

DAWES HICKS LECTURE ON PHILOSOPHY

PLATO'S DIVISION OF THE SOUL

By MICHAEL WOODS

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THE topic of this lecture is a familiar doctrine that Plato presents in the *Republic*: the doctrine that the human soul is divided into three parts. The division appears to be central to the argument of the dialogue. The topic of that dialogue is an inquiry into the nature of justice, and the answer to that question that Plato elaborates seems to depend essentially on his view that three parts can be discerned in a human soul. Plato holds that a person is just if each of the three parts fulfils its proper function. Plato distinguishes in the soul a reasoning element, a spirited element, and a desiring element, and he says that a soul is in the ideal condition—that is, it is a just soul, when reason rules for the benefit of the soul as a whole, and the other two parts act in harmony with reason and follow reason's prescriptions. Platonic justice consists in psychic harmony, to use a phrase of Professor Gregory Vlastos,¹ a condition which Plato likens to health in the body. Plato's conception of justice as mental health was the topic of a lecture by Dr Anthony Kenny to the British Academy some twenty years ago.²

If justice is a form of psychic harmony in the soul, it would seem that it ought to be possible to distinguish parts or elements that may be in harmony or disharmony with one another, and that nothing remotely resembling the Platonic conception of justice could be adopted without making some division of a human soul. So the division of the soul occupies a central place in the dialogue. The division of the soul is central to the *Republic* in another way, because the threefold structure of a soul is represented by Plato as mirroring the structure of the ideal city that Plato constructs as part of his inquiry.

¹ See his 'Justice and Psychic Harmony in the *Republic*', *Journal of Philosophy*, lxvi (1969), 505–21.

² See 'Mental Health in Plato's *Republic*', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, lv (1969), 229–53.

Plato's conception of justice has been much discussed in recent work by a number of interpreters of Plato, and this discussion has inevitably included some examination of the nature of Plato's elements in the soul, and the manner in which they are differentiated by him. It has been argued that the threefold structure that Plato introduces is more defensible and coherent than has sometimes been supposed.³ But there has recently been a tendency among interpreters to minimize the extent to which Plato was committed to a view of the soul as containing actual *parts*, and some have tried to show that much of what Plato wants to say can be defended without postulating really distinct elements in a soul. (It has sometimes been pointed out that, for most of the passage in Book IV in which the division is first introduced, Plato avoids speaking of 'parts' in favour of other locutions.)⁴ It has been argued that the various phenomena that are attributed to each part of the soul can be seen as having a certain similarity or unity, despite their variety, and hence that the threefold division has some justification. The phenomena that are held by Plato to be evidently attributable to a soul include various forms of reasoning, thought, and calculation, a wide range of desires and impulses to action, and certain forms of spirited and emotional behaviour, and it can be claimed that there is a basis for a threefold classification of the whole range of phenomena; and the question then arises whether this captures at least a large part of what Plato needs in order to develop his distinctive notion of human justice. Some recent work on the *Republic* seems to me to have assumed that this does capture most of what Plato wants to say. The most recent example is, perhaps, an article by Professor John Cooper.⁵

Allied to this tendency to regard the doctrine of the tripartite soul as essentially a threefold classification of psychic phenomena has been a further tendency to discount the arguments that Plato

³ See, for example, the discussion in Terence Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977), 7.6, and John Cooper's 'Plato's Theory of Human Motivation', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* i, no. 1 (1985), 3-21, from both of which I have learned much.

⁴ It must be conceded that there is no explicit mention of *parts*—no occurrence of *meros* or *morion*—until relatively late in the passage in Book IV of the *Republic*. *Meros* first occurs at 442B11.

⁵ Op. cit. It is possible to see the same tendency in Irwin (op. cit.), when he writes (p. 527): 'For the purposes of Book IV . . . Plato's general claim about "kinds", "parts" . . . or "things" amount to the claim that there are desires differing in kind in a way unrecognised by Socrates.'

actually offers for the division in Book IV of the *Republic*.⁶ What I want to do in this lecture is to look again at the arguments presented in that Book of the *Republic*, and try to see what sort of division of the soul into three elements Plato took himself to have established, and why it was important to the project of defining justice that the soul should be susceptible of precisely that sort of division. I aim to show that Plato needs more than a threefold classification of phenomena: he needs to establish distinct *sources* of action.

The view that the soul admits of some form of division is not, of course, to be found only in the *Republic*: it may be found also in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, for example; and there is much evidence about the character of the *Republic's* tripartite division outside Book IV, notably in Books VIII, IX and X.⁷ But my discussion in this lecture will be focused almost exclusively on Book IV.

I

In the section of Book IV of the *Republic* that we are concerned with, Plato begins by saying⁸ that anything that is called by the same name as something else, whether it be smaller or larger, must be similar in that respect in which it is called by the same name. Plato's argument is that any set of things that are all called by the same name, however much they may differ,⁹ must be alike in that respect which is the basis for the application of the same name to all of them. He goes on to say that a city has been agreed to be just if and only if the three kinds of *phusis* (nature) each fulfilled its own role—did what belonged to it, and to be brave, temperate, and wise on account of other states and conditions of those same kinds;¹⁰ and he says that we shall expect the individual man to have the same kinds in his own soul, and be called by the same names as the city is called by on the strength of the same

⁶ As, for example, I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (Routledge, London, 1962), I, 356, where he ends an illuminating discussion of the basis for differentiating the three parts with a proposal to offer Plato a much weaker principle than the one to be found in the text.

⁷ It is in Book IX that it is said explicitly for the first time that each of the parts of the soul has its own set of *desires*, that there are three different forms of life associated with each of them, and that the spirited element of the soul is the source of an impulse to competition, honour and personal achievement. See Book IX 580Df.

⁸ 435A5.

⁹ And whatever other differences there may be between members of the set.

¹⁰ This summary of the conclusion arrived at 427Ef. is somewhat loose, as, in the case of bravery and wisdom, it is a characteristic of only one class of person that determines whether the city possesses the virtue or not.

characteristics. So we are led to examine whether the individual man's soul has those kinds or not.¹¹

If we were confronted with the observation about the kinds of nature in the city, a natural reaction might be to ask 'Kinds of what?'. We might first think that Plato has in mind the sorts or kinds of *human being*. After all, at 435B5, Plato speaks of the three kinds (*genē*) of natures as each doing its own task, and this is naturally taken to refer to appropriate activities of the three classes of person. But it clearly makes no sense to speak of three sorts of person each present in an individual soul: what *can* be intelligibly asked is whether the same kinds of natural tendency are present in an individual human soul. The sorts of natural tendency in question are those that are the basis for the division into three classes in Plato's ideal city, as Plato, of course, wants to say that the threefold division into classes in his ideal city is based on natural differences. The classes are distinguished by their natural capacities or tendencies, and in the ideal city they are in a certain state—the tendencies have developed in a certain way. On the basis of the principle mentioned earlier, that different things called by the same name must be so called on the strength of a common character, it is said that we shall expect an individual man to have the same kinds in him as the city displays, and to have the words used to ascribe virtues to the city applied to him on the basis of the same conditions of those kinds. However, Plato regards that as needing separate argument, and there follows a short passage in which he argues that the individual contains the same kinds and characteristics. As I interpret the passage, it will contain the same kinds or forms if and only if it contains the same natural tendencies. At the end of this section¹² Plato says that *this* conclusion is one that it is not difficult to arrive at.¹³

If this account of Plato's use of these terms is correct, we can understand why he says that they have to look for the same kinds

¹¹ We may note the use that Plato makes of the various terms *genos*, 'kind', *eidōs*, 'form', 'sort', *pathos*, 'state', *phusis*, 'nature', *hexis* ('condition') and *ēthos*, 'character'. It seems reasonably clear from the run of the argument that in this context *genos* is being used interchangeably with *eidōs*, *pathos* with *hexis*, and *phusis* with *ēthos*.

¹² 436A.

¹³ I think it is clear that, although Plato implies that this conclusion needs argument, and more than once in this part of the *Republic* (434D2ff. and 435C9–D5) mentions the necessarily provisional nature of their enquiries, it is not suggested that the 435B1 principle may be in need of revision or qualification. We may call that principle the Principle of Univocity. If the required kinds and tendencies are not to be found in the individual soul, the definitions of justice and the other virtues must be looked at again.

and characters in the individual as were distinguished in the city: the characters in question will be the natural tendencies which were thought by Plato to be present in any city, whether an ideal one or not. The difference between the ideal city and any ordinary city will be that these tendencies and capacities have undergone (cf. *pathē* 435B6) a certain development, or are in a certain condition (*hexis*). It is also assumed that the relevant characters are spiritedness, love of learning or rationality (*to philomathes*), and desire. The third of these is perhaps not on the same footing as the other two; it is indeed the case that a capacity for reasoning, developed in a certain way, might be thought to be characteristic of the Guardians in the city, and that spirit, again suitably trained, is what is distinctive of the Auxiliaries (*epikouroi*); but the capacity for desire of a certain kind (here referred to as *to philochrēmaton*) is hardly a *special* feature of the third class. Rather, what qualifies someone for membership of this class is the absence of the special characteristics of the other two classes; and what *is* required for their fulfilling their role in the city is that this class of tendencies, common to human beings in general, should be trained and directed in a certain way. As we have seen, Plato thinks that it has already emerged from the earlier discussion of the establishment of the ideal city that the tendencies are sorted into three kinds.¹⁴

We might well wish to query the Principle of Univocity: as has been brought out very clearly by Gregory Vlastos in his article 'Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*' in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973) and by Bernard Williams in his article 'The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic*' in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos and R. M. Rorty (eds), *Exegesis and Argument* (Van Gorcum, Assen, 1973), it is always possible, where 'F' is a term that may be applied both to a group (like a community) and to an individual, that the application of the term to the group may be on the basis of its being truly predicable of all, or a sufficient number of, the members of the group. Where that is the basis of 'F's being applicable to a group, the Principle of Univocity will no longer hold, as it would be reasonable in such cases to say that 'F' is not applied univocally to individuals and groups. What we should have is an example of a phenomenon which interested Aristotle, and is now commonly spoken of as focal meaning. In the case of terms like 'just', which we are presently concerned with, it is extremely plausible to hold that they are applied to communities on the basis of their being truly predicable of members of those communities. So Plato is not really entitled to assert that the Principle of Univocity holds in general, nor that it holds in the cases that he is particularly concerned with.

¹⁴ If that is correct, it will not be possible to defend the position that has sometimes been taken, that the argument for the tripartite soul is independent of the earlier argument for the ideal city: the conclusions reached earlier about the ideal city determine *what* characteristics are to be looked for in the individual soul.

If this interpretation is generally correct, the argument is as follows: a city is virtuous if and only if the three natural kinds (of person) in it have certain specified characteristics—namely, that certain natural tendencies have been trained and developed in a certain way. Using the Principle of Univocity, if the definitions given by Plato of a city's virtues are correct, we can say that an individual is virtuous if and only if the three kinds or sorts of natural tendency in the individual have those same characteristics, or are in that same state. Such a definition would be inapplicable to an individual soul unless it contained these sorts of tendency, so it has to be argued that a particular person's soul does indeed contain them.

How does Plato argue for this conclusion? Appeal is made to the absurdity of supposing that these tendencies could come to be present in the city except from the individuals. They could hardly have come from any other source. What is the general principle being appealed to here? It may be suggested that the principle is that if a city is *F* (where '*F*' is a predicate of a suitable kind, holding of individuals and not solely of classes, like 'numerous'), that will be so only if the individuals in it are *F*. That principle, however plausible, would be incompatible with the Principle of Univocity; for if being *F* for a city consists in having as members things that are *F*, an independent explanation will have to be given of what it is for an individual to be *F*, otherwise the definition will lead to an infinite regress. It may be that Plato failed to see this, but it seems to me, for two reasons, that this was not his argument. Firstly, Plato does not in fact hold that if a city is *F*, all or a majority of its members are *F*. As we have seen, in the case of one virtue—wisdom—he mentions as a striking but none the less acceptable feature of his account that the city as a whole is wise on account of the wisdom of an extremely small minority of its members (428E7f.). Similarly in the case of bravery.¹⁵ Secondly, we have to ask what precisely this argument is meant to establish. Is it simply that individual men show spiritedness, rationality, and desire? If that was all he was trying to show, it does not seem that any argument would be needed, even a short and easy one. Moreover, the differentiation of the classes in the city on the basis of these natural tendencies already presupposes that individual men have these tendencies.

I want to suggest that Plato was in fact arguing for something rather stronger than that. It seems to me that it is a mistake to assume, as some have done, that he is simply making use of some

¹⁵ This point is discussed fully by Williams (*op. cit.*).

general principle that the characteristics of cities must be determined by the characteristics of the individuals in them; what he is arguing is that *these* tendencies must be present in a city only as a consequence of their presence in particular individuals. Not every characteristic that can be attributed to a community is so ascribed derivatively from its presence in the individuals in the community; there are other possible sources of a community's character. But in the case under consideration, there is no other possible source; so these characteristics must be treated as natural or original characteristics of the human soul. In asserting this, Plato is asserting more than the platitude that we can find individual souls that exhibit spirit, rationality, and desire.

What I am arguing for may be clearer if the conclusion of this argument for the origin in individuals of spirit in the city is contrasted with the case of justice. Plato has argued that a city is just if and only if each of the elements fulfils its own role, and therefore if each individual does so. But one could not argue immediately from that that doing one's own is what an individual's justice consists in, on the grounds that the justice of a city must derive from the justice of the individuals; for the justice of the city, according to Plato, is a matter of each individual's fulfilling his own role *in the right political structure*, and hence its justice is not simply a matter of the justice of the individuals composing it. If that is correct, Plato is arguing that a certain classification of psychical activities is a basic or fundamental one, independent of political structure. In saying this, he is perhaps simply reminding us of the basis in natural human characteristics for the ideal city.

One of the faults of this argument is that it does not show that these natural tendencies are all present in one and the same individual soul, which is what the application of the analogy to the virtues of the individual requires. But perhaps having established by argument that these tendencies are original human tendencies, existing prior to any political structure, he can simply appeal to familiar observation to support the view that the same soul can exhibit all three tendencies.¹⁶

One thing that is noteworthy is that this conclusion, which has been easily arrived at, seems to be all that appears to be necessary

¹⁶ Thus I am disagreeing with Williams's view (*op. cit.*, p. 197) that the argument of 435E is inconsistent with the Principle of Univocity, although, as I said earlier, Plato should have considered the possibility that a predicate like 'just' applies to a group on the basis of its being true of all or most of the individuals in the group.

to establish the possibility of defining the virtues of an individual human soul in a way parallel to their definition for a city. At 435B9–12, Socrates says that they will expect, on the basis of the Principle of Univocity, the individual soul to have those same sorts (of tendency) as are to be found in the city. They must see whether individual souls do; and, as we have seen, it is quickly and easily shown that it does. What more is needed as a preliminary to the definition of the individual's virtue?

Yet Plato goes on (436A8f.) to ask whether we perform each of these things (sc. the activities associated with the three natural tendencies distinguished) with the whole soul or with different parts; and *that* is said to be a hard question to decide. It is not made clear why that question, not foreshadowed earlier, needs to be addressed. It might seem that it should be possible to define the individual soul's virtues in a way parallel to those of the city if bravery (for example) were defined as a suitable training and development of the spirited tendency, and wisdom as a proper training of the rational capacities. Why should it matter to the applicability of the analogy between city and soul that these tendencies have different origins in the soul?

The full answer to this will emerge only with a full account of Plato's argument for the tripartite division of the soul, which I now go on to consider.

II

I shall be concerned mainly with the argument for distinguishing the reasoning from the desiring element. Having sorted the soul's activities into three kinds, Plato asks, as we saw, whether each sort of activity occurs in, or is done with, the whole soul, or with or in separate elements. Understanding what Plato is asking here is crucial to everything that follows. He argues that different elements are involved by appeal to the following principle: 'A thing cannot do or undergo opposite things in relation to the same thing in respect of the same thing.' I have tried to produce a literal translation of the sentence: what it means I shall consider later. I shall, following a number of other commentators, call this principle the Principle of Opposites. A case of conflict is then used to show that the reasoning element is distinct from the desiring element. The case given is the case of a man who at the same time both desires a drink, but declines to take one, presumably on the basis of a calculation that it would be harmful to him to do so: he is thirsty but something draws him back.

(Exactly what sort of case is envisaged by Plato will be considered later; his description is extremely thin.)

Examples of conflict are similarly used to establish the distinctness of the rational part from either the spirited or the desiring part of the soul. To show the distinctness of the desiring and the spirited part, Plato cites the case of Leontius,¹⁷ who gets angry with himself for indulging a desire to look at some corpses. (As has often been noted, almost the only manifestation of the spirited part mentioned in Book IV is angry behaviour.) Reason is distinguished from the spirited part by appeal to a case in which someone rebukes himself for irrational anger, and that is evidently taken to be a further example of conflict.

Clearly Plato is attempting to do more than show that there are three sorts of psychical behaviour or activity to be found in an individual, attributable to different natural tendencies. So something more must be at issue than simply whether psychical activity can be given a threefold classification.

What is the form of the argument from cases of conflict, and how much force does it have? These are the questions that I shall be occupied with in the remainder of this lecture.

One objection that has been raised to this argument is that, if valid, it would establish a separate part of the soul corresponding to any two desires that can come into conflict.¹⁸ It seems evident that conflicts occur in the soul not only between reason and desire, between spirit and reason, and between spirit and desire (supposing those three elements to have been identified as each being sources of impulse to action), but also between different desires. Plato elsewhere in the *Republic*, does, of course, show full awareness of such conflicts between desires.¹⁹ Much of Books VIII and IX is devoted to describing the conflicts that occur in the disordered souls of unjust persons. So, if the bare fact of conflict is enough to establish separate parts, it will establish too many. Every time that two desires come into conflict, that will be a manifestation of two elements in the soul. If someone is torn between spending money on some indulgence today, and on one next week, for which there will not be enough money if the present desire is yielded to, we shall have, apparently, two parts

¹⁷ 439E6–440A6.

¹⁸ See, for example, Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981), pp. 137–8.

¹⁹ See, for example, VIII 554D–E, where the conflicts between the appetites in the oligarchic man are described, and generally the description, later, of the democratic and the tyrannical man.

of the soul corresponding to the two desires. This consequence would plainly have been unacceptable to Plato. It is true that, in one passage, he appears to allow that the soul may in fact contain more than three elements;²⁰ but the interest of the thesis that some activities result from one part of the soul, reason, and others from another part, the desiring part, would presumably evaporate if exactly the same thing can be said about two activities, both of which result from desire. Clearly, in order to see how far Plato's argument is open to this objection it is necessary to understand the Principle of Opposites, and, in particular, to form a view about what Plato means by 'opposite'.

It is not clear whether or not the Principle of Opposites is to be regarded as a purely formal principle, explicative of the meaning of 'opposite'. If it is a purely formal principle, there will be no question of disputing its validity; the question will simply be whether it is correctly applied in this case to yield the conclusion that Plato wants to establish. It has, I think, quite commonly been construed as a formal principle:²¹ the question has been raised whether it is to be regarded as some form of the Principle of Contradiction. If it is taken as a formal principle, it will be natural to construe the word 'opposite' as meaning simply 'incompatible', or at any rate to treat it simply as a more specific form of the principle that it is impossible for a given thing to stand in incompatible relations to the same thing. There is a short argument,²² in which it is readily agreed that two sets of psychological states are opposed to one another in the relevant sense. Before that,²³ various apparent counter-examples are said not to cast doubt on the principle because the opposite movements are not 'in respect of the same thing'.

Some commentators on the passage have in fact not sought to dispute the principle, but simply argued that the example of conflict that Plato gives, and any others that may be suggested, are not ones to which the Principle can be applied to yield Plato's conclusion, because they are not cases where something stands in opposite, or incompatible, relations to the same thing. It has been pointed out that there is no incompatibility in ascribing to someone at the same time a desire for, and aversion to, one and the same object. There is nothing inconsistent in saying of

²⁰ 443D7.

²¹ See, for example, Richard Robinson, 'Plato's Separation of Reason and Desire', *Phronesis*, xvi (1971), 48; Annas (op. cit.), p. 141.

²² 437B-C.

²³ 436C5-437A.

someone that they both want to have X and want not to have X. The wants are then inconsistent, but our description of them is not. Similarly, if we say that someone believes P and also believes not-P, we are ascribing to them inconsistent beliefs, but our description of them is not inconsistent. We may say idiomatically, both in Greek and in English, of someone that they want X and don't want X, and seem to have a contradiction, but there is in fact no contradiction, if that is taken, as it very naturally is, in either language, as saying that they both want X and want not-X.

I want to argue that the Principle is a substantial one, which has to be understood in the light of the passage²⁴ in which examples are given by Plato to clarify its application. Plato gives a list of actions or impulses which are immediately agreed to form pairs of opposites; but he also holds that anything from the one set is opposed to anything from the other. The examples given are such things as hunger and thirst, desires in general, wanting something, accepting something, going after a thing, and being attracted towards it on the one hand, and rejecting, refusing, being averse to something, not wanting a thing (that is, wanting not to have it), not desiring something (that is, desiring not to have it) on the other. The idea seems to be that all the members of the one set involve movement towards something, and all the members of the other set involve retreating from something, rejecting it, or pushing it away. This is borne out by the examples given later of the man who is moving his head and arms, but is otherwise stationary, and the examples of the spinning top, that rotates round a fixed axis, and the archer, who draws a bow with opposite movements of his hands. These are all cases where we are ready to say that the same thing is both moving and stationary, or is moving in two directions. It is noteworthy that in the case of the archer, Plato uses the very same words²⁵ to describe the opposite movements of each of his hands as he uses elsewhere of the opposite states which he is really concerned with in the argument. So I suggest that the clearest cases of opposites were thought to be spatial movements in opposite directions.

The argument appealing to the Principle of Opposites has sometimes been taken to argue that, since we have, in the example of the person who is thirsty, both a desire for a drink and a recoiling from it, and there cannot be a single subject both

²⁴ 437B-C.

²⁵ *apotheisthai* and *proselkesthai*.

of a desire for and of an aversion to the same thing, we must suppose that the desire and the aversion do not share a common subject: distinct parts of the soul have to be assumed as *subjects* of the opposed attitudes.²⁶ This may be thought to gain some support from the fact that later in the *Republic*, Plato does sometimes speak of the desires in the disordered soul as independent agents that can sometimes take the person over, as it were.²⁷

This interpretation seems also to be supported by a passage,²⁸ where, after getting agreement to the proposition that the soul of a man who is thirsty, in so far as he is thirsty, simply wants to drink, Socrates secures agreement to the conclusion that, if something drags the thirsty soul back, that must be something other than the subject of the thirst. And so this passage suggests that the subject of the thirst and the subject of the restraining are distinct. But then in the next paragraph,²⁹ the example of the archer is introduced, and specifically said to be similar to the one of the person wanting a drink; there it is at least most natural to suppose that Plato would allow that the same *man* is, at the same time, both pulling and pushing the bow, although we can go on to say that that is because one of his hands is pushing and the other is pulling. If so, the example of the archer becomes similar to that of the man mentioned earlier, who is moving his head and arms, and is otherwise remaining still: that man is both at rest and moving, because some parts of him are moving and other parts are stationary. But that example, along with that of the spinning top, was introduced to show that one and the same subject *could* stand in opposed relations to something, provided that we insist that the subject does not stand in opposed relations in respect of the same thing, the qualification given in the Principle of Opposites when it was first introduced.³⁰ If so, the

²⁶ See Crombie (op. cit.), pp. 344–56, 365–8.

²⁷ See, for example, IX 573f.

²⁸ 439B3–5.

²⁹ 439B8–11.

³⁰ That reading, at least of the earlier example of the man moving his head and arms, but otherwise remaining stationary (see 436C8–D2) may be disputed; for Plato says that the proper reply to someone who urges as a counter-example to the Principle of Opposites that, in such a case, the same person is at the same time stationary and at rest is that ‘we should not speak in that way’ (C11–D1); we should say instead that ‘one part of him is at rest, and another moving’. In a similar way, when the example of the archer is mentioned at 539B8–C1, we are told that ‘it is not right to say that the hands of the archer are at the same time pushing and pulling, but that there is one hand that pushes and another that pulls’. This may suggest that the point is

argument for the separateness of the reasoning and desiring elements relies crucially on this qualification, and is of the following form: A certain subject stands in opposed relations to the same object; therefore, by the Principle of Opposites, we must say that that *with respect to which* it stands in one of those relations is different from that in respect of which it stands in the opposed relation. It is now apparent that it is crucial to the understanding of the argument to know how to interpret the phrase 'in respect of the same thing' that occurs in the various statements of the Principle of Opposites. (I have tried to translate it as neutrally as possible.)

Confirmation of the view that Plato is not here disputing that there is a single subject of both desire and aversion in the case of the man who wants to drink is afforded by the passage in which Plato says that sometimes those who are thirsty refuse to drink. There is no suggestion that in such cases it is incorrect to say that the man both desires to drink and is averse to it; what Plato claims has been established by the Principle of Opposites is that in such cases we must say that there are two distinct elements in the man's soul, one of which draws the man towards the drink, the other of which drags him back from it. As Plato describes the case, we have a single subject, pulled in opposite directions.

What, then, should we think of the validity of the argument?

that these cases are meant to show that we have distinct subjects of the opposite movements, not that we have to qualify the attribution of the opposite movements to a single subject by a phrase that indicates that the subject does them 'in respect of' (*kata*) different parts or aspects.

On the other hand, it is quite clear that the example of the spinning top (436D₄–E₆) is intended to support the second suggestion: the right thing to say is that the top is at rest in respect of (*kata*) its vertical axis and revolving in respect of its circumference. What is thought objectionable in this case is thus not the statement that such tops are at the same time moving and stationary, but saying that they are so 'as a whole' (*holoi*), because that implies that the contrary predicates hold without qualification. Given that this is what Plato thinks is the right thing to say in the case of the spinning top example, itself introduced as a more sophisticated sort of apparent counter-example to the Principle of Opposites, it is natural to try to interpret the example immediately before in the same way; and it is quite easy to do so if we suppose that what is objectionable is saying that the person is both moving and stationary *without adding the needed qualifications*. The observation that one part is moving and another stationary can then be seen as pointing the way to the addition of the needed qualification. It is, in any case, difficult to believe that Plato would have disallowed the description of a case like that of the archer as an example of a single person making opposite movements if the paradox was neutralized by the insertion of suitable qualifying phrases.

In order to answer that question, it is crucial, as I have said, to arrive at some understanding of the phrase 'in respect of the same thing', and that in turn requires us to form a view about the alternatives mentioned at the beginning of this whole stretch of argument. As we saw, the question is there raised, concerning the three types of psychical activity mentioned in the preceding argument—reasoning, spirited activity such as anger, and desiring, whether we perform all three of them with or in the whole soul, or with or in distinct things.³¹

We might naturally think that what is being distinguished by this argument is something like a different location for the different sorts of psychical activity. But it is unclear what content can be given to the idea of different locations in the case of something like a Platonic soul, which is not spatially extended (even though Plato, in the *Timaeus*, for example, is prepared to associate the different parts of the soul with different parts of the body).³² If we insist that talk of *where* in a Platonic soul such phenomena as reasoning and desiring occur is a convenient way of distinguishing the soul into aspects, reflecting the different activities that the soul displays, there is, once again, the objection that *that* does not seem to involve anything more than has already been established in the earlier passage: the passage in which Plato says that there is no great difficulty in deciding that the soul has the same kinds of activity in it that are to be found in the city. If all that is in question is whether the soul may be treated as having aspects, there is no need at all for the extended and elaborate argument that we find, and, in particular, the arguments based on the Principle of Opposites become otiose. Indeed, if there is no more to the distinguishing of three elements in the soul than the distinguishing of three *aspects*, on the basis of the classification of psychical activities already accepted, the question posed at the beginning of this stretch of argument, to which the ensuing

³¹ The question is posed using a simple dative—hence the alternative translations I gave using 'with' or 'in'. Later on, at the end of the argument from conflict that I am discussing, designed to distinguish the reasoning and desiring elements, Plato once again uses the simple dative in expressing the conclusion of the argument. At 439D4f., he says: 'We shall reasonably think that these are two and distinct from one another. The first, that with which (or in which) the soul reasons, we shall call the rational part, and the second, that with which (or in which) it loves, and hungers and thirsts, and flutters round the other desires, we shall call the irrational and desiring part, the companion of various indulgences and pleasures.'

³² Crombie (op. cit.), drawing upon the *Timaeus*, actually concludes that 'the principle of identity of origin has the best claim to be regarded as providing the basis for the unity of the parts [in the *Republic*].'

argument is intended to provide an answer, becomes unintelligible. It makes no sense to ask whether the three sorts of activity that belong to the soul occur in, or are performed with, the same element, if the elements in question turn out to be the sorts already distinguished.

Is it, then, a fair criticism of Plato's argument that, if sound, it would establish separate parts corresponding to each desire that could be in conflict with another desire? That was the common objection urged against Plato's account that I alluded to earlier. If Plato is not willing to suppose that there are distinct parts in the case of an ordinary conflict between two desires, why should he suppose that there is in the case of the person wanting a drink either? This point might be supported by the suggestion that in this example, too, we really have a conflict between two desires, with reason as a third element in the situation. Thus, it might be said that the person has a desire for a drink, on the one hand, and, on the other, a desire that comes into conflict with his thirst—a general desire for health, no doubt; it may then be said that reason, acting in the role of an adjudicator between conflicting desires, pronounces in favour of the desire for health, after a calculation of the consequences of satisfying the two desires in this case.

However, it seems reasonably clear, as has been recognized by many interpreters of Plato,³³ that this is not Plato's view of the situation described. It is crucial to Plato's analysis of the example that reason is itself the source of certain impulses to action. These impulses are not called desires in Book IV, though they are so called later on, in Book IX. Thus, what is called the desiring part of the soul is not the source of all desires. Plato's view of the example is not what David Hume's would have been. In Hume's theory, reason is not regarded as itself one of the influencing motives of the will: its role is confined to calculating causes and effects; it has its influence on human action only through the passions, not being an independent origin of action. For Plato, reason is not, in a healthy soul, nor should it become, the slave of the passions. In the case of the person who wants to drink, it is observed *after* the conflict argument has established that there are distinct sources of the two impulses, that one impulse comes from reason, the other from a diseased state.³⁴ The problem is that the

³³ See, for example, H. W. B. Joseph, 'Plato's *Republic*: the Nature of the Soul' in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1935); Annas (op. cit.), pp. 133–6.

³⁴ 439C9–D2.

bare fact of conflict is not enough to exclude a Humean analysis of the example; and if appeal is made to the fact that the impulses have different origins, the argument from the occurrence of conflict drops out as superfluous. If it is possible simply to *observe* that one of the two impulses to action has its origin in reason and the other in a diseased state, we might think it should be possible to recognize that human actions have such a dual origin independently of any example of conflict. Moreover, the observation that, since these are the origins of the two impulses, we have here *two distinct* sources of action already presupposes that we have distinguished them, and thus made the separation between two parts of the soul that the argument is meant to establish. This difficulty is certainly one of the sources of the tendency of some modern interpreters to discount the importance of the argument from the Principle of Opposites.³⁵

An attempt might be made to differentiate between the sort of conflict that occurs in the example that Plato discusses and the ordinary case of a conflict between two desires by making a distinction between contingent and non-contingent conflicts. (I owe this terminology to Bernard Williams' article 'Ethical Consistency'³⁶ which specifically alludes to Book IV of the *Republic*.) A contingent conflict occurs when it is a contingent truth, if it is true at all, that the two desires cannot both be satisfied. If I want to attend both an opera performance and a concert, and they are happening at the same time, I cannot satisfy both wants, but that is a contingent conflict. They might not have been occurring at the same time. The suggestion then is that Plato's argument may be understood as establishing separate parts of the soul only when the conflict is non-contingent. This line of thought, in effect, tries to save Plato's argument by understanding 'opposite' in a suitably strong sense. Desires and impulses are opposed to one another in this sense only when they are opposed non-contingently. The question now arises: What would be a good example of a non-contingent conflict?

In the example that Plato gives, of someone in a diseased state wanting a drink, we might naturally think, as we have seen, that

³⁵ Thus Irwin (*op. cit.*), p. 327, argues that the need for restriction on the scope of the Principle of Opposites 'shows how little use [it] is to the argument—Plato would have done better to introduce his argument about desires at once.' Similarly, Crombie (*op. cit.*), p. 356, urges that we substitute a much weaker principle for the one that appears in the *Republic*.

³⁶ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol. xxxix (1965), 103–24, reprinted in *Problems of the Self* (CUP, 1973).

there are two desires here, which are only contingently in conflict: the desire for a drink, on the one hand, and, on the other, the desire for health, or for the person's welfare, which, as a consequence of the man's morbid state, cannot in that situation be simultaneously satisfied. Exactly the same can be said if we consider more normal cases where a man wants to drink but abstains on prudential grounds. In general, any reason there is for the man's refusing a drink would seem to depend on some aim or purpose that taking a drink would frustrate; but then it would seem always to be a contingent fact that drinking would frustrate that aim. In order to get a non-contingent conflict, we have to consider a conflict between the desire for a drink (which is clearly one party to the dispute) and some impulse to action that is *essentially* opposed to that desire. It seems hard to see how that condition could be fulfilled unless we suppose that the opposing impulse to action issues a prescription that takes the form 'Do not satisfy *that desire*'. The particular occurrent desire for a drink has to figure as part of the content of the prohibiting prescription. We thus suppose that the conflict is between a first- and second-order desire or impulse to action.

Thus, although the conflict may originate in a contingent conflict between someone's desire for a drink and the desire, say, for health, the operation of reason, reflecting on the (contingent) impossibility of fulfilling both desires, results in a derivative, second-order desire that is essentially opposed to the thirst. The problem with this analysis of the example is that the conflict might still be taken as originating in two first-order desires: one first-order desire for health generates an impulse, arising from reflection, against satisfying the thirst. Reason is still being assigned a purely Humean role, and there is no more reason to suppose that the ultimate origins of the conflict lie in different parts of the soul than there is in the case of any other conflict between desires.

Now it is reasonably clear that Plato *does* hold that the opposed impulses to action do have different *sources*. The problem was that, if the fact that the two sources are distinct is evident on its own account, we do not need Plato's elaborate argument to establish it; and if it is not immediately apparent to observation, it does not seem that the argument from conflict can establish it. No such argument can show that there are distinct sources for reasoning and desiring—at least if I am right in holding that Plato thought that what can be said about the archer provides an adequate model for the case of the man who both desires, and is

averse to, drinking. No more can an argument of that sort show that it is not the same part of the soul that is responsible for the forward movement of the archer's left hand and the backward movement of his right; on the contrary, a single desire manifests itself in two ways.

That it should have seemed to Plato that the argument could establish this may be thought to be due to an ambiguity in the Principle of Opposites as originally stated. The Principle contains the phrase 'in respect of the same thing' (*kata tauton*). The applications to the case of the person moving his head and arms while standing still, the spinning top, and the archer suggest that the principle is saying that a thing cannot be moving in opposite directions with respect to the same part; but what is crucial about the drink example is not that there is *movement* in two directions, but that the person is *pulled* two different ways: he feels under pressure both to accept the drink and to decline it. If we ask why Plato should have subscribed to a doctrine of this sort, it may be relevant to refer to *Phaedo* 97B, where Socrates objects to certain suggested causes or reasons on the grounds that they involve supposing that the same cause could have opposite effects. It may be some such consideration as this that led Plato to think that opposite movements must have distinct sources. But it is clearly not a simple application of the principle that opposite movements in the same thing must occur in different locations.³⁷ Of course, I am not saying that when Plato speaks of doing or undergoing opposites, he simply *means* movement in opposite directions; but I am suggesting that the clearest cases of opposite doings and undergoings, and the ones he regards as relevant to the argument, are cases of moving in opposite directions in a literal sense, or being in motion as contrasted with being stationary. If the Principle of Opposites is given a strong interpretation, and understood as saying that the *sources* of opposite doings and undergoings must be different, Plato's conclusion follows. But such an interpretation is not supported in the least by the three examples that Plato gives. And, in any case, the fact that the same item cannot move in two directions will not show that it cannot be pulled two ways by a single cause. The Principle will yield Plato's conclusion, but we can reasonably ask why we should accept it. What is in question is not the truism that opposite movements cannot occur in the same place, but the

³⁷ When he restates the Principles of Opposites at 439B5, and again at 602E8, the *kata*-phrase is replaced by a simple dative; but the same possibility of ambiguity persists.

much more questionable claim that opposite movements in different places cannot share a common origin. It is natural to look for an alternative interpretation.

Is an alternative understanding of the argument possible? It seems to me that we need to pay proper heed to two things in the passage. First, we should note that Plato, at the beginning of this stretch of argument, has said that it is extremely hard to tell whether the different sorts of psychic occurrence involve the same part of the soul or different parts. This suggests that he held that it was not a simple matter of ordinary observation that some desires and impulses originated in reason and others elsewhere. Secondly, we should note that the example of the thirsty man and also the case of conflict used to argue for the distinctness of the desiring and spirited parts of the soul are both somewhat bizarre and indeed *recherché*. It is apparent that Plato has invoked no ordinary case of thirst. Typically, thirst, for Plato, would belong to the class of what he calls elsewhere the 'necessary' desires, whose satisfaction (up to certain limits) is needed for the well-being and survival of their subject.³⁸ But it appears that, in this case, the desire results from a physical disorder. What we have is a morbid craving.³⁹

This is apparent also in the example of Leontius, who has a morbid craving to look at some corpses. He feels ashamed of this desire, and is angry with himself for having indulged it. This again is not a typical example of a physical desire that may need to be restrained. Why does Plato choose such examples? The answer, I suggest, is that he thought that it was only by appeal to such cases as these that the existence of an origin of action distinct from reason can be decisively shown. So we must ask *what* feature of these rather special cases it is that makes them especially suitable for Plato's purposes.

I suggest that what is distinctive about them is that the agent does not to any degree at all think of the morbid craving as bringing any pleasure, and hence their indulgence is not, in the slightest degree, seen by the agent as a good. In typical cases of physical desire, the satisfaction of the desire is seen by the agent

³⁸ See VIII 558Ef.

³⁹ The description of the source of the desire for a drink as a morbid state has not been much remarked on by commentators on this passage. Crombie (op. cit.), p. 345, writes: 'The depletion which creates a bodily appetite is thought of as a mild case of that unbalance of which disease is an aggravated case.' That seems to me to underestimate the oddity of regarding an ordinary case of thirst as a morbid state.

as in some degree good in that it is seen as involving pleasure. We can now understand why Plato regarded the distinguishing of separate parts of the soul as a matter of some difficulty, since the decisive examples were of such a *recherché* kind.

It seems that what the example of the thirsty man shows is that there is such a thing as a desire simply for a drink, and not for a drink seen as good under some aspect—as pleasant, for example. It has been held that Plato has already argued for this in the passage immediately preceding the one in which the example of the thirsty man was introduced. In that passage,⁴⁰ an argument is developed against the suggestion that, since everyone desires the good, such desires as hunger and thirst must always be for good examples of the relevant kind of object. Against this, Plato argues (surely rightly) that thirst, as such, is simply for a drink, not specifically for a good drink. But thus far, the argument is incomplete: in accepting this, we are merely accepting a conclusion about the sort of desire that thirst essentially is. It is not possible to infer from this correct a priori observation about thirst (*viz.* that all it essentially is is a desire for a drink) that there actually do occur examples of thirst whose object is no more specific than the object of thirst in general. For that, we need an example like the example of the man with dropsy.⁴¹

It has been recognized⁴² that the claim that there are cases of thirst in which someone simply has a desire for a drink—not, more specifically, for a good drink—can be seen as part of Plato's rejection of the position of Socrates, and perhaps his own earlier view. If one holds, instead, with Socrates, that desires like thirst are only for good objects of a certain kind, examples like Plato's of the thirsty man might be seen as cases in which someone pursued an object in the erroneous belief that it was a good example of the relevant kind. Plato argues that examples like the one that he cites show that someone may be drawn towards something that he does not recognize as good in any way at all, and perhaps sees as wholly bad.

What, then, is the role of the Principle of Opposites in this argument? I suggested earlier that it seemed as if Plato thought that we could see, after reflection on the example described, that

⁴⁰ 438A–439B.

⁴¹ It has regularly been thought that Pluto had in mind the case of someone suffering from dropsy.

⁴² This has been very clearly brought out by T. M. I. Penner in his 'Thought and Desire in Plato' in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato Critical Essays*, II (Doubleday, New York, 1971), 96–118.

one of the two impulses originates in reason, and the other does not, in which case the existence of two parts of the soul follows immediately without any reliance on the phenomenon of conflict. I now want to suggest that in fact Plato regarded the conclusion that the two impulses have distinct origins as depending on an application of the Principle of Opposites. It is taken for granted that the role of the rational part of the soul in such cases is to generate impulses that reflect calculations of the goodness or badness of alternative choices open to the agent. What is ruled out by the Principle of Opposites is that that same element in the soul should also be the source of desires that do not depend upon any thought of the goodness of the object of the desire; in particular, a desire for something that reason does not think of as good in any way at all. An example of such a desire would be the desire for a drink that was not characterizable more specifically than simply as a desire for a drink.

How does this interpretation of the way in which the Principle of Opposites is used in this passage differ from the earlier interpretation, which I sought to improve upon, according to which Plato is simply denying that there can ever be a single causal origin of movement in opposed directions? The difference lies in the fact that, on the reading of the Principle that I propose, it is not ruled out that reason might be the source of desire for and aversion to the same object; that could happen provided that both the desire and the aversion are to be seen as deriving from reason's tendency to pursue the good. This may become clearer if we consider what Socrates might have said about a case of conflict. It seems clear to me that he would have had no difficulty in allowing that a conflict could arise from an agent's pursuit of the good in so far as the pursuit of one good might conflict with the pursuit of pleasure.⁴³ A single fundamental disposition to pursue the good might give rise to *derivative* desires that are opposed. A general desire for the good, and acceptance of pleasure as a good, could give rise, on the strength of a calculation of the pleasure likely to result, to a desire for something seen as pleasant.

Of course, Socrates would insist that, just because there was a

⁴³ It has commonly been held that Socrates is debarred from recognizing any genuine cases of conflict at all. Thus Penner (op. cit.), p. 107, supposes that the recognition that thirst must be for drink *simpliciter* 'stops Socrates from re-describing such cases of conflict as cases of a single desire for good wavering between two answers to the question what the best thing is.' See also note 45 below.

conflict, the agent in question had failed to reach an adequate comprehensive and synoptic view of human good. A fully integrated and synoptic view would preclude the possibility of conflicting derivative desires.

If my interpretation is correct, the Principle of Opposites would not rule out, and was not intended to rule out, the occurrence of conflicting desires. In the case described (and in other cases of conflict) there are two fundamentally opposed impulses that cannot be traced to a common source. They cannot be so traced because it is not possible to see the desire for a drink as a derivative desire for a certain good, namely pleasure. We have an impulse that is essentially opposed to reason because it leads to the pursuit of an object irrespective of its value.

If this interpretation is generally correct, we can now answer the objection that at 439C1–D2, the fact that one impulse derives from reason, the other from a morbid state, is presented as if it were an independently observable fact. Rather, the fact that there are opposite tendencies establishes the distinct sources. If one impulse has its origin in a rational calculation of good, the other, precisely because it is opposed to it, must be seen as a reflection of a morbid state.

We can now see how the example of the archer may have been thought by Plato to be useful for his purposes; we there have a single decision by the archer to use the bow, and that leads to opposed movements by his two hands. In the case of reasoning that leads to an ordinary conflict of desires, we have an explanation of how reflection that originates in an impulse to pursue the good can give rise to a conflict. What is distinctive about the rather special cases that Plato cites is that there no such explanation is available.

If this interpretation is correct, we can see Plato as, once again, opposing the view of Socrates that all action could be explained as originating in human beings' desire for the good, and wrongdoing and injustice as manifesting false opinions about the good. The importance, for Plato's conception of justice in the soul, of distinguishing different parts in the soul, lies in the fact that the ideal state of the soul will have to involve the harmonization of different elements that are not all good-directed. If Socrates' conception of the origins of human action had been accepted, the task of attaining virtue would have lain in acquiring an adequate view of the form of human life that was ideal overall. Now in fact Plato would have agreed with Socrates that if reason is allowed to develop in the right way, and an adequate view of

goodness in general and the good state of the soul are achieved, the soul will certainly be in a virtuous state: such a command of goodness is available only to the virtuous man, and hence the full development of the rational part of the soul carries justice and the other virtues with it. Where he disagreed with Socrates was in holding that there are other elements in the soul external to the reasoning part that might prevent the attainment of such a knowledge of goodness. Someone might fail to attain to Plato's ideal state of the soul not because reason was afflicted with some incapacity, but because the wrong training of the *other* elements impeded the proper development of reason. That is a possibility that Socrates' simpler view of the structure of the human soul makes no room for.

The objection might be raised⁴⁴ to the interpretation here offered that, even if there are cases of conflict of the somewhat *recherché* sort that Plato here describes, he evidently wants his account to fit more ordinary cases of conflict, where a desire of physical pleasure, say, is in conflict with a rational desire for the good. In these cases, too, two parts of the soul are involved. Although, as I interpret the example, we have in the case of the person wanting to drink a case of a desire emanating from the appetitive part of the soul (*to epithumētikon*) that is not directed towards pleasure, it is clear that, in the ordinary case, the desire of that part of the soul *is* so directed, and that that is Plato's view.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ I owe this objection to John Ackrill.

⁴⁵ Since the position I have adopted is similar to Irwin's in a number of respects—notably in holding that it is crucial to the understanding of the argument that the desires arising from the appetitive part of the soul are, in Irwin's terminology 'good-independent', it may be helpful if I briefly set out the points on which my interpretation differs from his.

Firstly, I regard it as vital to recognize the bizarreness of the examples that Plato takes to establish the separate existence of the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul.

Secondly, in my view the Principle of Opposites is playing a more important role in the argument than Irwin allows (see note 35 above).

Thirdly, I do not accept the method of distinguishing precisely three parts of the soul that Irwin possesses (*op. cit.*), p. 192: he suggests that we should distinguish reason as the source of wholly good-dependent desires, *to thumoeides* as the source of desires that are partly good-dependent, and the appetitive part as giving rise to entirely good-independent desires. As will, I hope, be clear, I hold that the required parallelism between the drink example and the example of Leontius means that *both* the non-rational parts of the soul have to be seen as good-independent, in that they do not originate in any beliefs about the goodness of their objects, though both may, of course, lead to derivative desires that presuppose calculation.

[footnote cont. on p. 46]

But here, surely, it is open to us to conjecture with a fair degree of confidence that Plato held that, once the existence of the appetitive part of the soul as an independent source of desire had been accepted, it was reasonable to attribute to it pleasure-directed desires of a less *outré* sort. The Socratic analysis of conflict, already shown to be inadequate by the occurrence of morbid cravings, can be rejected for more central cases of conflict also. As we saw, Socrates was in a position to explain ordinary cases of conflict in line with his general view by supposing that conflicts reflected a conflict of opposed desires each attributable to the disposition to pursue the good. Now that a source of action distinct from reason has been established, Plato is free to insist that that view, which sees the pursuit of the pleasures characteristic of the appetitive part of the soul as derivative from the pursuit of the good, reverses the true order of explanation. The impulses that find their source in the appetitive part of the soul are, in the normal case, directed towards certain forms of pleasure, and this will in turn present itself as a good; but this belief is itself a consequence of the original impulse towards certain things, and not simply of the rational pursuit of the good.

What, then, of the arguments by which the spirited element (*to thumoeides*) is distinguished from each of the other two parts? We find two arguments for the distinctness of the spirited element, each, as before involving cases of conflict.⁴⁶ We have first the example of Leontius, mentioned earlier (439E6–440A6), who is angry with himself for having given way to a desire to look at some corpses. As I hope I have made clear, I suggest that this case, like the earlier one, involves a morbid craving that shows that the Socratic account is inadequate, and is taken as showing the distinctness of the appetitive and spirited element. Clearly, this argument needs to be supplemented by a demonstration of

Finally, I reject Irwin's view that a Socratic view could not allow the possibility of conflicting desires. It may be that both the historical Socrates and the Socrates of Plato's earlier dialogues did not allow such conflicts; but an alternative view is possible that would allow conflicting desires to be generated from single desire for the good. And Plato wishes to reject such a view also in the *Republic*.

⁴⁶ I pass over in silence the passage, 441A7–B1, in which Glaucon says that the reason can be distinguished from the spirited element because the latter, but not the former, manifest themselves in children and animals. This is surely a very weak argument, on any view: a single part of the soul might well manifest itself in certain ways earlier in the life of an individual than it does in some other ways.

the separateness of the spirited from the reasoning element, which we find at 441B2–C3. The case of Odysseus is cited, who is described by Homer as rebuking himself for his anger against the suitors. Plato says:

For in this passage, Homer clearly distinguishes between two principles, and depicts the one, which reasons concerning the better and the worse, rebuking the other for unreasoning anger.

It is here made clear that the one impulse is unreasoning, and that the other has a concern for the good. Although it would no doubt be unfair to describe the anger as a morbid craving, it is still true that it is treated as independent of the good in the sense that it cannot be seen as derived from a calculation of the good, though Plato would not wish to deny that the impulses of the spirited part typically manifest themselves in an opinion about the goodness and badness of the actions to which the spirited element prompts the agent.

It will, I hope, now be clear that Plato's purposes would not have been served solely by a threefold classification of the soul's activities. Such a classification, without ascribing the different activities to different parts, would not have made a proper provision for the non-intellectual sources of a failure to reach the ideal state of the virtuous man. It was part of Plato's advance on Socrates that he saw the human soul as containing a specific form of complexity and as constituted of diverse elements.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ I am grateful to a number of friends and colleagues with whom I have discussed the topic of this lecture, but particularly to John Ackrill and Lesley Brown, who made some extremely valuable comments on an earlier version of it.