for a rigorous musical education is that it forms “the right distastes” in a person, which in turn cause him to pursue good things and accept what is reasonable “because of its kinship with himself” (401e4-402a4). It follows that a person is more likely to act in accord with desires and beliefs that are generally consistent with his prior tastes and commitments. So, even if the complicated analysis is not explicitly Plato’s own, the addition of a *ceteris paribus* clause is broadly consistent with his expressed views.

However, even granting that some version of the complicated analysis is implicit in Plato’s view of desire and belief, using them to solve MacIntyre’s dilemma runs into the following problem. Once the simple analysis is replaced with the complicated ones, we cannot *automatically* derive contradictions from the presence of competing desires in a soul, since the presence itself seems to make it so that other things *aren’t* equal. If other things aren’t equal, then the events in the consequents of the complicated analysis (that the agent will bring it about that *p* or act as if *p*) need not occur even if the triggering conditions in the antecedent are present. The attempt to use dispositions to drag the logical incompatibility of content into the attitudes themselves will have failed.

Nevertheless, there is a way for Plato to use the *ceteris paribu*s clause to his advantage.[[46]](#footnote-46) The basic idea is this: if Plato is entitled to assume in the conflict cases that other things *are* equal, then the dispositions in question will be activated when their main triggering conditions are activated. Once both are activated, the simple soul which has those dispositions will do the impossible, e.g., drink and not drink. The first stepin defending this move is to articulate *when* other things are equal. After all, the *ceteris paribus* clause must not simply mean “whatever might block the agent from bringing it about that *p*”. This would render the disposition vacuous, for it would essentially amount to the trivial truth that the agent who desires that *p* will bring it about that *p* unless she doesn’t.[[47]](#footnote-47) It is likely impossible to fully specify the conditions implicit in the clause “other things being equal”—the very existence of the clause is a recognition of this fact—but we can nonetheless say enough so as to make the clause non-trivial in the context of Platonic desires and beliefs. We suggest that at the very least the *ceteris paribus* clause should include the world’s cooperation. What is the world? It is, most generally, the set of concrete things distinct from the agent themselves, whether objects or events. So, lightning, sidewalks, and windstorms all count as part of the world, whereas an agent’s own desires, thoughts, volitions, beliefs, and so on do not. What is the world’s cooperation? It is its non-interference with the activation of the disposition. For example, if one desires to run a marathon and the world cooperates, then, at the very least, things like lightning strikes or hurricanes won’t prevent the desire from being satisfied. Unpacking the *ceteris paribus* clause this way leaves the ‘other things being equal’ clause non-vacuous because, as it is defined in terms of external impediments, it leaves open the possibility that the world cooperates and yet the disposition is blocked because of some impediment internal to the agent. For example, it leaves open the possibility that some stronger desire prevents the disposition’s activation.

The next task is to explain why Plato is entitled to assume that everything else *is* equal in the conflict cases, i.e., why at the world is cooperating in these cases. Consider what the world’s cooperation involves. The world is the set of things independent of the agent. For a desire to be efficacious, the world must cooperate—things distinct from the agent must not prevent the agent who desires that *p* from bringing it about that *p*. To use the example above, if one desires to run a marathon and the world cooperates, then lightning or hurricanes won’t prevent the person from running the marathon. In the context of the partition argument, Socrates seems to be assuming that nothing external to the person in conflict impedes the satisfaction of their attitudes. Reconsider the central passage of the thirsty man who desires not to drink:

Now, would we assert that sometimes there are thirsty people who don’t wish to drink?...What, then, should we say about them? Isn’t it that there is something in their soul, bidding them to drink, and something different, forbidding them to do so, that overrules the thing that bids?...Hence it isn’t unreasonable for us to claim they are two, and different from each other.439c2-d3

Socrates is here inferring that there must be two parts of the soul (appetite and something that overrules it), based on the fact that the desire to drink is not efficacious. But one could easily block this inference by interjecting “perhaps the man doesn’t drink because each time he tries, someone tackles him—so, all we can infer is that something other than the simple soul exists”. This would be an absurd interjection, since the context makes clear that an external force is *not* the kind of reason for why the thirsty person’s desire to drink fails to produce drinking. The world is cooperating, in other words. If anything interferes with the desire’s disposition to action, then it must be *internal* to the soul in question.

The question now becomes whether or not Plato can count a competing desire, such as the desire *not* to drink, as something similarly *external* to the simple soul that wants to drink. If he cannot consider the competing desires to be external, then Stalley’s objection stands: the competing desire can block the consequents of C1, C2, C4, and C5 even if the main triggering conditions in the antecedents are met. But if he *can* count the desire not to drink as external to the soul who wants to drink, just as hurricanes are external to the agent who wants to run a marathon, then Plato is entitled to set aside the desire not to drink as part of his assumption that the external world is cooperating. That is, just as he entitled to assume that the soul’s desire to drink is not impeded by external forces like being tackled, so too would he be entitled to assume that they are not impeded by an external desire not to drink. And if Plato is entitled to construe the desire not to drink as external to the simple soul that wants to drink, then he can say that both desires are activated and thereby generate the contradiction necessary for partitioning the soul.

At first glance, however, it would seem that Plato can only construe competing desires as external to the agent by begging the question, i.e., by assumingthat competing desires must come from a competing part of the soul. So, he wouldn’t be entitled to assume that there are no competing desires simply because the world is not interfering. Nonetheless, we think that Plato *can* consider competing desires as external to the agent without begging the question. To see why, it is important to notice a key feature of the thirsty man argument. The conclusion of the argument is phrased in terms of an inference to the best explanation:

Now, would we assert that sometimes there are thirsty people who don’t wish to drink? …What, then, should one say about them? Isn’t it that there is something in their soul, bidding them to drink, and something different, forbidding them to do so, that overrules the thing that bids? (439c2-7)

The explanandum is the fact of mental conflict and the explanans is the composite nature of the soul. But Socrates can infer that the existence of multiple parts best explains conflict only after first considering, and rejecting, the possibility that the fact of conflict can be explained by a simple soul. To reject this possibility, Socrates considers what a simple soul who thirsts would be like: “the soul of the thirsty person, insofar as he’s thirsty, doesn’t wish anything else but to drink, and it wants this and is impelled towards it” (439a5-b1). Two things are important here. First, Socrates clearly thinks that we can form a coherent conception of a simple soul, one who has desires and acts on them, with no information beyond the fact that the soul is thirsty (or at least nothing beyond what is required to be thirsty).[[48]](#footnote-48) As he says: “thirst itself is in its nature only for drink itself… hence the soul of the thirsty person, *insofar as he’s thirsty* (*kath’ hoson dipsei*)…” (439a5-b1, emphasis ours). We are able to form,to borrow the Cartesian phrase, a “complete conception” of a soul that thirsts and thirsts alone—complete in the sense that it is sufficient for understanding the agent in question that we understand that it desires to drink.[[49]](#footnote-49) Second, a simple thirsty soul would not only desire drink, but would also will to satisfy that desire for drink (“…doesn’t wish anything else but to drink (*ouk allo ti bouletai ȇ piein*), and it wants this *and* is impelled towards it” (439a5-b1, emphasis ours). This is important, because if this simple agent’s desire to drink were to be blocked by another desire, then *additional* information would be necessary to characterize the soul in question. We would have to appeal to something external to the coherent simple agent to explain the competing desire.[[50]](#footnote-50) Given that we can conceive of a simple soul whose sole desire is for drink, with no reference whatsoever to its capacity for rational calculation (which grounds the desire not to drink), it seems that rational calculation must be some *extra* capacity that the soul has, if it has it. But since Socrates is considering a simple soul for the sake of argument, and is conceiving of that simple agent without any capacities beyond those needed for a desire to drink, the extra capacity must be *independent* of the simple soul in question. This is important, since in the context of the argument Socrates is already assuming that the simple soul is not impeded by independent forces. As the desire not to drink is here considered an independent force—as it is conceptually independent of the simple soul under consideration—Socrates is entitled to assume that it will not interfere with the simple soul that desires to drink. In other words, other things are equal and so the disposition in question will be triggered. A simple soul that desires to drink will drink. Socrates can then run the same argument back, but with the soul under consideration being a soul which desires not to drink. Since other things are equal there too, the disposition will likewise be triggered. So, a simple soul that desires to drink and not to drink will both drink and not drink, generating the contradiction necessary to infer that the soul has parts.

One might object at this point that the mere fact that there can *be* no contradictions would require that at most one of the two conflicting dispositions would activate. That is, at least one would simply not fire. If at least one of the two is not activated, then no contradiction results and there is no partition. This is no doubt true in normal circumstances: in normal circumstances the world prevents the occurrence of inconsistent things. But highlighting that the triggering of one disposition logically blocks the triggering of the other requires referencing something independent of the second disposition. It therefore violates a key aspect of the supposition that other things are equal, namely, that no interfering forces are being considered. In other words, Socrates is in this context intending to isolate each desire from any independent forces’ interference, so he can even set aside the scenario that holds in normal circumstances, in which the world would prevent one of the simple soul’s dispositions from being triggered. So, both dispositions are triggered and a simple soul in conflict would generate a contradiction.[[51]](#footnote-51)

**V. Conclusion**

MacIntyre accuses Plato of conflating the impossibility of a simple soul in conflict satisfying its desires with the impossibility of that same soul having conflicting desires. This accusation raises a dilemma: either Plato is equivocating on ‘opposites’ when he says that the soul in conflict undergoes opposites, or he has failed to show that having opposites as the contents of one’s attitudes entails that the attitudes themselves undergo opposites. We’ve proposed a solution to the problem MacIntyre raises. [[52]](#footnote-52)  We argued that the dispositional nature of desire and belief offers Plato a way to drag the opposites that exist in the content of a soul in conflict into the soul’s attitudes themselves, at least insofar as the soul is simple. The strategy we’ve defended is of course not foolproof—for example, we have not defended Socrates’ apparent assumption that capacities which are conceptual independent are therefore ontologically independent. [[53]](#footnote-53) But it does show that one can grant the attitude-content distinction—a view of desire more in line with contemporary views—and yet nonetheless think that Plato has a way of responding to MacIntyre’s dilemma.

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1. Specifically, three parts: reason, appetite, and spirit. Nothing in this paper turns on there being exactly three parts, or on the specific nature of those parts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Much of the literature on the partition argument concerns whether Plato endorses or rejects the Socratic moral psychology of the *Meno* 77b–78b, *Gorgias* 468b–e and *Protagoras* 358b–d. See White (1979: 124– 50), Lesses (1987: 147–161), Reeve (1988: 134–5), Penner (1992: 129), Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 90–96), Irwin (1995: 209), Parry (1996: 93–4), Carone (2001: 107–8), Lorenz (2006: 28), Moss (2006: 525-7 and 2008: 60-64), and Kamtekar (2017: 129-30). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Crombie (1962: 355-6), Penner (1971: 108-11), Stalley (1975: 124), Annas (1981: 137), Reeve (1988: 124-31), Irwin (1995: 205), Price (1995: 39), Smith (1999: 31-8), Bobonich (2002: 228), Lorenz (2006: 38-40), and Brown (2012: 53-74) offer various objections. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In the following section we consider whether this is truly the form of the argument. For detailed reconstructions of the entire argument, as opposed to its basic structure, see Irwin (1995: 204), Lorenz (2006: 25), Stalley (2007: 32), Duncombe (2015: 39, and Kamtekar (2017: 136). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Irwin (1995: 204) and others call it ‘the principle of non-contrariety’. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Trans*. following Grube and Reeve (1992) with alternations noted. All references to the Greek are Slings (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Price (2009) catalogues some of the more recent disagreements about how this example functions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This is stressed by many commentators, e.g., Duncombe (2015: p. 39, fn. 5), Price (1995: 39), and Reeve (1998: 119). Brown (2016) claims that the Principle of Opposites is “comparable to Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction”. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Stalley (1975: 121-4) makes a similar observation. Likewise, though Aristotle distinguishes between contrary properties and contradictory properties, he uses the Principle of Non-Contradiction to explain why contraries cannot both be true of a thing (*Meta*. 1011b17–19). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Though we do not have space to address them in detail, there are interpretations that construe the co-existence of opposites in a simple thing as merely metaphysically or physically impossible. Price (1995: 39-48) seems to hold this view. See also Shields (2001: 145). Duncombe (2015) may hold it as well. See Clarke (2010) for discussion of opposing dispositions. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. 439b1-6, 439b8-c7, and 440a7-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Here we use ‘desire’ in the most general sense. That is, having a ‘desire’ need not entail the activity of the appetitive part of the soul (*hē epithumia*), but can occur in any part (cf. 580d6-8). We do not defend the more controversial view that the soul’s parts are *homuncili* or robust psychological agents in their own right rather than mere aspects of ourselves. See Cooper (1984), Kahn (1987), Bobonich (2002: 220), Lorenz (2006: 23), and Kamtekar (2017: 130) for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In Section I we further address whether introducing the attitude-content distinction is faithful to Plato’s view of desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. As Tye (2007: 610, fn 14) writes: “the content of a thought … is expressed in the ‘that’-clause and it is either true or false (or neither true nor false, on three-valued views). (2007: 610, fn. 14) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. So, even though belief and desire have inverse directions of fit, they both have conditions for satisfaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Crombie (1962: 355-6) accuses Plato of conflating the principle that a soul cannot have a pro-attitude that *p* and lack that attitude with the principle that it cannot both have a pro-attitude that *p* and have an anti-attitude that *p.* Stalley (1975: 118-121) defends Plato against this accusation. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This distinction between different properties of desire will come up again in Section IV. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This alters Grube and Reeve (1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For an overview of the distinction, see MacBride (2020). For specific accounts, see Moore (1919), Armstrong (1997: 87-89), and Lewis (1986: 62). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. If the content is fixed by the agent’s relation to the environment, then one could accept the attitude-content distinction while construing desires as external relations. We know of no evidence that Plato accepts such an externalist view of content. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Exceptions to this view include Leibniz, for whom force and motion are intrinsic properties. See Garber (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For the view that Platonic desires are opposite relations akin to pushings and pullings, see Stalley (1975: 111-2 and 2007: 71-2), Cooper (1984: 7), Smith (1999: 34), and Duncombe (2015: 54-55). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. It is inspired by Kant’s critique of Leibniz’s rejection of non-logical opposition in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (A264-5/B320-1). See also Kant (1992). See Southgate (2013) for discussion of Kant’s critique. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Mechanism and its commitment to contact-based forces, together with the principle that no two bodies can occupy the same space, might render the scenario physically impossible. But mechanism is likely not a view Plato would accept. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. A view which considers desires to be internal relations can easily explain away the physical counterexample just given: object P is not technically undergoing opposites since there is no contradiction generated in the scenario just described. In order for F and G to cause P to undergo opposites, they would need to successfully move P in opposite directions. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. One might respond that the desiderata here are something like Protagorean sense data. But sense data theory is a fringe view in the philosophy of perception, and an even more fringe view as an account of desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Internal views of desire or belief would also need to explain how one can desire the non-existent. But the task is not as hopeless as explaining how a desire can stand in an external relation to something non-existent. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cf.*.* 478b5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Socrates uses the same description for the perceptual states that cause the conflicting beliefs: “something *looks crooked* when seen in water and straight when seen out of it” (602c9-10, our emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. To interpret the Book X in a way that is inconsistent with the way we are interpretating requires interpreting it as involving a belief that *p* and a denial that *p* and then to add that a denial that *p* does not entail a belief that not-*p*. But this is a claim that Plato clearly rejects, insofar as he describes the Book X case in terms of two beliefs towards incompatible content. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Cf. 439b1-6, 439b8-c7, and 440a7-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Irwin (1995: 381, n.7) and Smith (1998: 32) for the distinction between an aversion to x and not wanting x.” Lorenz (2009: sec. 3.2) and Duncombe (2015: 39) both describe the desires as the locus of opposition, not their contents. See Smith (1999 and *forthcoming*) for a critique of this view. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Stalley (1975: 119) suspects Plato is being imprecise when he says this. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. A free-floating forbidding that exists independently of a desire that not *p* makes no sense in prudential cases like the thirsty man case. Likewise, Socrates construes the Leontius and injustice conflicts as arising in part from rational calculation (440a8). Smith (1999 and *forthcoming*) echoes this line of reasoning. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Siewert (2001: 336) agrees. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Choi (2018) offers a standard account of dispositions: “F is a disposition iff there are an associated stimulus condition and manifestation such that, necessarily, x has F only if x would produce the manifestation if it were in the stimulus condition”. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. These properties ultimately belong to the agent. We attribute them to the attitude so as to highlight that they are not properties of content. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Cf. *Symposium* 200b where to have a desire for something is to be lacking (*endeneis*) it. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Trans. our own for clarity. Kamketar (2017: 136) reads the thirsty man similarly: "thirst (an appetite) gives rise to both a psychological attitude directed to an action (bouletai) that will procure the object desired (oregetai) as well as a motion (hormai)". [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Trans. our own. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Cf. 388d2-e4 which considers the link between false stories and bad actions, and 392a1 which considers the link between imitative arts and “a strong inclination to do bad things”. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See Stalley (1975: 125-8), Price (2009: 1), Blackson (2010: 109), Bobonich (2017: 11) on the dispositional features of desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Stalley (1975: 127) suggests that Plato may ascribe to this analysis, though he finds it unpromising. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. They are translated into propositional logic as <if P, then Q> and <if R, then not-Q>, which are logically consistent. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Socrates warns Crito against believing that the death of the body is harmful (115e5-7). To believe that Socrates is harmed by the death of the body will lead Crito to privilege bodily concerns over matters of true importance. Also, in the Book X discussion of poetry, Socrates claims that beliefs formed on the basis of rational deliberation lead to the most appropriate actions (604c5-d4). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Stalley thinks simple versions of the dispositional strategy fails for this reason (127). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Hempel (1988) and Lange (1993) for this worry with ceteris paribus clauses. See Hüttemann (2014) for an attempt to avoid it in the context of dispositions. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. This isn’t to say that a simple soul doesn’t have other desires, but only that we don’t need to conceive of those other desires to have a coherent picture of a simple soul. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. In the *Fourth Replies,* Descartes uses the concept of a complete conception in his argument for the real distinction between mind and body. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This claim—that additional, and therefore external, information would be necessary—is bolstered by the fact that the competing desires in question originate in distinct psychic capacities, regardless of whether or not they’re located in the same part of the soul (439c9-d1). Likely, 436a7-9 supports thinking about psychic capacities as at least *conceptually* distinct from parts of the soul. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. One might prefer to argue, in the spirit of Lewis (1976), that the simple soul in this scenario has the power to both drink and not drink even though it never will. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. While our reconstruction of the partition argument saves it from invalidity, it does not address the so-called over- and under-generation problems. See Cross and Woozley (1966: 116-7), Penner (1971: 108-11), Annas (1981: 137), Reeve (1988: 124), Irwin (1995: 205-6), Price (1995: 45-8), and Duncombe (2015: 43) for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. It is an open question whether Plato intends the soul’s parts to be ontologically or explanatory parts. For an example of the latter, see Irwin (1995, 203-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)