

# AFFECTIVITY, AGENCY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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*Peter Šajda et al.*

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well as the issue of what constitutes the process of a genuine dialogue between individuals, groups and traditions. The notions of non-violence, conflict resolution and mediation are explored in detail in order to locate the possibilities for overcoming inherited misrepresentations and traumas.

The present volume continues the tradition of thematic volumes annually published by the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in collaboration with its international partners. Ever since 2005 the Institute has hosted annual conferences under the joint title *The Bratislava Philosophical Days*, which brought together scholars from different countries and fields of study. This volume is based on the 2011 conference held in Bratislava and it is the fruit of the cooperation between the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava), the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (Prague), the Department of Philosophy of Central European University (Budapest), the Department of Philosophy of the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences (Budapest) and the Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts. We hope that the volume will provide the reader with vital philosophical inspiration and novel insight into the highly relevant themes that it aims to elucidate.

Peter Šajda

## PLATO'S PSYCHOLOGY OF ACTION AND THE ORIGIN OF AGENCY

Florin George Călian

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*As regards the superstition of logicians, I never tire of underlining a quick little fact that these superstitious people are reluctant to admit: namely, that a thought comes when 'it' wants to, and not when 'I' want it to; so it is falsifying the facts to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'. There is thinking, but to assert that 'there' is the same thing as that famous old 'I' is, to put it mildly, only an assumption, a hypothesis, and certainly not an 'immediate certainty'.*

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 17.

Alongside developing a theory of forms which are in charge of what things are, Plato gives an account of change and motion in the world which, unlike the forms, is unstable and in a permanent transformation. Since the forms, as principles of permanence, cannot stand as an explanation for why the sensible world changes, there must be another principle which is in charge of change and motion. The world is constantly maintained by the forms and there seems to be another entity besides them (which is not exactly a form and quite different from it) which complements the work of the forms. This entity is the soul. Plato's conception of the soul is partially an answer to questions pertaining to the origin of change and motion<sup>1</sup> in the world, and, accordingly, to that of human agency.

In *Phaedrus* (245e), Plato makes the following assertion: "for every bodily object that is moved from outside has no soul, while a body whose motion comes from within, from itself, does have a soul."<sup>2</sup> The body alone is incapable of any

<sup>1</sup> As G. C. Field notes, Plato is interested in finding a principle of cause and motion as a balance to the principle of stability and regularity. See G. C. Field, *The Philosophy of Plato* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> All references to Plato are quoted from John M. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997).

kind of agency,<sup>3</sup> or, in other words, as Erik Ostenfeld has pointed out: “the body and its constituents do not deserve the name of cause. It is not only that the body is not an agent, but that is not causally effective at all.”<sup>4</sup> This observation attributes exclusively to the soul power over matter, which may remind us of Ryle’s expression of the “ghost in the machine,” which for some scholars, is “very close to Plato’s usual view on the matter.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, for Plato, the “human soul is not simply a principle of motion: it is also intelligent.”<sup>6</sup> Because of this feature, i.e. the intellect, the soul can drive itself and also the body towards what is good. For example, if I intend to do something it is because I *think* it is good. For that reason, one could not have actions of the body which would be the result of chance. Christine J. Thomas notes, “the motions of Socrates’ body when he walks are caused by the psychic motions that are his beliefs, emotions or desires. Those psychic motions aim, in some sense, at what Socrates takes to be good. Socrates’ motion counts, then, as an action (and not merely an affection) because of its mechanical and teleological origins in Socrates’ soul.”<sup>7</sup>

Usually the Greek term *psyche* is translated as “soul,” but there are several alternatives, all of which do not have complete semantic overlapping with the current notion of the soul (Christian and post-Cartesian), mainly because *psyche* for the Greeks means more than an entity which survives the body. *Psyche* means also *character, personality*<sup>8</sup> or “in some passages, even as late as Plato or later, it can only be intelligibly translated as ‘life’ and even ‘mind.’” Julia Annas asserts that

<sup>3</sup> It is worthy of recognition that there is no Greek concept to correspond to that of an agent. See Miira Tuominen, “Assumptions of Normativity: Two Ancient Approaches to Agency,” *Ancient Philosophy of the Self*, ed. Pauliina Remes and Juha Sihvola (Springer: New Synthese Historical Library, 2008), p. 58. On the other hand, Aristotle in *De Anima* explicitly emphasizes that *psyche* is the principle of motion (*kinesis*).

<sup>4</sup> Erik Ostenfeld, *Ancient Greek Psychology and the Modern Mind–Body Debate* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1986), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> See Paul S. MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003ff), vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Christine J. Thomas, “Plato,” *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, ed. Timothy O’Connor and Constantine Sandis (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 432.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.433. In addition, Thomas notes that material conditions “are not always regarded as genuine explanatory factors by Plato,” they “are identified as necessary conditions for Socrates’ bodily actions; but they are not themselves regarded as genuine ‘causes’” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>8</sup> Nicolas Pappas, *Plato and the Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 83. Another peculiarity is that while Aristotle is speaking about the *psychai* of plants, in the *De Anima*, Plato, in *Timaeus*, is speaking about a *psyche* of the world; and it is quite difficult to imagine that the *psyche* of the world has desires and ambitions as the *psyche* of the human being.

<sup>9</sup> Field, *The Philosophy of Plato*, p. 115. Also Andrew S. Mason, *Plato* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), p. 99. Christine Thomas considers that Plato is the first who distinguished in Greek

Plato’s *psyche* is, in the *Republic* IV, “rather like our talk of someone’s mind to refer to certain mental phenomena without committing ourselves thereby to any particular theory about mind, for example that is something immaterial.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly to Annas, I am inclined to think that Plato’s *soul* is closer to our conception of *mind* and *psyche*, to the extent that the terms *soul*, *psyche*, and *mind* are interchangeable.

Plato is challenged several times in his dialogues (even if the discussions are not centered on psychological issues) to give an account of the *psyche*. Each dialogue has its peculiar notions of what is the nature of the soul. For instance, in *Crito*, the soul is the origin of ethical behavior, while in the *Apology of Socrates*, it is an entity which undergoes progress through learning. The soul is referred to as something which has more value than the body, in *Protagoras*, while in *Gorgias* its description focuses on the feature that it commands the body. In *Meno*, one learns that the soul is unborn and that it is the source of unlearned knowledge through anamnesis, and in *Phaedo*, the immortality (*athanatos*) of the soul is its main characteristic, while the body is responsible for perception and irrationality. One can observe that, with each dialogue, Plato approximates a conception of the soul that does not appear as clear and unified. In these writings—with the exception of the apology for a typical and plain dualist conception of soul-body,<sup>11</sup> in which the soul is the positive entity (related with the rational part, overarching each psychological facet), and the body is hierarchically lower, therefore almost irrelevant<sup>12</sup>—Pla-

philosophy the soul from life (See Christine J. Thomas, “Plato on the Nature of Life Itself,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 18 (2003), pp. 39-61).

<sup>10</sup> Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> These views are usually seen as the mark of the Platonic antagonism between body and soul—the well-known metaphor of the “prison body,” or *soma-sema* collocation, “our bodies are our tombs” (*Gorgias* 493a). Moreover, the conception appears to be of Pythagorean and Orphic origin, as may well be argued according to the theory of anamnesis: if Pythagoras remembers his previous lives, then the soul has its own individual course, independent from that of the body. Nevertheless, the *psyche*, in the conception of Plato, does not envisage a concrete anamnesis of a previous personal life—in *Phaedo* the *anamnesis* occurs at the level of *episteme*, and only in later dialogues such as the *Timaeus* is this type of knowledge described as innate; the innate character does not concern personal memories, like, for example, the identity of somebody from a previous existence. In Plato’s case, the soul does not recollect anterior lives, but the world of Ideas. This vision really opens the gates to a revolutionary way of thinking, as the Socratic figure recalls. The Pythagorean account appears to be more of a circular paradigm (several reincarnations), whereas the Platonic account, by contrast, appears to be rather linear (total absorption into the intelligible world).

<sup>12</sup> For example, John Dillon argues that maybe Plato did not believe in the real existence of the body, therefore he did not have the problem with the relation of the soul to the body

to leaves little room for the soul to take responsibility for what can be called irrational agency.

However, in three dialogues—*Phaedrus* (246a-b, 253c-255b), *Republic* (IV, 435e-444e, IX, 580d-581a) and *Timaeus* (69c ff.)<sup>13</sup>—which are regarded as belonging to the middle and late period, Plato openly put forward a challenging theory according to which he allocates to the *psyche* a tripartite structure, according to different goal directed actions (both rational and irrational); these are not oriented only towards good, but towards honor or pleasure as well. In these works, Plato elaborates and continues a common sense psychology, which is largely presented in *Phaedo* or *Meno* (that there is an embodied soul), and develops an unusual and revised conception about motivation (according to which an action can have contradictory sources).

Particularly in the *Republic* IV, Plato logically segregates the inner world into separate entities: that-which-reasons<sup>14</sup> (*logistikon*), that-which-inspires (*thumoeides*) and that-which-desires, that is, appetitive dispositions (*epithumetikon*). If one accepts that in *Phaedo* reason can stand for the soul, while ‘non-reason’ is allocated to the body, one can say that the tripartition preserves the antithesis rational-irrational. Both in *Phaedo* and in *Republic* the dichotomy rational-irrational is developed.<sup>15</sup>

The origin of these tripartite tendencies is derived through social observation and, to some extent, through introspection. At *Republic* 436a Plato inquires whether we, when we are inclined towards ‘love of learning’ and ‘love of money,’ do that “with the same part of ourselves, or do we do them with three different

(which starts with Aristotle). See John Dillon, “How does the soul direct the body, after all? Traces of a dispute on mind–body relations in the Old Academy,” *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Dorothea Frede and Burkhard Reis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 346-356.

<sup>13</sup> It is not obvious whether the tripartition should be taken as exactly the same in all three dialogues. However, the resemblance is stronger and these three works share to some extent a common vision about the nature of the soul.

<sup>14</sup> For the periphrastic translation see MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*, vol. 1, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, E. R. Dodds recognizes that “the same passage of Homer which in the *Phaedo* had illustrated the soul’s dialogue with ‘the passions of the body’ becomes in the *Republic* an internal dialogic between two ‘parts’ of the soul; the passions are no longer seen as an infection of extraneous origin, but as a necessary part of the life of the mind as we know it, and even as a source of energy, like Freud’s *libido*, which can be ‘canalized’ either towards sensuous or towards intellectual activity.” See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 213.

parts?”<sup>16</sup> The question is further developed, “do we learn with one part, get angry with another, and with some third part desire the pleasures of food, drink, sex, and the others that are closely akin to them?” (436a-b). Plato’s solution and warning sounds like this, “It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. So, if we ever find this happening in the soul, we’ll know that we aren’t dealing with one thing but many” (436 b7-10). If one desires different things, the soul has to have different components.<sup>17</sup> This is what is usually called by scholars the *principle of opposites* or of *non-contradiction*—which is the source of psychological tension. Besides the principle of opposites, Plato draws a correspondence with the social classes of the polis (434d-441c, 581b-c).<sup>18</sup> The force of the claim is that we are almost blocked in antinomies, “pairs of opposites: assent and dissent, wanting to have something and rejecting it, taking something and pushing it away” (437b). Part of the actions seem to be according to the deliberation of reason, while other parts are against it; therefore there arises a psychological tension between the diverse motivations for action.

In Plato’s *Republic*, it is impossible to speak only about one motivational source of agency. Two characteristics about the internal engine of the soul can be said:

**A. Irrational agency can be explained.** Plato’s segmentation of the *psyche* creates a place also for irrational agency. The view from *Phaedo* is amended, and Plato develops a theory in which the soul also includes non-rational elements. He extends and splits the non-rational domain into the ‘appetitive’ and the ‘spirited.’ Non-rationality starts now to be a part of agency. Together with the rational part,

<sup>16</sup> For several scholars the tripartite soul is a very problematic issue. For example, Annas argues that Plato does not explicitly say whether the parts are “are spatial or temporal parts, and in fact does not use the language of ‘parts’ himself very much.” Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, p. 124. J. L. Stocks claimed that “Plato clearly means ‘trifunctional,’ while “the English word *part* suggests a crudity of which Plato was incapable.” See MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*, vol. 1, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> This argument is ridiculed by Gilbert Ryle: “no tutor would accept from a pupil the reasons given by Plato for...the doctrine that the Soul is tripartite.” See M. F. Burnyeat, “The Truth of Tripartition,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> The rational part corresponds to the guardians; the spirited, to the auxiliaries; the appetitive dispositions, to the craftsmen. The isomorphism of the soul and the polis is one of the main features of the *Republic*, and one cannot say which of them has priority—whether Plato wanted to have a tripartite polis because of the features of the soul, or the other way around. Perhaps Plato’s parallel is not alien to the following remark, that the notion of “psychic conflict” in the history of psychology, along with that of “psychic freedom,” is a construct “taken from political society.” See Philip Rieff, “Freudian Ethics and the Idea of Reason,” *Ethics* 67, no. 3 (1957), p. 170.

the non-rational part increases the sphere of the psyche and now forms an important source, which cannot be ignored anymore, of agency. The new paradigm leaves the possibility for irrational desires to generate agency, which is an autonomous motivational resource.

**B. The human soul is self-contradictory** (since reason itself cannot have contradictory aims). How can someone act if he or she has two mutually opposite aims, both of which having the same amount of strength? The structure of the human soul allows for conflicting sources of motivations and desires. All these puzzles find a solution in the partition of the soul into different components (439d). The question is which of them has priority in action. Does the tripartite model manage to keep the priority of rational agency? Plato draws our attention to the likelihood that there is something in the soul which acts against good behavior. One can say that this is the mark of a weakness of will,<sup>19</sup> but it is not exactly what Plato intends by his *principle of opposites*. The emphasis is on a very strong tension: an action recoils with a counter-reaction. For example, if I want to drink something, suddenly I have the counter-reaction (from the part of *logistikon*) not to drink it (since it may be forbidden). This is the most common experience. People who are thirsty decide not to drink, if it is not healthy for them to do so. Which part of the soul is the agent? The *logistikon* which forbids the satisfaction of thirst? But if the appetite does this, and drinks, is it still the agent? Or, again, is the lack of power on the side of the *logistikon* the origin of the appetite to behave badly? I think that it is hard to give an answer. The source of agency is not the final winner of the battle between reason and the desire. One can imagine a situation where there would be no action, solely because motivations from both sources are equal in agency (thus, they annul each other). To use a more plastic expression, the “Hamletian” question—to drink or not to drink—does not find a solution since the tension can be perpetuated *ad infinitum* (supposing that both reason and desire have the same energy, and consequently they are annihilating each other—therefore no agency).

In order to understand how divergent psychological motions become motivated actions for Plato, one must be aware, according to Julia Annas, that “there is more

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the new theory is more flexible and the explanation of human behavior can be more nuanced. It can make space for *akrasia*, even if the purpose of the whole of Plato’s construction is not especially related to it. For a thorough discussion see Christopher Shields, “Unified agency and *Akrasia* in Plato’s Republic,” *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy. From Socrates to Plotinus. Philosophia Antiqua*, ed. Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destrée (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 61-86.

than one origin of behavior within a person.” She further adds, without insisting on this issue, that one must also be aware that “this basic idea had a long history in psychology,” from which, “one of the more familiar is Freud’s theory of the conscious and unconscious, and another is his later theory of the ego, superego, and id.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, psychoanalysis bears important similarities to the Platonic view of human agency that should be explored more. Even if the parallel may seem inappropriate at first glance, scholars do notice a certain familiarity between Platonic psychology<sup>21</sup> and psychoanalysis.<sup>22</sup> Werner Jaeger strongly claims that Plato was “the father of psychoanalysis,”<sup>23</sup> while Charles Kahn, who has given the issue more attention, remarks that “Plato is perhaps the only major philosopher to anticipate some of the central discoveries of twentieth-century depth psychology, which is, of Freud and his school.”<sup>24</sup> Also, Anthony Kenny advocates the idea that for Freud, the mind, in his later and revised theory, “closely resembles the tripartite soul of Plato’s *Republic*.”<sup>25</sup> How far can one go with this ‘close resemblance,’ and how could this parallel shed some light on the issue of Platonic agency?

Initially, Freud postulated two instances of the mind: the conscious and the unconscious. One can see even a third instance, if one also takes into consideration the subconscious, as Freud suggested in other writings, between the two entities. Freud gradually refined his terminology and his theory, by dividing the psyche into: *id*, *ego* and *superego*.<sup>26</sup> *Id* and *superego* must be seen as parts of the unconscious, while the *ego* belongs to the conscious part. For Kenny, the overlapping of these concepts with the ancient tripartition is quite evident, “the id cor-

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> A notable reference on Platonic psychology is Dodds’ *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Dodds argues in favor of the idea that “Plato’s growing recognition of the importance of affective elements carried him beyond the limits of fifth-century rationalism” (p. 212). Plato “found himself driven to recognize an irrational factor within the mind itself, and thus to think of moral evil in terms of psychological conflict” (p. 213).

<sup>22</sup> Psychoanalytic literature also explores the similarities between psychoanalysis and Plato. For a review of the subject, see Justin Glenn, “Psychoanalytic Writings on Greek and Latin Authors, 1911-1960,” *The Classical World* 66 (1972), pp. 129-145 (especially pp. 134-137).

<sup>23</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), vol. 2, p. 343.

<sup>24</sup> Charles H. Kahn, “Plato’s Theory of Desire,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1987), p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Philosophy in the Modern World: A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 206.

<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923). All references to Freud are from the Standard Edition which is usually abbreviated as SE. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1956-1974).

responds to what Plato calls appetite (*epithumetikon*), the source of the desires for food and sex. The ego has much in common with Plato's reasoning power (*logistikon*): it is the part of the soul most in touch with reality and has the task of controlling instinctual desire. Finally, the superego resembles Plato's temper (*thumoeides*).<sup>27</sup> It appears that with the help of the analogy one can make more sense of Plato's threefold agency. The main concepts that build the analogy are as follows:

**Spirited (*thumoeides*)-Superego.** For Freud the super-ego is the supreme instance of censorship and moral prohibition. Kenny sees them as linked<sup>28</sup> by being non-rational, "the source of shame and anger with oneself," or "the source of ambition-fear."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the spirited part is still irrational, but it is closer to the *logistikon* than the appetite. More than that, they work like "punitive forces in the service of morality."<sup>30</sup> Plato himself relates the spirited part with our social behavior—someone cannot be spirited alone, one needs a social environment. The spirited feature makes us social human beings.

**Reason (*logistikon*)-Ego.** For Plato, reason functions as a punitive and hostile entity. For Freud, ego is the most realistic layer of the psychological apparatus. Both ego and reason break the instincts and the desires, and their function is to redirect one's energies towards alternative channels. Not accidentally, Freud compares the ego with a rider and the id with a horse,<sup>31</sup> which reminds us of the image from *Phaedrus*. The ego rider, like in "Humean" logic, cannot have absolute power over the horse. It must be noted that "the modern individual concept of the personality, the Ego, does not exist in Plato."<sup>32</sup> Ego and reason function as a mediating principle between basic impulses and the external world (which for Plato is the intelligible world, while for Freud is the tangible world).

**Appetite (*epithumia*)-Id.** Both the appetite and the id belong to an area without morality. Kahn rightly notes that Plato's description of *epithumetikon* corresponds to Freud's illustration of the id.<sup>33</sup> Freud insists that we should "approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations." Furthermore, adds Freud, "we picture it as being open at its end to somatic influences, and as there taking up into itself instinctual needs which find their psychological expression in it, but we cannot say in what substratum." The most important fea-

ture is that "it is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle."<sup>34</sup> Many of these characteristics belong to the *epithumia* as well. Freud assures us that "the logical laws of thought do not apply to the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction."<sup>35</sup> Also, the id is the reservoir of instinctual needs in which, "contrary impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out or diminishing each other: at the most they may converge to form compromises under the dominating economic pressure towards the discharge of energy."<sup>36</sup> The main divergence, and an important one, as Kenny remarks, is that while the id is unconscious, the appetite is more conscious.<sup>37</sup>

One of the conclusions which can be traced from the association of the components of the two models is that there are more similarities than differences. Concerning the id and the appetite layer, there is a serious overlap, which cannot be neglected. Using the analogy as a background I will try to see how the modular feature of Plato's agency can be better understood. There are three possible scenarios for what happens when an action is deliberated upon:

**1. Reason is ruling.** This means that a strict hierarchy is preserved, in which reason is driving spirit and appetite. This is an ideal case, where the source of agency must be found only in reason; more often the hierarchy is inverted, and only with few exceptions is reason ruling absolutely.

**2. Appetite is ruling.** The opposite scenario is when the lowest part leads. Freud talked extensively about the pressure of the appetite on the other parts of the psyche. Without us realizing it, each action, even the most elevated, is driven by the id (desire) and reason is more or less a victim of internal passions. The primordial character of basic needs (such as sexuality, food, security, etc.) overcomes reason which must work in favor of the satisfaction of desires. Hume assumes that reason is not an agent; the only agent of a human being is his or her desire, and reason is only a slave to the passions of desire.<sup>38</sup> Plato would not accept

<sup>27</sup> Kenny, *Philosophy in the Modern World*, p. 206.

<sup>28</sup> For another more skeptical view see Kahn, *Plato's Theory of Desire*, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Kenny, *The Anatomy of the Soul* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, 1973), p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), SE XVIII, p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. 2, p. 343.

<sup>33</sup> Kahn, "Plato's Theory of Desire," p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> Freud, "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" (1933), SE XX, p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Kenny, *The Anatomy of the Soul*, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> The nature and function of reason is still a controversial issue. For sure we share some primary instincts with animals, but the purpose of reason is not clear—to satisfy the primary instincts or to be against their satisfaction. For Hume, reason is dedicated to philosophy or is a device (ineffective on its own) which is dedicated to the passions. He claims that, "Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of such active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals" (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 1,1). Probably the most quoted passage from Hume is: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (*Treatise*,

such an extreme scenario, since for him human nature is teleologically oriented and the way to the *telos* (the good) is through reason.

**3. A symmetrical relation.** Here the appetite is the mediator between extremes (reason and desires), and can work in order to reduce their excesses. I think that this scenario must receive more attention, since is not so obvious how the spirited part relates to reason and desire when it comes to agency. Philip Rieff argues that having only a bipartite polarization—reason and desire—means the rational part will be subordinated (as in the second scenario), and we will take notice of “the supremacy of the irrational.”<sup>39</sup> Hence, Rieff’s solution is that in order “to give reason a chance, it is necessary to create a mediating function between reason and unreason—one which can take the side of either and, moreover, has some of the energy which in the two-part division is assigned entirely to unreason. The mediating function will then hold the balance of power, as the volitional agency of either reason or appetite; and this middle place Plato assigned to the emotions.”<sup>40</sup> In this way, the major source of agency and balance is to be found in the spirited part, which balances and finds a common language for diverse actions and is a go-between for extreme animality and extreme spirituality. It is a arbitrator between elemental needs (desires) and superior needs (reason),<sup>41</sup> and a rough guide for symmetry. It can be taken as a negotiator which fails to be a mediator only when it is excessive. This does not mean merely that the appetite rules, but that balance is reached only by taking into account the appetitive part as well. And agency without balance is impossible. The *logistikon* gets support from the spirited part (439e-441b), and principally rejects the desiring part. Even within the Freudian model, an ego without a super-ego is difficult to imagine.

All three models are valid, but only the model which integrates all the components assures full agency. There is a permanent switch between the parts of the soul when it comes to agency and this can be taken as fragmented agency or as no agency at all. The symmetrical model assures the working of all parts together, and all of them are limiting each other’s tendencies. The symmetrical model can be taken as the main source of agency.

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2.3.3.4.). He claims also that, “Reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition,” (*Treatise*, 2.3.3.3). However, he is not quite original insofar as he resembles Hobbes who claimed that the “thoughts are to the desires as scouts and spies, to range abroad and find the way to the thing desired” (*Leviathan* 1.8.).

<sup>39</sup> Rieff, “Freudian Ethics and the Idea of Reason,” p. 172.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> I don’t know if it is accurate to say that reason is a superior need. However, I would assert this here, keeping in mind Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

Christine Korsgaard discusses two models for agency: the “Combat-model” (the agent is guided in action by one part of the soul alone, after a previous conflict between all the parts of the soul) and the “Constitutional-model” (agency is the summa of the intentions of the parts, raising itself above them).<sup>42</sup> The symmetrical scenario for agency can be taken as the condition for the “Constitutional-model.” Moreover, it looks to me like Korsgaard’s models can be taken as variations of the “Psychoanalytical-model,” within which the “Combat-model” is the normal, everyday way of being agents (in which the desires are ruling or a are in a permanent conflict with reason), while the “Constitutional-model” is the ideal state for an ideal action (in which one can talk about the harmony of the parts).

In the constitutional-symmetrical scenario, Plato wants a consensus among parts which is ruled by reason with the help of appetite. There is a “dialogue,” a give and take relation, between these parts. Desire has a request and reason decides if the request is proper, but through the mediation of spirit. There is a reflection which begins from the lower parts. The function of reason is to look for a channel of realization for the desire (for example to drink), or to forbid the desire (not to drink). The decision to assure or not the realization of the desire is not on the spot, it is not instinctive; there is a process which is deliberate.

Still, not all the actions of an agent are agencies. When the action is not a result of deliberation, but of mere instinctual desires (the third scenario), we cannot speak of a proper action (since it is done mechanically), but of one which appears to be and yet is not. Consequently, it looks like, from the perspective of somebody who analyses the action as an outsider, one can speak about—what I would call—*active* and *passive* agency. Active agency implies deliberation (we drive) while passive agency is given by the lower parts (we are driven), especially by desire; which means that it is not the entire soul which is responsible for the deliberation, but something else “deliberates” for it, i.e. the desiring part, which cannot be controlled. Plato faces this paradox that inside of the soul there are two origins of agency which contradict themselves. His solution, similar to the psychoanalytical one is to harmonize the divergent tendencies. For Plato, the person who is passive—which means that the person is driven by desire—is not acting properly since what he is doing is not exactly what he should do. Even if the agent is acting consciously, being aware of his driving desires (which is not the case in psychoanalysis), he is not exactly *the* agent since the actions he does are performed by something inside of him which he cannot control, but which controls him. Translated into contemporary vocabulary, it looks like Plato was aware of the distinction between intentional and non-intentional action.

<sup>42</sup> Christine Korsgaard, “Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant,” *The Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999), pp. 1-29. Also see Tuominen, “Assumptions of Normativity,” p. 60.



Perhaps a supplementary nuance would be to view the opposition above (passive vs. active agency) in terms of *deliberative* action and *non-deliberative* action, respectively. Non-deliberative action is similar to involuntary action, such as involuntary reflex actions. Deliberation is the key concept in Platonic agency. Without it human agency is not too much different from animal agency. For example, someone who is suffering from Alzheimer's does not act correspondingly; his or her memory is altered, and the action is done by virtue of inertia, and by forgetting the aim of the action. On the opposite side, is there an action which belongs only to the *logistikon* which does not implicate the lower parts as well? And if there is such a thing, can it be called an action, if it ignores the rest of the parts?

Concerning the *teleological* feature of agency, it looks to me that the source of agency is more important than its purpose. Even if Plato explicitly maintains that every action should be directed towards good, how can one recognize that the content of that action is directed towards good? Somebody can act in a way which looks like it is being directed towards good. However, its content belongs not to rational deliberation, but to the spirited part, since that person may be acting thus more in the way of an actor (it's a role that guarantees external appreciation). For this reason the etiology of agency should be granted priority in Plato's model.

A question which stresses more the result of the action is whether a bad action is an activity at all and whether someone is still an agent if she or he fails to be virtuous? For Plato, justice is the main criteria for a unified soul. Injustice makes the action unattainable, since the unified soul collapses. Therefore the unjust person cannot act at all, as Miira Tuominen, who argues from this perspective, agrees that "those who are all bad and completely unjust are completely incapable of accomplishing anything" (352c). When all three parts are in conflict the result is a flawed action which prevents any kind of activity in its full meaning.<sup>43</sup> Tuominen maintains that, in Plato's circumstances, descriptive and normative criteria for agency overlap, even though for Plato it appears that "agency is a matter of degree: bad agency is deficient both from the point of view of the notion of action and from an ethical point of view."<sup>44</sup> I think that following the *active* (deliberative), *passive* (non-deliberative, instinctual) distinction, there is no room anymore for degrees of agency. The action of an agent is proper agency or it is not, since one cannot speak of quasi-deliberation, or ambiguous action; this being set on the background of Plato as a philosopher who does not like relativism or uncertainties.

<sup>43</sup> See also Christine Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 108-109.

<sup>44</sup> See Tuominen, "Assumptions of Normativity," p. 64.

## Conclusion

I do not claim that Freud is right and that his understanding of the nature of the psyche is accurate or precise.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, I don't want to state that the parallel with Freud is univocal; it is only one facet of Plato's psychology which could be explored more. The main difference between them is that while for Freud the basic nature of our mind is the appetite-id part, which is the main source for agency, for Plato it is the other way around—we are divine, and reason is the essential nature and the origin of our agencies which together with the emotions temper the extreme and disparate tendencies of our behavior.

Agency is an effect of the internal life of the *psyche*. In order to find a better explanation for a behavior which (divergent to our reason) is driven by anger or desire, Plato revised his theory of the soul from *Phaedo*. The tripartite psyche stands as a better explanation for the diversity of human agencies. The conflict between specific parts of the soul is the origin of any type of agency and all three parts have a word to say concerning agency. The degree of awareness (i.e. deliberation) while engaged in an action determines the distinction between what is 'real' agency and what fails to be agency at all. For Plato this awareness is translated into being directed towards good, but especially into *being aware of the meaning of the action* (why you want to do what you do). Impulsive action is not for Plato real agency. Only if one understands the meaning of an action, can one say that what she or he is doing is full agency (and not instinctual and mechanical action). If the internal conditions, i.e. deliberation, are fulfilled, then the effect is full agency. Otherwise, in different situations one can speak only about lack of agency.

<sup>45</sup> Beside this multilayer understanding of the psyche, Freud and Plato share the concept of *eros* as the main origin of desires, and as a motive force. As Freud asserts: "In its origin, function, and relation to sexual love, the 'Eros' of the philosopher Plato coincides exactly with the love-force, the libido of psycho-analysis" ("Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), SE XVIII, p. 91). Freud has only a few, unconvincing remarks on Plato, and he probably had access to Plato's ideas only through commentators. An important remark can be found in the Preface of the third Edition of his widely read *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905): "And as for the 'stretching' of the concept of sexuality which has been necessitated by the analysis of children and what are called perverts, anyone who looks down with contempt upon psycho-analysis from a superior vantage-point should remember how closely the enlarged sexuality of psycho-analysis coincides with the Eros of the divine Plato," (Freud, SE VII, p. 134).

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## UNITY, IDENTITY AND OTHERNESS IN HEGEL'S ACCOUNT OF LIFE-AND-DEATH STRUGGLE

Matthew Post

*Pollakhou goun autôi hê men philia diakrinei, to de neikos sugkrinei.*  
Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A 985a23–25

### Alienation and Violence

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel addresses the problem of alienation on three related fronts, historically, politically and phenomenologically. Historically<sup>1</sup> speaking, we no longer believe that we can reconcile our knowledge of the physical world, as indifferent matter in motion, with our demand that our lives, as parts of that world, be genuinely *meaningful* beyond our own subjective fancies. We become strangers on the earth, living our lives as though our actions carried intrinsic meaning, but knowing deep-down that they are no more meaningful than anything else, no matter how trivial. In order to restore any sense of harmony between ourselves and this indifferent world, we are pushed to embrace one side to the exclusion of the other, *either* a system of static scientific categories, which, because they are applied indifferently to all aspects of life, require us to disavow the significance of our personal concerns and aspirations, *or* an affirmation of the supremacy of sentiment, which, although edifying in its insistence that we are all one with each other and with nature, is incapable of bearing any serious analysis or insight.<sup>2</sup>

Politically speaking, this alienation manifests as the tension or even the outright contradiction between individual desire and social duty.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hobbes and

<sup>1</sup> I have in mind here Hegel's conception of history as the progressive development of our comprehension of the whole, framed by culture and revealed through action and experience over time. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 31–34. English translation: G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§ 27–29. I will consistently cite the *Phenomenology* in German and in English. For Hegel's other works, I will only cite the German text when the German itself is at issue. Otherwise, I will cite English translations.

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 15 ff. (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 7 ff.)

<sup>3</sup> By speaking of a conflict between individual desire and social duty, I characterize alienation in contemporary terms, rather than in the way Hegel himself approaches it. His own analysis is far more complex. The community itself entails principles that contradict each