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## The Metaphysics of Personhood in Plato's Dialogues

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Daniel T. Sheffler, Student

Dr. David Bradshaw, Major Professor

Dr. Clare Batty, Director of Graduate Studies

THE METAPHYSICS OF PERSONHOOD IN PLATO'S DIALOGUES

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

D. T. Sheffler

Director: Dr. David Bradshaw, Professor of Philosophy

Lexington Kentucky

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### THE METAPHYSICS OF PERSONHOOD IN PLATO'S DIALOGUES

While most scholars know, or think they know, what Plato says about the soul, there is less certainty regarding what he says about the self. Some scholars even assert that the ancient Greeks did not possess the concepts of self or person. This dissertation sets out to examine those passages throughout Plato's dialogues that most clearly require some notion of the self or the person, and by doing so to clarify the logical lineaments of these concepts as they existed in fourth century Athens. Because Plato wrote dialogues, I restrict myself to analyzing the concepts of self and person as they appear in the mouths of various Platonic characters and refrain from speculating whether Plato himself endorses what his characters say. In spite of this restriction, I find a number of striking ideas that set the stage for further philosophical development. After an introductory chapter, in Chapters 2 and 3 I argue that the identification of the person with the soul and the identification of the human being with the composite of soul and body make possible a conceptual split between person and human being. In Chapter 4, I argue that the tripartite account of the soul suggests an ideal identification of the person with the rational aspect of the soul rather than the lower aspects of one's psychology. Finally, in Chapter 5 I argue that the analogical link between rationality in us and the rational order of the cosmos leads to the conclusion that the true self is, in some sense, divine.

KEYWORDS: Plato, Platonism, self, person, personhood

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D. T. Sheffler

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April 17, 2017

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THE METAPHYSICS OF PERSONHOOD IN PLATO'S DIALOGUES

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For Rose

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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1 Previous Scholarship, Terminology, and Method</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Previous Scholarship on Greek Thought About the Person . . . . .	2
1.2 Previous Scholarship on Plato . . . . .	9
1.3 Core Concepts . . . . .	17
1.4 Method . . . . .	21
1.5 Division of Chapters and Selection of Texts . . . . .	26
<b>2 Body, Soul, and Self</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1 Laws . . . . .	34
2.2 Alcibiades . . . . .	40
2.3 Soul as Subject at the Beginning of the <i>Phaedo</i> . . . . .	46
2.4 Us and Humans in the Recollection and Kinship Arguments . . . . .	57
2.5 The Polluted versus the Ideal Self . . . . .	63
2.6 Historically Available Notions . . . . .	71
<b>3 Afterlife and Metempsychosis</b>	<b>74</b>
3.1 If You Can Catch Me . . . . .	78
3.2 Capability and Intelligence . . . . .	83
3.3 The Myth of the <i>Gorgias</i> . . . . .	90
3.4 The Myth of the <i>Phaedo</i> . . . . .	98
3.5 The Myth of Er . . . . .	103
3.6 The Myth of the <i>Phaedrus</i> . . . . .	107
<b>4 Tripartition</b>	<b>115</b>
4.1 Self-Control . . . . .	118
4.2 Explaining Internal Conflict . . . . .	123
4.3 The Human Being Within . . . . .	132
4.4 What Survives? . . . . .	141
4.5 Conclusion . . . . .	152
<b>5 Noûs and the Divine in Us</b>	<b>154</b>
5.1 Background . . . . .	156



5.2	Divinity and Noûs in the <i>Timaeus</i> . . . . .	162
5.3	Divine Noûs in the <i>Philebus</i> . . . . .	177
5.4	Our Divinity in the <i>Phaedrus</i> . . . . .	183
5.5	Self-Knowledge and the Divine in the <i>Alcibiades</i> . . . . .	193
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>206</b>
	<b>Vita</b>	<b>209</b>

## Chapter 1

### Previous Scholarship, Terminology, and Method

Anyone who has the least familiarity with the philosophy of Plato will have heard something or other about the soul. The literature on the tripartite theory of the soul alone runs to many thousands of pages. Many undergraduate students will have some notion, more or less vague, that Socrates preaches an opposition between body and soul before he dies. Despite the ease with which we speak about the *soul* in Plato's dialogues, however, we may find it rather difficult to speak about the *self*. We may intelligibly ask whether all the things Socrates says about his soul are things he would say about *himself*. Before we can answer this question and engage in the serious business of working out Plato's theory of the person or the self, we must confront a tricky historical problem. On one interpretation of intellectual history the concept of the *self* or the *person* only arises within the context of modern, especially post-Cartesian, thought. On another interpretation of this history, these concepts come from Christian theological reflection. Both interpretations pose a difficult problem for the scholar who wishes to work out Plato's theory of the self, since it may be that such a scholar would simply be searching in vain, anachronistically imposing upon texts a concept that would be foreign to their author. Hence, any such interpretive project must first ask whether these concepts are available to

Plato and if so the specific forms in which they are available before undertaking the more difficult task of identifying Plato's own views about them. This dissertation will attempt the first task by looking closely at those passages throughout the dialogues that most clearly seem to require some notion of the self or the person. I hope that this effort will enable more precise work both in the interpretation of Plato and in telling the history of these Concepts.

### 1. Previous Scholarship on Greek Thought About the Person

Beyond Plato, the claim is sometimes made that the ancient Greeks more generally did not have a concept that corresponds to what we today mean by "person." Those that make this claim, however, do not always agree on precisely which features fail to appear in Greek anthropology (whether implicitly in literature or explicitly in philosophy).<sup>1</sup> Having the concept of *person*, one might say, requires a deep awareness of oneself as a pure *res cogitans* or as a noumenal being somehow free from the laws of necessary causation that we observe in the phenomenal realm. As examples, I have drawn these requirements directly from Descartes and Kant, so it should not come as any surprise that the Greeks fail to deploy such specific notions in their literature or philosophy. In opposition to this way of proceeding, however, we find other scholars arguing that such Cartesian or Kantian versions of the concept of *person* are inadequate and that we would do better to search for alternatives among the Greeks.<sup>2</sup>

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1. For scholars who, in various ways, hold that the Greeks do not have a concept of *person* see Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*, trans. T.G. Rosenmeyer (Blackwell, 1953); Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1982); and Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (Oxford University Press, 2000), all of which I discuss below.

2. For this line of thinking see C.J. De Vogel, "The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought," in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philoso-*

## Chapter 1, Section 1: Previous Scholarship on Greek Thought About the Person

Unfortunately, the nature of the term “person” exacerbates the confusion of this debate considerably. Because the word “person” is common in everyday speech, it covers a wide semantic range that remains fuzzy at the edges. Because the word also denotes a central concept in many philosophical systems, all the authors involved in the debate employ their own very precise usage. As a result, one author claims, “here is concept *X* covered by the term ‘person,’ and the Greeks do not have it,” while another author claims, “here is concept *Y* covered by the term ‘person,’ and the Greeks do have it.” Both *X* and *Y* are within the semantic range of the English word “person,” and both authors are largely correct in their analysis of the Greek material, but an apparent controversy has been created. On the one hand, the nay-sayers frequently adopt a very stringent view of what it means to be a person that emphasizes deep acts of introspection, subjectivity, and free agency. Often, this stringent definition is explicitly formulated in order to capture peculiar features of post-Cartesian European philosophy since the whole point of saying that the Greeks do not have the concept of *person* is to draw attention to an important point of difference between their thought-world and ours. On the other hand, the yay-sayers frequently seem to adopt very loose and easily satisfied criteria for a culture’s displaying an awareness of personhood. On this approach, a text succeeds in displaying the concept of *person* if it describes in external, objective terms the kinds of behaviors or qualities we take persons to exemplify.

On the negative side, we find Bruno Snell’s claim that Homeric heroes fail to show any awareness of a unified “I” behind their decisions. According to Snell, the modern notion of the person essentially involves an awareness of oneself as the *phy*, ed. Ryan John Kenneth (Catholic University of America Press, 1963); Christopher Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1996); and Richard Sorabji, *Self* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), discussed below.

ultimate source of one's actions. Snell argues that we do find heroes in Homer deliberating about various courses of action, but the ultimate explanatory principle always lies with the gods. Hence, "Homer does not know genuine personal decisions,"<sup>3</sup> and therefore, "Homer's man does not yet regard himself as the source of his own decisions."<sup>4</sup> Snell thinks that the notion of the responsible self emerged slowly, beginning with the individualizing tendencies of lyric poetry, taking a decisive step with the recognition of inner turmoil in tragedy, and culminating in the inner spiritual landscape of Virgil's eclogues.<sup>5</sup>

Albrecht Dihle understands classical Greek anthropology as exclusively bipartite, dividing human psychological grounds for action between rational and irrational factors. Dihle insists that the modern understanding of the person necessarily includes a third factor: the "will," which he understands as a pure "intention as such" quite apart from the cognitive or appetitive features of human deliberation.<sup>6</sup> The gulf between these two ways of thinking becomes especially apparent in the realm of ethics. The Greeks trust the capacity of the human mind to ferret out appropriate standards of living, while Dihle thinks that those cultures influenced by the Hebrews do not. According to the Greeks, the gods may command and we should certainly obey these commands, but the gods, being perfectly rational, can only command that which is already in accord with the structure of reason. The same reason that makes human philosophy possible also structures the *κόσμος* and structures the commands given by the gods. According to Dihle, the Hebrews

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3. *The Discovery of the Mind*, 20.

4. *Ibid.*, 31.

5. See especially, *ibid.*, 106, 123, 301.

6. See especially *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, ch. 2, "The Greek View of Human Action I." Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, 182, also claims that the Greeks lack the concept of a distinct faculty of the will as "the mainspring of action."

strongly distrusted the capacity of man to ascertain the commands of God apart from a revelation from God himself: “Any attempt to understand intellectually the motives behind an order given by Yahveh is doomed to fail and even to lead to fatal disobedience.”<sup>7</sup> The critical factor is our obedience rather than our understanding and this implies a faculty in man such that he can will that which he does not understand. Since such a faculty is neither conceivable nor desirable within Greek anthropology, Dihle thinks that Greek anthropology lacks the most central feature of Christian and post-Christian conceptions of the human person, and that this feature does not become philosophically explicit until Augustine.<sup>8</sup>

Philip Cary also finds a turning point in Augustine. He claims that the modern notion of the person includes the picture of ourselves as containing a private “inner world” and that this picture of the self is absent from classical thought prior to Augustine.<sup>9</sup> Cary claims that in Plotinus we do have a turn to the self but not in the modern sense. Plotinus encourages the soul to turn inward, to turn away from outward, sensible things and toward the inward intelligible things. Hence, Cary thinks that what the soul finds is not a private and individual self but rather *Noûs*, which is divine.<sup>10</sup> Hence, what I find when I turn inward is identical to what you find when you turn inward despite the fact that our souls are distinct. Thus,

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7. *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, 15.

8. While his book does not focus on the concept of *person*, Michael Frede, *A Free Will*, ed. A.A. Long (University of California Press, 2012), presents a compelling case against many of the complaints raised by Dihle. Contra Dihle, Frede sees nothing distinctively new concerning the will in the Christian sources that does not have parallels in pagan antecedents. Instead, he locates the real origin of thinking about the faculty of the will as free with the Stoics, especially in Epicetus’s conception of complete freedom to give or not to give assent to an impulsive impression.

9. See especially *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*, ch. 9, “Inner Privacy and Fallen Embodiment.”

10. See especially *ibid.*, ch. 6, “Explorations of Divine Reason.”

the soul finds “itself” in the sense that it reflexively turns back on what it really is, but according to Cary, the “self” discovered is not recognizable as the modern individual and private self because it is simply divine *Noûs*. Cary points out that when we think about the self today, we take it for granted that what I find when I inwardly look at my self must be distinct from what you find when you inwardly look at your self. In fact, the concept of my *individuality* is frequently taken to be most my own, that which characterizes me *as opposed to* all others.

According to Cary, Augustine is the first to open up this possibility because he found himself forced to abandon the idea that the soul is most of all divine *Noûs*. Once Augustine fully affirms the Christian distinction between creature and Creator, he must claim that God is other than the soul even though he continues to locate God within it.<sup>11</sup> This separation between the self and God arises both from the ontological gap between creature and Creator and from the ethical gap caused by sin, and this latter gap also produces a gap between each soul and every other. Cary thinks that it is this last feature of Augustine’s account that ultimately provides the historical roots for the idea of a private inner life. What begins in Augustine, therefore, as part of the deep suffering of fallen man—our isolation from one another within a private mental world—becomes for us today an automatic way of conceiving ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

On the positive side, C. J. De Vogel finds that “the first metaphysics of man as a moral person is found in Greek philosophy, and of man in his individuality as well.”<sup>13</sup> She begins by helpfully drawing a distinction between the notion of *person* and the notion of *personality*. The former she defines as “man as a rational being and moral subject, free and self-determining in his actions, responsible

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11. *Ibid.*, 114.

12. *Ibid.*, 120–24.

13. “The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought,” 22.

## Chapter 1, Section 1: Previous Scholarship on Greek Thought About the Person

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for his deeds.” The latter she defines as “man’s individual character, his uniqueness.”<sup>14</sup> With respect to a philosophy of the *person*, De Vogel finds ample reflection on moral agency and responsibility beginning as early as the Pythagoreans and Heraclitus, but cropping up again and again as an important concern in all the major philosophical schools. She mentions that at least since Locke, the criterion of self-consciousness or self-reflection on one’s agency is added as an essential element of the concept of *person*. She shows that this element, while perhaps less prevalent in ancient theories, is nevertheless present, especially in the Stoics and Plotinus.<sup>15</sup> With respect to the concept of *personality*, De Vogel cites several examples from Greek literature that bring the unique personality of heroic characters to the forefront, such as Achilles, Antigone, or Socrates. She does, however, concede that the Greeks “were not interested in [individuality] *in the same way* as moderns often are,” as evidenced by the fact that they “never produced such a *genre* as modern psychological novel.”<sup>16</sup>

Christopher Gill contends that a Cartesian-Kantian understanding of what it means to be a person is central to the accounts of those who fail to find personhood in Greek thought. He describes these accounts as “subjectivist-individualist,” since they focus on acts of introspection, subjectivity, and atomic individuality in opposition to the external world or society.<sup>17</sup> Gill concedes that we do fail to find this especially modern set of concerns particularly emphasized in Greek literature and philosophy, although we may detect a trace of it here and there. According to Gill, however, it does not follow from the observation that the Greeks fail to have

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14. *Ibid.*, 23.

15. *Ibid.*, 24.

16. *Ibid.*, 29.

17. See especially, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy*, 10, where he identifies five theses that are characteristic of a “subjectivist-individualist” approach to the self.



## Chapter 1, Section 1: Previous Scholarship on Greek Thought About the Person

our set of concerns about the self that they do not have a conception of the self at all. Instead, he advocates an “objectivist-participationist” model, which considers the person from an external perspective as that person appears within a community.<sup>18</sup> Gill claims that once we analyze the person in these terms we are able to make sense of the rich material concerning the person that Greek literature and philosophy has to offer.

Richard Sorabji claims that the central feature of what it means to be a person is an awareness of “me and me again” and finds abundant textual evidence for the presence of self-reference in Greek thought, but contends that it is always through an objective, social lens rather than Cartesian introspection. Sorabji thinks that we cannot always replace “talk of the self” with “talk of persons, or humans, and aspects of them.”<sup>19</sup> He cites, for example, the saying of Epictetus, “What did you say, man? Put *me* in chains? My leg you will put in chains, but my will (*προαίρεσις*) not even God can conquer” (*Discourses* 1.1.23).<sup>20</sup> Sorabji explains the conceptual distinction involved in this dictum:

Epictetus is not saying “You cannot chain the person, or human”. Of course you can. Nor is he saying “there is an aspect of me you cannot chain, my will”. The Tyrant knew that. He is rather saying “the aspect you cannot chain is *me*”.<sup>21</sup>

I differ with Sorabji on the merely terminological point that he uses “person” as roughly synonymous with “individual human,” while I discuss below why we should keep these terms distinct. Nevertheless, Sorabji makes a good point. This passage from Epictetus is merely one example among many that Sorabji cites from

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18. See especially, *ibid.*, 10–11, where he identifies five theses that are characteristic of an “objectivist-participant” approach to the self.

19. *Self*, 47.

20. *Ibid.*, 44.

21. *Ibid.*, 47.

ancient sources that demonstrate a definite awareness of and keen interest in questions of the “self” or “I.”

Most recently, A. A. Long has written a very helpful book that outlines what he considers to be a diverse array of “models” for the mind and self in Greek literature and philosophy. Long agrees that the Greeks conceived of the self in markedly different terms than we do today since many of their ideas about the self are “utterly remote from the individualistic and secular contexts of our body-centered market capitalism.”<sup>22</sup> Rather than thinking, however, that the Greek conception is “primitive” while ours is “developed,” Long argues that we can profitably illuminate our own thinking by hearing what the Greeks have to say. Much of his study concerns the interplay between the Greek concepts of body and soul. He argues that a belief in the immortality of the soul that begins with the Pythagoreans and Orphics plays an important role in understanding the changes that take place in thinking about the self from Homer to Plotinus.

## 2. Previous Scholarship on Plato

This debate about the concept of *person* in the history of Greek thought certainly includes discussion of Plato since he is a monumental figure in that history, but authors that focus on the broad sweep of Greek thought understandably limit the space they devote to him.<sup>23</sup> Against the background of this broader discussion, however, we also find more specialized studies in Plato addressing similar questions.<sup>24</sup> I want to begin the examination of this scholarship backwards, however,

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22. *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 2.

23. In particular, the discussions of Plato in Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy* ch. 4, and Sorabji, *Self*, pt. III, are quite limited as I will discuss more fully below.

24. See especially, Mary Margaret McCabe, *Plato's Individuals* (Princeton University Press, 1994) ch. 9, and Lloyd Gerson, *Knowing Persons* (Oxford University

by looking at a charge brought against Plato from a perhaps unexpected quarter. The claim is made in twentieth century Catholic theological and Thomistic circles that patristic thinking develops something radically new in the metaphysics of personhood during the fourth and fifth centuries, principally in the course of the Trinitarian and Christological debates. In order to describe the development of this thought, patristic and medieval scholars often try to contrast the new Christian thinking with old Greek thinking—and in the process make some rather bold claims about Plato.

We can see a prime example of this in Étienne Gilson's extremely influential *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*:

In a doctrine like Plato's it is not at all this Socrates, however highly extolled he may be, that matters: it is Man. If Socrates has any importance at all it is only because he is an exceptionally happy, but at the same time quite accidental, participation in the being of an Idea. The idea of Man is eternal, immutable, necessary; Socrates, like all other individuals, is only a temporary and accidental being; he partakes of the unreality of his matter, in which the permanence of the idea is reflected, and his merely momentary being flows away on the stream of becoming. Certain individuals, no doubt, are better than others, but that is not in virtue of any unique character, bound up with and altogether inseparable from their personality, it is simply because they participate more or less fully in a common reality, that is to say this ideal type of humanity which, being one and the same for all men, is alone truly real.<sup>25</sup>

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Press, 2003), both of which I discuss below.

25. *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1936), 190–91. Perhaps Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, 246–47, has this passage of Gilson in mind when he rejects a similar historical claim: "It is sometimes averred that the Greeks in their art did not portray any one man with his accidental traits, but that they represented *man* himself, the idea of man, to use a Platonic expression which is not infrequently used to support the argument. The truth is that such a statement is neither Platonic nor even Greek in spirit."

Gilson makes this claim at the beginning of his chapter entitled “Christian Personalism,” and he goes on to give an account of the development of the concept of the person in Christian thought against the backdrop of this ostensible failure in Plato’s metaphysics (along with a slightly different failure in Aristotle’s). As one example of how influential Gilson’s account is we find the following statement from Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI):

The concept of the person is thus, to speak with Gilson, one of the contributions to human thought made possible and provided by Christian faith.<sup>26</sup>

Surely *something* new is going on in early Christian anthropology, but Gilson and Ratzinger perhaps overstate their case. Gilson seems to think that the metaphysical status of *Socrates* appears in the dialogues uniformly as a concrete particular to be treated just like any other concrete particular in contrast to the eternal Forms. Several texts that we will examine (especially in Chapter 5), however, suggest that *Socrates himself* does not fit neatly into a simple Form–Particular dichotomy. All too often, the scholarship on the early Christian material is based on a deep reading of the patristic authors and a shallow reading of their Greek antecedents. My hope is that by more fully attending to the details of the dialogues we can come to appreciate both the points of genuine novelty in later thinkers and the points of continuity between them and Plato.

Returning to Plato scholarship proper, what Gilson considers a reproach to Plato we hear G. M. A. Grube echo in tones of praise in his similarly influential *Plato’s Thought*:

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26. “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” trans. Michael Waldstein, *Communio* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1990), 439. See also responses to Gilson from De Vogel, “The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought,” and Hans Urs von Balthasar, “On the Concept of Person,” *Communio* 13 (Spring 1986), 19–20.

As for immortality, the human soul as a whole definitely does not attain it, since part of it is unequivocally stated to be mortal: neither physical desire nor ambition survives. So that the human personality as we know it ceases to be at death. It is however said with equal clearness from the *Phaedo* to the *Timaeus* that the highest part of the soul, the mind or intellect, the capacity to apprehend universal truth, does survive. It lives on, presumably, as a focus of soul-force, that is, of the longing for perfection, beauty and truth, which is the ultimate origin of all ordered movement and life in the universe. If we ask further, how far this immortal mind keeps its individuality we must remember that from first to last the aim of the Platonic philosopher is to live on the universal plane, to *lose himself* more and more in the contemplation of truth, so that the perfect psyche would, it seems, lose itself completely in the universal mind, the world-psyche. Hence it remains individual only in so far as it is imperfect, and personal immortality is not something to aim at, but something to outgrow.<sup>27</sup>

I have a couple of reservations about this passage that arise from ideas I will develop more fully in the next two sections. First, Grube attempts to find a single Platonic doctrine across diverse dialogues by reading statements in the mouths of different characters as statements of Plato's own position. I am skeptical that any such synthesis can be achieved given the dialogue form and especially given the mythic character of nearly all the passages that have to do with immortality and the soul. Second, Grube does not clearly distinguish here between qualitative diversity and numerical plurality. Does the phrase "lose itself completely in the universal mind, the world-psyche" involve an ontological merging with that universal mind or merely a qualitative conformity? Similarly, when Grube says, "it remains individual only in so far as it is imperfect," it is unclear whether he means "individual" in the sense of "numerically distinct from others" or in the sense of "qualitatively unique." Perhaps this ambiguity arises from the ambiguity of the di-

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27. *Plato's Thought* (Beacon Press, 1964), 148. Grube is perhaps responding to Robert Hall, " $\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato," *Phronesis* 8, no. 1 (1963), 63, who, publishing in the previous year, considers "the nature of the individual immortal soul" to be one of the "central problems of Plato's thought."

alogues themselves, but in that case, we should call attention to that ambiguity and then fall silent.

More recently and in contrast to Gilson and Grube, Mary Margret McCabe argues that Plato *does* have an account of persons including the “specialness of ‘I.’”<sup>28</sup> McCabe holds that a concern with the individual self does not begin with Descartes but rather goes back all the way to Parmenides. Hence, she thinks that it is not anachronistic to find this concern in Plato, especially in Socrates’s examination of perception in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>29</sup> While McCabe’s book persuasively illuminates many aspects of the metaphysics of individuation in Plato’s thought more generally, she devotes only one chapter to the individuation of persons specifically and here she focuses principally on the unity of consciousness. While this is quite valuable in its own right and while we will have occasion in coming chapters to refer to her work, the limited scope of this chapter calls for expansion.

Writing shortly after McCabe, Gill also includes a chapter on personality in Plato’s thought.<sup>30</sup> As with Homer and the Greek Tragedians, Gill thinks that we can indeed find a conception of personality in Plato provided only that we look for it under the guise of his “objective-participant” model rather than a more modern “subjective-individualist” model.<sup>31</sup> While Gill’s study is certainly adequate for his own purposes, three features of it limit its usefulness for our present inquiry. First, Gill only examines the *Republic*, and even within the *Republic*, he limits himself to the material concerning tripartition. Second, Gill focuses on ethical and political questions while neglecting their metaphysical underpinnings. Third, Gill is more interested in what we will call “personality” rather than what we will call the “per-

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28. *Plato’s Individuals*, 264.

29. *Ibid.*, 275.

30. *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy*, ch. 4, “The Personality Unified by Reason’s Rule in Plato’s *Republic*.”

31. *Ibid.*, 240.

son" or the "self," that is to say he is more interested in the idiosyncratic flare of the hero rather than the metaphysical structure in virtue of which Socrates is a person.

To my knowledge, the only book-length study of the topics that concern this dissertation is Lloyd Gerson's *Knowing Persons*. Gerson holds that we find a clear and consistent distinction in Plato between the person and the human being. The former Gerson identifies with the soul, while the latter he identifies with the composite of soul and body. This is complicated, however, by the fact that the embodied soul is also the subject of "bodily states," i.e. states that essentially involve the body, like hunger, but are nevertheless states of the soul.<sup>32</sup> Because of this, Gerson argues that we should distinguish the given embodied self, which he calls the "the endowment of personhood," from "an ideal of achievement," which he calls "the achievement of personhood."<sup>33</sup> Gerson claims that endowed persons stand in relation to achieved persons "roughly as images stand to their eternal exemplars."<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, the gap between the endowed and achieved identities generates an ethical imperative, which Gerson summarizes nicely near the end of the book:

Questions like "How ought we to live?" or "What is the best life for human beings?" patently require an answer to the question "What is a human being?" The evidence of the dialogues hitherto discussed suggests that Plato approached this question somewhat obliquely by asking first, "Am I identical with a human being?" His answer is "No, I am identical with a soul." More specifically, I am identical with a subject of thinking. Then, the question "What is the best life for me?" amounts to the question "What is the ideal state for such a subject?" The answer to that question is "A state of knowing."<sup>35</sup>

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32. *Knowing Persons*, 2.

33. See *ibid.*, 3, 60, 113. See also Gerson's earlier essay, "Platonic Dualism," *The Monist* 69, no. 3 (July 1986), 359, where he makes a similar distinction.

34. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 3.

35. *Ibid.*, 237–38.

The progressive narrowing down, therefore, of ideal personal identity from the total human being, to the soul, to the specifically rational soul demands of me that I strive to conform my actual identity ever more closely to this ideal by pursuing philosophy. Similar to my reservations about Grube's approach, I am skeptical whether Gerson can extract from diverse characters in diverse dialogues a unified view of what *Plato* thinks. Nevertheless, I think he correctly identifies a distinction between person and human being in the dialogues that many scholars fail to consider, and I will argue for a similar view in Chapters 2 and 3. I also agree with his distinction between personal identity as a given and as an ideal, and I find similar grounds for the presence of this distinction in the dialogues, especially in Chapters 4 and 5. I am somewhat hesitant, however, about the specific way that Gerson characterizes this distinction. In particular, I am hesitant about the way that the ideal-self/embodied-self relation is supposed to mirror the Form/instance relation, since the embodied self is not an *instance* of the ideal self.<sup>36</sup> To his credit, Gerson only argues that the analogy between these two relations holds "roughly," but the terms in which he characterizes the ideal self seem to me to come too close to characterizing it as a kind of eternal Form.

Unfortunately, one of the most recent books on the notion of *person* in ancient thought generally, Sorabji's *Self*, contains the least material on Plato in particular. Sorabji's Part III, titled "Platonism: Impersonal Selves, Bundles, and Differentiation," comprises two chapters, but it is primarily a discussion of the "Platonist tradition from Plato to Averroës" (emphasis mine). His discussion of Plato takes up all of two and a half pages and examines only two passages, one from the *Alcibiades* and one from the *Republic*, along with a couple of citations from the *Phaedo*.<sup>37</sup> In

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36. See especially *ibid.*, 56.

37. Throughout, I follow John Cooper in referring to the *First Alcibiades* simply as the *Alcibiades*. We will have nothing to say about the *Second Alcibiades*.



these few pages, however, Sorabji manages to make some important broad claims about Plato. First, he claims that the problem of personal individuation which occupies the tradition of Platonism “starts with Plato’s belief that the true self is the rational soul or the *intellect*.”<sup>38</sup> Second, he claims that “as regards soul, Plato himself speaks as if all soul is one, indivisible except amongst bodies.”<sup>39</sup> With respect to the *Alcibiades*, Sorabji argues that in this dialogue Socrates “makes the true self to be the intellect” and “contrasts the true self with the individual.”<sup>40</sup> While he is right to call attention to this often neglected dialogue, I hope to show in Chapters 2 and 5 that we need to be very careful with these difficult passages. With respect to the *Republic*, Sorabji thinks that Plato’s view becomes more complex as he begins to acknowledge irrational parts of the soul, eventually coming to the view that “the true self is the rational *part* of the soul.”<sup>41</sup> Sorabji focuses on the famous metaphor of the soul as an inner human being, lion, and many-headed beast (*Republic* IX, 589a–b). Here he argues that “it is because the reason is described as the man or human that Plato is taken to mean that reason is the true man or the true self.”<sup>42</sup> As we will see in the coming chapters, I think all this is too simple to be true. While I think that Sorabji notices important features of the ideas about the self that emerge from the dialogues, all his statements need to be carefully qualified and a more thorough examination of the actual textual basis for them is certainly necessary.

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38. *Self*, 115.

39. In support of this claim, Sorabji cites *Timaeus* 35a1–6, but I fail to see how this passage establishes such a strong metaphysical claim.

40. *Ibid.*, 115.

41. *Ibid.*, 116.

42. *Ibid.*, 116.

### 3. Core Concepts

When we examine this multifaceted scholarly discussion, we can make better sense of what is going on if we break the question of personhood down into two distinct inquiries. Both ask the question, “What is a person?” but because they interpret this question in different ways the kinds of answers they find are distinct. The first inquiry translates the question “What is a person?” into what I will call the Categorization Question: “What sorts of things count as persons?” This inquiry tends to list necessary and sufficient conditions for something’s being a person and, when the question becomes historical, proceeds to ask whether the Greeks classify things under exactly this category. The second inquiry translates the question “What is a person?” into what I will call the Metaphysical Question: “What is a person *really*?” or more exactly, “Of all the candidates for the *person himself*, which are the most fundamental as opposed to the merely adventitious or derivative?” In discussing this question, speaking of “the self” frequently becomes more natural than speaking of “the person.” The inquirer in pursuit of the answer to this question typically focuses on an individual entity already known to be a person and attempts to sort through the various realities that present themselves as candidates for the *real* person (e.g. the person’s body, the stream of consciousness, memory, a distinctive personality), eliminating what is derivative until he arrives at the person *himself*.

Bafflingly, those who attempt to answer the Categorization Question often fail to distinguish between the categories *human* and *person*. Gill, for example, uses the terms “human,” “person,” “human person,” “individual,” and “individual human” interchangeably.<sup>43</sup> If “person,” however, is meant to cover precisely the same

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43. In his last chapter, Gill does draw a distinction between “person” and “human being,” but he does not seem to think that they cover distinct classes of objects, even in principle. Rather, he focuses on the manner in which “subjectivists”

ground as “human,” then the question whether the Greeks possess such a concept becomes uninteresting. I find it difficult to imagine a culture that fails to recognize human beings as a category, and even more difficult to imagine that Greek philosophy fails to reflect on its significance. As we will use the terms, however, the term “person” covers more ground than the term “human” — at least in principle. Whatever else it means to be human, it at least involves belonging to a particular species. We can conceive, however, of persons that do not. In our own time, we are familiar with science fiction stories that center around the theme of human encounters with alien life-forms who nevertheless count as persons. Frequently, this takes the shape of mere anthropomorphism (e.g. “Martians” that are little more than humans living on Mars), but occasionally science fiction authors attempt to push the limits of the non-human features of such alien life in order to see just how *non-human* something can be and still remain a moral and rational agent.<sup>44</sup> Similarly in ancient literature, the treatment of gods and spirits places them within the sphere of dialogue, rationality, and moral agency, while at the same time emphasizing the radical gap between gods and men.<sup>45</sup>

In order to trace the limits of the class of persons, we must also distinguish the concept of *person* from the concept of *personality*.<sup>46</sup> The latter notion emphasizes uniqueness and individuality, that which makes someone special and interesting. In boring society there may be a room full of persons but only a few personalities. Some of the scholarship I have discussed in the last two sections either focuses on

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tend to use the term “person” while “objectivists” tend to use the term “human.”

44. See for example “Home Soil,” an episode of *Star Trek the Next Generation* (Season 1), in which an inorganic, crystalline life-form is able to communicate with the crew of the *Enterprise* by means of pulsing light.

45. One classic example is the treatment of Orestes, Apollo, and the Erinyes as peers in judgment in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*.

46. De Vogel, “The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought,” 23, makes a similar distinction.

the question of personality or does not clearly distinguish this from the more fundamental question of persons. Since the ideas of genius, idiosyncratic flare, eccentricity, and historic uniqueness seem to be important themes in modern literature, especially from the romantic period, it makes sense to ask whether the Greeks conceive the world in similar terms or, even if they do, whether they choose to emphasize these notions in their literature. While we will have occasion to refer back to the idea of personality in the coming chapters, it will not be central to our investigation. We will mention it only to notice that it does not seem especially important in connection with certain passages. This observation, however, should not lead us to believe that the notion of *person* suffers the same fate—*that* must be an independent question.

The distinction between *person* and *personality* makes it possible for us to notice a further ambiguity in the term “personal” and the contrasting term “impersonal.” We can say that something is “personal” in the sense that it is characteristic of the class of persons rather than the class of mere things. In this sense, we might say that rationality is personal. In contrast, we can say that something is “personal” in the sense that it is characteristic of that which sets a personality apart. In this sense we can speak of an impersonal conception of rationality, i.e. one that considers rationality in cold, abstract, or formal terms without emphasizing the unique flare of the romantic genius. We can also say that something is “personal” in the sense that it is characteristic of intimacy and privacy, the sphere associated with the unique individual in contrast to the public square. In this sense, a particular plan may be personal or impersonal, whereas in the first sense, plan-directed agency is always personal.

Turning to the Metaphysical Question, talk about the “real” or the “true” self can become confusing because there are a range of different concepts floating

around in the literature. In order to become clear on the questions I want to ask, we need to separate out three pairs of contrasts that each define personal identity along three distinct dimensions:

1. The *true* self versus the *derivative* self,
2. *One* person versus *another* person, and
3. The *given* self versus the *ideal* self.

Along the first axis, we can distinguish the *true* or the *real* Socrates from derivative entities that we may call Socrates when speaking loosely. For instance, we may say, “Socrates is snub nosed,” but turn around and question whether Socrates’s nose is a part of his *true* identity. Primarily, this contrast is important for our purposes because we find several passages in the dialogues (e.g. *Laws* 959a–b, discussed in Chapter 2) that seem to identify the soul as the true self in contrast to the more apparent and conventional identification of the self with the body or the whole composite of body and soul (Chapters 2 and 3). Once our focus turns from the interaction between body and soul to intrapsychic interactions, we can ask the further question whether anything within the soul is even more fundamental than the soul *simpliciter*, the primary candidates being τὸ λογιστικόν or νοῦς (Chapters 4 and 5).

Along the second axis, we normally assume that Socrates is the same person as himself but a different person from Cebes. Given this difference, we can ask what accounts for it. In combination with the first contrast, certain difficult problems arise. Suppose, for example, that the nonidentity of Socrates and Cebes rests on a reality that belongs to the adventitious and derivative aspects of them both rather than to their true self. One might read, for instance, the passage I quoted from Grube above in this light. On this interpretation, Socrates and Cebes *are* distinct persons, but the *true* self of Socrates is one and the same as the *true* self of Cebes.

This appears to be Sorabji's reading of Plato's position and the central doctrine that, according to him, generates difficult problems for the Platonic tradition. While this is most explicit in Sorabji, I believe something like this (at various levels of clarity) lies behind many things scholars say about Plato. As we will see in what follows, I do not think we can find this idea in the dialogues and, once we take into account the distinction between person and personality, much of the textual evidence that appears to the contrary dissolves.

Finally, along the third axis, we may distinguish Socrates as he is from Socrates as he ought to be. We have seen this distinction between given and ideal identities play an important role in Gerson's reading of Plato, but it appears also in McCabe.<sup>47</sup> According to both these authors, the dialogues consistently differentiate persons as we find them in ordinary life from persons ideally. The characteristic feature that separates the former from the latter is embodiment and the fallout from embodiment. Naturally, there is some interplay between this dimension and the previous two. For example, suppose that the true self of Socrates along dimension (1) is the rational part of his soul. We might use this as grounds for supposing that the ideal toward which Socrates must strive is a further and further identification with his rationality and the things which separate him from this ideal are all the irrational elements of his psychology that have yet to be brought to heel. Finally, we may wonder whether Socrates's ideal identity is distinct from Cebes's ideal identity either qualitatively or numerically.

#### **4. Method**

The focus of our inquiry will be entirely historical and largely positive. We will seek to establish which notions exist by the time of fourth century Athens and we will

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47. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 264.

accomplish this by identifying which notions positively appear in Plato's dialogues, although we will occasionally notice the absence of certain notions along the way. Since this is the nature of the inquiry, we will set to one side questions of Plato's own final position. In order to see what I have in mind, imagine a debate between Archibald and Bentley one night over cigars. Archibald asserts that Europeans did not possess the concept of extraterrestrial aliens until the twentieth century, while Bentley points out that H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* was published in 1898. At this point, it will not work for Archibald to say, "Yes, yes, but he didn't *believe* any of that nonsense; it was all fiction, mere *myth*." In order for Wells to represent aliens in his novel he must possess the concept of aliens irrespective of his own views on the matter and irrespective of his purposes in writing the novel.

This is not to say that I think an inquiry into Plato's own views is without merit or impossible to achieve, but there are three features of his writing that make it a particularly daunting task for this subject more than others. First, we find Socrates several times warning that the methods he is currently using in the dialogues cannot be trusted to deliver an adequate account of the soul. To take a prime example, the tripartition of the soul in the *Republic* has enjoyed celebrity status, but Socrates himself raises a caution about the accuracy of his own analysis. Right after bringing up tripartition explicitly at 435c, Socrates says,

But you should know, Glaucon, that in my opinion, we will never get a precise answer using our present methods of argument—although there is another longer and fuller road that does lead to such an answer.<sup>48</sup>

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48. All translations from the *Republic* are from G. M. A. Grube as revised by C. D. C. Reeve in ed. John M. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, (Hackett, 1997). Unless otherwise noted, all translations throughout are from Cooper's edition.

Mitchell Miller has made much of this passage and rightly advises extreme caution before we attribute claims made about the soul by Socrates in the *Republic* directly to Plato himself.<sup>49</sup>

Second, the dialogue form itself means that we never find Plato speaking in his own voice and must rely upon a diverse cast of characters in different dramatic settings to give us all our clues. Since antiquity, Plato's commentators have noticed certain apparent contradictions across dialogues concerning his psychology (See Chapter 4 for a good example). Much of the scholarly debate in this area breaks down between those who offer a developmental account of Plato's views and those who offer nuanced interpretations that resolve the apparent inconsistencies.<sup>50</sup> In my view, we can explain many of these surface-level tensions when we pay attention to the fictional speakers behind the various claims and the dramatic context in which these claims are uttered. Just imagine scholars charging Euripides with inconsistency because *Medea* and *Alcmaeon* assert contradictory things in two different plays. Nevertheless, that Plato chooses to represent different characters saying different things does tell us something about Plato himself. It tells us that he cares enough about a certain topic to write about it and that he understands a certain line of thinking—whether or not he endorses it—well enough to represent one of his characters arguing in such and such a manner. In order to establish the historical thesis that ancient Greek thinkers acknowledge a particular notion, this is all we need.

Third, the vast majority of texts that reveal anything about the metaphysical status of the self come from contexts where one of Plato's characters is describing

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49. "A More 'Exact Grasp' of the Soul?" in *Truth*, ed. Kurt Pritzl (Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 40–43.

50. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (University of Toronto Press, 1970), is representative of the former approach, while Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, is representative of the latter.



a myth (e.g. the Myth of Er in the *Republic*, or the Chariot Myth in the *Phaedrus*). What is more, Plato frequently has his characters draw attention explicitly to the mythic character of these passages in contrast to the dialectical character of the arguments we find elsewhere (e.g. *Phaedo* 114d, *Timaeus* 27d–28b). Luc Brisson offers a compelling explanation for this consistent feature of the dialogues:

Considered from a general perspective, in Plato's works the soul is regarded as a reality intermediate between the sensible and the intelligible. It is not therefore perceptible either by the intellect (*nous*), since it is not a Form, or by any sense organ, since it is not a sensible particular thing. From this perspective, the type of discourse available for it cannot be verified and hence is very often mythical.<sup>51</sup>

Hence, we should not expect too much from the dialogues. Plato must care about the themes of his myths considering the space he devotes to them, but we should not expect him to give us an exact dialectical account. If Brisson's reading of Plato's epistemology is correct, the self or the soul is simply not the right kind of object for either exact knowledge or empirically-based opinion and so must be treated in myth. Once we admit this, however, it does not follow that there are no important ideas about the self contained in the myths or that later thinkers will not inherit these ideas because they are contained in mere stories. Often enough, Plato's disciples will read the fundamental themes of his myths, if not the more colorful details, in a very serious light. Our historical inquiry, therefore, must examine the mythic side of Plato just as carefully as the dialectical side if we wish to uncover those ideas in his dialogues that influence later conceptions of the person.

While we will not attempt a systematic interpretation of Plato's position, this does not mean that we will refrain from engaging in any interpretation at all. Frequently, the logic behind an argument or the meaning of metaphors will require

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51. "Soul and State in Plato's *Laws*," in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 306.

that we fill in the gaps and draw comparisons. We will attempt to interpret each text as locally as possible, drawing upon the immediate context first, the whole dialogue second, and the entire corpus only as a cautious third. Our first step will always be to look at what is actually said and only after this will we attempt to reconstruct the conceptual resources that must be in place to make these words possible.

In addition to the obstacles that prevent us from investigating what Plato himself believes about the self, we must also face a further difficulty in selecting our texts. Since the metaphysical status of the self or the person does not appear to be the central theme of any one dialogue, we will not be able to say very much worthwhile if we artificially restrict the scope of our investigation to, say, the *Phaedrus*. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from this that nothing worthwhile can be said. Once we read synoptically, we will notice certain notions, distinctions, or lines of thinking appear again and again. Simply placing key passages from different dialogues side by side without comment can bring out definite strains of thought that may remain muted otherwise.

With such a wide net being spread, we must introduce limiting factors lest our investigation grow to unmanageable proportions. Throughout, we will focus exclusively on the *metaphysical* status of the person or the self and will ignore questions of purely political, ethical, or epistemological interest. For example, we will not examine any of the texts in the *Republic* that discuss the private individual's relationship to the state. Likewise, we will not concern ourselves with the numerous thorny issues surrounding the specifics of Plato's psychology where these specifics do not directly relate to the status of the self. For example, we will not discuss the detailed correspondences between parts of the soul and physical organs in the *Timaeus*. Further, since we ultimately have an eye toward the influence of the ideas

we find upon later thinkers, we will lay greater stress upon those dialogues that loom large throughout history. On the basis of these criteria, the central texts that we will examine come from the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Timaeus*, the *Laws*, and the *Alcibiades*, although reference will also be made occasionally to the *Gorgias*, the *Meno*, the *Philebus*, and the *Theaetetus*.

## 5. Division of Chapters and Selection of Texts

We can imagine the overall trajectory that we will take as a dive through concentric levels from the most broad and external to the most narrow and internal. We will work our way from the total human being to the soul within that human being; then from the soul *simpliciter* to the internal makeup of the soul; and finally from the internally complex soul to the divine element within the soul. At each level we will primarily ask whether we can find texts that identify, or seem to identify, this level with the true self. Secondarily, we will ask whether the things said about this level give us grounds for sorting the world into the categories of persons and things and what those grounds might be.

Beginning at the outermost layer, Chapter 2 will examine those texts that discuss the relationship between the body and the soul without introducing the internal complexity of the soul. I have titled the second chapter “Body, Soul, and Self,” although a fuller title might have been: “Body, Soul, and Self apart from Tripartition.” As others have noticed, some passages in the dialogues (most obviously the *Phaedo*) treat, or at least seem to treat, “the soul” as a unitary entity in contrast with “the body.” Interpreters that offer a developmental account tend to see this as an early stage of Plato’s thinking about the soul, while interpreters that want to reconcile the various claims of the dialogues appeal to the rhetorical requirements

of strongly contrasting the soul with the body.<sup>52</sup> In either case, it will be useful to group these texts together and delay until Chapter 3 any discussion of those texts that include psychic complexity in their account of the relationship between body and soul. On this basis, I have reserved for Chapter 4 any material from the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, or *Phaedrus* concerning tripartition. Material on the afterlife and metempsychosis would also be relevant for this chapter, but the sheer quantity of this material and the especially mythical character of much of it require that we separate off these texts into a chapter of their own. Finally, many of the famous passages that discuss the relationship between the soul and the body would require considerable interpretive strain before we could spot any distinct notion of the self alongside the obvious concepts of soul and body. Many of the passages concerning Socratic ethics and pleasure in the *Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and *Philebus* are of this character together with numerous passing remarks throughout the dialogues.

Using these exclusionary criteria, we are left with one key passage from the *Laws* (959a–b), an argument from the *Alcibiades* (129a–131d), and several famous passages from the *Phaedo* (principally 63e–69e, 72e–73a, 76c, 79c, 81b–83a). In these texts, we find fairly explicit and consistent claims that the person is *not* identical with the whole soul–body composite, but rather with the soul only. This identification needs to be carefully understood, however, because we do find expressions like “Socrates is sitting” or “Socrates is hungry.” In the *Phaedo*, we find a number of texts that help to explain this by distinguishing the soul as it is in its embodied condition from the soul as it is ideally, according to its own proper nature. Further, we find the term *ἄνθρωπος* consistently used in the *Phaedo* to refer to the whole organic composite of body and soul. Combined with the earlier identification of the

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52. Again, Robinson is representative of the former approach while Gerson is representative of the latter.

self with the soul, this gives us grounds for suspecting that a conceptual distinction between person and human being appears at least sometimes in the dialogues.

Chapter 3 will confirm this suspicion by investigating passages that deal with immortality and metempsychosis. It is worthwhile to separate these passages into their own chapter for two important reasons. First, nearly all the passages in Plato that discuss the afterlife and metempsychosis in any detail are overtly mythic in character—even more explicitly than the generally mythic character that I noted in the previous section. Second, thinking about the afterlife involves a special logic, particularly important for our concerns, that other aspects of thinking about the soul do not share. When we wonder about our prospects for surviving death, it intuitively matters in a pressing way whether it is really *us* that survives. Telling me that my bones will continue remarkably unchanged for a long time after death does not especially matter unless I have reason to think that *I* will thereby continue too. Furthermore, many of the afterlife myths in the dialogues focus on a postmortem judgment with rewards and punishments and this seems to require that the agent being judged be somehow identical with the agent who acts viciously or virtuously in this life.

We will begin this chapter with a pair of passages from the *Phaedo* (70b–76c and 115c–116a) that bridge the gap between the material in the previous chapter and the more overt myths that follow. We will examine just how far Socrates intends his arguments for the survival of the soul to involve a survival of the self. We will then turn our focus toward the afterlife myths in the *Gorgias* (523a–526c) and the *Phaedo* (107d–115a), which especially involve the ideas of postmortem judgment, reward, and punishment. Finally, we will begin to look forward to the next chapter on psychic complexity by examining the Myth of Er at the very end of the *Republic* (614b–621d) and the Chariot Myth from the *Phaedrus* (246a–257b). While

the Myth of Er is embedded in the larger context of the *Republic* which involves psychic complexity, the myth itself makes little use of this. The situation with the Chariot Myth, however, is a bit more complex since the main force of the chariot metaphor requires psychic complexity. I have divided the material in this myth, therefore, between this chapter and the next. In this chapter, I focus on those aspects of the myth that shed some light on the relationship between the self and the soul as it enters or exits embodiment, while I reserve for the following chapter those aspects of the myth that shed some light on the relationship between the self and the aspects of the soul represented by the charioteer and his horses.

Chapter 4 will extend our dive inward by examining the impact that psychic complexity has on the identification between soul and self. Once we speak of various parts or aspects of the soul, it becomes more difficult to straight-forwardly identify the self with the soul *simpliciter*. We can ask whether we should identify the *really* true self with some part or aspect of the soul rather than the whole. Before we move to the fully tripartite material, we will begin by examining a group of closely parallel passages from the *Gorgias* (491d–e), the *Laws* (626d–627a), and the *Republic* (430e–431a), which all discuss the logic of expressions such as “self-mastery” or “being stronger than oneself.” Such expressions require that the mastering or stronger aspect be distinct from the mastered or weaker aspect, and we may wonder where to locate the self between the two.

We will need to exclude a large number of passages that deal with tripartition proper and leave untouched many of the obvious difficulties with the theory of tripartition—one can find books and articles enough on this subject. Instead, we will focus exclusively on those texts that reveal something more or less obvious about where we should locate the self in the tripartite account. We can sort these texts into three groups that motivate a connection between the self and the

tripartite account in three slightly different ways. First, we have those passages from the *Republic* that appeal to tripartition as a way of explaining internal conflict and rely upon the logic of self-mastery, principally surrounding the initial argument for tripartition (439c–441e). Second, we have those passages that identify the rational part of soul with an inner *ἄνθρωπος*: the famous image of the soul as a human, a lion, and a many headed beast (*Republic* 588c–592a) and the Chariot Myth (*Phaedrus* 246a–257b). These metaphors suggest a special relationship between the rational part and the person because the lower parts of the soul are represented in ways that encourage us to alienate ourselves from them while the rational part is represented as an inner version of what we ordinarily take ourselves to be. Third, we have those passages involved in the longstanding dispute surrounding the relationship between tripartition and immortality, principally a difficult passage from the *Republic* (611b–612a) and the distinction between the mortal soul and the immortal soul in the *Timaeus* (41c–42d, 69c–71e). Here, we are encouraged to connect the self with the aspect of the soul that survives for reasons similar to those which encourage us in Chapter 3 to connect the self with the immortal soul *simpliciter*.

Finally we will complete our inward dive in Chapter 5 by examining those passages that encourage us to think that something divine within our soul is the true self. Out of all the chapters, the connections drawn in this chapter will perhaps be the least obvious yet most important because these connections run through the dialogues and exercise a strong influence on later thinking in the Platonic tradition. I suspect that this nexus of ideas more than those found in the other chapters lies behind the claims of Gilson, Grube, and Sorabji that I quoted above together with numerous incidental remarks in the literature along the same vein. I do not attempt to cover all the material relevant to the notion of divinity in Plato but rather to focus exclusively on those texts that most plausibly link the notion of a divine

element within the total makeup of the human being with the notion of the true self. The term  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  (mind or intelligence) acts as a bridge between these two notions in the dialogues because we are encouraged to think of  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  as something divine and encouraged to think of  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  as the true self. In order to trace this thread, it will be necessary to step back from the discussion of the self to see what the Greeks could mean when they call something in us “divine” and what they could mean by the peculiar word  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ . We will then examine the connection in the *Timaeus* (especially 41a–47e and 69c–90d) and *Philebus* (especially 21b–30d) between the concept of cosmic  $\text{No}\hat{\upsilon}\varsigma$ , responsible for the logical order and harmony of the world, and the concept of  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  in us. Finally we will look at those passages from the *Phaedrus* (246a–257b) and the *Alcibiades* (132d–133c) which suggest that an element within us (most plausibly  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ ) is divine and consider the grounds for thinking that this element is the true self.

Ultimately, I will argue that we do not find a single Platonic doctrine of the self, but rather a collection of ideas expressed by different characters in different contexts that will come to impact the history of later thought in dramatic ways. Among these ideas, I want to conclude by highlighting three. First, the identification of the self with the soul and the identification of the human being with the composite of soul and body makes possible a conceptual split between person and human being. Second, the tripartite account of the soul suggests an ideal identification of the self with the rational aspect of the soul rather than the lower aspects of one’s psychology. Third, the analogical link between rationality in us and the rational order of the cosmos makes possible the conclusion that the true self is, in some sense, divine.



## Chapter 2

### Body, Soul, and Self

In this chapter we will examine the relationship between the true self and (i) the body, (ii) the soul, and (iii) the whole composite of both. Throughout, we will pay attention to those passages where this relationship is more or less explicitly thematized and will ignore those innumerable passages where some inference might be drawn from casual ways of speaking. It should come as no surprise that Plato's characters often use proper names to designate an ordinary, embodied human being in a completely conventional sense. When these characters do raise a question about the self in relation to the soul and body, however, we find fairly consistent answers. First, Plato's characters repeatedly identify the true self with the soul and not with the body or the body-soul composite. Second, the individual human, considered as an instance of a mortal biological species, *is* identified with the body-soul composite. Third, embodiment is something alien to the true nature of the soul or the self so that association with the body is liable to pollute the soul with qualities opposed to its own essence. It may be that Plato represents his characters as speaking in these ways because he wishes to subtly reveal the limitations of this approach. Our project here, however, is simply to establish the terms in which his characters do speak overtly about the self whatever Plato's ultimate purpose may be. These

overt terms have a definite impact on the historical development of thinking about the self, but Plato's hidden meaning must remain just that: hidden to the bulk of history.<sup>1</sup>

Plato is not the first to draw a systematic distinction between body (*σῶμα*) and soul (*ψυχή*). We find Isocrates drawing such a distinction and holding that the soul is fit to rule, while the body is fit to be ruled. Isocrates states that such a distinction is "generally agreed" (*Antidosis* 180).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Plato's skill as a writer and fame as a philosopher make the dualism we find in his dialogues a strong current in subsequent intellectual history—for better or for worse.

We will begin with two short but densely packed passages, one from the *Laws* and one from the *Alcibiades*, that make the link between self and soul explicit. We will then devote the remainder of the chapter to the *Phaedo* because this dialogue draws the connection between self and soul more fully than any other. Two related topics will deserve fuller treatment in separate chapters. First, all the material related to death and rebirth must wait until Chapter 3. Second, all the material related to tripartition of the soul must wait until Chapter 4. Although I will make a few connections to material in the *Theaetetus* along the way, I will also ignore many other passages that reference the relationship between body and soul in general—there is literature enough on this wider theme in Plato. In each case, I select passages that more or less explicitly include reference to the true self and relate this notion to the larger Platonic concern for the relationship between body and

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1. I have in mind here approaches to the interpretation of Plato similar to Rona Burger's (discussed below) that attempt to show that various flaws in a dialogue's surface-level argument expose Plato's true purpose: to undermine that very argument. This approach is especially popular in the secondary literature on the *Phaedo* as we will see below.

2. For translation and discussion see Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 88–93.

soul. We will begin with the short passage from the *Laws* because it introduces these themes most explicitly and directly.

## 1. Laws

In Book XI of the *Laws* the Athenian Stranger addresses a variety of laws concerning proper funeral and burial practice:

As in other matters it is right to trust the lawgiver, so too we must believe him when he asserts that the soul is wholly superior to the body, and that in actual life what makes each of us to be what he is is nothing else than the soul (ἐν αὐτῷ τε τῷ βίῳ τὸ παρεχόμενον ἡμῶν ἕκαστον τοῦτ' εἶναι μηδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν), while the body is a semblance which attends on each of us (τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἰνδαλλόμενον ἡμῶν ἕκάστοις ἔπεσθαι), it being well said that the bodily corpses are images (εἴδωλα) of the dead, but that which is the real self of each of us (τὸν δὲ ὄντα ἡμῶν ἕκαστον ὄντως), and which we term the immortal soul (ἀθάνατον ψυχὴν), departs to the presence of other gods, there (as the ancestral law declares) to render its account. (*Laws* 959a–b)<sup>3</sup>

Here, the Athenian Stranger uses the phrase “each of us” (ἡμῶν ἕκαστος) three times to specify the self as distinct from something else. We have two contending candidates for what “we” are: on the one hand the body, on the other the soul. Although we may conventionally talk about the body as though it is identical with the person, the Stranger encourages us to identify “each of us” in the strictest sense with the

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3. Trans. R. G. Bury (Harvard University Press, 1968). Unless otherwise noted, all other translations from the *Laws* will be from Trevor J. Saunders. Greek text is from *Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet (Oxford University Press, 1973). Oxford University Press is in the process of publishing new critical editions of Plato to replace the Burnet editions, but so far, only the first two volumes have been published. Volume I, ed. A. E. Duke *et al.* (Oxford University Press, 1995) covers the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*. Volume II, ed. S. R. Slings (Oxford University Press, 2003) covers the *Republic*. Throughout, all Greek text from the dialogues comes from the most recent text in this series.

soul and *not* with the body.<sup>4</sup>

The phrase τὸ παρεχόμενον ἡμῶν ἕκαστον τοῦτ' εἶναι proves particularly interesting but difficult to translate. Bury's translation above is more literal, but Trevor Saunders renders the whole clause, "while I am alive I have nothing to thank for my individuality except my soul." Lloyd Gerson translates it, "while one is alive, that which provides one's identity is nothing but the soul."<sup>5</sup> Literally, τὸ παρεχόμενον ἡμῶν ἕκαστον τοῦτ' εἶναι means, "that which provides for each of us to be [what he is]," where the sense of παρεχόμενον involves furnishing or supplying something's being thus and so.<sup>6</sup> While the translations of both Saunders and Gerson nicely emphasize the notion of individuality and identity brought out by ἕκαστος and τοῦτ' εἶναι, they leave out ἡμῶν. Consider, however, the way that the meaning of the phrase would shift slightly if the Stranger had instead chosen to say ἄνθρωπος ἕκαστος. Instead of each "human," the Stranger chooses to speak about "each of us." This is an interesting way to pick out the kind of entity he wants to talk about. Among this class, "us," he encourages us to inquire about each of its members. Just what exactly does the job of providing for each member the identity that he has? The Stranger contends that the soul does this job, and because it does this job, while the body does not, we should recognize that the soul has a claim to actually *being* "each of us."

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4. See Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 274. For similar observations see Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 49 n. 9, 145. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge University Press, 1955), 23, calls this passage Plato's "last word" on the subject of individual immortality.

5. *Knowing Persons*, 274.

6. E.B. England, *The Laws of Plato* (Manchester University Press, 1921) *ad loc.* Both England and Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 274, hold that τοῦτ' εἶναι is a statement of qualitative identity. They both consider and reject an alternative reading that takes τοῦτ' εἶναι to pick out numerical identity, i.e. "that which provides for each of us to be *this* [rather than *that*]," although they both concede that such a reading is quite tempting.

Further, the inclusion of ὄντως in the phrase τὸν δὲ ὄντα ἡμῶν ἕκαστον ὄντως emphasizes a contrast between two conceptions of “each of us.” On the one hand, we have what we *really* are, the *true* self. On the other hand, we have various derivative or peripheral realities that have some claim to be called “us,” but are not “us” *really*. All three translators, Bury, Gerson, and Saunders, render the phrase with “real self” even though nothing in the Greek directly corresponds to the English word “self.” A more literal translation would be, “that which each of us really is.” Nevertheless, the insertion of the word “self” seems especially justified in this passage because the whole point of the paragraph is the affirmation of a real or true identity for “each of us” in contradistinction to a surface or conventional identity.<sup>7</sup>

If the soul is what each of us is, in what sense is the body a “semblance which attends on each of us”? The Stranger claims that it is “well said” that corpses are “images” of the dead, but it would be strange if he intended his hearers to understand “semblance” and “image,” in the literal sense of an image-based symmetric relation of resemblance. Plausibly, the soul does not look like anything at all because visibility belongs to the body.<sup>8</sup> Instead, we may consider three conceptual resonances that “image” has in a Platonic context. First, throughout Plato’s dialogues we find the idea that images are potentially deceptive because they induce the incautious to believe that they really are that of which they are merely a likeness.<sup>9</sup> Second, even for the cautious, the image–original relation is not symmetrical because an image necessarily occupies a lower ontological level than the original.

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7. Robinson argues that the language τὸ ὄν...ὄντως does not imply a Form of individuals but rather emphasizes a contrast between the genuine self and the merely apparent self, i.e. the body. See *Plato’s Psychology*, 49 n. 9.

8. See *Phaedo* 79b.

9. “Isn’t this dreaming: whether asleep or awake, to think that a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like?” *Republic* 476c. See also *Republic* 598c, *Philebus* 38d, *Phaedo* 74d–e.

Compared to a bed, a painting of a bed is less real *qua* bed—it is not a *real* bed, it is only an *image of* a bed. It may be a bed in some sense: e.g. it is true to say “the bed in the picture has three pillows on it;” but it is not a bed in any full sense.<sup>10</sup> Third, images play a positive role by serving as a reminder, pointer, or stimulus to the one seeking the original. For instance, a picture of Simmias may remind Socrates of him.<sup>11</sup>

These conceptual resonances make sense of the Stranger’s description of the relationship between soul and body. First, someone speaking to Socrates while he is alive finds it difficult to disassociate the experience of Socrates’s face from the experience of Socrates himself. Hence, he may easily mistake an experience of Socrates’s body for an experience of Socrates himself just as the lovers of beautiful sights and sounds in the *Republic* mistake the images of beauty for beauty itself. When Socrates dies, however, it becomes clear that the corpse lying there at the funeral is *not* the person who formerly engaged in conversation. As the Stranger insists just after our passage,

This all goes to show that we should never squander our last penny, on the fanciful assumption that this lump of flesh being buried really is our own son or brother or whoever it is we mournfully think we are burying. (959c)<sup>12</sup>

We easily recognize this truth in the case of corpses—that they are only images of deceased persons—and this recognition should lead to the more difficult recognition that all along even the living bodies we experience are not the persons we know. After all, little changes about the body as it slides from living to dead. The

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10. *Republic* 509d–510e, 596d–597a, *Sophist* 235d–236e, 240b, *Timaeus* 37d. Failure to recognize the asymmetry of this relation leads to the fatal likeness regress at *Parmenides* 132d.

11. *Phaedo* 73d–74a, *Phaedrus* 254b.

12. Trans. Saunders.

body of Socrates is the same height before and after, it weighs just the same, and it still has a snub nose. Nevertheless, something *is* missing. “In this life,” the presence of the soul furnishes the body with a dynamic vital responsiveness. That is to say, the soul furnishes “each of us to be what he is.” This helps us recognize, second, that the body occupies a lower ontological station than the soul. The Stranger establishes the general priority of soul over body earlier in Book X (896a–d), but here the idea that the body is “a semblance which attends on each of us” implies this same priority in our own particular case. Third, provided that we cautiously understand the image relationship of the body to the self, the body may serve as a helpful reminder drawing our attention to a reality beyond itself: the person that the body attends as a semblance. Just as a painting of Simmias may remind Simmias’s lover of Simmias himself, so too Simmias’s body may serve as a reminder because it too is a “semblance” of Simmias himself.<sup>13</sup>

In the absence of a technical vocabulary for personal identity, selfhood, and consciousness, the phrase “each of us” (*ἡμῶν ἕκαστος*) suggests itself as a natural term for the individual person. This is especially so in contexts where a Greek writer wants to draw a distinction between individual persons and individual human beings. In this passage, it would be strange if the Stranger replaced the three instances of *ἡμῶν ἕκαστος* with *ἄνθρωπος* because the end of *human* life and the continuation of the self is just the point. As members of a biological species, humans are mortal, but “each of us” is immortal because we are identical with an immortal soul.<sup>14</sup> The phrase turns up to serve a similar purpose in Aristophanes’s humorous speech in the *Symposium*. Here, Aristophanes claims that each human being (*ἕκαστος ἄνθρωπος*) was originally a whole with two faces, four arms, and four legs

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13. See *Phaedo* 73d–74a.

14. See *Phaedo* 71c, 81d, discussed below.

(189d–e). In order to limit human power, Zeus forms the plan of cutting each human into two. Because *ἄνθρωπος* must refer to the whole, Aristophanes needs a term to refer to the individual that is the half, and so he reaches for *ἡμῶν ἕκαστος* at 191d:

Each of us, then, is a “matching half” of a human whole (*ἕκαστος οὖν ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπου σύμβολον*), because each was sliced like a flatfish, two out of one, and each of us is always seeking the half that matches him (*ζητεῖ δὲ αἰεὶ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἕκαστος σύμβολον*).<sup>15</sup>

In the analysis below we will see *ἡμῶν ἕκαστος* turn up several more times in passages that explicitly thematize the individual person as a philosophical concept.<sup>16</sup> Beyond these, *ἡμῶν ἕκαστος* occurs fourteen more times in Plato’s dialogues in a sense that could reasonably be translated as “individual person” although these passages do not specifically focus on the concept.<sup>17</sup> In only ten instances does *ἡμῶν ἕκαστος* mean something that has little or nothing to do with individual personhood, e.g. “each of us at the symposium.”<sup>18</sup>

This passage from the *Laws* shows us that ancient Greek philosophy is capable of speaking about the self with great flexibility even though we do not find any technical terms that are univocally applied to the concept. As we move to the *Alcibiades*, we will see that this discussion of the self and the identification of the true self with the soul is not an isolated incident.

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15. Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff.

16. *Phaedo* 95d, *Republic* 369b, 370a–b, 435e, 441d, *Laws* 626e–627a, 644c, d, 687e, 904c.

17. *Theaetetus* 166c, d, 178e, *Philebus* 38a, 40a, *Phaedrus* 237d, *Gorgias* 497b, c, 507d, *Meno* 72a, *Republic* 344e, 618c, *Laws* 807b, 895d.

18. *Statesmen* 177d, *Philebus* 17b, *Symposium* 177d, 198e, *Charmides* 155c, 172d, *Laches* 194d, *Laws* 642b, 699d, 838c.



## 2. Alcibiades

Near the end of the *Alcibiades* we find a remarkable and densely packed passage directly addressing the nature of the self. Although the authorship of the *Alcibiades* is disputed, we need to examine this passage for three reasons.<sup>19</sup> First, this passage yields some of the most explicit evidence that a philosophical concept of personhood *is* under examination in ancient Greek philosophy. Second, it discusses explicitly and in detail the central question of this chapter. Third, the *Alcibiades* was taken to be Plato's work in Thrasyllus's list of tetralogies, and was later commented on by Iamblichus, Proclus, and Olympiodorus.<sup>20</sup> Insofar as we are investigating the availability of ideas for later thinkers the real authorship of the dialogue is immaterial. Later thinkers read the ideas in the *Alcibiades* alongside the ideas in the other Platonic dialogues whether Plato wrote the *Alcibiades* or not. Authorship does matter, however, if we attempt to compare this dialogue with others and to synthesize from them a coherent account of Plato's theory of personhood. Such a synthesis may not be available for the simple reason that Plato did not write the dialogue.

The best material on the self comes at the end of the dialogue in two sections, 129a–131d and 132d–133c. I will address the first of these sections here because it deals explicitly with the relationships between body, soul, and self, and I will address the second in Chapter 5 because it deals with the relationship between the

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19. For arguments about authorship see Julia Annas, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," in *Platonic Investigations*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 111–38; David M. Johnson, "God as the True Self: Plato's Alcibiades I," *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999), 1–19; Nicholas Denyer, ed., *Plato: Alcibiades* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), who argue for Platonic authorship, and Nicholas D. Smith, "Did Plato Write the Alcibiades I?" *Apeiron* 37, no. 2 (2004), 93–108, who argues against. For a good review of the scholarship on the issue see *ibid.*, 94, n. 6.

20. See Annas, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 112, n. 5, for a list of references throughout multiple philosophical schools in antiquity.

self and the divine. From the first section, I want to draw out two central ideas. First, Socrates specifies the self contrastively by using the familiar concepts of owning and using. The self is the owner *in contrast to* the thing owned and the user *in contrast to* the thing used. Second, Socrates advances an argument by elimination showing that the self is identical to the soul rather than the body or the soul-body composite.<sup>21</sup>

The bulk of the dialogue leading up to our passage aims at convincing Alcibiades that he needs to practice self-cultivation. Quoting the Delphic Inscription, Socrates persuades Alcibiades that self-cultivation requires self-knowledge (124a–b). We need to know what we are before we can specify what the art of self-cultivation is.

Socrates begins by drawing a distinction between owner and possession. He asks, “is [a man] cultivating himself when he cultivates what he has?”<sup>22</sup> The skill of shoemaking, for instance, looks after shoes rather than feet so it looks after what belongs to the feet rather than the feet themselves. This means that “when you’re cultivating what belongs to you, you’re not cultivating yourself” (128d). Ruling out a whole class of skills that do not count as self-cultivation, Socrates reintroduces his central question:

What sort of skill could we use to cultivate ourselves?...it’s a skill that won’t make anything that belongs to us better, but it will make *us* better....Well then, could we ever know what skill makes us better if we didn’t know what *we* were (τί ποτ’ ἐσμὲν αὐτοί)? (128e)

The question “What are *we*?” must be answered in contrast to “What *belongs to us*?” This puts the inquiry into the nature of the self within the conceptual frame-

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21. For the way that this argument from elimination establishes that the soul is the self in early Plato see Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 8.

22. All translations from the *Alcibiades* are from D. S. Hutchinson.

work of ownership. Alongside the owner–possession pair Socrates next employs the user–tool pair:

Hold on, by Zeus—who are you speaking with now? Anybody but me?...Is Socrates doing the talking?...And isn't Socrates talking with words?...I suppose you'd say that talking is the same as using words?...But the thing being used and the person using it— they're different, aren't they (ὁ δὲ χρώμενος καὶ ὃ χρηταὶ οὐκ ἄλλο)? (129a–c)

Here Socrates returns to shoemaking and draws a distinction between the shoemaker and his knife because the one *uses* the other. Again, in the same way that he first orients the conversation in terms of owning something, he now orients it in terms of using something.

Socrates, therefore, starts from the ordinary cases of *belonging to* and *being used by* and notices the formal distinction implicit in these structures. First, from shoes and feet he draws a general distinction between *X* and *that which belongs to X*. Second, from shoemaker and knife he draws a general distinction between *user* and *thing used*. Both of these aim at bringing Alcibiades to a basic apprehension of the self as an object of inquiry. Alcibiades can begin with something familiar to him, like speaking, and from there distinguish the user (himself) from what he uses (the words). He may begin with a conventional sense that his words are him, but Socrates's considerations cause both *that which belongs to Alcibiades* and *that which Alcibiades uses* to appear external to the *real* or *true* Alcibiades. As a byproduct of this technique—perhaps an intentional one—readers of the dialogue are encouraged to think about the nature of the true self primarily in terms of possessions and tools. This is significant because both possessions and tools are ways that agents extend their agency. By *having* more leather, the shoemaker can make more shoes. By *using* a knife, the shoemaker can cut leather that he could not cut before. This naturally leads us to associate both possessions and tools with the whole activity of the agent

even while we distinguish the true agent himself behind the things he has and the things he uses.

This becomes especially important as Socrates extends his analysis to the body. Besides the knife, the shoemaker also uses his hands and eyes (129d). Thus, “the shoemaker and the lyre player are different from the hands and eyes they use in their work” (129d). Although the knife is separable from the shoemaker in a way that his hand is not, the shoemaker uses this part of himself as an instrument to accomplish his tasks. In an ordinary sense, we naturally think of the hand as the person. For instance, if someone touches Alcibiades’s hand, then he is touching that person. If his hand holds something, then he is holding it. By considering Socrates’s comparison between knife-as-tool and hand-as-tool, however, Alcibiades’s hand appears less and less to be him and more and more to be something that his real self merely uses. What goes for the hand also goes for the eyes and presumably the feet and ears as well. Socrates draws an inference, therefore, from all the parts to the whole: “man uses his whole body” (παντὶ τῷ σώματι χρῆται ἄνθρωπος). Therefore, “a man is different from his own body” (ἕτερον ἄρα ἄνθρωπός ἐστι τοῦ σώματος τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ, 129e). Hence, although we naturally associate the body with the activities of the self, the body is merely the extension of the *real* self’s agency. The body *belongs* to the self and *is used by* the self, so it must be distinct from the self that *has* and *uses*.<sup>23</sup>

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23. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 55, sees this same logic present in the arguments of the *Phaedo*. Annas, “Self Knowledge in Early Plato,” 130–31, thinks this argument yields a “sharply dualist conception” that encourages us to think of the true self in deeply impersonal terms: “My body is certainly individual to me; but if my body is no part of what I really am, perhaps what I really am—my real self—is not individual to me in the way that my body is. Perhaps my real self, far from being my individual embodied personality, is something that does not differ among embodied individuals.” I think that quite a lot is riding on this “perhaps.” Nothing about this passage suggests that the body is the only thing that differs among

This leads Socrates to reintroduce the question from 128e in slightly different terms. There he asks, “What are we?” (*τί ποτ’ ἐσμὲν αὐτοί;*). Here he asks, “What is man?” (*τί ποτ’ οὖν ὁ ἄνθρωπος;* 129e). He insists that Alcibiades already knows the answer to this question despite his protests. The “man” must be “what uses the body,” and nothing else uses the body but the soul. In fact, the soul not only uses the body but rules it (*ἄρχουσα*, 130a).

Although his previous comments already seem to provide a conclusion, Socrates abruptly begins a new argument. I suspect that he starts fresh because the brevity of the move in 130a may appear to beg the question. That is, we would only think that the soul uses and rules the body if we already think the soul is the self. Whatever his motives may be, Socrates next presents a three-pronged argument from elimination for the conclusion that the soul is the self.

1. Man is one of three things (130a): (a) the body, (b) the soul, or (c) the two of them together, the “whole thing.”
2. Man is that which rules the body (cf. 129e).
3. The body does not rule itself (130b).
4. If one of them (i.e. body or soul) does not take part in ruling, then no combination of the two could rule (130b).
5. Therefore, the soul must be the man (130c).

This argument results in the dictum: “the soul is the man” (*ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος*, 130c).

Beginning with his distinction between user and thing used and continuing through this argument from elimination, Socrates introduces *ἄνθρωπος* (“man”) as the object of inquiry where he earlier said “we” (128e) or “the self” (129a). I think Hutchinson’s translation of *ἄνθρωπος* here as “man” is slightly better than “human” because the latter encourages us to think of a biological species (as in the *Phaedo*, see below). In this discussion, however, Socrates brings in *ἄνθρωπος* as a term only individuals.

after he fixes the concept of self as the ultimate owner and user. The whole import of the passage is that this ultimate subject—call it *ἄνθρωπος* or what you will—is *not* the body or the soul–body composite that we may ordinarily take the human being to be. Instead, this ultimate subject is the soul and thus the soul is the proper referent of the term “man.” While the sense of “we” throughout the passage never drifts far from “we humans,” the meaning of *ἄνθρωπος* here comes quite close to the English “person.” The dictum *ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος*, for instance, could reasonably be translated as “the soul is the person.” All this goes to show the flexibility of Greek terminology when philosophers begin to search for words to talk about the self. We will see below that in the *Phaedo* *ἄνθρωπος* contrasts with that which is *θεῖος* and that Socrates tries to identify the true self with the latter *as against* the former. In the *Alcibiades*, by contrast, Socrates simply uses *ἄνθρωπος* as a convenient word to refer to the true self. Two conclusions follow from this observation. First, we should be careful not to pin down too precisely what any Greek author means by *ἄνθρωπος* without looking at the specific context. Second, we should not infer from the absence of any Greek term that *unambiguously* means “person” or “self” that the Greeks have no way of talking about the subject.

When Socrates especially wants to specify the true self he uses the proper names “Socrates” and “Alcibiades” rather than general terms (e.g. 129a). This serves a double function. First, it helps Alcibiades identify the object of inquiry in the immediate space of conversation. Rather than considering the abstract Man, he focuses on the immediate person, Socrates, who addresses him directly. Second, it serves Socrates’s ultimate goal of persuading Alcibiades that no one else loves *him*. All his other lovers only love what Alcibiades *has*, while Socrates loves *him* (131c–d).<sup>24</sup> This appeal would lose some of its force if Alcibiades did not from

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24. Annas, 129–30.

the first consider the distinction between true self and externals in terms of “Alcibiades” and “Socrates.” We see this most clearly when Socrates sums up what they have discovered together:

So the right way of looking at it is that, when you and I talk to each other, one soul uses words to address another soul (τοῖς λόγοις χρωμένους τῇ ψυχῇ πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν).<sup>25</sup> ...That’s just what we were saying a little while ago—that Socrates converses with Alcibiades not by saying words to his face, apparently, but by addressing his words to *Alcibiades*, in other words, to his soul. (130d–e)

As we will see in Chapter 6, these conclusions are not the end of the story. Socrates goes on to give a famous and puzzling comparison involving eyes, mirrors, the soul, and God which we will examine in Chapter 5. For now, however, these two passages from the *Laws* and the *Alcibiades* present a simple contrast between soul and body and identify the self with the former against the latter. This contrast and identification, however, finds its fullest expression in the *Phaedo*.

### 3. Soul as Subject at the Beginning of the *Phaedo*

Given that we will be drawing heavily on this dialogue in this chapter and the next, I should begin with a few words about my method as it applies to the *Phaedo* in par-

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25. This sentence is Johnson’s main reason for thinking that the use and ownership arguments are left behind as inadequate, Johnson, “God as the True Self,” 5. He claims that Socrates here establishes a fatal flaw in the logic of the user–tool contrast that undergirds those arguments: cases in which the soul uses itself. I disagree with his reading because I take τοῖς λόγοις to be the object of χρωμένους, while τῇ ψυχῇ is a perfect example of the “with-idiom” (see the discussion of Burnyeat below). Hence, if Burnyeat’s analysis is correct, the soul is the subject of speaking while the *words* are the instrument it uses—just as Socrates says at 129b. For similar language see *Gorgias* 523e (discussed in Chapter 3), where one soul examines another soul (αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν θεωροῦντα). I agree with Johnson that there is a problem with a psychology that cannot account for the soul using itself, but I disagree that this sentence is meant to call attention to this problem or is meant to invalidate the conclusions of the dialogue up to this point.

ticular. The dialogue form itself forces us to start by assuming a distance between the views of Plato the author and the views he chooses to represent in the mouths of his characters. Further, these latter views should not be understood as something fixed and manifest but rather as open to revision, sarcasm, irony, and duplicity. In the *Phaedo*, several textual clues conspire to bring these interpretive challenges into an especially vivid light: (i) all four of the arguments for the immortality of the soul contain questionable logical moves and Socrates himself calls attention to this (e.g. 84c),<sup>26</sup> (ii) there seems to be a tension between what is firmly asserted by both Socrates and his companions mythologically and what is actually proven dialectically,<sup>27</sup> (iii) much of what the interlocutors say about the immortality of the soul rests on Pythagorean religious assumptions, but the status of these assumptions is drawn into question.<sup>28</sup> Any adequate reading of the dialogue as a whole must take these challenges into account, and any adequate reading of what Plato—or even Plato’s Socrates—is *really* trying to say in any isolated passage must situate that passage within the context of the dialogue as a whole.

Fortunately, the historical focus of this present study means that we need not offer anything like an adequate reading of even a single isolated passage. What we are interested in is whether certain ideas do or do not *exist* during a particular period of history—not whether these ideas are or are not *endorsed* by a particular author or even by a fictional character. If Plato represents Cebes as thinking that the soul is immortal, it is immaterial to our present purposes whether Plato means us

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26. For a sustained complaint against the dialogue’s logic see David Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo* (Oxford University Press, 1986). Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem, *Plato’s Phaedo* (Focus, 1998), 2, claim that the arguments are, “full of patent logical flaws.”

27. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 42; Ronna Burger, *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth* (Yale University Press, 1984), 13; Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 29.

28. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 4, 42; Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 17–18; Burger, *The Phaedo*, 7.



to understand this position as his own or he means us to allegorize it somehow or to reject it altogether. In all three cases, Plato himself must have at least thought of the idea in order for him to represent Cebes as thinking it. We will proceed, therefore, by identifying those passages where questions of the self are raised explicitly and attempt to extract from them the conception of the self that their logic requires. I hope that this examination and extraction will serve not only my own historical interests but also the interests of those who do want to read the *Phaedo* deeply. For surely a close examination of what is actually said by the characters in a dialogue and the logic that such speech requires must precede the examination of what Plato himself means us to understand by it, although the reverse procedure is a constant temptation.

Near the beginning of the *Phaedo* Socrates alludes to a doctrine “put in the language of the mysteries, that we men are in a kind of prison” (ἐν τινι φρουρᾷ ἐσμὲν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, 62b).<sup>29</sup> Socrates himself will express something close to this view in his ethical exhortation following the Kinship Argument (82e–83a). In Socrates’s version, however, it becomes explicit that the prison we are in is the body and our soul is forced to “examine other things through it as through a cage and not by itself” (82e).

The first section of serious argument in the *Phaedo* runs from 63e to 69e as Socrates delivers a second “apology” to his friends the “jury” in defense of the good hope he has facing death. He breaks this apology down into two main arguments: one argument from 64c to 68c for the striking conclusion that the proper aim of

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29. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the *Phaedo* are taken from G. M. A. Grube. Note that ἐν τινι φρουρᾷ may also mean “in a kind of guardhouse.” *ibid.*, 33, believes that this ambiguity is intentional, contrasting the human philosopher’s perspective that desires to escape from the body and the divine perspective that assigns the soul to the body and prohibits suicide.

philosophy is “to practice for dying and death” and a second, shorter argument from 68c to 69e about the nature of courage and self-control. In the next chapter, we will examine more closely the understanding of death and immortality throughout this apology, but for now we must focus on the understanding of body and soul that his first argument (64c–68c) exhibits. We can summarize the argument as follows:

1. Death is “the separation of the soul from the body” (64c).
2. The philosopher concerns himself with the affairs of the soul rather than the body (64c–65a).
  - a. The body is an obstacle and deceives the soul in the pursuit of knowledge (65a–b).
  - b. The soul reasons best when it is untroubled by the body and its senses (65c–66a).
  - c. This is because we cannot grasp the Forms through the senses, but only by thought alone (65d–e).
3. Therefore, the philosopher seeks to separate the soul as far as possible from the body (66a–66d).
4. Full separation of the soul from the body is only possible after death (66e–67d, cf. Premise 1).
5. Therefore, true philosophers welcome that which brings the fulfillment of their main preoccupation (67d–68c).

The terms in which Socrates chooses to make his points reveal much about how he is here conceiving the soul, the body, and the relationship between the two. In addition to “the soul” and “the body,” however, we also have “the philosopher” and “us” as terms in the argument. The logic of the argument only works if Socrates identifies the individual philosopher or “us” with the soul that knows best when separated from the body. If person and soul are distinct, there is no good hope for *the philosopher*, only for the philosopher’s soul.<sup>30</sup>

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30. Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 26, concedes that this shift may simply mark a metaphorical way of speaking that Socrates finds convenient for his present purposes. Nevertheless, “if all the language is metaphorical, it is remarkable how internally coherent it all is, how methodically it conspires to lead the reader to imagine the soul under one and only one guise—that of a person.” Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 35–38, 57, agrees that Socrates identifies the soul with the person, but we should note that Bostock is somewhat inconsistent in his terminology. Further, Bostock

Every step in the argument depends on Socrates's initial definition of death as "the separation of the soul from the body." He immediately expands this definition with a more precise formula:

Death is this, namely, that the body comes to be separated by itself apart from the soul (*χωρίς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγόνειναι*), and the soul comes to be separated by itself apart from the body (*χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγείσαν αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν εἶναι*). (64c)<sup>31</sup>

Right away, the careful reader of Plato should notice the deliberate usage of *αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό*, which occurs frequently in descriptions of the Forms (e.g. below at 66a). This phrase occurs particularly in conjunction with the notion of being "separate" (*χωρὶς*) at *Parmenides* 130b. Socrates does not use the language of "Form" in this section, but he does ask Simmias whether he admits the existence of "the Just itself" together with "the Good" and "the Beautiful," and "in a word, the reality of all other things, that which each of them essentially is" (*ἀπάντων τῆς οὐσίας ὃ τυγχάνει ἕκαστον ὄν*, 65d). Throughout, I interpret these realities, "those which are," as the Forms. We will have occasion to think more about the relationship between the soul and the Forms in Chapter 5, but we may note here that right from the beginning of the argument Socrates conceives of both soul and body in metaphysically illegitimately assumes that continuity and qualitative peculiarity of psychological states (especially memory) are the only criteria of personal identity available to Plato. He thinks, therefore, that personal identity is lost both in the case of a soul being reborn into a new body (because the memory is wiped) and in the case of a philosopher who has become sufficiently purified (because the contents of his thoughts are not sufficiently idiosyncratic). Burger, *The Phaedo*, 38–39, recognizes an identification between individual self and soul in this passage but thinks this is a view ascribed to the "pure philosophers" which Socrates is ironically drawing into question. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 51, thinks the dialogue as a whole attempts to unite the conception of soul as "whatever it is that differentiates a living being from a dead one" and the conception of soul as "immortal person" that stand *prima facie* in tension.

31. Compare this with a very similar definition at *Gorgias* 524b.

weighted terms. Both soul and body are capable of self-subsistence separate from one another in a way that dimly reflects the separate self-subsistence of the Forms.<sup>32</sup> The substantial separability of soul and body brings with it a cognitive dimension as well. It is only when the soul is *αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν* that it is in a position to come into contact with the Forms as they are *αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό* in premises 2b and 2c.<sup>33</sup>

Next, Socrates establishes (premise 2) that the body prevents or at least hinders “the actual acquiring of knowledge” (*τῆς φρονήσεως κτήσιν*, 65a) when the soul “grasp[s] the truth” (*τῆς ἀληθείας ἄπτεται*, 65b). The body systematically opposes knowledge and understanding by (i) causing the soul to desire bodily things like food and sex (64d–e), (ii) distracting the soul with the constant reports of sensation (65c), and (iii) deceiving the soul through the inherent unreliability of sense perception (65a–e). Socrates concludes from this that the soul must be as free as possible from this opposition and distraction if it is to achieve any true understanding. The soul does this best when it is “most by itself” (*μάλιστα αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν*, 65c). This leads Socrates to a hortatory speech exemplary of what philosophers must assert to one another in order to keep up their confidence at the prospect of death (66b–67a).<sup>34</sup>

Throughout this argument, the obstacle to true understanding is “association” (*κοινωνία*) with the body (65a).<sup>35</sup> The soul “reasons best” when it has “no contact or association (*μὴ κοινωνοῦσα*)” with the body (65c). In Socrates’s hortatory

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32. Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 21, 141; Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 21; Sabina Lovibond, “Plato’s Theory of Mind,” in *Psychology*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35; McCabe, *Plato’s Individuals*, 265–66; Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 52, 56–57. For comment on what Socrates is subtly suppressing here see Burger, *The Phaedo*, 39–40.

33. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 12; McCabe, *Plato’s Individuals*, 266–67; Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 58.

34. Compare Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 119.

35. Notice similar language at *Republic* X 611b, discussed in Chapter 4.

speech, the philosophers say that, although we cannot gain full knowledge in this life, we will be closest to it,

if we refrain as much as possible from association (*μηδὲν ὀμιλῶμεν*) with the body and do not join (*μηδὲ κοινωνῶμεν*) with it more than we must, if we are not infected with its nature but purify ourselves from it until the god himself frees us. (67a)

What are we to make of this consistent “association” language? Socrates gives the idea of *κοινωνία* a political sense metaphorically at 66c–d where our association with the body leads to our slavery to it. In its simplest sense something is *κοινός* when it is held in common or shared between two people. Hence, *κοινωνία* occurs when one person or community enters into a relationship with another such that something becomes common or shared between them. In the case of a political alliance between cities or a business contract between individuals, it is the *interests* of each party that become common. If Sparta enters into *κοινωνία* with Corinth, Sparta takes on the interests of Corinth as its own because those interests become *κοινός*. In the case of slavery, the adoption of interests becomes oppressively asymmetric. The slave takes on his master’s interests as the principal object of all his efforts while the master does not reciprocate. Further, the interests of the master are essentially alien to the slave’s own interests and only enter into his self-interest extrinsically because of the condition of slavery. Hence, the idea seems to be that the soul *could* take on the interests of the body—the souls of non-philosophers worry from dawn until dusk about food, sex, and shoes (64d)—but Socrates insists that this is a kind of slavery because when the soul adopts the interests of the body it works for interests that are not really its own.<sup>36</sup>

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36. I disagree slightly, therefore, with Ahrensdorf’s characterization of this passage, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato’s Phaedo* (State University of New York Press, 1995), 47. He thinks that the identifi-

Remarkably, Socrates appears entirely comfortable switching seamlessly between the soul and the individual person as the subject of cognition. It is the soul that “grasps the truth,” that tries to “examine anything with the body,” and that is “deceived by it.” (65b). By contrast, it is “in reasoning if anywhere that any reality becomes clear to the soul,” and it is the soul that “reasons best when none of the senses troubles it...in its search for reality” (65c). We have, therefore, *the soul* grasping truth, reasoning, searching for reality, and being deceived. Just a few lines later, however, Socrates directly addresses Simmias and asks whether “you ever grasped [the Forms] with your bodily senses?” He then generalizes from Simmias in particular to “whoever of us prepares himself best” as the subject that grasps “that thing itself which he is investigating” (65d–e). In the next paragraph it is “that man” (ἐκεῖνος) who approaches his object “with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself” (65e–66a).<sup>37</sup> We have, therefore, *the philosopher* grasping truth, using thought, reasoning, and tracking down reality. Socrates does not mark this shift from the soul to the philosopher as the subject of cognition, and the easiest way to read the shift is to say that Socrates tacitly treats both the soul and the philosopher as two names

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cation of the self with the soul allows the genuine philosophers to distance themselves from their failure to acquire true wisdom, placing the blame entirely on the body instead. Throughout the passage, however, the soul itself can associate more or less with the body, and because of this is itself more or less to blame. Ahrens Dorf and I agree, however, that the strong ethical language of the passage consistently identifies the responsible self with the soul and not at all with the body.

37. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo*, 52, points out that Socrates also substitutes διάνοια for ψυχή at 67c, which goes to show that it is principally “the cognitive conception of the soul which predominates in this part of the dialogue.” See also Burger, *The Phaedo*, 42.

for one thing: the conscious subject.<sup>38</sup>

This reading receives further confirmation when we notice a basic asymmetry between the body and the soul. Throughout, Socrates pairs the opposition between body and soul with an opposition between sense perception and reasoning. Because the philosopher “turns away from the body toward the soul” (64e) one might expect that the philosopher accomplishes sense perception through the body and reasoning through the soul. We do not, however, find this symmetry. The soul is the single subject of both sense perception and reason, although it does require a body for perception.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the closest modern words to the way that “soul” is being used in this passage would be “mind” or “consciousness.”<sup>40</sup>

This notion will become clearer if we examine briefly a passage from the *Theaetetus* that contains a contrast between what Myles Burnyeat calls a “with-idiom” which uses a bare dative and a “through-idiom” which uses *διά* and a genitive.<sup>41</sup> The “through-idiom” indicates the medium through which or the tools by means of which an activity is accomplished, whereas the “with-idiom” indicates the ultimate subject of the activity.<sup>42</sup> In the *Theaetetus*, we see this contrast in play when Socrates asks,

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38. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 53, rightly points out that this simple identification of soul as subject becomes complicated in what follows by the soul’s association with the body: it is only because of this association that the soul becomes the subject of sensory states that require bodily organs (see below).

39. *ibid.*, 111; Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 25–26: “It is the soul that actually does these things [i.e. perceives, desires, fears], but it does them when it is in a body, and because of the body it is in.”

40. Lovibond, “Plato’s Theory of Mind,” 35–36, argues that Plato in fact *invents* this notion and expands the meaning of *ψυχή* to include it.

41. See M. F. Burnyeat, “Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving,” *The Classical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1976), 29.

42. Burnyeat, 33, “Evidently, the working rule for the ‘with’ idiom is this: to say that a man  $\phi$ s with  $x$  is to say that  $x$  is that part of him (in the thinnest possible sense of ‘part’) which  $\phi$ s when he does, that in him which does his  $\phi$ ing or by  $\phi$ ng makes it the case that he  $\phi$ s.”

Which reply is the more correct, that eyes are what we see with ( $\hat{\omega}$   $\acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\omega}\mu\epsilon\nu$ ) or that they are what we see through ( $\delta\acute{\iota}$   $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$   $\acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\omega}\mu\epsilon\nu$ )? That ears are what we hear with ( $\hat{\omega}$   $\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu$ ) or what we hear through ( $\delta\acute{\iota}$   $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$   $\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu$ )? (184c)<sup>43</sup>

Endorsing Burnyeat's analysis, Mary Margaret McCabe explains how Socrates answers this question by using a striking metaphor. Socrates recalls the image of Odysseus and his soldiers sitting inside the Trojan Horse:

It would be a strange thing, my child, if there were many senses sitting in us as if in a wooden horse, and if all these things did not converge on one single form ( $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$   $\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$   $\tau\omega\acute{\alpha}$   $\iota\delta\acute{\epsilon}\alpha\nu$ )—the soul or what you will ( $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\epsilon$   $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta\nu$   $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\epsilon$   $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$   $\delta\acute{\epsilon}\iota$   $\kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\iota\nu$ ). With this we perceive whatever is perceptible *through* [eyes and ears] as if they were instruments ( $\eta\grave{\nu}$   $\delta\iota\acute{\alpha}$   $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\nu$   $\omicron\iota\omicron\nu$   $\acute{\omicron}\rho\gamma\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\nu$   $\alpha\acute{\iota}\sigma\theta\alpha\nu\acute{\omicron}\mu\epsilon\theta\alpha$   $\acute{\omicron}\sigma\alpha$   $\alpha\acute{\iota}\sigma\theta\eta\tau\acute{\alpha}$ ). (184d–e)<sup>44</sup>

As McCabe notes, if our eyes were the subject of sight and our ears were the subject of hearing we would have these distinct sensory centers of consciousness sitting inside the bundle of our body as so many Greeks inside a Trojan Horse.<sup>45</sup> We would not be a single *person* with a unified consciousness but rather many persons all boxed in together. Instead, Socrates insists that it must be a single something—the soul or whatever—*with which* we experience all these diverse sensations *through* the eyes and ears. Burnyeat calls this “the unity of the perceiving consciousness.”<sup>46</sup>

Although we get a fuller and more explicit treatment of this idea in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates seems to have much the same understanding of the soul as the single subject of both perception and reason in the *Phaedo*.<sup>47</sup> We see the “through-

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43. Trans. Burnyeat, 29.

44. Trans. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 281 (slightly emended).

45. For similar remarks see Sorabji, *Self*, 246–47.

46. Burnyeat, “Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving,” 29. Compare Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 141, and Lovibond, “Plato's Theory of Mind,” 53.

47. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 55. Burnyeat, “Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving,” 49, thinks that the treatment of perception in the *Theaetetus* and the *Phaedo* are substantially different because the latter treats perception as “something essen-



idiom” together with the soul as the single subject of perception come up most clearly a little later in the dialogue:

Haven’t we also said some time ago that when the soul makes use of the body to investigate something, be it through hearing (διὰ τοῦ ἀκούειν) or seeing (διὰ τοῦ ὁρᾶν) or some other sense (δι’ ἄλλης τινὸς αἰσθήσεως)—for to investigate something through the body (διὰ τοῦ σώματος) is to do it through the senses (δι’ αἰσθήσεως)—it is dragged by the body to the things that are never the same, and the soul itself strays and is confused and dizzy, as if it were drunk, in so far as it is in contact with that kind of thing. (79c)

Above we considered that the soul is capable of taking on interests alien to its own nature by association with the body. This left a question, however, about those interests that are proper to the soul itself. We get a hint here by considering the range of the soul’s experiences and removing those that require the body as an instrument or medium. When the soul investigates through the body it comes into contact with bodily things. It experiences sense perception, pleasure, and pain. When, however, it withdraws alone by itself (αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτήν), it contemplates “each of those realities pure alone by itself” (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ εἰλικρινὲς ἕκαστον...τῶν ὄντων) with “pure thought alone by itself” (αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτήν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ διανοίᾳ, 66a). Although Socrates’s principal purpose here is not to investigate the nature of the soul itself, this step in the argument proves extremely telling. As soon as we get the soul isolated away from alien interests and activities, we find it engaged in contemplation of the Forms. Socrates is not picky about the terminology he uses to describe the activities he contrasts with sense perception. He variously uses, “reasoning” (λογίζεσθαι), “intelligence” (φρόνησις), “grasping” (ἐφάπτειν), “contemplating” (θεωρεῖν), and “understanding” (διάνοια). In each case, however, we get a picture of the soul

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tially alien to the soul, or to the soul’s true nature.” This does not, however, prevent the distinction between the with-idiom and the through-idiom from turning up in both dialogues with much the same import.

as the thinking subject able to grasp the intelligible reality of the Forms. This yields a total picture of the soul or self as the seat of consciousness: when embodied it is the subject of perception, but when alone by itself the subject of noetic intelligence.

#### **4. Us and Humans in the Recollection and Kinship Arguments**

We will examine the way that the Recollection and Kinship Arguments relate to the immortality of the individual person in the next chapter. In this chapter, however, we must examine the way that the *Phaedo* consistently associates the term “human” (*ἄνθρωπος*) with the body and its mortality rather than the soul, while they associate the self with the latter. This stands in contrast to the usage we saw above in the *Alcibiades* where Socrates uses *ἄνθρωπος* as a convenient term for the self. From the *Phaedo* onward, however, (assuming the traditional chronology) Plato frequently uses *ἄνθρωπος* to mean “a human being” in the sense of a biological organism belonging to the human species. Humans are mortal because a human being is a composite that begins when soul and body join and dies when they part. The soul, however, is immortal because it exists both before and after this union with the body. For this way of speaking to make sense, Socrates and his friends must treat the self, that is the soul, as distinct from the human being which it inhabits only for a time.

After Socrates advances an argument for the immortality of the soul based on the nature of opposites (70d–72e), Cebes reminds Socrates of the theory of recollection:

According to this [theory], we must at some previous time have learned what we now recollect. This is possible only if our soul existed somewhere before it took on this human shape (*ἦν ποὺ ἡμῖν ἡ ψυχὴ πρὶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ εἶδει γενέσθαι*). So according to this theory too, the soul is likely to be something immortal. (72e–73a)

## Chapter 2, Section 4: Us and Humans in the Recollection and Kinship Arguments

Simmius needs a reminder of the details of this theory so Socrates explains it. In brief, it is impossible for us to *come to know* the Forms in this life but we are nevertheless *reminded* of them. For a reminder to work, one must already know the thing remembered. Hence, *we* must have come to know before this life begins what *we* remember now.<sup>48</sup> Many interesting things can be said about this argument itself, but our interest here is only the language in which Cebes chooses to put the theory of recollection and the way that Socrates sums it up:

When did our souls acquire knowledge of them [i.e. the Forms]? Certainly not since we were born as men (*ἄνθρωποι γεγόναμεν*)...So then, Simmius, our souls also existed apart from the body before they took on human form, and they had intelligence (*ἦσαν ἄρα, ὦ Σιμμία, αἱ ψυχὰ καὶ πρότερον, πρὶν εἶναι ἐν ἀνθρώπου εἶδει, χωρὶς σωμάτων, καὶ φρόνησιν εἶχον*). (76c)

Simmius also speaks of the soul “existing before it enters a human body” (*πρὶν καὶ εἰς ἀνθρώπειον σῶμα ἀφικέσθαι*, 77b), and Socrates echoes this same language later at 95c–d when he speaks of the soul as existing “before we were born as men” (*πρὶν ἡμᾶς ἀνθρώπους γενέσθαι*) and its “entrance into a human body” (*τὸ εἰς ἀνθρώπου σῶμα ἐλθεῖν*).

Twice in this discussion we see the word “shape” (*εἶδος*), indicating the structure of the human organism. We do not have soul and body jumbled together in any old way, but rather soul and body join together in a specific configuration set by the nature of a human being. In both cases, the theory of recollection establishes that the soul exists prior to its union with “this human shape.”<sup>49</sup> This makes clear that we are not reading Aristotle, for whom the soul *is* the configuration or “form” (*εἶδος*) of the living organism. Instead the soul undergoes a process of entering into

48. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 65. See also, Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 80.

49. Lovibond, “Plato’s Theory of Mind,” 44, gives an interesting reading of the theory of recollection that does not require literal pre-existence.

this human shape, and this process marks the beginning of a human life. What sort of thing, then, was the soul before? Certainly it was not human because human is just what it becomes. The soul of Socrates is the soul of a human *now*, but the theory of recollection points to a time *before* when it was not. The individual soul, therefore, is not identical to the individual human. Notice, however, that it is not merely the soul that exists before this human life but rather *we ourselves*. Socrates and his interlocutors switch seamlessly between talking about “us” before human life and “the soul,” presumably because they treat them as two different names for the same thing. Notice, also, that the body is not the human either, but rather “of a human.” The individual human is instead the composite formed by soul and body together.<sup>50</sup> The soul exists both before and after this union in some other mode, while the material that constitutes the body also continues to exist separately for a time (*χωρίς*, cf. 64c).

A similar distinction between the individual soul and the individual human being becomes clear as Socrates advances another argument for the immortality of the soul based on the kinship between the soul and the eternal Forms. Over the course of the argument, Socrates establishes several pairs of contrasting opposites. At each step, Socrates asks Cebes to assign both the soul and the body to the pairs. This culminates at 80b when Socrates gathers up all the pairs side by side, with the soul in one half and the body in the other:

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50. This analysis also makes good sense of what Socrates says at *Phaedrus* 246c: “A soul that sheds its wings wanders until it lights on something solid, where it settles and takes on an earthly body, which then, owing to the power of this soul, seems to move itself. The whole combination of soul and body is called a living thing (*ζῶον τὸ σύμπαν ἐκλήθη, ψυχὴ καὶ σῶμα παγέν*), or animal, and has the designation ‘mortal’ as well. Such a combination cannot be immortal, not on any reasonable account” (all translations from the *Phaedrus* are from Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff). Compare Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 126–27.

## Chapter 2, Section 4: Us and Humans in the Recollection and Kinship Arguments

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Soul ( <i>ψυχή</i> )	Body ( <i>σῶμα</i> )
Divine ( <i>θεῖος</i> )	Human ( <i>ἀνθρώπινος</i> )
Deathless ( <i>ἀθάνατος</i> )	Mortal ( <i>θνητός</i> )
Intelligible ( <i>νοητός</i> )	Unintelligible ( <i>ἀνόητος</i> )
Uniform ( <i>μονοειδής</i> )	Multiform ( <i>πολυειδής</i> )
Indissoluble ( <i>ἀδιάλυτος</i> )	Soluble ( <i>διαλυτός</i> )
Always the same as itself	Never consistently the same

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Most striking for our concerns is the appearance of “human” (*ἀνθρώπινος*) on the side of the body and the appearance of “divine” (*θεῖος*) on the side of the soul. In the recollection argument, the soul appeared as something merely different from the individual human because it had some mode of existence prior to this human life. Here, however, Socrates describes the soul specifically *in contrast to* what is human. Mortality and unintelligibility are proper to the human sphere. During its time in “this human shape” such qualities may afflict the soul, but they do so always as outside invaders. In its own right, the soul is divine *rather than* human and possesses immortality and intelligibility as proper to its own nature. This confronts the soul with the ethical task of casting off as far as possible these alien features that come along with human embodiment. Hence, the good soul makes its way to what is like itself, the “divine” and “immortal,” having freed itself “of various human ills” (*τῶν ἄλλων κακῶν τῶν ἀνθρωπείων*, 81a).<sup>51</sup>

Commentators on the *Phaedo* tend to miss entirely or at least under-appreciate the consistency with which Socrates and his friends identify the self with the soul

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51. Ahrensdorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 93–95, argues that Socrates is using an illegitimately sharp dichotomy to deceptively urge us “to feel, at least, that we are not simply human beings and therefore that we are not simply mortal,” but then to subtly undermine this feeling by suggesting at 79b1–3 that “we” are a composite of soul and body (see discussion below).

## Chapter 2, Section 4: Us and Humans in the Recollection and Kinship Arguments

*rather than* the human being which Socrates identifies as a biological organism composed of both soul and body. It is common enough for commentators to notice the identification of the true self as the soul. But they often fail to see that this excludes an identification of the self as a human being composed of soul and body.<sup>52</sup> Throughout the *Phaedo*, all parties to the discussion simply assume that human beings die. What they are concerned about is whether this fact poses a threat to *Socrates*. To my knowledge, Lloyd Gerson is the only one to fully appreciate the consistent distinction between person and human being in the *Phaedo*:

The strategy of the entire [*Phaedo*] is aimed at showing that each person can come to understand that he is, counter to appearances, really identical with an immaterial entity whose existence is not threatened by the death of any human beings including the one that others recognize him to be.<sup>53</sup>

This becomes especially important because two recent studies by Ronna Burger and Peter Ahrens Dorf attempt to argue that Socrates believes, contrary to the overt message of the dialogue, that we are truly mortal. Both authors rest a large portion of their case on the idea that Socrates identifies *us* with *us human beings*, and they proceed to point out those passages where human beings are definitely mortal. It seems to me that this line of thinking relies heavily on an appeal to a contemporary sensibility that finds absurd the idea the *we* are not essentially human rather than any close argumentation from the text itself. There are, however, three specific places in the *Phaedo* that they suggest identify the self with the composite human being. I want to examine each of these in turn to explain why I do not find them convincing.

First, Burger points out that *αὐτός* is the first word of the dialogue. Echecrates begins by asking Phaedo a question:

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52. For example, Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 37, does just this.

53. *Knowing Persons*, 237–38.

## Chapter 2, Section 4: Us and Humans in the Recollection and Kinship Arguments

Were you with Socrates yourself (*αὐτός*), Phaedo, on the day when he drank the poison in prison, or did someone else tell you about it? (57a)

Burger thinks the dialogue therefore “begins by referring to the self as an inseparable unity of psychē and body.”<sup>54</sup> I suppose the idea is that Echecrates is asking whether Phaedo was physically in the room and hence *αὐτός* must refer to an embodied entity. I do not think, however, that this sentence by itself can differentiate between these two possible readings: (a) *αὐτός* refers to Phaedo considered as a soul, present with Socrates physically because he is *in* a body and (b) *αὐτός* refers to Phaedo considered as a soul–body composite, present with Socrates because he *is* a body in part. Burger gives no argument for why we should favor reading (b) over reading (a). It seems to me that Echecrates is merely speaking conventionally and that nothing much rides on the particular use of *αὐτός*, except perhaps to draw the reader’s attention to a theme of the dialogue. If this word *is* meant to be metaphysically loaded, however, reading (a) seems much more in line with what Socrates and his friends do say explicitly.

Second, it may appear at 79b that Socrates refers to body and soul as parts of “us.” In the middle of the Kinship Argument, he asks Cebes,

Is something of ourselves body and something else soul (*ἄλλο τι ἡμῶν αὐτῶν τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ψυχή*)?<sup>55</sup>

Both Burger and Ahrens Dorf think that this passage speaks definitively of “we ourselves” as composed of body and soul and therefore *not* simply identical with the soul.<sup>56</sup> It seems to me that this is drawing quite a lot from the genitive case, which

54. *The Phaedo*, 15 see also 7.

55. Trans. Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem. Compare the potentially misleading translation of Grube: “Now one part of ourselves is the body, another part is the soul?”

56. *ibid.*, 89; Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 95.

could just as easily mean possession as composition. Socrates seems to be simply restricting the things he is going to talk about, as though he were to ask, “is there anything else belonging to us beyond body and soul that I would need to investigate?” On this reading, the move would be quite similar to the way that he narrows down the field at *Alcibiades* 130b.

Third, at 115b Phaedo refers to Socrates with *αὐτός* right after Socrates suggests that he will go in to bathe. Burger thinks that this “recalls the first word of the dialogue, which designated the living being as an inseparable whole consisting of body and psychē.”<sup>57</sup> Again, she does not explain, but I suppose she means there is something about the physical character of bathing that forces us to think of Socrates “himself” as a composite of body and soul. Again, it seems easy enough to attribute physical predicates like sitting, eating, and bathing to persons considered as souls *in* bodies just as much as persons considered as composites of body and soul.

I am actually sympathetic to the idea that Socrates ultimately believes that the soul is mortal and that he is subtly attempting to show his interlocutors the deep problems associated with thinking of themselves as immortal souls rather than essentially human. I do not mean to suggest here that I prefer one hidden meaning to another. Any interpretation of the hidden meaning, however, must face the overt fact on the surface of the dialogue that both Socrates and his friends consistently speak of the true self as identical with an immortal soul that is not strictly identical to any mortal and composite human being.

## 5. The Polluted versus the Ideal Self

Just after these arguments for the immortality of the soul, Socrates launches into a description of the various fates that good and bad souls can expect after death. We

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57. *The Phaedo*, 207.



do not find many surprises in the good soul's fate. Being gathered itself into itself (*αὐτῇ εἰς ἑαυτήν*) it goes to what is akin to it, the invisible, immortal, divine, and wise (80e–81a). When we turn to the bad soul's fate, however, we face a difficult passage:

[The bad soul] is no doubt permeated by the physical (*ὑπὸ τοῦ σωματοειδοῦς*), which constant intercourse and association with the body, as well as considerable practice, has caused to become ingrained in it (*ἐνεποίησε σύμφυτον*). . . . This bodily element is heavy, ponderous, earthy, and visible. Through it, such a soul has become heavy and is dragged back to the visible region in fear of the unseen and of Hades. It wanders, as we are told, around graves and monuments, where shadowy phantoms, images that such souls produce, have been seen, souls that have not been freed and purified but share in the visible, and are therefore seen. (81b–d)

Socrates assigns four qualities to the “bodily element” in the soul: (i) heavy, (ii) ponderous, (iii) earthy, and (iv) visible. Because this element is “ingrained” in it, the soul itself explicitly becomes (i) heavy and (iv) visible. We may worry that this quasi-physical picture of souls is silly and unsophisticated—especially if we retain from earlier in the dialogue the sense that the soul is the conscious self—but we also face the deeper worry that Socrates is being flatly inconsistent.<sup>58</sup> Socrates denies that the soul is visible in the Kinship Argument at 79b—to human if not

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58. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 23, 30, 141, 158–59, sees this as an instance of Plato attempting to bring together the various incompatible strands of meaning that the word *ψυχή* carries in presocratic Greek. On the one hand we have *ψυχή* as a quasi-physical “breath of life” that departs from the dead as a kind of ectoplasm, while on the other hand we have *ψυχή* as a “sort of inner person.” For the former sense in presocratic philosophers see W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers* (Harper Perennial, 1960), 30–31. Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 28, thinks that we should simply dismiss this passage as a joke since it would commit Socrates to belief in ghosts if taken literally. Just because belief in ghosts may seem absurd *to us*, however, does not mean that Socrates or his interlocutors *must* have felt the same way. The issue of consistency seems to me to be far more important than the issue of strangeness.

to divine eyes. This explicit statement two pages prior is not merely an offhand remark. Instead, it represents the whole thrust of the argument so far: that the soul is immaterial and therefore not the sort of thing that can be blown apart by a strong gust of wind.<sup>59</sup>

An initial answer to this puzzle comes from the protreptic character of the passage. When he describes the fate of bad souls, Socrates's hearers are meant to find such a fate disgusting and so reject it for themselves. By contrast when he describes the fate of good souls, Socrates's hearers are meant to find such a fate admirable and so desire it for themselves. Hence these colorful pictures target our ethics more than our metaphysics, and seek to turn our souls from bodily to philosophical pursuits. While this observation is surely right, these pictures lose their protreptic bite if we discover them to be wholly incongruent with the account of souls in the rest of the dialogue.<sup>60</sup>

Fortunately, the notion of "association with the body" provides a link between this passage and the passages that it seems to contradict. In our earlier analysis of association, we saw that embodiment causes the soul to be the single subject of both thought (by itself) and sense perception (through the body). Although it is capable of this latter mode of experience and although we see in the Recollection Argument that sense perception may even provide the happy occasion for recalling true knowledge, such experience remains at best extrinsic and at worst destructive to what the soul is in its own right. Earlier we saw that embodiment is an occasion for the soul to abandon its own ideal condition by embracing as its interests objects

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59. Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 95, also wonders whether the very possibility of the soul being dragged about by the body conflicts with the depiction of the soul in the Kinship Argument as altogether changeless.

60. Robert Hall makes similar comments about the force of all the eschatological myths, "*Ψυχὴ* as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato," 66.

(food, sex, and shoes) that are not really its interests. Similarly in this passage, it is “constant intercourse and association with the body, as well as considerable practice” that causes the soul to have these troublesome corporeal qualities. Notice, therefore, that it is not the body *simpliciter* that causes the soul grief, but rather the soul’s own adoption of bodily interests and contact with bodily objects.

We can resolve the tension between these passages by again drawing a distinction not between soul and body but between the soul as it is in its own right and the soul as it is because of embodiment. Perhaps Socrates’s prior statements about the soul in the Kinship Argument regard the true nature of the soul in its own right, while his statements here regard the soul after it has adopted interests and cognitive objects that are in fact contrary to its nature. Hence, even the bad soul is not “visible” according to its own true nature. Instead, the bad soul is a bad *soul* because it takes on interests contrary to what it means to be a soul.<sup>61</sup>

This passage adds to our earlier analysis, however, the puzzling idea that the body’s pollution may persist after death.<sup>62</sup> Earlier passages give an obvious sense in which embodiment distracts the soul. Without eyes and ears, sights and sounds would not trouble the soul’s contemplation (e.g. 66a). On this basis, we may think that death solves these ills for good and bad souls alike. An incautious reader, for example, may read statements in the exhortation from 66b to 67a in this way: after

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61. Compare Robinson’s comment on *Republic X* 611b (discussed in Chapter 4), *Plato’s Psychology*, 53: “The soul bound in a body is by that very fact ‘untrue’ ...to its own genuine nature; and the deeper it involves itself in the body and the material the more it defiles itself and distorts its own true nature out of all recognition, just as Glaucus becomes covered with barnacles.” Compare Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 27, who thinks that we should understand the idea of the soul being “interspersed with a corporeal element” as a metaphor for the idea that the soul “retains its desires for things bodily.”

62. Similar comments may be made about the scars that remain on the disembodied soul on the basis of its embodied experiences at *Gorgias* 524b–d (discussed in Chapter 3).

death, the soul necessarily ceases to experience those states that were occasioned by embodiment and proceeds to pure contemplation.<sup>63</sup> But bad souls go on being troubled by their association with the body even when their particular bodies are rotting away. How can this be? How can the soul's own true nature continue to be distorted when death removes the body? We begin to find answers to these questions when we recognize that "association with the body" implies a moral *allegiance* to the body over and above the mere experience of bodily sensations.

This dimension comes to the fore when Socrates says that the soul itself is the primary cause of its own problems while the body is merely the occasion.

The lovers of learning know that when philosophy gets hold of their soul, it is imprisoned in and clinging to the body, and that it is forced to examine other things through it as through a cage and not by itself, and that it wallows in every kind of ignorance. Philosophy sees that the worst feature of this imprisonment is that it is due to desires, so that the prisoner himself is contributing to his own incarceration most of all. (82d–e)<sup>64</sup>

In the metaphor, the body is the cage and the prisoner, that is the person, is the soul.<sup>65</sup> Hence, when philosophy reveals that "the prisoner himself is contributing to his own incarceration most of all," this means that the soul itself is the chief cause of its own difficulties even though it could not be so imprisoned were it not for the body. It may be trivially true that a prisoner in an unlocked cage could not

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63. Burger, *The Phaedo*, 44, reads Socrates's speech in just this way and argues that Socrates thereby ironically exposes the flaws in the view that the body is the sole obstacle to the soul's apprehension of the Forms, a view which she thinks he ascribes not to himself but to the "genuine philosophers." See also Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 52.

64. Compare Hackforth's translation: "The philosopher's eye discerns the ingenuity of a prison in which the prisoner's desire can be the means of ensuring that he will co-operate in his own incarceration."

65. Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 103: "For, according to this comparison, the body is not truly a part of the philosopher's self but is merely the prison in which his truest self, his soul, is forced to dwell."

be “imprisoned” were it not for the cage, but the *real* reason that he goes on in his imprisonment is that he does not himself open the door. In our discussion of the ways that the body opposes the soul’s proper activity in 64d–65e, we noticed three main difficulties that embodiment causes the soul: (i) desires for bodily things, (ii) distractions, and (iii) the inherent unreliability of sense perception. Here, Socrates says that the worst feature of the soul’s imprisonment is “that it is due to desires.” Because of this feature the soul contributes most to its own imprisonment. Plausibly, difficulties (ii) and (iii) drop away at death while (i) persists. Without ears, the soul no longer receives the constant distracting report of noise. Without eyes, the soul no longer bases faulty judgments on the unreliability of what it sees. Without mouth and stomach, however, the craving of the gluttonous soul goes on because the soul has ingrained this desire into itself as part of its semi-permanent character.<sup>66</sup>

Plausibly, desires have this effect upon the soul because the soul sanctions its desires in a way that it does not sanction mere sense experience.<sup>67</sup> The eyes and ears continue to report images and sounds even when the soul does not want to see or hear what they report. It may have desires that it does not want to have, but a desire implies an endorsement by the soul at some level—otherwise the soul would not want what it wants. Socrates imagines a cage, therefore, that has an ingenious magical seductive power. It may have locks and iron bars, but its “worst feature” is that the prisoner himself comes to want the cage. Should this seduction become total, the locks may break and the bars rust away, but the prisoner continues to bind himself.

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66. Compare Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 26.

67. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 87: “Bodily pleasures that seduce are the pleasures of the same person who does or does not desire to submit to the seduction.”

The magical power of this cage comes from the incredible psychic force of bodily pleasure and pain.

Every pleasure or pain provides, as it were, another nail to rivet the soul to the body and to weld them together. It makes the soul corporeal, so that it believes that truth is what the body says it is. As it shares the beliefs and delights of the body, I think it inevitably comes to share its ways and manner of life and is unable ever to reach Hades in a pure state; it is always full of body when it departs, so that it soon falls back into another body and grows with it as if it has been sewn into it. Because of this, it can have no part in the company of the divine, the pure and uniform. (83d–e)

Every pleasure or pain rivets the soul to the body in two areas: beliefs and delights. First, although sense experience of every kind is liable to induce the soul to believe “that truth is what the body says it is,” pleasure and pain scream at the soul in a particularly intense way. The nail being driven into the hand says, “I am most real.” Nearly anyone can judge that the oar dipped into the water is straight even though the eye “says” that it is bent, but only a philosophical hero can continue to judge rightly under torture or seduction. Second, pleasure has a strong tendency to persuade the soul to pursue more of it, and pain has a strong tendency to persuade the soul to flee more of it. Thus, each experience of bodily pleasure or pain is liable to orient the soul more fully toward the body as an object of concern. These two areas cause the soul to share the body’s “ways and manner” (ὁμότροπός τε καὶ ὁμότροφος γίνεσθαι). Because the body’s “ways and manner” are extrinsic to the soul’s own true nature, such an allegiance to the body prevents the soul from being what it ought to be: divine (θεῖος), pure (καθαρός), and simple (μονοειδής).<sup>68</sup> Hence,

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68. Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 101: “Socrates implies here that, if the philosopher can purify his soul of the body in this life, he will have shown that his truest self, his soul, is distinct from and superior to his merely human and mortal self.”

the soul must fall back to a condition of embodiment rather than proceeding to its own proper state.<sup>69</sup>

This passage should complete our growing sense that there are two ways of speaking about the soul throughout the *Phaedo*. On the one hand, when we consider the true nature of the soul as it is “alone by itself” (*αὐτῆ καθ’ αὐτήν*), we see it pure, immortal, invisible, divine, simple, and knowing. On the other hand, when we consider the soul as it is because of association with the body, we see it distracted, deceived, impure, complex, mortal, and even visible. This latter condition is not identical to the straight-forward condition of embodiment because embodied souls may be more or less associated with the body and after death souls can maintain this association even in the body’s absence.<sup>70</sup> Further, all these passages treat the soul’s association with the body as an ethical problem that the soul must overcome. Failure to overcome this challenge bears a culpability that mere embodiment does not. The bad soul is not merely *in* a body but *allied* to it, and for this it should be despised. To capture these conceptual associations, I suggest the phrases “ideal soul” and “polluted soul.” The former signifies the soul in its own true nature, an ideal that we seek to live up to. The latter signifies the soul in its association with the body, a condition that we find ourselves in but seek to overcome. Although Socrates does not say so explicitly, this possibility that the soul can take on alien attributes implies a certain plasticity in its nature—like wax that is smooth and uniform “alone by itself” but that can become coarse and lumpy if one pollutes it

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69. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 87: “The consequences of embodied life do not change what we are ideally, that is to say, in the disembodied state. Indeed, it is because we are ideally knowers, akin to gods, that an embodied life devoted to something other than philosophy results in re-embodiment.”

70. This contrast, then, is somewhat distinct from the simple distinction between embodied and disembodied conditions of the soul, which much of the secondary literature focuses on.

with sand. We must postpone until Chapter 4 an examination of the extent to which this plasticity and receptivity threaten Socrates's claims that the soul is eternal and incomposite in the Kinship Argument (80b).

## 6. Historically Available Notions

After examining all these passages from the *Laws*, the *Alcibiades*, and the *Phaedo*, what notions are readily available for later thinkers to absorb? At the forefront is the idea that Socrates is really his soul and not this face we see. Because the soul does not jump out in the ordinary immediacy of sense experience, this means that the true self is a hidden self.<sup>71</sup> Uncovering the real Socrates therefore becomes something of a discovery and achievement.<sup>72</sup> This discovery takes on the utmost ethical importance because the success of every venture requires a knowledge of what one is. Although the details have changed with the centuries, this notion that one must discover one's true self has never left us.

Ultimately, the idea of the true self in these passages does not seem to be the soul in general, but rather the soul conceived as the subject of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. So far, this notion remains rather inchoate because these passages focus on the contrast between soul and body rather than the contrast between rational and non-rational aspects of the soul.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, when we strip

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71. Annas, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 129: "knowledge of the 'real' or 'true' self turns out to be very different from what one intuitively thinks of as knowledge of self." For the need to discover one's true self and the achievement this represents see Lovibond, "Plato's Theory of Mind," 53; McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 277; Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 237–38.

72. See De Vogel, "The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought," 35; Lovibond, "Plato's Theory of Mind," 46; McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 264; and Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 3, 60, 113, 117, 245.

73. See McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 299. For the view that this way of talking about  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  in the *Phaedo* represents a somewhat early stage in Plato's thinking about mind and self see Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 23, 25, 128, "Soul and Immor-



away all the inessential accretions that association with the body accumulates for the soul we see Socrates describe the soul especially in terms of thinking and knowing.

At this point, a comparison with the Cartesian self-reflective *ego* becomes tempting, but the conception of the soul as knower in these passages remains strikingly different than Descartes's conception of the *ego* as center of consciousness. For Descartes, thinking is not something that his "thinking thing" can fail to do. In these passages, however, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are achievements that have stringent conditions of success. We also see a difference in the kind of reflexivity involved. For Descartes, the *ego* becomes aware of its own act of thinking just by paying attention. Here, by contrast, the kind of self-knowledge that the soul must seek is a knowledge of its own true nature. This answers the question, "What sort of being am I?" rather than the question, "What am I doing right now?" We should be careful, then, not to conflate Cartesian self-awareness with Greek self-knowledge.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, we have the contrast between the ideal and the polluted conditions of the soul. This brings with it the idea that what I *really* am, my own true nature, is something to which I have not yet lived up. Anywhere we look in ordinary human life we encounter souls deeply associated with the body. This association involves the soul's allegiance to a foreign power so that everywhere we confront the chaltality in Republic X," *Phronesis* 12, no. 2 (1967), 148, and Richard Bett, "Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the 'Phaedrus'," *Phronesis* 31, no. 1 (1986), 17. I tend to be skeptical about claims regarding development in Plato's thought in this area. In most cases, I think the context and rhetorical demands of particular dialogues account for differences in emphasis and detail. In this case, the soul-body contrast comes to the fore while more nuanced treatment of the inner workings of the soul fades to the background.

74. For other helpful comparisons with Descartes see McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 264, 280.

lence of breaking free. I must not live up to the condition of my soul as I find it, but rather must live up to the condition of my soul as it ought to be in its own right.<sup>75</sup>

That this pollution is put in terms of an opposition between soul and body is of enormous historical import. I would suggest, however, that the more general notion of living up to an ideal or original condition of self has a wider though less striking influence. For instance, in Christian thought we see the idea that, although man is made in the image of God, sin has disfigured this image. Man therefore finds the self in a distorted condition and faces the ethical challenge of restoring that self to its own proper nature. Again, the parallel is not exact because the pollution arises for the Christian from the will rather than the body, but the parallel is strong enough for Platonic ideas to present themselves as ready to hand when Christian thinkers begin looking for resources in their ancient Greek predecessors.

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75. This is close to but not quite the same as Gerson's notion of the embodied person striving to identify itself with an ideal disembodied subject, *Knowing Persons*, 60: "Engaging in philosophy is a two-sided activity: identifying oneself with the subject of knowing and alienating oneself from the subject of embodied states." See also McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 264: "Socrates asked, 'Who will you become' (*Protagoras* 331b). This formula, I shall suggest, captures something of Plato's account of persons; and it shows him not lagging far behind Descartes. For he does have an account to give of the first person; but the context in which it is given pushes him toward the view that being a unified person is not something I can take for granted (once I start to focus on my own intellectual activities) but rather something to which I aspire. Being a unified person is for Plato an honorific title; hence, the proper question to ask is indeed, Who shall I become?"

## Chapter 3

### Afterlife and Metempsychosis

Plato provides us with an abundance of texts which speak about the condition of souls both before birth and after death. As in Chapter 2, we must be extremely cautious before assigning a settled view about this condition to Plato himself because the overwhelming majority of these texts speak in the mode of myth rather than rigorous philosophy. Further, anyone who tries to construct a systematic picture of disembodied life by stitching together what Plato says in various dialogues must find the task impossible because the myths themselves vary so much in their details if not in their spirit. Instead, the myths are plausibly meant to confront us with a rhetorically powerful display that aims to bring the irrational and emotional aspects of our psychology into alignment with the ethical conclusions we have already reached through dialectic.<sup>1</sup> This may help to explain why many of the dialogues conclude with an eschatological myth after the interlocutors have already reached their main objective. Be that as it may, we also find a surprisingly consistent general picture of our postmortem fate. Taken with a dash of allegory, the myths can be made to yield a compelling comprehensive picture of death and rebirth. This feature of the myths gains historical influence through those many

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1. See Rachana Kamtekar, "Speaking with the Same Voice as Reason," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2006), 167–202.

readers who have taken belief in an afterlife seriously and have sought answers from Plato. This matters for our present purposes because the conception of the self that this picture requires differs dramatically from that required by its alternatives: on the one hand a commitment to human mortality by the Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans and on the other a commitment to immortality without cyclic rebirth by the Christians.

Although it may come to us chiefly through Plato, we should not think of metempsychosis as an exclusively Platonic doctrine. Many scholars suppose that Plato acquired this idea from Orphic or Pythagorean friends, perhaps during his stay in Sicily.<sup>2</sup> While this is certainly plausible, the idea also circulated widely in Greek culture during Plato's lifetime. Plato himself simply refers to it as an "ancient theory" (*παλαιός τις λόγος*) at *Phaedo* 70c and credits both "priests and priestesses" and Pindar (probably referring to his *Olympian Ode*) at *Meno* 81a–b.<sup>3</sup> Plato could also find similar ideas in Empedocles or Heraclitus.<sup>4</sup> In all likelihood, Plato simply takes over for his own purposes—whatever they ultimately turn out to be—a common idea that appeals to a particular religious sensibility.<sup>5</sup> At its most basic, the idea seems to be that each soul lives through an ongoing cycle of death and rebirth (perhaps reborn even into a different species) with the character of both its rebirth

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2. Scholars who suggest this include Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo*, 4; D.D. McGibbon, "The Fall of the Soul in Plato's Phaedrus," *The Classical Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (May 1964), 56; Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 17–18; Burger, *The Phaedo*, 7; Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem, *Plato's Phaedo*, 3; Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 97.

3. See Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 12.

4. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 71–83.

5. For some further connections to the idea of metempsychosis as it stands in the *Phaedrus* and Plato's predecessors including Pindar and Empedocles see R.S. Bluck, "The Phaedrus and Reincarnation," *The American Journal of Philology* 79, no. 2 (1958), 162. and R.S. Bluck, "Plato, Pindar, and Metempsychosis," *The American Journal of Philology* 79, no. 4 (1958), 405–14.

and its intermediate state dependent upon how it lived its previous incarnations. While this idea has obvious utility in motivating ethical behavior, we should also notice the striking and perhaps unintuitive conception of the self that it requires. Anthony Long remarks, for example, at the “sheer boldness of the notion that human beings continue to have a real life after their present body has ceased to exist.” This idea requires of the believer that “the essence of human identity is no longer psychosomatic...but psychic.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, in order for this religious picture to make any sense, the believer must identify *himself* with the soul that persists through its many incarnations and *not* with the organism into which he is born for a time. We will explore this more deeply in what follows, but I want to call attention at the outset to the way that this conception of the self must always accompany such religious commitments, be they Pythagorean, Orphic, Platonic, or whatever.

Even outside of the religious sphere, we find a natural connection between death, survival, and personal identity. For example, suppose that, during a voyage across the Mediterranean, a storm wracks my ship to the point of breaking. Hermes may descend from the clouds with the prophecy that one of the passengers will certainly survive, but this prophecy will not comfort me much unless I also know that the surviving passenger is *me*. Philosophers and sensitive souls sometimes worry about the death of people in general, but everyone worries about the death of one person in particular. What any culture, therefore, thinks about death and survival grants some glimpse into the way it thinks about personal identity. Thus, If we want to investigate how the Greeks thought about individual persons in the absence of a treatise *On the Individual Self*, we can approach the subject indirectly by looking at texts that concern survival.

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6. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 69.

Finally, it matters to individuals not only *that* they survive but also *how* they survive. I may prefer annihilation to eternal torment. Hence, we gain insight into the way we think about personal identity not only by looking at our concern for continued life but also our concern for the mode of that life. This line of inquiry proves fruitful when applied to Plato's dialogues because we perpetually find Socrates motivating ethical arguments by the good or the bad that an action ultimately does *to the agent*. Very often, his conclusions are puzzling to his interlocutors when seen through the lens of ordinary life—e.g. injustice does more harm to the aggressor than the victim—and he must appeal to an afterlife myth in order to render fully vivid the good or bad done to the person. In outline, his reasoning runs like this: I should avoid doing this bad thing because (i) it will prove bad for my soul, (ii) I myself am identical with that soul, (iii) that soul will survive death, so (iv) the bad it does *me* will have everlasting ramifications. This chain of reasoning may not be the best construal of Socratic or Platonic ethics ultimately, but it does show up frequently at the surface level of the myths themselves. This means that the motivation to do good, according to the myths, is grounded in a consideration of the sort of being that I am and the kind of future I can expect *for myself*—the point of the afterlife myths tends to fall apart if we think that the fate of one's soul after death is the fate of someone else.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, then, we will examine the details of the afterlife myths in *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*. Before we examine the explicitly mythical

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7. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo*, 171; Burger, *The Phaedo*, 188; Michael Inwood, "Plato's Eschatological Myths," in *Plato's Myths*, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31. Robert Hall, " $\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato," 66, puts the point succinctly: "The great eschatological myths in the dialogues which stress the importance of the proper moral condition of man in this life would lose their impact and significance if there were serious doubts of the survival of the individual's personality."

passages, however, we must take a close look at a few passages in the *Phaedo* that hover somewhere between myth and strict dialectic. My purpose in these next two sections is not to give a comprehensive treatment of the argument for immortality in the *Phaedo* (there are books enough on this). Instead, I will limit myself to those passages that especially reveal details about the nature of the individual self.

### 1. If You Can Catch Me

At the end of the *Phaedo*, just as he is about to drink the hemlock, Socrates expresses his last wishes saying, “take good care of your own selves (ὕμῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιμελούμενοι) in whatever you do.” Crito responds, “We shall be eager to follow your advice...but how shall we bury you?” Interpreted literally, Crito’s question implies that *Socrates* will still be around to bury after he dies, and Socrates exploits this literal interpretation to make a joke with a serious point:

[You may bury me] in any way you like, said Socrates, if you can catch me and I do not escape you. And laughing quietly, looking at us, he said: I do not convince Crito that I am this Socrates talking to you here and ordering all I say, but he thinks that I am the thing which we will soon be looking at as a corpse, and so he asks how he shall bury me. I have been saying for some time and at some length that after I have drunk the poison I shall no longer be with you but will leave you to go and enjoy some good fortunes of the blessed, but it seems that I have said all this to him in vain in an attempt to reassure you and myself too. Give a pledge to Crito on my behalf, he said, the opposite pledge to that he gave the jury. He pledged that I would stay; you must pledge that I will not stay after I die, but that I shall go away, so that Crito will bear it more easily when he sees my body being burned or buried and will not be angry on my behalf, as if I were suffering terribly, and so that he should not say at the funeral that he is laying out or carrying out or burying Socrates. For know you well, my dear Crito, that to express oneself badly is not only faulty as far as the language goes, but does some harm to the soul. You must be of good cheer, and say you are burying my body, and bury it in any way you like and think most customary. (115c–116a)

Socrates's own words suggest that we should look carefully at this passage in its details because here we find in summary what Socrates has been "saying for some time and at some length." When we interpret the argument for the immortality of the soul, we may take our cue from what Socrates himself hopes to have accomplished over the course of the dialogue.<sup>8</sup>

Behind the joke, Socrates makes a serious point about the success or failure of his conversation with Simmias and Cebes. So far, they have conducted the discussion in general terms with Socrates arguing for the continued existence of "the soul" after death and with Simmias and Cebes offering objections. The backdrop of this discussion, however, is the jail where Socrates will—within minutes now—drink the poison. The conversation about the survival of "the soul" is implicitly a conversation about the survival of *Socrates*. What will happen to *Socrates* when he drinks the poison? "Not even a comic poet," Socrates says, "could say that I am babbling and discussing things that do not concern me" (70c). Although Crito's careless way of speaking may cause Socrates to think it all in vain, the arguments are "an attempt to reassure you and myself too." This makes explicit at the end of the dialogue what has been evident from the very beginning: The argument is about reassurance and hope in the particular case of Socrates.<sup>9</sup> Socrates has an extraordinary confidence in the face of death and he claims (contrary to what he says in the *Apology*) that this confidence is justified by an understanding of the soul's condition after death. Taken out of this context, portions of the argument

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8. Burger, *The Phaedo*, 161, "Socrates hopes to convince Crito of the identification of the self with a psychē that is unaffected by death and burial; the proper name betrays the pathē that motivate our particular interest in positing the identity of the self that remains the same through all change." Sorabji, *Self*, 116: "[Socrates] is reminding them of the whole purport of the dialogue, that he is the rational soul, not the body."

9. Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem, *Plato's Phaedo*, 2.



in the *Phaedo* may be read in ways that do not offer any hope. For instance, someone could read the Opposites Argument (see below) as establishing the timeless existence of the Form of Soul or perhaps the continued existence of a single cosmic Soul. Such an argument may be interesting as a piece of philosophy, but it would not serve Socrates's "attempt to reassure." What good is it *to Socrates* if a panpsychic life-force goes on its merry way?<sup>10</sup> Instead, the survival of Socrates's soul means the survival of Socrates himself.<sup>11</sup> If this identity between soul and self were not operative throughout the dialogue, Socrates would have no hope—and no joke.

When he asks "how shall we bury you?" Crito clearly has Socrates's corpse in mind. Socrates knows what he means and could simply let it by, but he thinks this carelessness in conventional language does harm to Crito's soul. Socrates thinks that he has failed to make absolutely lucid in Crito's mind the idea that, "I am this Socrates talking to you here and ordering all I say." Instead, Crito's language betrays that, at some level, he still conceives of Socrates as "the thing which we will soon be looking at as a corpse." This lack of clarity gives Crito cause to fear: his *friend* is about to be burned or buried and this is something one does not bear easily. By contrast, clarity in both thinking and talking should engender hope. Socrates makes clear that his friends should not think that he is about to be burned or buried or even that he will cease to be. Instead, they should have hope because he is merely going away: "after I have drunk the poison I shall no longer be with you but will leave you to go and enjoy some good fortunes of the blessed." Again, Crito pledged

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10. For the importance of the interlocutors' anxiety and emotional concern over the individual fate of Socrates see Burger, *The Phaedo*, 82; Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 187; McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 29, 64, 265; Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 38; Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem, *Plato's Phaedo*, 2; and Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 51.

11. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 153.

at the trial that Socrates would stay, but Socrates enjoins his friends to make the opposite pledge: “you must pledge that I will not stay after I die, but that I shall go away.”<sup>12</sup> By using proper names and personal pronouns only to refer to the real person—that is the soul—rather than the person’s body, they reinforce their assurance that the real person survives death, is not buried, and only “goes away.”

We get a rare insight into how Socrates conceives of the self when he says, “I am this Socrates talking to you here and ordering all I say” (ἐγώ εἰμι οὗτος Σωκράτης, ὁ νυνὶ διαλεγόμενος καὶ διατάττων ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων).<sup>13</sup> The language of ordering and arranging recalls the dissatisfaction that he earlier expressed with the philosophy of Anaxagoras. In his youth, Socrates says, he encountered the books of Anaxagoras and was delighted by the claim that “it is Mind that directs and is the cause of everything” (νοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ διακοσμῶν τε καὶ πάντων αἴτιος, 97c). He became disillusioned, however, when he found Anaxagoras making no use of this hypothesis in his explanations but rather accounting for everything in physical and mechanical terms. Socrates compares this to explaining his act of sitting by reference to the bones and sinews of which his body is composed rather than his mind (νοῦς; 98c). Similarly, a philosopher given to this style of explanation,

Would mention other such causes for my talking to you: sounds and air and hearing, and a thousand other such things, but he would neglect to mention the true causes, that, after the Athenians decided it

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12. Burger, *The Phaedo*, 208, “To ascribe withdrawal at death to himself, Socrates must identify the psychē with the self as a whole, while at the same time assuming its separation from the body.”

13. Burger, 207–8, interprets the idea that Socrates is “just this Socrates who is now conversing and arranging each of the things spoken,” as the idea that Socrates “is nothing but the logos.” This seems to me to flatly conflate speaker with thing spoken. Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 196–97, makes a similar mistake. He recognizes that for Socrates’s interlocutors, at least, the point of the joke turns on the identification between self and soul that has been assumed throughout the dialogue.

was better to condemn me, for this reason it seemed best to me to sit here and more right to remain and to endure whatever penalty they ordered. For by the dog, I think these sinews and bones could long ago have been in Megara or among the Boetians, taken there by my belief as to the best course, if I had not thought it more right and honorable to endure whatever penalty the city ordered rather than escape and run away. (98d–99a)

Socrates himself is therefore the cause of his sitting and speaking because he is the rational agent to whom it seems best to do these things. It is, of course, true that Socrates could not sit without bones or speak without air, but he maintains,

Surely to say that these are the cause of what I do, and not that I have chosen the best course (*τῇ τοῦ βέλτιστου αἰρέσει*), even though I act with my mind (*ταῦτα νῶ πράττων*), is to speak very lazily and carelessly. (99a–b)

Socrates can order all he says because he is the sort of being that acts with mind (*νοῦς*). Bones and sinews do not have a view about what course of action is best because they are not the right sort of thing. Socrates himself, by contrast, has beliefs about which course is more right and honorable. To generalize, a proper explanation of intentional action cannot be made in purely mechanical terms. Instead, it must include reference to *something seeming best to someone*, and this involves someone possessing *νοῦς*.<sup>14</sup>

Because Crito uses “you” to refer to the corpse, Socrates infers that his preceding argument has failed to convince Crito that “I am this Socrates talking to you

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14. Compare *Protagoras* 358b–c, *Gorgias* 467c–468b, and *Meno* 77b–78b. Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 142–43. For a careful analysis of what Anaxagoras is saying and how Plato responds to it see Stephen Menn, *Plato on God as Nous* (St. Augustine’s Press, 1995), especially 1–2 for his discussion of this passage in the *Phaedo*: “To know that *S* is *P* because of *nous* depends on knowing that it is best for *S* to be *P*, and indeed this dependence is analytic: if something is done by *nous*, then to say that it is not done by choosing the best ‘would be a very great laxity of speech’ (99b1–2).”

here and ordering all I say.” If he had understood what the real Socrates is, Crito would not talk this way. This means that Socrates takes the previous arguments about the survival of “the soul” to establish the survival of whatever it is that orders words while speaking. The words of a sentence are clearly arranged in a way that betrays purpose and intention, and Socrates requires that the true cause or origin of such arrangement takes the form *something seems best to someone* (98e). Given our analysis of Anaxagoras’s failure, this suggests the idea of *νοῦς* as that which enables someone to form a conception of what is best and arrange things accordingly. In the formula *something seems best to someone*, Socrates is a *someone* because he possesses *νοῦς*. What then survives the hemlock? This Socrates here ordering all he says, the intelligent being to whom the decision to converse with his friends rather than run to Megara seems best.

## 2. Capability and Intelligence

Socrates’s joke at the dramatic conclusion of the dialogue reflects a concern that is present from the beginning. As we saw in the last chapter, the first section of argument in the *Phaedo* takes the immortality of the individual soul for granted. The definition of death at 64c requires that both the body and the soul continue to exist as separate substances, and Socrates takes this as a basic premise in his Second Apology. Cebes, however, says that accepting this premise requires a “good deal of faith and persuasive argument.” For Cebes, it is not completely apparent that,

The soul still exists after a man has died (*ἀποθανόντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*) and that it still possesses some capability and intelligence (*καί τινα δύναμιν ἔχει καὶ φρόνησιν*). (70b)

In the middle section of the *Phaedo*, therefore, Socrates proceeds to offer “a good deal of persuasive argument” for just this conclusion. We must be careful to note,

however, what Cebes requires Socrates to establish. First, Socrates must argue that the soul continues to exist when a human being dies. Second, Socrates must argue that the soul that survives must continue to possess “some capability and intelligence.” Hence, the famous argument for immortality in the *Phaedo* takes its point of departure from a major and a minor concern. The major concern is obvious: what if nothing survives death? The minor concern is less obvious but still important: what if *something* survives, but it lacks agency (*δύναμις*) and intelligence (*φρόνησις*)?<sup>15</sup>

Suppose that a vaporous, smoky substance called “the soul” does survive death, floating off on the breeze. This substance does not think or perceive anything at all, and differs from the blood and bones of the body only in its rarity.<sup>16</sup> On this picture, the soul continues to exist but is *just stuff*. What is wrong with this kind of survival? Why does Cebes need to add the continued possession of “capability and intelligence” to the list of things that Socrates must show? In a general sense, we can see the hopelessness of this picture. The survival of dumb stuff—call it “soul” if you like—simply does not amount to the survival of Socrates any more than the survival of his bones in the grave.<sup>17</sup> There is, however, a more specific sense in which the survival of dumb stuff proves inadequate in the terms of Socrates’s own

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15. Burger, *The Phaedo*, 9 n. 21, thinks that it would be strange for Cebes to require that disembodied souls possess *φρόνησις* if this word meant only “practical wisdom.” Hence, she thinks that the meaning of *φρόνησις* is thematized in the dialogue. Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 25, paraphrases Cebes’s requirement as the requirement that the disembodied soul remain “conscious and active.” Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 51, thinks that the conception of the immortal soul in the *Phaedo* ideally involves “self-reflexive cognition.” It seems to me that the constraint of *φρόνησις ἔχειν* requires only cognition *simpliciter*, especially cognition of the Forms.

16. Something like this view seems to be held by Homer. See Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, chap. 1, and Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers*, 30–31.

17. Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 23: “The idea of personal survival without that of elementary cognition is unthinkable.”

Second Apology. Philosophers ought to have confidence in the face of death, says Socrates, because they have oriented their lives toward the pursuit of knowledge, a pursuit which the body constantly hampers. Only after death does the soul become free from the constraints of the body and thereby gain wisdom (*φρόνησις*, 66a, see also 79d). Should the soul survive without possessing “capability and intelligence,” the hope that death brings knowledge would be futile. Should death transform the philosopher into a dumb vapor, death would turn out to be worse for philosophy than embodied human life and the justification for Socrates’s hopeful expectation would fall apart. This reasoning remains essentially the same when we consider other, less materialistic pictures of survival. Suppose, for instance, that we all survive by passing into identity with the single, timeless Form of Soul (if there turns out to be such a thing). As long as this condition does not involve the possession of intelligence, it will not serve to justify Socrates’s confidence in the face of death.<sup>18</sup>

Socrates responds to Cebes’s objection with the Cyclical Argument and the Recollection Argument. If we take these arguments singly and out of context they may appear rather inadequate, but when we view them merely as stages in a single complex argument in response to Cebes they make much better sense.<sup>19</sup> The Cyclical Argument focuses on establishing the substantial existence of the soul be-

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18. McCabe, *Plato’s Individuals*, 264: “[Socrates’s friends] are afraid that by the next day there will be no more Socrates (not no more souls). So it would hardly be consolation to them to show, for example, that the form of soul is deathless. Plato must demonstrate that Socrates’ soul is immortal, that we go on and on as individuals, not as a generic soul, or even as part of some reservoir of psychic stuff.”

19. In this approach I am following Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 52–53. Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 117, mentions this approach but dismisses it. Burger, *The Phaedo*, 3, 110, 126, thinks that the arguments of the first and second half of the *Phaedo* stand in tension because they appeal to what she takes to be the incompatible conceptions of *ψυχή* as mind and *ψυχή* as life-source. She offers no reason, however, why these two conceptions are necessarily in conflict. Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 63, 74, notices that only the Recollection Argument really answers Cebes requirement that the soul continues to possess *φρόνησις*.

fore and after human embodiment (Cebes's major concern), while the Recollection Argument focuses on establishing the intellectual capacity of the soul in its disembodied state (Cebes's minor concern). A basic sketch of the Recollection Argument will serve our purposes:

1. Recollection of an already known object can be occasioned by things that are dissimilar. (E.g. a lover can remember the beloved upon seeing his lyre, 73d.)
2. There is such a thing as the Equal itself (74a).
3. We get the Equal itself in mind by seeing equal sticks and stones (74b).
4. But the things we see could not be the Equal itself because these very things also appear unequal and the Equal itself never appears so (74c).
5. So the equal sticks and stones remind one of the Equal itself (74c– d).
6. We need this kind of recollection in every case where we recognize that equal sticks and stones are equal but deficiently so (74d).
7. Therefore, "We must possess knowledge of the Equal before that time when we first saw the equal objects and realized that all these objects strive to be like the Equal but are deficient in this" (74e–75a).
8. This kind of experience is inherent to sense perception, so we must have gained knowledge of the Equal itself before we ever began to have sense perception of equal objects (75b).
9. We began to have sense perception right at birth (75b).
10. Therefore, "we must have acquired the knowledge of the Equal before this" (75c).
11. This conclusion generalizes for all the Forms (e.g. the Greater, the Smaller, the Beautiful, the Good, the Just, and the Pious).

While this argument does not say anything directly about the condition of the soul after death, it does say much about the possibility of an intelligent mode of being for us apart from human embodiment. If we knew the Forms before we were born, we should be able to know them again after we die.

We see this point especially in the way that Socrates sums up the conclusion of the Recollection Argument:

When did our souls acquire knowledge of [the Forms]? Certainly not since we were born as men (*ἄνθρωποι γεγόναμεν*)...So then, Simmias, our souls also existed apart from the body before they took on human

form, and they had intelligence (*καὶ φρόνησιν εἶχον*). (76c)

The last words of the Recollection Argument are important because Socrates uses the same phrase that Cebes uses to express his concern (*φρόνησιν ἔχειν*). If we grant its premises, the Recollection Argument certainly establishes the existence of the soul before birth—one must exist in order to learn—but the real focus of the argument rests on the intelligent nature of the soul’s disembodied state: it had knowledge of the Forms. This recalls the description of *φρόνησις* as a “state” (*πάθημα*) of the soul that has come to be “alone by itself” (*αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτήν*) apprehending the Forms (79d).<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, Socrates switches casually from talk about “we” throughout the main body of the argument to “our souls” here at the conclusion. More than the other three arguments, the Recollection Argument aims at the individual thinking person, and this makes sense given that its subject matter is memory. When I remember something, I never remember the prior experiences of another mind. The knowledge I recall is always the knowledge *I* previously learned.<sup>21</sup> In our present human life, Socrates grounds our recognition that these particular sticks are equal in knowledge of the Equal itself prior to human life (74e–75c). Because we could not have gained this knowledge at any time during our human embodiment, we must have gained it before *we* entered “this human shape.” Although we could not have been human then, it must be *us* in some meaningful sense both before and after because this line of thought will not work if the mind that knew the Equal were a different mind from the one that recalls the Equal now. Here as elsewhere, therefore, we should interpret as interchangeable talk about “our souls” before birth and talk about “us” before birth—both refer to the intelligent beings that once had

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20. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 61.

21. *Ibid.*, 65.



knowledge of the Forms before becoming human and now continue to carry that knowledge in individual, personal memory.<sup>22</sup>

We face a twist, however, because each person remembers the same thing: the Equal and its like, which must be both objective and universal.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the kind of memory under examination is not the episodic and idiosyncratic kind that becomes so important for Locke's theory of personal identity.<sup>24</sup> We have nothing—in this passage at any rate—that would *qualitatively* differentiate one person from another, but it does not follow from this that Cebes and Socrates are *numerically* identical before birth. We should be careful, therefore, not to confuse two distinct issues. On the one hand, we have “person” in the sense of “personality,” the source of unique flair and genius, so beloved by Romantic thinkers like Rousseau or von Humboldt. On the other hand, we have “person” in the sense of “individual substance of a rational nature,” a numerically singular mind capable of knowledge. The memory at issue in the Recollection Argument is “impersonal” in the first sense, but it need not be in the second.<sup>25</sup> This gives us further insight into the way that

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22. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 27, speaks of the “continuity of self” before and after incarnation through “the unifying thread of memory.” He also points out, 26–27, that this memory must be individual and that this seems to be the whole point of bringing in the Recollection Argument. For a helpful discussion connecting the *Phaedo* with the role that continuity of memory plays in the *Theaetetus* see McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 274–76

23. McCabe, 265.

24. See Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 9. and Sorabji, *Self*, 100.

25. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo*, 75: “In default of recollection of personal experience it is difficult to see how there can be that consciousness of identity preserved through a series of incarnations without which one cannot properly speak of individual immortality.” Both Hackforth and Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 36, think that *personal* immortality requires *idiosyncratic* continuity of memory, but they do not consider the distinction I draw here. In my view, McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 265–66, and Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 10, 23, 193, 279, get this right. Gerson, 279: “A multitude of disembodied knowers, however, each knowing the same things, does not in principle seem to be a contradiction.”

Socrates is implicitly conceiving the individual self. If (i) the Socrates who now remembers is the same person as the Socrates who formerly knew before birth and (ii) there is nothing qualitatively unique about this connection, then personal identity must not depend on the idiosyncratic features of embodied life. Instead, personal identity would depend on a numerically singular and in at some level continuous act of apprehending the Equal and its like because this act is all that links Socrates then and Socrates now.<sup>26</sup>

It is important that the recollection argument establishes this individual and intelligent nature of the soul's disembodied state because the other arguments only lightly touch on this. The other arguments instead focus on different issues such as the full immortality of the soul over a merely long-lasting survival. Taken apart from the Recollection Argument, therefore, we may suspect that these arguments are discussing something other than the individual, intelligent person when they discuss "the soul." We should read the arguments together, however, rather than apart. Taken in this way, the other arguments rely on the Recollection Argument to establish the individual, intelligent nature of the disembodied soul and continue to have this conception in view throughout. We see this conception surface again when Socrates summarizes Cebes's Second Objection:

You say it makes no difference whether [the soul] enters a body once or many times as far as the fear of each of us is concerned (*πρός γε*

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26. Although she does not bring her position to bear on this specific question, De Vogel, "The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought," 35, identifies two necessary presuppositions of the Greek philosophical view of personality which are congenial to this interpretation: "first, the *objective existence* of a supra-personal order of transcendental Being; second, the *individuality* of the strictly personal act of 'seeing' that supra-sensible Reality." Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 77: "If the remnants of embodied life are to be excluded from the essential self, the identity of the person as a knower comes more sharply into focus. The sole connecting link between the pre-embodied person and the embodied person is the knowledge acquired in the former state."

τὸ ἕκαστον ἡμῶν φοβεῖσθαι), for it is natural for a man who is no fool to be afraid, if he does not know and cannot prove that the soul is immortal. (95d)

Although, the dialogue has shifted to a concern for full-blown immortality rather than temporary survival after death, the concern still motivating the discussion is the “fear of each of us” —our old friend from Chapter 2: ἡμῶν ἕκαστος. Establishing temporary survival is not enough to handle the party’s fear for *Socrates*.

Again, Socrates simply speaks of “the soul” throughout the Opposites Argument, and the examples of snow and fire certainly encourage us to think about generic, homogeneous stuff, but he summarizes the conclusion of the argument thus:

Therefore the soul, Cebes, he said, is most certainly deathless and indestructible and our souls will really dwell in the underworld. (106e–107a)

Notice, then, how Socrates switches from “the soul” in the singular to “our souls” in the plural. All along, the abstract discussion about “the soul” has direct implications for Socrates and his friends. After all, “not even a comic poet,” Socrates says, “could say that I am babbling and discussing things that do not concern me” (70c).<sup>27</sup>

### 3. The Myth of the *Gorgias*

Although the account at the end of the *Gorgias* bears all the features of a myth, Socrates calls it “a very fine account (μάλα καλοῦ λόγου)” as opposed to a “mere

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27. Ahrens Dorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*, 87–88, is therefore unjustified in drawing a hard distinction between talk of “the soul” and “our souls” in the Cyclical Argument. Sorabji, *Self*, 115, is also incorrect to say “As regards soul, Plato himself speaks as if all soul is one, indivisible except amongst bodies.” See Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 187, for the absurdity of this interpretation of the *Phaedo*.

tale (*μῦθον*),” something he will relate “as true (*ὡς ἀληθῆ*)” (523a).<sup>28</sup> He tells the story of a divine law “concerning human beings” that determines where they go after death: the just and pious to the Isles of the Blessed and the unjust and godless to the “prison of payment and retribution” (523b). While there is nothing wrong with this law itself, there was a problem with its administration during Chronus’s time: Living judges judged living men (523b). This meant that the judges were inaccurately determining who was just and who was unjust, and hence, they sent people to the wrong places. Zeus corrects this injustice by making three important changes: (i) the judgment takes place after death without the individual knowing when it is coming, (ii) both judges and judged are stripped naked, and (iii) the judgment is given to three of Zeus’s trusted sons, with the third being an arbiter in difficult cases.<sup>29</sup> This story is important for our purposes because its internal logic requires that we identify the soul after death with the real person, the same morally responsible agent who once lived as a human being.<sup>30</sup>

The most important of these changes for the argument in the *Gorgias* is (ii). According to Zeus, the judgments go awry because the judges are apt to countenance illegitimate and extraneous things in their judgments:

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28. All translations from the *Gorgias* are from Donald J. Zeyl.

29. Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 28.

30. See Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 26. and Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 97. In discussing this myth, Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 28–31, draws a systematic distinction between the soul inhabiting a particular human being and the “embodied person.” Throughout, he assumes that personal names like “Socrates” refer to the “embodied person,” and therefore invents the device “S(Socrates)” to refer to the soul of Socrates which may be identical with S(Nietzsche). While Inwood is correct to distinguish soul from embodied *organism*, I do not think anything from the *Gorgias* myth warrants the identification of the person Socrates with that organism. All the evidence points the other way: we should identify the person Socrates—or the person Rhadamanthus, whose naked soul is named—with the soul and *not* with their embodied career. The point about names aside, however, Inwood does seem to think, 31–32, that the soul being judged must be conceived as the same “I” throughout its existence.

The cases are being badly decided at this time because those being judged are judged fully dressed. They're being judged while they're still alive. Many ...whose souls are wicked are dressed in handsome bodies, good stock, and wealth, and when the judgment takes place they have many witnesses appear to testify that they have lived just lives. Now the judges are awestruck by these things and pass judgment at a time when they themselves are fully dressed, too, having put their eyes and ears and their whole bodies up as screens in front of their souls. All these things, their own clothing and that of those being judged, have proved to be obstructive to them. (523c–d)

The metaphor of being dressed and being naked proves particularly apt. When someone puts on clothing, the clothing becomes a partial screen between the naked body and others observing. Furthermore, clothing can serve to disguise by presenting to the world an appearance that does not faithfully indicate what lies beneath. Wolves may sneak in by wearing sheep's clothing. Ultimately, however, this hiding and disguising layer turns out to be extraneous decoration, dispensable in the end without fundamentally altering the body beneath.

This metaphor is helpful for our purposes because it encourages us to think carefully about those features of human beings that are only the outer layer—mere decoration or disguise—around the true self. Central to the myth is the idea that justice requires that judges base their judgments only on the features of the true self and not on these extraneous decorations.<sup>31</sup> Having looked at the *Phaedo*, we may already guess that the body with its “eyes and ears” is mere clothing around the soul. This myth, however, adds more to our list of things that we may conventionally take to be the real person but that, upon inspection, turn out to be mere decoration. Zeus lists four things: (i) handsome bodies, (ii) good stock, (iii) wealth, and (iv) good reputation. We should pause for a moment to consider (ii)–(iv) be-

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31. See Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford University Press, 1979) notes to 523c. Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 28: “What is intrinsic to the person up for judgment is the person’s moral value alone.”

cause they point to a richer notion of the real self than a simple dichotomy between body and soul may suggest. All three of these items play a role in determining the social identity and status of the individual. An aristocrat in Athens may cherish his identity as a particular son of such and such august ancestors, who owns such and such fertile lands, and holds honor and respect with such and such powerful men. Conventionally these items may exhaustively define *who one is*, the idiosyncratic contents of one's identity as a person that establishes one's value and station relative to others. Zeus, by contrast, requires that judges and judged discard all these things like an old garment, so that what lies *underneath* all this may serve as the basis of just judgment.

As we guessed, the true identity of the individual beneath the garment turns out to be the soul:

They must be judged when they're stripped naked of all these things, for they should be judged when they're dead. The judge, too, should be naked, and dead, and with only his soul he should study only the soul of each person immediately upon his death (*ἀπὸ τῆ τῆ ψυχῆ ἀπὸ τῆν τῆν ψυχῆν θεωροῦντα ἐξαίφνης ἀποθανόντος ἐκάστου*), when he's isolated from all his kinsmen and has left behind on earth all that adornment, so that the judgment may be a just one. (523e)<sup>32</sup>

We may notice right away that the language and assumptions of this passage confirm the observation from the last chapter that Socrates tends to work with the background assumption that the soul and the self are identical, and hence moves easily and silently between the two ways of speaking. When the dead *individual* is stripped naked of all extraneous adornment, this means that only his *soul* is left.

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32. Compare the language we examined in Chapter 2 from the *Alcibiades* (130d) where Socrates says that in conversation, "one soul uses words to address another soul (*τῆ ψυχῆ πρὸς τῆν ψυχῆν*)."<sup>32</sup> For commentary on this connection see E. R. Dodds (Oxford, 1959) *ad loc.*

We see a further correspondence with the material in the *Phaedo* when Socrates defines death on the basis of “these accounts”:

Death, I think, is actually nothing but the separation of two things from each other, the soul and the body (δυσὼν πραγμάτων διάλυσις, τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος, ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων). So, after they’ve separated, each of them stays in a condition not much worse than what it was in when the person was alive. (524b)

Again, this way of understanding death requires a view of the soul as something substantial and capable of continued existence apart from the body rather than something epiphenomenal or merely supervenient upon a physical base.<sup>33</sup>

This theoretical aside proves important for the details that come next in the myth. Because both soul and body are substantial entities that can exist apart from one another after they separate, they also both continue to possess characteristics or “marks” (ἔνδηλα) after death (524b–c). For instance, if a man earns floggings in life, the scars on the back of his corpse will continue to bear witness to this past for some time after death. Socrates twice divides the kinds of characteristics that remain on the body after death into two categories: those that the body possesses by nature (φύσει) and those that it acquires because of what happens to it (τροφῆ, 524b). This rather mundane description of corpses finds a more interesting mirror image in Socrates’s description of souls:

All that’s in the soul is evident after it has been stripped naked of the body, both things that are natural to it and things that have happened to it, things that the person came to have in his soul as a result of his pursuit of each objective (τά τε τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὰ παθήματα ἃ διὰ τὴν ἐπιτήδευσιν ἐκάστου πράγματος ἔσχεν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος). (524d)

The just judgment of the naked individual, therefore, is based upon all that is evident in the soul after everything extraneous has been removed. These character-

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33. See Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 21, n. 2, and Irwin, *Plato* note to 254b.

istics fall into two kinds: (i) things that are natural to the soul, and (ii) things that come to exist in the soul on the basis of the individual's actions.<sup>34</sup> It seems, therefore, that we have an operative notion of the naked individual distinct from and in addition to the ideal soul of the previous chapter. The concept of the ideal soul involves only those characteristics of the soul that belong to it according to its own "true nature," that is, characteristics of type (i). Here, however, the naked individual possesses other characteristics, type (ii), even after everything extraneous has been stripped away, and it does not seem that these characteristics necessarily belong to a lingering association with the body as with the heavy souls of the *Phaedo*.<sup>35</sup> The naked individual carries the lasting consequences of his own actions and passions even after the covering of this life falls away, and these marks indicate both vices and virtues rather than corruptions of the soul only. Here, the marks of type (ii) do not always seem to be *alien* to the soul's own true nature but rather merely *added* to it.

On the basis of these two kinds of characteristic the judges determine the fate of each individual and must be blind to all those extraneous details that only count as so much clothing. Socrates has a curious way, however, of expressing this blindness:

So when they arrive before their judge—the people from Asia before Rhadamanthus—Rhadamanthus brings them to a halt and studies each person's soul without knowing whose it is (ὁ Ῥαδάμανθους ἐκείνους ἐπιστήσας θεᾶται ἐκάστου τὴν ψυχὴν, οὐκ εἰδὼς ὅτου ἐστίν). He's often gotten hold of the Great King, or some other king or potentate, and noticed that there's nothing sound in his soul but that it's been thoroughly whipped and covered with scars, the results of acts of perjury and of injustice, things that each of his actions has stamped upon

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34. For the perhaps difficult connection here between actions as causes of character and actions as effects of character see Irwin, note to 525c.

35. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 52, is too quick, therefore, to simply identify the alterations in the soul and the soul's association with the body.



his soul (*ἡ ἐκάστη ἢ πράξις αὐτοῦ ἐξωμόρξατο εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν*). (524d–525a)

Rhadamanthus does not know “who it is” that he has before him. This identity, this “who it is,” corresponds to the individual being “the Great King” or “some other king or potentate,” in other words, an identity of power or status in this life.

A similar usage occurs on the next page:

So as I was saying, when Rhadamanthus the judge gets hold of someone [wicked] like that, he doesn’t know a thing about him, neither who he is nor who his people are, except that he’s somebody wicked (*ἄλλο μὲν περὶ αὐτοῦ οὐκ οἶδεν οὐδέν, οὔθ’ ὅστις οὔθ’ ὄντωνων, ὅτι δὲ πονηρός τις*). (526b–c)

Here, Socrates pairs “who it is” with the a plural “who” to which the individual belongs, apparently his family or tribe. In other words, “who it is” expresses a social and conventional identity, everything expressed earlier by handsome bodies, good stock, wealth, and favorable testimony. In English, we may approximate this meaning of *ὅστις* by imagining an indignant celebrity that has been rudely served at the post office. We can imagine such a celebrity protesting, “don’t you know *who I am?*” This sense of identity stands in contrast to another sense of identity that the judge sees when the individual is stripped naked. Rhadamanthus sees only that the individual is “somebody wicked (*πονηρός τις*).” When the judge looks at the naked individual he sees the character of the soul taken by itself without trappings, a character established both by the nature of the soul and those events that make an impress upon it.

We have, therefore, an interesting notion of the true self. On the one hand, the real character of the naked individual does not include much of what people ordinarily take to be personal identity. Nearly all of what goes for one’s “personality” or “identity” belongs to the “who it is” that Rhadamanthus is not allowed to see. On the other hand, the naked individual does retain individuating features

that distinguish one soul from another.<sup>36</sup> On the basis of these real distinctions between naked individuals, some travel down one road in the meadow of judgment and others down the other. It seems to me that this observation applies more generally to understanding the ideas of personhood and self in the Platonic dialogues. On the one hand, we should not read into the dialogues a post-Lockean conception of personal identity formed on the basis of social and idiosyncratic psychological factors like social relationships and continuity of memory. As a point in case, we do not find in the dialogues a modern fascination with the absolute uniqueness of persons. On the other hand, we should not overreact against this contrast and deny that there is *any* operative notion of individual personhood or *any* distinctions between disembodied souls.

This points to another case where we do not find something in the dialogues, but should be careful to avoid an overreaction: free will. The marks that stamp the soul are described in terms of both actions and passions (524b–d, 525a); both what I do and what is done to me potentially hold consequences for the character of my soul after death. This introduces the notion that—in some small part—the individual plays a role in shaping the character of soul that he will one day present to the judges. On the one hand Zeus rules out judgments based on entirely extraneous factors, but on the other hand he also rules out judgments based on the given nature of the soul alone. This, of course, is a far cry from the claim that the individual's unconstrained free choices are the sole basis for his moral worth, but this should not cause us to overlook the rich picture of responsibility that does emerge from this and many other ancient texts.<sup>37</sup>

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36. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 77: "If rewards and punishments for embodied deeds are to make any sense, there must be something more to disembodied life than what would be had without embodiment."

37. See Inwood, "Plato's Eschatological Myths," 44, for an enumeration of the ways that the freedom souls exhibit in the myths falls short of what he con-

#### 4. The Myth of the *Phaedo*

The idea that an individual has some influence over his own postmortem fate comes up again in the myth of the *Phaedo*. We can divide the whole myth into three main sections. The first gives some general remarks on the fate of souls being led by guides after death (107d–108c). The second gives a long aside on the true nature of the earth, complete with a description of the various channels that run in and out of Tartarus (108c–113c). The third relies upon this portrayal of the earth's structure to give further details on the journeys of the dead (113d–115a). At the end of the myth, Socrates tells us what he hopes to conclude on the basis of it. As in the myth of the *Gorgias*, the knowledge that our decisions now will impact our fate after death ought to motivate us to lead more virtuous lives:

Because of the things we have enunciated, Simmias, one must make every effort to share in virtue and wisdom in one's life, for the reward is beautiful and the hope is great. (114c)

Such a conclusion to the myth would not be possible if making "every effort" had no effect upon the fate of a person's soul. Further, the ideas of both "reward" and "hope" rely upon the assumption that we cannot pull apart the self making the effort now and the soul that enjoys the outcome then. If *my soul* and *me* were separable, distinct entities, an appeal to the future benefit of *my soul* would scarcely motivate *me* to do anything at all.<sup>38</sup>

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siders "genuinely free choice." See also Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy*, 445–46, for a discussion of "radical" freedom, characteristic of modern theories, as opposed to the kind of freedom and responsibility we see in ancient authors. For discussion of the absence of free will from both Plato and Aristotle see Frede, *A Free Will*, 20.

38. See Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo*, 171, and Hall, "Ψυχή as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato," 64, 66. Burger, *The Phaedo*, 188, recognizes the connection between the continued existence of the soul and a motivation to care for the *ψυχή* now. She does not, however, think that we *need* such a motivation.

Turning to the very beginning of the myth we notice the same assumption working in the opposite case of the wicked:

If death were escape from everything, it would be a great boon to the wicked to get rid of the body and of their wickedness together with their soul. But now that the soul appears to be immortal, there is no escape from evil or salvation for it except by becoming as good and wise as possible, for the soul goes to the underworld possessing nothing but its education and upbringing, which are said to bring the greatest benefit or harm to the dead right at the beginning of the journey yonder. (107c–d)

The hypothesis that Socrates rejects, “if death were escape from everything,” turns on the destruction of both body and soul. This would turn out wonderfully for the wicked because they can “get rid” of both their body and soul and hence escape any lasting consequences for their wickedness by simply slipping into nonexistence. This logic only works if the destruction of the wicked person’s *soul* means that there is no longer any wicked *person* to suffer the consequences. Socrates rejects this hypothesis, however, in favor of the idea that we cannot escape the condition of our souls because those souls are immortal. Although he does not spell it out, his background assumption again seems to be that the soul simply *is* the self. I should act in the long-term interests of my soul because I *am* that soul.<sup>39</sup>

As in the myth of the *Gorgias*, we can infer that there are many numerically distinct individual souls after death because there are diverse fates that these souls suffer.<sup>40</sup> The logic of the myth requires that we do not all merge into a single Soul, whether that single Soul is characterized as the World Soul of the *Timaeus* or the Hypostasis Soul of Plotinus. In the first part of the myth, Socrates draws a distinc-

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39. Long *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 54: “In these [Platonic myths] the postmortem *psyche* is no senseless ghost. It is the bodiless but mentally and morally complete survivor of the previously embodied person.”

40. For a careful analysis of these diverse fates see Bluck, “The Phaedrus and Reincarnation,” 158–64.

tion between those “well-ordered and wise” souls that follow their guide easily and have a “familiarity” with their surroundings, and those souls that are “passionately attached to the body” and hence hover around the visible world for quite some time (108a).

Although there are many interesting details in Socrates’s account of the earth we may, for our present purposes, skip over much of it. A few points, however, require comment. First, the structure of the myth relies on an analogy: as the realm of water (under the sea) is to the realm of air (our world), so the realm of air is to the realm of aether above the air (109e–110a). Second, purity is the most important feature of this analogy. Just as the world of our ordinary experience is vastly more pure and lucid compared to the murky depths beneath the sea, so the realm of aether above the air is to ours. Third, even the realm of aether is bodily, visible, and inhabited by humans (*ἀνθρώπους*, 111a). Thus, it would be wrong to think of the realm of aether as the transcendent, invisible, non-spatial, and divine realm of the Forms. The whole series, water–air–aether, belongs instead to the mortal, visible, and human side of the table of opposites in the Kinship Argument, although the ethereal beings are presumably as good as visible nature gets.

This last detail proves important because Socrates, after assigning different regions as fates for different souls, says, “those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live in the future altogether without a body.” This ultimately places such souls completely outside the framework of the myth, including rebirth as ethereal “humans.” All that he says about such souls is that “they make their way to even more beautiful dwelling places which it is hard to describe clearly, nor do we now have the time to do so.” Hence, the entire depiction of death and rebirth into different kinds of bodies leaves out the souls of those sufficiently purified by philosophy. The best fate included in the myth itself is that of those who “are

deemed to have lived an extremely pious life” and go on to rebirth in the realm of aether on the surface of the earth (114c). The way that Socrates simply leaves out a description of the absolutely ideal fate mirrors the way that he alludes to but declines to describe in detail the true nature of the soul in several other dialogues.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, we should say something about the notion of rebirth present in the myth. This will receive fuller treatment in the *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, but we find it already in the *Phaedo*.<sup>42</sup> The fates of various souls differ in terms of where they go, how long they stay, and whether or not they will be reborn.

[The Acheron] flows through many other deserted regions and further underground makes its way to the Acherusian lake to which the souls of the majority come after death and, after remaining there for a certain appointed time, longer for some, shorter for others, they are sent back to birth as living creatures (πάλιw ἐκπέμπονται εἰς τὰς τῶν ζώων γενέσεις). (113a)

The term “living creatures” (τά ζῶα) implies that rebirth is not limited to rebirth as humans. Indeed, earlier in the dialogue, Socrates says that souls are reborn into bodies because of their longing for the physical (τοῦ σωματοειδοῦς), and they are then “bound to such characters as they have practiced in their life” (81e). He enumerates a few possibilities: first, the gluttonous and drunk become donkeys or similar animals; second, the unjust and tyrannous become wolves, hawks, and kites; and third, those who have practiced “popular and social virtue” but “without philosophy or understanding” become gregarious animals such as bees, wasps, ants, or “the same kind of human group (ταυτόν γε πάλιw τὸ ἀνθρώπων γένος).” Once again, therefore, we have the idea that diverse lives lead to diverse individual fates and the idea that this should motivate the pursuit of a philosophical life (82a–b, see

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41. *Alcibiades* 130c–d, *Republic* X, 611a–612a, *Phaedrus* 246a.

42. E. R. Dodds finds the doctrine of reincarnation implicit as early as the myth of the *Gorgias* (see his commentary on the *Gorgias* 525b).

also the allotment of fates in the myth at 113d–114b).

Alongside this main ethical point, however, we also find the idea that the individual soul need not be human forever. Together with the assumption that the self and the soul are identical this implies that the essence of the self is not ultimately identical to the essence of a human being. This implication holds historical importance because it begins to create a conceptual gap between the questions “What sort of thing am *I* most fundamentally?” and “What does it mean to be a human being?” even though the latter question continues to hold philosophical and existential interest for me now. To see what I mean by this gap, consider a blacksmith named Thomas as an example. Thomas knows that he is a blacksmith now and is likely to remain so for some time. He therefore holds questions like “What does it mean to be a blacksmith?” or “What makes a good blacksmith?” to be practically important—indispensable even—in order for him to go about living his life. Nevertheless, he also knows that he need not always be a blacksmith. He may come into a great inheritance or conversely lose his shop to war and famine. On the one hand he could one day become a land-owning noble and on the other a pauper. Hence, the question “What sort of being is *Thomas*, who remains the same through these changes in career?” has a different weight and character from the questions about blacksmiths he was asking before. Something similar to this separation opens up when we encounter the thought that we may one day live the life of a donkey, a hawk, or a being in the realm of aether on the surface of the earth. What is the operative metaphysical conception of Thomas—what sort of entity is he exactly—when we can even imagine, much less seriously believe, that *Thomas* may turn into a donkey in one thousand years?<sup>43</sup>

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43. See the suggestion by Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem, *Plato's Phaedo*, 6, 20, that Socrates is using ideas like this to wean his friends away from an undue attachment to the individual human being that must inevitably die. For the conceptual

## 5. The Myth of Er

As in both the *Phaedo* and the *Gorgias*, Socrates follows the long argument of the *Republic* with a vivid description of our fate after death. He frames this description as the tale of a man named Er who comes back from the dead after ten days to tell what he has seen. As in the other myths, Socrates describes a judgment of souls for the lives they have led, whether they have been just or unjust, and a corresponding allotment of fates. Right away, we get the sense that the details of the story are meant to paint an imaginative picture rather than set out a literal philosophical account because Socrates describes the disembodied souls as having signs attached to either their “chest” or their “back” as they are judged (614b–c).<sup>44</sup> As in the *Phaedo*, Socrates describes a cyclical process of birth, death, and rebirth, with the possibility that an individual soul currently embodied in a human life may one day occupy a lower animal life instead (620a–d). The myth of Er adds to the earlier myths, however, an emphasis on the individual’s responsibility for the life chosen and hence for the soul’s fate in judgment.

Er observes a gathering of souls choosing their upcoming lives just before another round of incarnation. The souls are presented with a large number of “mod-  
distinction between person and human being that metempsychosis involves see Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 53, 237–38. Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 37, thinks that the possibility of non-human incarnations poses a “serious problem” for the theory of metempsychosis because Plato makes reason out to be the “core” of human souls but turns around and says that these souls may just as easily animate irrational forms of life. I do not think, however, that a temporary suppression of a soul’s central faculty is as threatening to the general picture as Inwood makes it out to be (we do sleep after all). As we will see in the myth of the *Phaedrus* below, Socrates himself has something to say on the matter.

44. Inwood, 31, notes how difficult it is to speak about souls without using language that suggests some kind of bodily existence. He suggests that this is one good reason why Plato frequently switches to myth when he discusses disembodied souls.



els” or “patterns” (*παραδείγματα*) that depict various “lives” (*βίοι*; 617e–618b). The souls are given lots that establish the order in which they choose, but the large number of models affords good options even for the last soul (619b).<sup>45</sup>

Next, a messenger comes to the souls on behalf of Lachesis to announce how all this will work:

Ephemeral souls, this is the beginning of another cycle that will end in death. Your daemon or guardian spirit will not be assigned to you by lot (*οὐχ ὑμᾶς δαίμων λήξεται*); you will choose him (*ἀλλ’ ὑμεῖς δαίμονα αἰρήσεσθε*). The one who has the first lot will be the first to choose a life to which he will then be bound by necessity (*πρῶτος δ’ ὁ λαχὼν πρῶτος αἰρείσθω βίον ᾧ συνέσται ἐξ ἀνάγκης*). Virtue knows no master; each will possess it to a greater or less degree, depending on whether he values or disdains it. The responsibility lies with the one who makes the choice; the god has none (*αἰτία ἐλομένον: θεὸς ἀναίτιος*). (617d–e)

One motive for this complex arrangement seems to be the typically Greek sense that the stories of our lives follow an inevitable chain of cause and effect once started—as Oedipus illustrates all too painfully. Another motive which stands in tension with the first, however, seems to be Socrates’s desire to remove from the gods all responsibility for our folly.<sup>46</sup> If the course of my life is inevitable while I am in the middle of it but the gods did not dictate that I should live this way, then I must locate a root cause or explanation (*αἰτία*) outside the stream of events in this life. Within the myth itself this *αἰτία* lies with a primitive act of selection that one

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45. Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 129, sees this whole arrangement as “ludicrous.” He seems, however, to be reading the whole myth far more literally than Socrates’s tone suggests.

46. Robinson, 146, identifies this motive and connects it with a similar passage in *Laws* X 904c where responsibility is located in individual souls rather than the creator. In the *Gorgias* and the *Laws*, of course, we do not get the contrasting sense that our lives are inevitable once started as these myths locate responsibility in choices made *within* a life. Sorabji, *Self*, 152, notices that responsibility for the ultimate shape of our lives is being located in our own choice and remarks on the significance of this passage for the rest of the Platonist tradition. See also Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 42.

makes before one is born.<sup>47</sup> Whether or not we (or Socrates for that matter) take this idea seriously as a literal event, understanding the myth requires that we at least imagine the individual soul who chooses as something logically distinct from the life that is chosen.

The notion of “life” (*βίος*) in play comes close to what we would call a “career” in English. It begins at birth, ends at death, and includes all those items that one puts on a *curriculum vitae*. Some of the models include “tyrannies,” both those that last for the whole life and those that end “halfway through in poverty, exile, and beggary.” Some models include fame on account of physical beauty, athletic prowess, or noble birth. Some models include wealth, poverty, sickness, or health. The choice of details here, especially the emphasis on tyranny as a kind of life, resembles closely the kinds of details that we called one’s “idiosyncratic personality” in discussing the myth of the *Gorgias*, the “who it is” that Rhadamanthus is not allowed to see. Socrates tells us, however, that “the arrangement of the soul was not included in the model (*ψυχῆς δὲ τάξις οὐκ ἐνεῖναι*, 618b).” The reason he cites is that the choice of model itself alters the arrangement (*τάξις*) of the soul doing the choosing.<sup>48</sup> Apart, therefore, from the narrative details of an individual’s life that constitute a “personality” or “career” we find a soul that is explanatorily prior to those details in the way that a chooser is explanatorily prior to a thing chosen and that is itself characterized by a *τάξις*.

The effect of the choice upon the choosing soul’s arrangement (*τάξις*) resembles closely the scars left upon the soul in the myth of the *Gorgias*. There we noticed

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47. Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 129, finds this solution entirely dissatisfying: “At a stroke Plato seems to have solved the problem of free will by placing in another life the entire choice of this one.”

48. Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 42, suggests that the *τάξις* is left out because it would make the choice all too easy and would obviate the need to study the effects of each kind of life on the soul as Socrates urges at 618d.

a distinction between features of the soul that are inherent to the nature of being a soul and features that an individual soul acquires because of both what it does and what is done to it. Here in the *Republic*, Socrates tells us that the wise man will know “all the things that are either naturally part of the soul or are acquired (πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν φύσει περὶ ψυχῆν ὄντων καὶ τῶν ἐπικτήτων)” (618d). From our analysis of the *Phaedo*, we distinguished the ideal soul from the polluted soul. The former signifies the soul according to its own true nature while the latter signifies the soul in its association with or allegiance to the body. These considerations from the *Gorgias* and *Republic* myths, however, complicate our picture. In both the *Gorgias* and *Republic*, the features that the soul acquires may be the marks of bad decisions but they may also be the virtues gained by good ones, especially philosophical education. This yields a three-part rather than a two-part distinction. First we have the notion of the ideal soul, that is, the soul *qua* soul, presumably identical for everyone. Second we add the idea of the individual soul in so far as it acquires a *τάξις*, for good or ill, according to its choices, actions, and passions. Third we have the idea of a purely embodied identity, complete with such things as good looks, noble birth, or political power.

All three of these concepts have some claim to be called the self, but the third clearly drops away in the myths as something extraneous to one’s true identity. This category constitutes the clothes that must be stripped off in contrast to the naked soul or the model to be chosen in contrast to the soul that chooses. The first and second, however, remain. The myths themselves do not, of course, state explicitly that either is the *true* self as opposed to the other. This is important to note, however, because the second conception allows for qualitative distinctions between individuals, while the first does not, making possible the just allotment of diverse fates on the basis of the former but not the latter. If the claim “the im-

mortal soul is what each of us really is” means that the true self is an ideal soul considered only *qua* soul, then it will turn out that each of us is qualitatively (if not numerically) identical. If, however, the operative notion of “immortal soul” includes an acquired *τάξις*, then qualitative distinctions between one true self and another become possible.

## 6. The Myth of the *Phaedrus*

Turning now to the *Phaedrus*, we notice right away that the Charioteer Myth is packed with material on selfhood. In this section, I will focus on what the myth tells us about individual identity before birth and after death. In Chapter Four I will address the issue of disembodied tripartition that seems to be the force of the chariot image. In Chapter Five I will address the relationship between the intellect and the Forms that constitutes the very pinnacle of the soul’s journey. And in Chapter Six I will address the relationship between our souls and the gods.

At the outset we should note the hesitation that Socrates expresses in his account that reflects closely his hesitation elsewhere (especially *Alcibiades* 130c–d, *Republic* X, 611a–612a):

Now here is what we must say about its [the soul’s] structure (*περὶ δὲ τῆς ιδέας ἀντῆς*). To describe what the soul actually is (*οἶον μὲν ἐστὶ*) would require a very long account (*μακρᾶς διηγήσεως*), altogether a task for a god in every way; but to say what it is like (*ὅψ δὲ ἔοικεν*) is humanly possible and takes less time. (246a)

It is remarkable that Socrates consistently declines to give a precise account of the soul’s nature. I am persuaded that we do not in fact find this “very long account” explicitly stated anywhere in the Platonic corpus.<sup>49</sup> Instead, we find here a collection

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49. See Miller, “A More ‘Exact Grasp’ of the Soul?”

of mythic images that are more or less consistent with the conception of selfhood that we have developed so far.

Before the Charioteer Myth begins, Socrates presents a dense argument for the immortality of the soul (245c–e). He leads off with the assertion *ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος*, which Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff translate as “every soul is immortal.” *Ψυχὴ πᾶσα*, however, is ambiguous between “every soul” and “all soul” and we must look to the context to determine whether Socrates is talking about each individual soul or a the class of souls considered only as a whole.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to these two ordinary ways of taking *ψυχὴ πᾶσα*, Richard Bett points out that we may be tempted by a third: that there is a single soul that Socrates has in mind.<sup>51</sup> Part of the argument that immediately follows relies on the idea that if soul ever ceased its motion, “all heaven and everything that has been started up<sup>52</sup> would collapse, come to a stop and never have cause to start moving again” (245e). This would be a strange insertion if Socrates were talking only about one of our souls. Why should it matter whether the soul of Cebes perishes so long as *some* cosmic soul remained to push the heavens along? This assertion would make ready sense, however, if Socrates had in mind throughout the argument the immortality of World Soul alone.

The phrase *ψυχὴ πᾶσα* comes up again a page later at 246b where we read, “All soul (*ψυχὴ πᾶσα*) looks after all that lacks a soul (*παντὸς ἐπιμελεῖται τοῦ ἀψύχου*),”<sup>53</sup> and this is immediately followed by talk of patrolling “all of heaven” (*πάντα*

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50. Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 36, for example leaves the question undecided.

51. Bett, “Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the ‘Phaedrus,’” 11.

52. Nehamas and Woodruff read *πᾶσάν τε γένεσιν* rather than Burnet’s *πᾶσάν τε γῆν εἰς ἔν*. The difference does not matter for my argument.

53. Note that B reads *πᾶσα ἡ ψυχὴ* and T reads *ἡ ψυχὴ πᾶσα*, both of which would read “the whole soul.” Bett, “Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the ‘Phaedrus,’” n. 23, gives several good reasons for rejecting this minority reading.

οὐρανόν) and having “the entire universe” (πάντα τὸν κόσμον) as soul’s dominion. Again, this seems to suggest a single cosmic soul of which our individual souls are only aspects. On this reading, ψυχῇ πᾶσα might be a poetic way of saying “the Soul of the All” or “All-Soul” even though this would not be standard Greek.

Such a reading of the *Phaedrus* would be strange, however, since the overwhelming majority of the Palinode concerns itself with the diverse fates of individual souls, the distinctions between the souls of the gods and our souls, and the significance all this has for *our* lives right now. Hence, Bett rightly rejects this reading:

We find no suggestion, either in the proof of immortality or in the succeeding myth, that all our souls are ultimately aspects of the same thing, or that our ultimate goal, in striving to escape from the cycle of rebirth, is reabsorption in some larger unity. On the contrary, I would say, it is the individuality of our souls, the differences between them, that is emphasised in the myth.<sup>54</sup>

As an alternative, Bett suggests that Socrates uses ψυχῇ throughout as a mass noun, like “water” or “electricity,” referring to an immaterial kind of stuff of which individual souls consist.<sup>55</sup> For my part, I think Bett is on the right track, but we do not need to go so far as saddling Socrates with a general metaphysical distinction between stuffs and things. Instead, the passage seems to make perfect sense if we read

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Throughout the entire Palinode, Socrates primarily speaks of ψυχῇ in the singular without the article.

54. *Ibid.*, 12.

55. Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 111, argues that ψυχῇ πᾶσα should be translated as “soul in all its forms”; Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus* (Yale University Press, 1986), 84, puts the point nicely: “General truths about all individuals can be stated without entailing the existence of separate entities over and above these individuals. The ‘all soul’ at 245c5 is thus a mass term.” Bett, “Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the ‘Phaedrus’,” 12–14; Similarly Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 136–37. Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 35–36, also raises this possibility.

ψυχή) πᾶσα as simply referring to soul in general in the way that older English writers use “all mankind” to refer to humanity in general. Consider the sentence, “All mankind has the whole earth for his habitation.” Having the whole earth for his habitation is certainly not true of any individual human, but it makes good sense without resorting either to a single cosmic World Human or to a single Human Stuff of which all individual humans consist.

If this interpretation is correct, what do we learn about the nature of soul in general? Socrates tells us that he is giving the “very essence and principle of a soul” (ψυχῆς οὐσία τε καὶ λόγος) and the “nature” (φύσις) of a soul when he describes it as “whatever moves itself” (τὸ αὐτὸ ἐαυτὸ κινῶν). And from this nature “it follows necessarily that soul should have neither birth nor death” (245e). This points to a link between soul and motion that we find also in the *Timaeus* and *Laws*, but that is more or less absent from *Phaedo* and *Republic*. Bett sees this as representing a fundamental change in the way that Plato is conceiving soul and immortality between the middle and the late dialogues.<sup>56</sup> Gerson is correct, however, to caution that the sense of self-motion both here and in the *Timaeus* and *Laws* need not be distinct from the understanding of soul as that which brings life in the *Phaedo*.<sup>57</sup>

For our concerns, we can see the correspondence between the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* come out most clearly when Socrates gives a description of the way that living bodies are animated by soul:

A soul that sheds its wings wanders until it lights on something solid, where it settles and takes on an earthly body, which then, owing to the power of this soul, seems to move itself (αὐτὸ αὐτὸ δοκοῦν κινεῖν διὰ τὴν ἐκείνης δύναμιν). The whole combination of soul and body is called a living thing (ζῶον τὸ σύμπαν ἐκλήθη, ψυχή καὶ σῶμα παγέν), or animal, and has the designation ‘mortal’ as well. Such a combination

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56. “Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the ‘Phaedrus’,” 17–20.

57. *Knowing Persons*, 136.

cannot be immortal, not on any reasonable account. In fact it is pure fiction, based neither on observation nor on adequate reasoning, that a god is an immortal living thing which has a body and a soul, and that these are bound together by nature for all time. (246c–d)

This confirms our analysis from the *Phaedo* (see Chapter 2) that the biological organism (ζῶον), be it human, canine, or crab is a composite of soul and body. This composite cannot be immortal precisely because things are liable to come apart at their joints (*Phaedo* 78c). The soul, by contrast, is the imperishable ἀρχή of motion within the organism so that the organic body *seems* to move itself. But if differences in biological species are determined by the nature of the compound rather than the soul that enters it, how are we to understand such terms as “human soul” or “divine soul” (245c)?

Quite simply, Socrates does *not* think that just any soul can enter just any compound. Because of the differences between the constitution of divine souls and human souls, the former are able to maintain their wings while the latter are prone to lose them (246a–b). When a soul does lose its wings, the divine law requires that its first incarnation (γένεσις) is not into the life of a wild beast (εἰς θήρειον φύσιν), but rather into one of nine kinds human life (248d–e). If this life is lived well, such souls are raised by Justice to a place in heaven where they live in a manner worthy of “the life they led in human form” (ἀξίως οὗ ἐν ἀνθρώπου εἶδει ἐβίωσαν βίου; 249b). This talk of a temporary βίος in a “human form” reflects exactly the same usage of these terms in the *Phaedo* (see Chapter 2). At the end of a cycle, the time comes for another incarnation:

In the thousandth year both groups [i.e. the just and the unjust] arrive at a choice and allotment of second lives (ἐπὶ κλήρωσίν τε καὶ αἵρεσιν τοῦ δευτέρου βίου), and each soul chooses the life it wants (αἰροῦνται ὃν ἂν θέλῃ ἐκάστη). From there, a human soul (ἀνθρωπίνη ψυχή) can enter a wild animal (εἰς θηρίου βίου), and a soul that was once human (ὅς



ποτε ἄνθρωπος ἦν) can move from an animal (ἐκ θηρίου) to a human being again (πάλιν εἰς ἄνθρωπον). But a soul that never saw the truth cannot take a human shape (εἰς τόδε ἤξει τὸ σχῆμα), since a human being must understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity (δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναιρούμενον). That process is the recollection of the things our soul saw when it was traveling with god, when it disregarded the things we now call real and lifted up its head to what is truly real (εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως) instead. (249b–c)

As I said, nature requires that the soul of every human being (πάσα ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆ) has seen reality (τὰ ὄντα); otherwise, no soul could have entered this sort of living thing (εἰς τόδε τὸ ζῶον). (249e–250a)

Throughout these passages we see a consistent terminology that corresponds with what we saw in the last chapter. A single immortal soul enters into (εἰς) a compound of a certain structure (φύσις, εἶδος, σχῆμα) to form a single mortal organism (ζῶον). While it is a member of this compound structure, the soul lives a temporary life (βίος) that runs from the birth of the compound (γένεσις) to its death. The kind of compound that the soul can enter into, however, is shaped by the past that it has lived so far—determined partially by allotment (κλήρωσις) and partially by its own choice (αἴρεσις). Because the structure of the human organism (ἀνθρώπου εἶδος) requires a certain ability—the capacity to “understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity”—only a certain class of souls can enter into this kind of compound, namely souls that have at some time in the past seen the Forms (τὰ ὄντα), without maintaining that vision like the gods.<sup>58</sup> It makes sense to refer to this class of souls as “human souls” (ἀνθρωπίνη ψυχῆ; 245c), but such souls can also enter lower forms

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58. For an argument that we should read this passage as requiring that a vision of the Forms is implicit in all humans, see Christopher Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 313–14, who concludes, “We should thus prefer the traditional interpretation of this passage ac-

of organic life as we see both here and in the Myth of Er. Lower souls that have never seen the Forms, however, have an upper limit to the kind of organism they can enter.<sup>59</sup>

We may note again that as soon as Socrates mentions the recollection of Forms he switches from generic language to the first-person plural: “That process is the recollection of the things *our* soul saw when it was traveling with god.” This switch occurs again even more strongly on the next page:

But beauty was radiant to see at that time when the souls, along with the glorious chorus (we were with Zeus, while others followed other gods), saw that blessed and spectacular vision and were ushered into the mystery that we may rightly call the most blessed of all. And *we* who celebrated it were wholly perfect and free of all the troubles that awaited us in time to come, and *we* gazed in rapture at sacred revealed objects that were perfect, and simple, and unshakable and blissful. That was the ultimate vision, and *we* saw it in pure light because *we were pure ourselves*, not buried in this thing *we are carrying around now*, which we call a body, locked in it like an oyster in its shell. (250b–c, emphasis added)

Again, we see that the present ability of Socrates to “bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity” relies on an identity between this Socrates now and a soul that saw the Forms then. This soul, being immortal, is not identical to the mortal compound of soul and body that it has entered into—the individual human being. Nevertheless, it makes sense to think of the class “our souls” as identical to the class of “human souls,”—that is those souls that *may* enter a human organism because they have at one time seen the Forms, although they *may* also enter an animal organism or no organism at all (248c).

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According to which Plato is claiming that some form of recollection is necessary for understanding language, since language reflects, however dimly or inaccurately, the division of the world into natural kinds.”

59. For a similar interpretation of this passage see Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 139.

This begins to flesh out our picture of what “each one of us” means. “We” are a class of beings that contrasts on the one hand with the gods above and on the other with the purely brutal souls below. We are not gods because we cannot *guarantee* a stable apprehension of the Forms, and we are not purely beasts because we all *have* apprehended the Forms—if only in a momentary glance. We are not the sort of beings that are *necessarily* human because we can also sink to the level of animal life. Indeed we aspire to a life that is more than merely human (250d). This yields a conception of the true Socrates as something that is not merely a soul *simpliciter* but rather a soul endowed with mind. What is more, it points to some kind of instability in that endowment. This instability comes to its clearest expression as we turn to the tripartition of the soul in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Tripartition

Scholars commonly identify a contradiction between the accounts of the soul that we find in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.<sup>1</sup> The *Phaedo* seems to present the soul as a simple entity while the *Republic* seems to present the soul as a complex of parts. Even for scholars that avoid an overly developmental reading of the dialogues, there seems to be at least a tension between these two pictures.<sup>2</sup> In general, I think that we can account for many of the ostensible contradictions between Platonic dialogues by attending to differences in dramatic context and rhetorical purpose. As a case in point, the discussion of the *Phaedo* focuses on the contrast between body and soul and simply does not discuss intrapsychic conflict. In the *Republic*, by contrast, the nature of internal conflict comes to the fore while the contrast between

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1. David Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 8, is representative of this view. He argues that the *Phaedo* understands the soul as a "single undivided unity," while the *Republic* understands it as a "compound of three parts." The latter view is, "clearly the more thoughtful of the two, and no one who had reached that view could return to the more naïve view of the *Phaedo* without considerable qualifications." Similarly, Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo*, 11. Robinson, "Soul and Immortality in Republic X," 148, argues that *ψυχή* in the *Phaedo* amounts to what becomes *λογιστικόν* in the *Republic*.

2. For examples of such scholars see Gerson, "Platonic Dualism," 359, and McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 267. By the time he writes *Knowing Persons*, however, Gerson seems to soften the sharpness of this contrast, *Knowing Persons*, 99.

soul and body fades to the background.<sup>3</sup>

While I am inclined to think this way, we need not immerse ourselves in this perennial argument for our present purposes. One good reason for avoiding this conflict is that Socrates himself prefaces his argument for tripartition in Book IV of the *Republic* with a caution:

Know well, Glaucon, that in my opinion, we'll never get a precise grasp of it [the soul] on the basis of procedures such as we're now using in the argument. There is another longer and further road leading to it. But perhaps we can do it in a way worthy of what's been said and considered before. (435c-d)

We cannot treat what follows in the *Republic*, then, as a definitive statement of even the views of Socrates much less those of Plato.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately (for our purposes anyway), ancient thinkers seem to leave this caution unheeded, frequently attributing a straight-forward theory of tripartition directly and unproblematically to Plato himself.<sup>5</sup> Insofar as we are looking for conceptual seeds in the dialogues that will later sprout into full blown theories of the self it is sufficient to notice that those passages examined in Chapters 2 and 3 seem to primarily conceive of the self in terms of the soul *simpliciter* in contrast with the body while those passages that we will examine in this chapter add a further wrinkle because the structure of the soul itself appears to be complex.

At the end of the last chapter we saw Socrates drawing a distinction in the

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3. For someone who adopts a more cautious reading along these lines see Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 152–53.

4. For a fuller discussion of what is *not* said in the *Republic* see Mitchell Miller, "Platonic Provocations," in *Platonic Investigations*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 163–93, and "A More 'Exact Grasp' of the Soul?"

5. For references and an interesting discussion of the way that division of the soul was received in antiquity see D. A. Rees, "Bipartition of the Soul in the Early Academy," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77, no. 1 (1957), 112–18.

myth of the *Phaedrus* between souls that have at some time seen the Forms and those that have not. The former class may sink down to forms of animal life lower than human, but the latter cannot rise up to the level of human life because being human requires the ability to “understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity” (249c). This contrast between kinds of soul begins to suggest a more fine-grained account of the self than a simple contrast between the soul and the body may suggest. Because all of “us” belong to the type of soul that has seen the Forms, our being a person must have something to do with this. Perhaps the class of persons is the class of rational souls rather than the class of souls in general.

This move immediately suggests an answer to the related question of whether anything within the total makeup of the soul counts as the *true* self rather than the whole soul. If we say that persons are rational souls as opposed to all those nonpersons that lack a rational capacity, we may be tempted to simply identify the true self with the rational part of the soul. On this reading, the *Phaedo* teaches us that the true self is the soul rather than the whole human organism, and the *Republic* teaches us that the *really* true self is the rational *part* of the soul rather than the whole soul. As we will see, however, things are not quite so simple. In the first place, even in the *Republic* Socrates speaks occasionally of the whole soul in terms of the self. In the second place, part of the ethical point of tripartition seems to be that one can identify oneself more or less with any of the parts or with relative rankings of these parts, even if some of these identifications are less than ideal. This fluidity of identification suggests that the self is conceptually distinct from any of the three parts, even while *ideally* identified with the rational part.<sup>6</sup>

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6. For similar approaches that see a fluid conception of the self in the tripartite psychology of the *Republic* see Gerson, “Platonic Dualism,” 359, and Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 151–52.

Throughout this chapter, I will not have space to sort out all the diverse and thorny issues associated with tripartition. Indeed, a library bookcase could not contain the literature on the subject. Instead, I will focus on those passages related to tripartition that more or less explicitly involve some conception of the self in addition to the mere division of the soul and interaction of its elements. Throughout, the *Republic* will be our primary text, but I will supplement the ideas in the *Republic* by reference to other works, especially the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus* in the discussion of the eschatological myths. Before we look at the explicitly tripartite material, however, we must examine a bipartition that occurs when Socrates remarks on the logic of self-control in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

## 1. Self-Control

Shortly before he launches into his famous argument for the tripartition of the soul in Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates conspicuously notes how odd it is to talk about self-control:

Isn't the expression "self-control" (κρείττω αὐτοῦ) ridiculous? The stronger self that does the controlling is the same as the weaker self that gets controlled (ὁ γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ κρείττων καὶ ἥττων δήπου ἂν αὐτοῦ εἴη καὶ ὁ ἥττων κρείττων), so that only one person is referred to in all such expressions (ὁ αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐν ἅπασιν τούτοις προσαγορεύεται). (430e–431a)

On the surface, Socrates's complaint seems to be against the strangeness of a Greek phrase, but the problem is more than linguistic. We cannot differentiate a completely simple or singular entity according to aspects or parts. Hence, if we attribute contradictory properties to such an entity, in this case *controlling* (i.e. being stronger, κρείττων) and *being controlled* (i.e. being weaker, ἥττων), we have a real and

metaphysically problematic contradiction. Somehow we must split up the entity in question.<sup>7</sup>

After our discussions in the last few chapters we may be tempted by an answer that seems ready to hand: The conventional meaning of “the self” is the composite of soul and body together, the human organism, while the *true* meaning of “the self” is just the soul. Hence, “controlling himself” means that the latter controls the former, i.e. the soul gains dominance over the whole. The solution works not by referring the contrary properties to different respects of the same entity but by referring them to different meanings of an ambiguous phrase.

Interestingly, Socrates does not propose this way out of the conundrum. Instead, he focuses on the soul alone:

The expression is apparently trying to indicate that, in the soul (περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν) of that very person (ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ), there is a better part (τὸ μὲν βέλτιον) and a worse one (τὸ δὲ χεῖρον) and that, whenever the naturally better part (τὸ βέλτιον φύσει) is in control of the worse, this is expressed by saying that the person is self-controlled or master of himself. (431a)

According to this way of glossing the phrase, one part or aspect of the soul is strong and in control, while another is weak and in submission.

This metaphysical way of glossing the rather traditional Greek idea of mastering oneself is not isolated to the *Republic*, so we should not consider it merely a rhetorical stepping-stone to the ultimate goal of tripartition. In the *Gorgias* Socrates explains that what the “many” mean by the phrase “rules himself” (ἐαυτοῦ ἄρχων) is “being self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasure and appetites

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7. For a similar analysis of the logic see Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 117. Louis-André Dorion, “Enkrateia And the Partition of the Soul in the *Gorgias*,” in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34, links the logical analysis in this passage to similar moves in the *Charmides* (168b–c).



within oneself" (491d–e). As I read it, the latter phrase is a gloss upon the first. In other words, the "oneself" in the phrase "master of oneself" is not really *oneself*, strictly speaking, but rather "the pleasure and appetites *within* oneself."

Again, we find the Athenian Stranger taking a very similar line in the *Laws*. He asks Clinias the puzzling question whether a man should "think of *himself* as his own enemy." Clinias answers that indeed the "first and best of victories" is the one that a man wins over himself and that "this way of speaking points to a war against ourselves within each one of us."<sup>8</sup> Like Socrates in *Republic IV*, the Stranger points out a similar logical puzzle in this way of speaking: "You hold that each one of us is either 'conqueror of' or 'conquered by' himself" (εἰς ἑκάστος ἡμῶν ὁ μὲν κρείττων αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ ἥττων ἐστί; 626d–627a). Here the stranger simply replaces Socrates's ὁ αὐτός with εἰς ἑκάστος ἡμῶν. If we treat each person as purely one (notice the emphatic place and use of εἰς), it makes no sense to ascribe such opposite properties as *conqueror of* and *conquered by* in relation to the same thing. The Stranger does not actually solve this puzzle in the case of the individual, but rather makes use of cities and households (perhaps his silence intimates a deeper problem in the case of individuals). We can say that a city overcomes itself when the class of virtuous citizens wins out over the class of vicious citizens and conversely that it is weaker than itself when the situation is reversed. The implication is that an individual is "stronger than himself" when the better *part* of his constitution gains mastery over the worse. Much later, he identifies anger as "one of the constituent elements" in the soul and defines injustice as "the mastery of the soul by anger, fear, pleasure, pain, envy and desires, whether they lead to any actual damage or not" (863b, 863e–864a). Although this is not exactly the tripartite account of the

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8. Notice the way that Clinias naturally slides into using ἡμῶν ἑκάστος when he begins to conceive of an abstract notion of the self within which a war is taking place: ταῦτα γὰρ ὡς πολέμου ἐν ἐκάστοις ἡμῶν ὄντος.

*Republic*, we have the idea that there is conflict *within the soul* together with the idea that the question of which element will gain the upper hand is of the utmost ethical importance.<sup>9</sup>

If Socrates, then, is “stronger than himself,” what does this make Socrates? Is *Socrates himself* strong or weak? Two plausible interpretations come immediately to mind: (i) Socrates himself is the whole soul. The phrase, “only one person [lit. the same, *ὁ αὐτός*] is referred to in all such expressions” seems to favor this interpretation. Just as a single top as a whole can both stand still and move at the same time in virtue of its stationary axis and spinning circumference (436d–e), so too Socrates himself is both master and mastered in virtue of one element within him that does the mastering and another that is mastered. (ii) Socrates himself is only the part that gains mastery. Self-mastery is a position of victory and strength *for Socrates* only if Socrates himself is identified with the better part of the soul (*τὸ βέλτιον*). If this were not so, the virtue of moderation would be a mixed blessing *for Socrates* as it would require that *he* is both winner and loser—part of him wins, but the part of him that loses has just as much claim to being him. Instead, the overall tenor of the passage suggests that gaining self-mastery would be altogether good for its possessor and this requires that the aspect of the soul that loses be somehow alienated from the identity of the self-controlled person.<sup>10</sup>

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9. I agree with Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast*, 260, that this passage from the *Laws* does not necessitate that we posit “agent-like” parts within the soul, although I disagree with him that we must contrast this with the *Republic* in as strong a fashion as he prefers.

10. Rachana Kamtekar, “Speaking with the Same Voice as Reason: Personification in Plato's Psychology,” in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 94, points out that insofar as “self-control” is a term of praise we implicitly identify the self with that which controls rather than that which is controlled. She also argues, however, that Socrates wishes to preserve the insight contained in the phrase that what we seek to control is not wholly exterior to ourselves either. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*,

Putting the second possibility in this way, however, raises a complication. Perhaps there are entities composed in such a way that the interests of the whole are best served by the dominance of the rest by one of the parts. In such a way, the interests of the whole correspond with the interests of one part against the claims to rule of the rest. Indeed, the ideal city of the *Republic* seems to be just such an entity. The whole city wins out when the proper class of rulers maintains firm control, while the whole city loses out when other classes come into power—even if this revolution might be a “victory” for those classes in some sense. Similarly, even if we understand “Socrates himself” to refer to the whole soul rather than the “better part,” it is good *for Socrates* as a whole if “the better part” of his psychology gains dominance over the rest.<sup>11</sup> To push the point further, however, the correspondence between the interests of what we ordinarily take to be Socrates and the interests of one of his constituents presents a good case for that constituent being the *real* or *true* Socrates. If I want to get to know “the real Boston,” for instance, I should perhaps not visit the suburbs. Without moving onto tripartition we are limited in what we can say about the nature of this “better part,” but this much is clear from these parallel texts that speak of self-control: The soul must be internally complex, and what is good *for Socrates* aligns with the victory of “the better part” within his soul

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106, mentions how natural it is to speak of being “overcome” by one’s anger or emotions but how unnatural it is to speak of being “overcome” by one’s rational decision, even if this latter is mistaken. He further argues that this is so because we can easily distinguish between a person and his emotions but we cannot so easily distinguish between a person and his reason.

11. For a similar train of thought see Lovibond, “Plato’s Theory of Mind,” 50: “This is the idea that every constituent of our subjectivity should be supervised and, as far as possible controlled...by a central agency which is representative of the self as a whole—like the philosopher-guardians *vis-a-vis* the city.” Lovibond sees this as a good reason to interpret the “central agency” as the “true” or “central” self and credits Plato as the originator of the whole idea of a “true self.”

over “the worse part.”<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Explaining Internal Conflict

As we enter Socrates’s argument for tripartition proper, a puzzle related to the self immediately comes to the surface. Socrates makes his argument on the basis of motivational conflict, and he resolves this by referring the contrary motivations to distinct parts or aspects of the soul in a manner similar to his solution to the problem of self-mastery above. The puzzle is this: the problem of motivational conflict only arises if we treat these motivations as taking place within a single self, and yet Socrates sometimes speaks of the distinct elements within the soul as though they were each distinct selves, complete with cognition, desires, and agency.<sup>13</sup> Just how

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12. See Dorion, “Enkrateia And the Partition of the Soul in the *Gorgias*,” 42–43, for an argument that the subject of self-mastery in all these passages must be internal to the soul itself and, more precisely, must be reason.

13. As just one indication of how strongly this latter perspective appeals to contemporary interpreters of Plato, Barney, Brennan, and Brittain are able to speak, in the introduction to their recent collection of papers on tripartition, of the “growing consensus” that the parts of the soul in the *Republic* are “robustly agent-like individuals,” 2–3. Terence Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 217, states that Plato “conceives the parts of the soul as analogous to agents.” Central to his account of the development of Plato’s ethics, Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 217, argues that Plato is committed in the middle-period dialogues to a “partitioning thesis” according to which “individual human beings consist of distinct agent-like parts.” According to Bobonich, the *Phaedo* treats the soul and body as two distinct agent-like parts that make up the human being, while the *Republic* refines this account to recognize three distinct agent-like parts internal to the soul itself, downgrading the role of the body. By “agent-like” Bobonich means that “each is treated as the ultimate subject of psychological affections, activities, and capacities that are normally attributed to the person as a whole,” 219. This partitioning thesis, however, is one that Bobonich thinks Plato ultimately gives up by the time he writes the *Laws*. Kamtekar, “Speaking with the Same Voice as Reason,” 79, argues that “Plato’s psychology represents our motivations as themselves person-like (‘personifies’ our motivations) with the aim of showing us the lineaments of philosophic virtue and of the self-transformation required for its development.”

many selves are there in this picture and is there any one self that has a rightful claim to actually being Socrates?<sup>14</sup>

Socrates begins his argument for tripartition by separating the rational part from the appetitive part. He does this by appealing to the example of “thirsty people who don’t wish to drink” (439c). In such cases, Socrates says that we cannot refer the contrary predicates *wishes to drink* and *refuses to drink* to a perfectly simple entity, but rather must refer them to different parts within these people:

Isn’t it that there is something in their soul, bidding them to drink, and something different, forbidding them to do so, that overrules the thing that bids. (439c)

The language of “bidding” and “forbidding” seems to personify the parts within the soul, as though the part that bids were a thirsty self asking the whole human being to take the drink and the part that forbids were a more cautious self that asks the whole human being to refrain. I will call this way of conceiving the three parts of the soul as three little complete selves within the person the “homunculi” interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

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14. For an excellent statement of the problem here see Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 105: “If we insist on literal division [of the soul], are we not led to a view of a nominal soul or person that is really three souls or three selves? Are we not led, as the predictable and just complaint has it, to the positing of homunculi, a little appetitive man, a little spirited man, and a little rational man, a sort of committee where each member is vying for dominance?” See also Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 248–54, for an admirably thorough analysis of the regress problem that this picture involves.

15. In this terminology I am following Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 100–124, who argues against this view, claiming instead that “a ‘part’ of the soul is just an ἀρχή of action.” Compare Whiting’s distinction, “Psychic Contingency in the *Republic*,” in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 178, between “realist” interpretations of the *Republic* that read the parts as robustly agent-like and “deflationist” interpretations that read all this as mere metaphor. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 142, refers to the regress problem that this interpretation sets up as the

Socrates frequently uses language throughout the *Republic* that seems to favor this interpretation. As just one example, he says that the virtue of moderation occurs when the three parts “agree” with one another (ὁμοδοξῶσι) that “the calculating part ought to rule” so that they “don’t raise faction against it” (442c–d). On the one hand, we can surely dismiss some of Socrates’s talk as mere colorful metaphor, reinforcing the link that Socrates wishes to draw between justice in the soul and justice in the city: The soul is like a city with little citizens running around inside it. In order to deflate the significance of this picture, we might attempt to scrub away all personifying talk from Socrates’s characterization of tripartition. Even once we have accounted for colorful metaphor, however, we are left with substantive difficulties. For example, Socrates says that a person is courageous when

his spirited part preserves, through pains and pleasures, what has been proclaimed by the speeches (τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων παραγγεῖλθέν) about that which is terrible and that which is not. (442c)

Perhaps we can dismiss “proclaim” as a metaphor, but we may still wonder how the spirited part can do anything remotely like what Socrates describes if we do not conceive of it at all in terms appropriate to a complete conscious agent.<sup>16</sup> Similar problems come up again in Book X when Socrates mentions that each of the three parts of the soul have their own distinct pleasures and their own distinct desires (580d). A little further, he mentions that “the part of the soul that forms belief contrary to the measurements couldn’t be the same as the part that believes in accord

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“Homunculus Problem.”

16. For the particular issues involved with attributing cognitive ability to the non-rational parts, see Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics*, 218: “If [Plato] treats the two non-rational parts of the soul as though they were capable of behaving like reasonable people, he seems to be treating each part as though it were an agent with its own rational part. To understand how this ‘agent’ makes its choices, we must presumably divide its soul into three; if we must also make each of these three parts an agent, we seem to be forced into a vicious regress.”

with them" (603a). If all cognition belongs to the rational part, how can there be any beliefs at all going on apart from it?<sup>17</sup> With the parts characterized in this way, the conflict between them seems very much like the conflict that occurs between different persons with different beliefs, agendas, and preferences.<sup>18</sup>

So far, I have attempted to resist an all-too-easy escape from the homunculi interpretation that would simply dismiss Socrates's talk as metaphor and read the three parts as unproblematic faculties or aspects within a single self. Nevertheless, we *do* need to escape from the homunculi interpretation because it too is untenable. While many objections have been offered against it in the literature,<sup>19</sup> I want to focus on one in particular because of our special interest in identifying the self. The kind of conflict that generates Socrates's argument for tripartition in the first place only makes sense if we view it as a conflict within a single self.<sup>20</sup> To see this point more

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17. For an admirably cautious exposition of the issues here see James Wilberding, "Curbing One's Appetites in Plato's *Republic*," in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 132, who argues that the lower parts of the soul possess modes of "cognition," even "conceptualization," that fall short of a full-blown ability to "reason."

18. After citing several passages in the *Republic* which characterize the three parts in this way, Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 131, puts the point succinctly: "All three parts have enough cognitive capacity to recognize one another, conflict or agree, and push their own interests. This has worried many people, who fear that the parts have been 'personified', that is, that they are just little replicas of the whole person. In fact they are not, but the point needs argument." See also, Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast*, 242–47, who carefully distinguishes the kinds of cognitive abilities required by what Socrates says of the lower parts of the soul and the kinds of cognitive abilities attributed to the rational part alone.

19. The foremost objections seem to be those stemming from the threat of regress (see above) and those stemming from the unity of consciousness. On the latter point see Bobonich, 254: "The *Republic's* partitioning theory commits Plato to denying the unity of the person. Specifically, it commits him to denying that there is a single ultimate subject of all of a person's psychic states and activities. What seems to be a single psychic entity is in fact a composite of three distinct and durable subjects."

20. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 142, notices this.

vividly, let us imagine contrary motivational predicates belonging to two distinct selves, Philo and Dion. Philo wishes to drink, while Dion refuses to drink. We do not generate a metaphysical puzzle here. Philo wishes to drink, so he does. Dion refuses to drink, so he does not. The conflict in Socrates's initial example, however, comes from desire and repugnance vying to determine the single action of a single self. We might imagine Philo and Dion coming into conflict because they cannot both satisfy their wishes. They are escaped prisoners chained together, say, and Philo wishes to flee north, while Dion wishes to flee south. They may settle this conflict in any number of ways, by persuasion or trickery or violence, but any resolution will involve two distinct agents committing two distinct acts more or less in parallel. The kind of conflict that Socrates appeals to, however, arises within a single agent over what that agent is going to do.

As further support for this line of thinking, we find several passages in the *Republic* where Socrates refers to the person as a whole interacting with or organizing all three parts.<sup>21</sup> We find a prime example of this way of speaking in Book IV:<sup>22</sup>

[Justice] isn't concerned with someone's doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious. (443c–d)

We can identify several possible interpretations of the "he" in this passage. First,

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21. This is noticed by Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 112.

22. Another convenient example would be (Book IX, 571d–572a).



Socrates could intend “he” to refer to a fourth part of the soul that governs or manages the others. On this reading, we have a mysterious *ego* somehow distinct from and set over the three parts. Second, Socrates could intend “he” to refer to the whole soul over and above the three parts.<sup>23</sup> On this reading, the the self would be identical to the soul *simpliciter*. Third, Socrates could intend “he” to refer to the rational part alone (or, what is much less likely, the spirited part or the appetitive part alone) in its capacity as manager. On this reading, the rational part is identified with the agent when it is conceived as doing the managing and referred to as one of the agent’s parts when it is conceived as being managed along with the other parts. Fourth, Socrates could intend “he” to refer indefinitely to *whatever* part or arrangement of parts actually prevails in determining what the person does.

I find this last interpretation superior to the first three because it makes sense of how each of the parts can be personified without resorting to the homunculi interpretation. If Socrates consistently identifies the agent himself with something other than, say, the appetitive part, then we should expect to see the appetitive part characterized throughout as merely a sub-personal force alien to the agent. As it stands, however, we *sometimes* see the appetitive part characterized in this way, but *sometimes* see it characterized as though it were *a version of the agent himself*.<sup>24</sup> I

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23. Eric Brown, “The Unity of the Soul in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 54–55, for example, argues that the whole soul is the locus of responsibility even if the number of parts that goes into this whole soul is variable, depending on whether the soul is embodied or not, and may comprise just the rational part in the ideal condition. For both the first and second interpretations, see Bobonich’s description of “the unattractive picture of agency” that posits an ultimate subject over and above the three parts, yet, in the case of internal conflict, pushes one part toward something while pulling another part away, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 234.

24. Drawing upon the work of Daniel Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (MIT Press, 1981), both Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 151, and Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 222, point out that the character-

suggest that this is because the “he” is something of a moving spotlight, picking out whatever source of motivation or relative hierarchy of motivational sources actually determines what an agent does in any given situation. This also makes sense of why Socrates speaks of the “he” arranging all three parts rather than simply speaking of the rational part arranging the other two parts beneath itself. Finally, I think this last interpretation is our best candidate for making sense of the passages we will examine in the next sections that seem to identify the true self with the rational part *in ideal cases*.

This way of understanding the identity of the agent as something up for grabs can also help us make sense of an otherwise difficult passage. In attempting to distinguish spirit from appetite, Socrates appeals to the story of Leontius:

Leontius, the son of Aglaion, was going up from the Piraeus along the outside of the North Wall when he saw some corpses lying at the executioner’s feet. He had an appetite to look at them (*ἄμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ*) but at the same time he was disgusted and turned away (*ἄμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραῖνοι καὶ ἀποτρέποι ἑαυτόν*). For a time he struggled with himself and covered his face, but, finally, overpowered by the appetite, he pushed his eyes wide open and rushed towards the corpses, saying, “Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight!” (439e–440a)

In this story, Leontius’s anger is aroused against *his own* behavior. It may well be that he would become indignant at another person looking upon corpses, but that kind of righteous indignation is not the emotion that Socrates here describes.<sup>25</sup>

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ization of the parts in terms appropriate to the whole does not threaten a regress provided that they do not “replicate entire the talents they were rung in to explain” (Dennett’s phrase). See also Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics*, 219: “From the point of view of the rational part, each non-rational part’s conception of itself is also a partial conception of the self to whom the part belongs; but the part itself does not recognize this relation to a larger self.”

25. For a similar line of thought see Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 109: “We must, I believe, insist on keeping the unity [of Leontius’s soul] at the same time as we try

Furthermore, we may find it at least a little strange that Socrates fails to describe any of Leontius's peers looking on in a situation where Leontius's honor-loving part is supposed to become aroused. Alongside anger at what others are doing and anger at what others think of me, however, I can also become angry over what I myself have done contrary to my rationally formed intentions or sense of what is honorable. Leontius becomes frustrated because he himself (as the subject of appetite) does the very thing that he himself (as the subject of honor and shame) struggled to avoid. We should notice especially that in his frustration Leontius addresses his own eyes as though they were other persons and attributes the action to them, doing anything he can to distance himself from himself.

Rather than characterize the struggle between reason and appetite in this story as a struggle between two complete selves on the one hand or two sub-personal psychological faculties on the other, we might instead characterize it as a struggle between two distinct versions of Leontius battling over who Leontius himself will be. On the one hand, we have Leontius as the subject of honor and shame. As such, Leontius finds himself led to look away. On the other hand, we also have Leontius as the subject of appetites, and as such Leontius finds himself led to look. One source of action within Leontius drives him to be the kind of person who looks at corpses and enjoys it. Another source of action within him drives him to be the kind of person that finds such things disgusting. These elements within his psyche cannot both succeed because they are fighting for control of a single identity.<sup>26</sup>

This helps to explain why his sense of honor would become engaged to the point to explain the conflict. Leontius is not literally fighting with an appetite; he is, as the text explicitly says, fighting with himself."

26. Similarly *ibid.*, 109: "When Leontius thinks 'Should I or should I not?' he is neither quarrelling with an appetite nor figuring out what he ought to do. He already *knows* what he ought to do. The quarrel is rather between Leontius as a subject of the appetite and Leontius as a subject of rational thought."

of frustration. The action of looking at corpses says something about who he is.<sup>27</sup> If I am right in this interpretation, then we can find no simple way to say which of the three parts of the soul *is* Leontius himself, for everything hinges on which of the three sources of action carries the day.<sup>28</sup>

In order to understand the fluid nature of Leontius's identity, I find Lloyd Gerson's notion of "identifying with" a soul-part to be helpful:

The endowed person [in contrast with the ideal or achieved person], I suggest, "identifies" with one or another parts of his soul in much the way we would say that someone identified with a cause or an institution or another person. This identification is equivalent to endorsing the rule of either the rational, or the spirited, or the appetitive part of the soul.<sup>29</sup>

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27. See Annas's analysis of spirit, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 128, in this passage as essentially involving reference to the self and to an ideal with which one wants to identify the self: "[Leontius] did not want to be the *kind of person* capable of doing such a thing." As Kamtekar points out, "Speaking with the Same Voice as Reason," 88, "Assigning motivations to distinct and evaluatively loaded *personae* facilitates disowning some of one's motivations and identifying with others."

28. Compare this with what Brown, "The Unity of the Soul in Plato's *Republic*," 68–69, calls the "principle of psychological hegemony." According to this principle, "different kinds of people are ruled by different soul-parts," where "to be ruled by a soul-part is to take the ends of that soul-part to be one's ends." Brown claims that this principle emerges as the best explanation of the various things Socrates says throughout Books VIII and IX about different kinds of people and their psychology. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 115–16, acknowledges a similar principle. Kamtekar, "Speaking with the Same Voice as Reason," 83, also endorses this principle, but argues that it is partition alone that does the theoretical work here rather than the personification of the parts. While I agree that personifying the parts is not strictly necessary to establish the principle of psychological hegemony, the conceit does help to imaginatively portray different possible versions of the self. In other words, I can more easily imagine what I would be like should I align myself wholly with the spirited part if I imagine the spirited part as a little version of me complete with thoughts, desires, and goals. We can observe a similar move at work in popular films where the traditional angel and demon on opposite shoulders of a character have the face of the character himself and magnified elements of his own personality (e.g. *The Emperor's New Groove*).

29. *Knowing Persons*, 117.

This notion, says Gerson, helps to explain why we find some passages (e.g. *Republic* IV, 443c–d, discussed above) that seem to speak of an agent over and above the parts organizing them or yielding to them while we also find passages that seem to identify the rational part as the real underlying agent:

If we try to characterize the agent involved in identification, it is difficult to do so in terms other than those that would be applied to the characterization of the rational part of the soul. That is, if we imagine a person “turning over” government in his soul to the spirited part in such a way as to fix his character, we must imagine reflective consideration on his part. Plato does exactly this.<sup>30</sup>

No doubt, Leontius *ought* to be the sort of person who consistently aligns his actions with his reasonable thinking. That is to say Leontius himself *ought* to be identical with Leontius the subject of rational thought. This gives us some grounds for saying that the “real” or the “true” Leontius is the rational part of his soul, but perhaps it would be better to call this the “ideal” Leontius. Unfortunately, who Leontius actually is falls short of who Leontius himself aspires to be and who he shows himself to be by his own cognitive activity even while abandoning himself to his appetites—hence the frustration. We can say, then, that the “true self” is the rational part of the soul only in the sense that ideally *who we are* would be just the same as *who we rationally know we should be*. As a matter of experience, however, we find ourselves frequently separated from this ideal, requiring education and struggle if we are to achieve our own truest and best identity.

### 3. The Human Being Within

Socrates closes Book IX of the *Republic* with the famous image of the soul as a human, a lion, and a many-headed beast (588c–592a). He introduces this image in

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30. Ibid., 117.

order to “return to the first things we said” about whether “injustice profits a completely unjust person who is believed to be just” (588b). He does this by painting with words the kind of image “in which many different kinds of things are said to have grown together naturally into one” such as the Chimera or Cerberus (588c). We should notice these framing comments because they establish two points that one may easily overlook about the image. First, we must interpret this image as an attempt by Socrates to portray the desirability of justice. Second, the image involves the tension between inherently different kinds of thing that have been naturally united into a single organism. In ordinary life, we see lions as a single kind of thing and human beings as a single kind of thing—two distinct natures. In myth, however, we may join these two natures that are alien to one another into a single composite nature by describing a lion with the head of a man. By his image, Socrates suggests that what we ordinarily take to be the simple nature of a human being includes a psychology composed of diverse and perhaps opposed elements that are nevertheless bound together “by nature” into a single kind of thing. This should provoke us to wonder what sort of thing we ourselves are. After describing the three creatures within the soul, Socrates tells Glaucon to “join the three of them into one, so that they somehow grow together naturally” (588d). The “somehow” here suggests that we should find the union surprising, and indeed the image *is* rather hard to picture.

Because he describes the rational part of the soul as a human being (*ἄνθρωπος*) we may suppose that Socrates means to emphasize a special connection between this part and the whole human organism. Socrates confirms this emphasis when he describes the covering that surrounds the three inner creatures:

Fashion around [the three inner creatures] the image of one of them, that of a human being (*ἄνθρωπος*) so that anyone who sees only the

outer covering and not what's inside will think it is a single creature, a human being (*ἄνθρωπος*). (588d–e)

Two interpretations are readily available: (i) Socrates describes the rational part as a human being because he wants us to understand that this element is what makes us human, that it is the most human aspect of our psychology, and that the other aspects are subhuman.<sup>31</sup> (ii) Socrates describes the rational part as a human being because he wants to say that this is the true self. In place of the exterior, conventional identity of a person, he wants to identify the rational part of the soul as the “inner person.”<sup>32</sup> These two interpretations are not exclusive. It may be that we should identify the rational part as the true self *because* it is what makes us human in contrast to the merely animal elements within us.

In favor of interpretation (i), Socrates says that “Fine things are those that subordinate the beastlike parts (*τὰ θηριώδη*) of our nature to the human (*ὑπὸ τῶ ἀνθρώπῳ*)—or better, perhaps, to the divine (*ὑπὸ τῶ θείῳ*)” (589c–d). We must delay until the next chapter our discussion of the tantalizing possibility that something within us is not just human but superhuman. For now, however, we can see that Socrates exploits his depiction of the rational part as a human being to make the subordination of the other two parts seem more appealing than the reverse. On the

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31. See Lovibond, “Plato’s Theory of Mind,” 48, for this view.

32. See Sorabji, *Self*, 116: “It is because the reason is described as the man or human that Plato is taken to mean that reason is the true man or the true self.” A related, but not quite identical, line of interpretation comes from Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 145: “The image unfortunately makes clear that while desire and spirit do not reproduce the characteristics of the whole person, reason seems to.” Annas qualifies this “seems” by noting that the interests and aims of the inner human and the whole human only coincide in the ideal case of the just person. I would point out that Socrates explicitly describes the whole human animal as the copy of the inner original rather than the other way around as Annas’s complaint would have it. Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 125–30, straight-forwardly interprets the “human being within the human” as a reference to the true self.

whole, things are better off for all the parts and the whole human organism when the human element within rules over the animal elements rather than letting the animal elements run wild (588e–589d). The idea seems to be that in ordinary life we see the relationship between humans and domesticated animals often benefiting both the humans and the animals. When we observe situations where wild animals gain control of human beings, however, this invariably profits the animals at the expense of the human beings. This happens, in part, because human beings are able to calculate rationally about how to cultivate animals, and this suggests a natural relationship of superiority. Already we see one way that the image makes justice desirable, but we should also notice a second way that Socrates subtly uses this image to make his appeal. Because we are humans we naturally picture ourselves within the image as being the little inner human rather than one of the animals.<sup>33</sup> We intuitively think of the situation in which the many-headed beast rips the little human apart as terrible for us because we imagine ourselves being ripped apart rather than ourselves enjoying a tasty meal. This identification, then, of the lower two parts of the soul with animals lends itself toward alienating those elements of our psychology.<sup>34</sup> One can easily think of someone saying, “It isn’t really *me* that feels this sexual urge; it’s merely the evolutionary hold-over of animal instincts within me.” Someone who thinks this way tacitly supposes that he himself must be identified with the aspect of his psychology that rises above the merely animal sphere, and part of the appeal in Socrates’s image relies on this kind of supposition.

In favor of interpretation (ii), Socrates subtly shifts from speaking about the rational part as though it were an element *within* the just person to speaking as

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33. Kamtekar, “Speaking with the Same Voice as Reason,” 97, makes a similar point.

34. Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 255: “[The image] invites us to identify with the human being and to see the animals as alien to us.”



though the inner human being were the just person himself:

Wouldn't someone who maintains that just things are profitable be saying, first, that all our words and deeds should insure that the human being within this human being (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ἐντὸς ἄνθρωπος) has the most control; second, that he should take care of the many-headed beast as a farmer does his animals, feeding and domesticating the gentle heads and preventing the savage ones from growing; and, third, that he should make the lion's nature his ally, care for the community of all his parts, and bring them up in such a way that they will be friends with each other and with himself? (589a–b)

In the first description of the just person, we have a clear distinction between “the human being within” and “this human being.” In the second and third descriptions, however, it becomes difficult to say who the farmer is. On the one hand, Socrates says “his parts” so that we should naturally read the “he” throughout as the whole just person, but on the other hand, the image lends itself to picturing the inner human being as the farmer tending the lion and the many-headed beast. The phrase “he should make the lion's nature his ally” especially suggests that we should think of the farmer as the rational part since elsewhere Socrates has spoken of the “alliance” that the spirited part makes with the rational part (e.g. 440b). It may be difficult to settle definitively whether the farmer in the metaphor is the rational part or the whole person because Socrates himself thinks of the rational part (in the just person at any rate) as a representative of the person as a whole, just as he conceives the ruling class within the just city as representative of the city as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

As we saw in our discussion of Leontius, there may be a separation between

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35. See Lovibond, “Plato's Theory of Mind,” 50, for a similar idea in her discussion of what she calls the “world-historic” idea within Plato of the centered or integrated subject where “every constituent of our subjectivity should be supervised and, as far as possible, controlled...by a central agency which is representative of the self as a whole.”

the ideal and the actual identity of the self. For this reason, I think that Richard Sorabji's flat identification of the inner human being as the true self is too simplistic. Instead, the image suggests that the rational part is that aspect of our psychology that we *should* identify with because doing so leads to the best state of affairs for us. Further, when we truly live up to what it means to be human we *do* identify with it because the rational part is what makes us human. In point of fact, however, many live bestial lives, identifying themselves instead with those aspects of their psychology that do not represent their own real interests. In this connection, I want to risk quoting A. A. Long at length because his way of putting the point rings true:

Because the *psyche* has a complex structure (the three parts comprising reason, *thumos*, and appetite), it manifests itself to consciousness in more than one voice, and its various voices can generate conflicting desires and a divided self. This condition, according to Plato, presents human beings with their primary task: to decide with which voice or ordering of voices they will identify themselves. Someone who identifies with appetite or with ambition, at the expense of reason and justice, is, in Plato's judgment, living a virtual animal life (recalling the image of the soul as a combination of man, lion, and many-headed beast), and hence not living the proper life of persons. The complexity of the *psyche* provides for different selves—a spectrum of self-identifications for persons, ranging from the truly philosophical right down to the fully bestial.<sup>36</sup>

On this interpretation, there is no single answer to the question, "Which if any of the three parts of the soul is the true self?" Instead, we find "a spectrum of self-identifications" available to us based on which "voice" we adopt as our own. The rational part, then, is the "true" self only in the sense that the philosophically ideal version of ourselves will identify wholly with it.<sup>37</sup>

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36. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 151–52.

37. For a similar view see Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 106: "The conclusion of this line of argument is that the person is to be identified with the rational part of the soul. Although Plato does not explicitly propose such an argument, it is

Before we turn to examine the famous image from the *Phaedrus* that also includes an inner human being, we must pause to examine an important passage from early in the *Phaedrus* that will frame what comes later. Before launching into his famous speeches, Socrates explains why he does not practice, like other “intellectuals,” the rational demythologization of traditional stories:

But I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself (*γνώναι ἑμαυτόν*); and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that. This is why I do not concern myself with them. I accept what is generally believed, and, as I was just saying, I look not into them but into my own self (*σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ’ ἑμαυτόν*): Am I a beast (*τι θηρίον*) more complicated and savage (*πολυπλοκώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπιτεθυμμένον*) than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler (*ἡμερώτερόν τε καὶ ἀπλούστερον*) animal (*ζῷον*) with a share in a divine and gentle nature (*θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀτύφου μοίρας φύσει μετέχον*)? (229e–230a)

We should notice right away that Socrates does not interpret the Delphic inscription as an injunction to know himself as an individual in contrast to other persons. Rather, he interprets it as an injunction to investigate what *sort* of being he is, what *nature* he has a share in.<sup>38</sup> In this investigation, he offers a contrast consisting of three pairs of opposing terms: (i) “complex” versus “simple,” (ii) “savage” versus “tamer” and “gentle,” and (iii) “beast” versus “divine.” Like the metaphor of the perhaps reasonable to read him as presupposing its cogency. Nevertheless, to leave matters thus is patently unsatisfactory for the very reason we encountered in the previous chapters, namely, that to identify the person with the rational part of the soul exclusively or unqualifiedly would be to treat one’s own appetites as if they were virtually those of another. But this is false. The agent of ratiocination is *also* the agent of passionate appetites.”

38. On this point I disagree with Gerson, 145–46, who holds that “self-knowledge in the dialogues is something more than the knowledge of the kind of thing a soul is. It is the first-person knowledge of my personhood.” As far as I can find in the dialogues, references to self-knowledge can best be understood as knowledge of the kind of thing one is and what this means for how one should live, as Socrates makes explicit here.

inner beast in the *Republic*, the complicated points toward the subhuman and wild because it suggests internal disharmony and even outright conflict. As we will see below in the myth of Glaucon, simplicity points toward the superhuman because it suggests internal unity, freedom from conflict, and purity. While we must postpone our discussion of divinity until the next chapter, we may notice that Socrates allows both the possibility of a bestial self and the possibility of a divine self. Being human seems to involve that both are possible answers to the question, “What am I?” Although we may suspect him of irony in his declaration of ignorance, we should take seriously the idea that Socrates is “still unable” to know the answer to this question. What follows in the *Palinode* is certainly suggestive, but we should avoid the search for a definitive Platonic dogma. Perhaps Socrates allows these various possibilities and invites us to join his perplexity because the answer to this question depends on the course of life we adopt.

We find a further caution when we come to the image of the soul as a chariot because Socrates explicitly states that he is not going to describe “what the soul actually is (*οἶον μὲν ἐστί*)” because such a description would “require a very long account” and be “altogether a task for a god in every way” (246a). Instead, he proposes to say “about [the soul’s] structure (*περὶ δὲ τῆς ἰδέας αὐτῆς*)” merely “what it is like” by using an image (246a–256e). Interestingly, he uses language reminiscent of the organic unity in myth of intrinsically dissimilar kinds of thing that we saw in the *Republic* image, calling the soul a “natural union (*συμφύτῳ δυνάμει*) of a team of winged horses and their charioteer” (246a). He goes on to draw a contrast between chariot teams that the gods have and those that “we” have:

The gods have horses and charioteers that are themselves all good and come from good stock besides, while everyone else has a mixture. To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort,

while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline. This means that chariot-driving in our case is inevitably a painfully difficult business. (246a–b)

While we may readily assume that the three-part metaphor for the soul in this image aligns with the tripartite account of the soul from the *Republic*, Socrates never actually identifies the white horse as the spirited part and the black horse as the appetitive part. He does, however, explicitly identify the chariot driver as *νοῦς* (247c). As with the image in the *Republic*, one intuitively pictures oneself as this driver rather than one of the horses or the chariot team as a whole.<sup>39</sup> When Socrates says that the chariot-driving is difficult, we picture ourselves having a rough time steering the horses. Again, this feature of the image seems propaedeutic, subtly encouraging us to alienate certain aspects of our psychology from ourselves and thereby enter into the philosophical life.

At the climax of the soul's journey the charioteer gains a glimpse of "the beings" (presumably the Forms) provided that he follows the appropriate god closely. The horses, however, do not gain this vision. Since this glimpse of the beings in the past is meant to explain our present ability to "understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity" (249c), we naturally imagine ourselves within the story from the perspective of the charioteer who has the necessary experience rather than from the perspective of the horses who do not. In principle, someone might think that our current ability to "understand speech in terms of general forms" might belong to the whole soul in virtue of one of its parts having the appropriate prenatal experience. I find it quite difficult, however, to imagine myself within the myth from the perspective of the chariot team considered as a whole, or again, to imagine the chariot team consid-

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39. Gerson, 138, makes this identification and draws a link with the inner human being of the *Republic*.

ered as a whole possessing the cognitive ability to “understand speech in terms of general forms.” This does not prove much about Plato’s considered psychology since it is, after all, only an image. What it does show, however, is that Socrates is capable of using the imaginative force of his images to push his audience toward one way of conceiving themselves rather than others.

On the other side of things, we may consider that the struggle between the driver and the black horse is a struggle for control, a struggle over the direction that the whole chariot team will take. And the answer to the question, “What sort of being am I, divided or unified, savage or gentle, bestial or divine?” hangs in the balance. The whole myth of the chariot team tells us about a fall from an ideal condition. Surely we are meant to learn from this narrative that the kind of soul that we ourselves are lies open to threats from within. We are not like the gods who maintain consistently an ideal mode of life but rather are capable of slipping down into a condition where the steersman *νοῦς* does not enjoy perfect control. We find ourselves in this life, then, faced with the challenge of regaining a certain identity, an identity in which *νοῦς* wins mastery. Again, that this mastery means victory *for us* points to an ideal identification between us and *νοῦς*, but the contingency of this victory points to an actual distance between us and *νοῦς*.

#### **4. What Survives?**

With these ideas in hand, we are now in a position to address a point that has vexed readers of Plato since antiquity. Some scholars have thought that the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus* seem to indicate that the disembodied soul is necessarily simple, while the *Phaedrus* seems to indicate that the disembodied soul still has three

parts.<sup>40</sup> For my part, I am not particularly interested in many of the debates that surround this issue. Plato may simply be inconsistent on this point, or there may be some way to resolve the apparent tension, or Plato may be rolling over in his grave that we are foolish enough to read statements in the mouths of different characters in different dialogues surrounded by mythic metaphors as literal statements of his position. What matters for the present inquiry is the inevitable conceptual connection between that which survives death and the true self. If the dialogues present a picture of the self in which everything but the rational part of the soul drops away at death and further lead readers to believe that *Socrates* survives death, then one naturally comes away with the idea that the real Socrates is just the rational part of his soul while the lower parts of the soul are, together with the body, extraneous trappings. If, however, the dialogues present a picture of the self in which the whole soul or some other configuration of the parts survive, then one naturally thinks that the real Socrates is something more than the rational part.<sup>41</sup> This conceptual link remains even if we attempt to demythologize the claims of the dialogues.

We have already examined the afterlife myths that speak of the soul *simpliciter* and I hope that the foregoing discussion of the charioteer myth in this chapter and the last will suffice for an examination of the *Phaedrus*. What remains, however, is a difficult passage from the end of Book X of the *Republic* and the analysis in

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40. See Gerson, "A Note on Tripartition and Immortality in Plato," *Apeiron* 20, no. 1 (1987), 81, for a good assessment of the literature and status of the debate. The most commonly cited evidence for this tension is the requirement in the Kinship Argument of the *Phaedo* that the soul be simple, the wording at *Republic* 611b–e (discussed below), the language in the *Timaeus* describing the lower parts of the soul as "mortal" (also discussed below), and the charioteer image in the *Phaedrus*.

41. For an example of just how easy it is to make this move without much further rationale, see Bobonich's comment on the Glaucus myth, *Plato's Utopia Recast*, 255: "In Book 10, Plato seems to suggest that once the soul is no longer embodied, the Reasoning part loses the other two parts. Since I persist after my death, I am then identical with the Reasoning part."

the *Timaeus* of the soul in terms of its “mortal” and “immortal” parts. Despite the division of the soul into three parts and the frequent mention of conflict between these parts throughout the *Republic*, Socrates warns Glaucon that they should not think “that the soul in its truest nature is full of multicolored variety and unlikeness or that it differs with itself (τῆ ἀληθεστάτῃ φύσει τοιοῦτον εἶναι ψυχῆν, ὥστε πολλῆς ποικιλίας καὶ ἀνομοιότητός τε καὶ διαφορᾶς γέμειν αὐτὸ πρὸς αὐτό)” (611b). Here we see Socrates mention again a “truest nature” of the soul distinct from what they have discussed so far. They can now say what it is *not* because they have established that the soul is immortal (608d–611a), and Socrates cites the principle that “it isn’t easy for anything composed of many parts to be immortal if it isn’t put together in the finest way” (611b). Notice that this principle is quite close to what Socrates says in the *Phaedo* at 78c, but notice also that here Socrates seems to admit the hypothetical possibility that something composite *could* be immortal if it is composed “in the finest way.”<sup>42</sup>

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42. Some scholars take this admission to be highly suggestive, amounting to the positive claim that, because tripartition has been introduced since the *Phaedo*, Socrates conceives of the immortal soul here as a composite, albeit a fine one. See Hall, “Ψυχὴ as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato,” 73, who claims that “surely [Socrates] implies that there is a ‘best way’ for the parts of the soul to be joined.” See Robinson, “Soul and Immortality in Republic X,” 147, and *Plato’s Psychology*, 51, who reads this passage as “affirming the immortality of the entire soul, three parts and all.” Other scholars are more cautious, pointing out that what Socrates actually says is purely negative, whatever it may suggest. See Roger A. Shiner, “Soul in Republic X 611,” *Apeiron* 6, no. 2 (1972), 23–24, who claims that Socrates is drawing a “distinction between two states of the soul” and further claiming that “the soul is immortal in its truest state,” but “we do not find any *further* claim as to the model in terms of which ἡ ψυχῆς ἀληθῆς φύσις is specifically to be interpreted.” More recently, however, some scholars have drawn the opposite lesson from this passage and especially the Glaucon myth which follows (see below). See Bett, “Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the ‘Phaedrus,’” 18: “It is hard not to read this as suggesting that in its true nature, the soul is not tripartite—that the division argued for in Book IV pertains only to the soul as embodied. To be sure, the tone is tentative; but the view being expressed seems clear enough.” Annas,



What follows from this is that the familiar analysis of the soul throughout the *Republic*—including tripartition—has fallen short of an ideal inquiry into the soul. While Socrates does not undertake this ideal inquiry anywhere in the *Republic* (or any other dialogue for that matter)<sup>43</sup> he does make some suggestive comments about what that inquiry would have to be like:

To see the soul as it is in truth, we must not study it as it is while it is maimed by its association with the body and other evils—which is what we were doing earlier—but as it is in its pure state, that’s how we should study the soul, thoroughly and by means of logical reasoning. (611b–c)

Since he makes a contrast in terms of the soul “maimed by its association with the body,” we may be tempted to understand Socrates as identifying “the soul as it is in truth” with its disembodied state. We should be cautious at this point, however. As we saw in the *Phaedo*, there may well exist the possibility of lingering on in something short of the soul’s truest nature even after it leaves the body. Instead, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 124, cites this passage to support the view that the soul separated from the body is simple and without parts. See also Lovibond, “Plato’s Theory of Mind,” 54, who reads this passage as saying that the lower parts do not belong to the soul essentially but rather are “mere trappings of the true soul, the *logistikon*, which cling to it in its present earthly state,” and Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 150, who, citing this passage, says, “By the end of the *Republic* the essence of the soul is taken to be pure philosophy—love of wisdom—transcending its embodied roles in ways that recall the *Phaedo*.” For my part, the more cautious middle position seems correct. Socrates noticeably refrains from making any positive claim about the true nature of the soul and merely rules *out* conflict and disharmony. In this vein, I agree with Raphael Woolf, “How to See an Unencrusted Soul,” in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 151: “The Glaucus passage is primarily a reflection on method, and on the methodological inadequacy that Socrates believes has marked the dialogue’s inquires into the soul thus far.”

43. For similar passages where Socrates refers to without undertaking an ideal inquiry into the soul’s true nature see *Alcibiades* 130c–d and *Phaedrus* 246a (discussed in Chapters 3 and 5). For a more thorough account of what Socrates does *not* undertake in the *Republic* more generally see Miller, “A More ‘Exact Grasp’ of the Soul?”.

what seems to be at issue here is the soul as it is in its own right, ideally, apart from any alien influence.

To illustrate what he has in mind, Socrates resorts to an analogy with the sea god Glaucus. While Socrates does not mention it, the traditional myth includes the detail that Glaucus was once a human being who become immortal and whose familiar human form became covered all over with the detritus of the sea:<sup>44</sup>

What we've said about the soul is true of it as it appears at present. But the condition in which we've studied it is like that of the sea god Glaucus, whose primary nature (*τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν*) can't easily be made out by those who catch glimpses of him. Some of the original parts have been broken off, others have been crushed, and his whole body has been maimed by the waves and by the shells, seaweeds, and stones that have attached themselves to him, so that he looks more like a wild animal than his natural self (*οἶος ἦν φύσει*). The soul, too, is in a similar condition when we study it, beset by many evils. That, Glaucon, is why we have to look somewhere else in order to discover its true nature. (611c–d)

Here again we find Socrates employing a metaphor to describe the soul that involves a complex object containing an original form—presumably human, although Socrates's silence may be significant—as one of its constituents. Further, Socrates says here what we only guessed at in the previous section: The original form of Glaucus represents the true self or the true soul while everything else represents mere accretions. In addition to the accretions, however, notice that the original form is itself maimed by its present condition, so that even if we pulled off all the dreck we would still not see the true Glaucus.

While I want to remain cautious about deriving from this metaphor a definite Platonic doctrine about whether the ideal condition of the soul is or is not complex, it seems safe enough to pull the notion of a *true* or *ideal* self from this pas-

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44. For this detail see Woolf, "How to See an Unencrusted Soul," 151.

sage on the basis of the identification between self and soul that we have seen in previous chapters. Further, while we may not be able to specify the exact nature of the ideal or how many parts it has, we can say that moving in the direction of the ideal will involve fewer bits and pieces than we have at present. Discovering the ideal in terms of this metaphor must involve conceptually removing inessential aspects and restoring that which is essential within our present psychology rather than, say, importing a wholly new aspect or replacing the whole soul with something else entirely.

When Glaucon asks Socrates to specify the direction in which we would have to look to discover the true nature of the soul, Socrates says that we would have to look at the soul's "love of wisdom" (*εἰς τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἀντῆς*, 611d). In order to explain this, Socrates extends the sea metaphor:

We must realize what [the soul] grasps and longs to have intercourse with, because it is akin to the divine and immortal and what always is, and we must realize what it would become if it followed this longing with its whole being, and if the resulting effort lifted it out of the sea in which it now dwells, and if the many stones and shells (those which have grown all over it in a wild, earthy, and stony profusion because it feasts at those so-called happy feastings on earth) were hammered off it. (611e–612a)

The resemblance between this passage and details from the *Phaedo* is striking. First of all, we may recall the comparison of this present life to living beneath the murky waves and the possibility of rising up to the region above the air in the final myth (*Phaedo* 109e–110a). Second, we may recall the need, even once we have left this present life, to remove the "earthy" admixture that has become ingrained in the soul (*Phaedo* 81b–d). Third, the notion of kinship between the soul and the divine echoes the Kinship Argument (*Phaedo* 80b). While all this is familiar, what Socrates says next appears somewhat more cautious than the *Phaedo* concerning the com-

plexity or simplicity of the ideal condition:

Then we'd see what its true nature (*αὐτῆς τὴν ἀληθῆ φύσιν*) is and be able to determine whether it has many parts or just one (*εἴτε πολυειδῆς εἴτε μονοειδῆς*) and whether or in what manner it is put together. But we've already given a decent account, I think, of what its condition is and what parts it has when it is immersed in human life (*τὰ ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ βίῳ πάθη τε καὶ εἶδη*). (612a)

As an aside, this last sentence serves to confirm the conceptual distinction we observed in the previous two chapters between the soul and the “human life” that the soul currently animates. The upshot of this whole passage is that we are only in a position to examine the soul as we find it in its present human condition, and *this* involves complexity. We simply do not know, given the present methods, exactly what we would find if we could examine the soul in its ideal condition.

Remarkably, Socrates never actually says that the original form of Glaucon underneath all the encrustations is the rational part of the soul. The direction in which Socrates tells us to look, however, does suggest something about what he thinks we will find when we look there. Since he tells us to look at the soul's love of wisdom, we can presume that the rational aspect of the soul must at least constitute the heart of the soul's ideal condition—whatever else may be involved. Further, as we saw in the last section, two other famous images from Socrates involve the rational part represented by an inner human being accompanied by extras. This does not tell us exactly how to interpret the present image, but it is suggestive.

In contrast to the cautious stance of Socrates in the *Republic*, we find Timaeus quite clear about the division of the soul into “mortal” and “immortal” parts. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, Timaeus first refers to the immortal part of the human soul when he describes the process by which the Demiurge creates an intermediate level of soul between the celestial gods and purely mortal plant

and animal life (41c–d). Since the Demiurge cannot himself make mortal beings, he outsources this task to the celestial gods. He gives one qualification, however:

To the extent that it is fitting for them [i.e. mortal creatures] to possess something that shares our name of ‘immortal’, something described as divine and ruling within those of them who always consent to follow after justice and after you, I shall begin by sowing that seed, and then hand it over to you. The rest of the task is yours. Weave what is mortal to what is immortal, fashion and beget living things. (41c–41d)<sup>45</sup>

For the time being, this “something” that shares the designation “immortal” remains somewhat mysterious because Timaeus does not specify exactly whether or not he is talking about reason. Nevertheless, we may make a guess since Timaeus says that the Demiurge takes each soul from his second batch, assigns it to a star, mounts it “in a carriage, as it were” and finally shows it “the nature of the universe” (41d–e). While it is not exact, the parallel with the *Phaedrus* myth is striking. In both passages, we find a vision from a mythical carriage attributed to one part of our soul and this prenatal experience used to identify that aspect of our soul that is peculiar to the souls of human beings rather than the kind of soul that belongs exclusively to lower forms of life.

We also find in this passage the interesting notion that the soul of an organism could be the mixture of two essentially heterogeneous kinds of soul with two completely different origins. We should not miss the strangeness of this idea because of our familiarity with Platonic partitioning of the soul. In modern philosophy, many find it odd enough that some people believe the body and the soul to be wholly different kinds of things mysteriously woven together. Imagine, however, someone who earnestly believes that one part of his soul was crafted by the Demiurge directly and is, by that fact, immortal, while another part of his soul was

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45. All translations from the *Timaeus* are from Donald J. Zeyl.

crafted by other lower gods and is mortal. What would such a person believe *he* is? Would he believe that he himself is mortal or immortal? We receive some answer to this question in the brief explanation that Timaeus gives of the cycle of reincarnation that begins with male human beings and may, if a person is unjust, descend through female human beings to lower forms of animal life. Timaeus says that a person in this cycle,

Would have no rest from these toilsome transformations until he had dragged that massive accretion of fire-water-air-earth into conformity with the revolution of the Same and uniform within him, and so subdued that turbulent, irrational mass by means of reason. This would return him to his original condition of excellence. (42c–d)

The penal character of the next incarnation in the cycle suggests that one and the same person exists throughout, responsible for his actions and therefore the just recipient of punishment. Further, Timaeus speaks of a “he” who returns to “his” original condition, and this suggests that he tacitly conceives of the *person* involved as identical with the immortal part which alone exists continuously throughout the cycles.<sup>46</sup> Finally, we are told that this ideal, original condition is the proper result of everything irrational being brought by means of reason into conformity with reason. While this claim does not exactly state that the “something” immortal within us is the same as the rational part in the *Republic*, it certainly does suggest that reason constitutes the core of our ideal condition.

Timaeus becomes more forthcoming about the nature of this “something” when he returns to the theme of human psychology in the second half of his account.<sup>47</sup> He begins by summarizing the conclusions from 41b–42d, saying that the

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46. Pace James V. Robinson, “The Tripartite Soul in the ‘Timaeus’,” *Phronesis* 35, no. 1 (1990), 103–10, who thinks that the entire tripartite soul continues unchanged throughout the cycles of reincarnation.

47. Timaeus explains that the first half of his account is in terms of “what

Demiurge constructs this universe so as to contain “all living things, mortal and immortal” (69c). Again, Timaeus reminds his audience of the principle that “[The Demiurge] himself fashioned those [living things] that were divine, but assigned his own progeny the task of fashioning the generation of those that were mortal” (69c). In order to carry out this task, the lower gods must take “the immortal origin of the soul” and do two things: (i) encase it in a mortal body and (ii) place “another kind of soul” alongside it in the same body. The second kind of soul Timaeus calls “the mortal kind” (69c). Readers of the *Republic* will readily recognize the “pleasures,” “pains,” “sense perception,” and “all-venturing lust” that this mortal kind of soul contains as belonging to the appetitive part of the soul, but Timaeus is comfortable at this stage interspersing his list with “boldness,” “fear,” and “the spirit of anger” that we would expect to belong to the spirited part. While Timaeus later distinguishes two subtypes within the mortal soul and even locates them in different physical organs, we must notice that this eventual tripartition takes place only after a more fundamental bipartition. Further, the ethical import of the passage hangs on bipartition rather than tripartition since Timaeus loads his description of the two kinds of soul with normatively charged language.

He refers to the lower soul variously as “the mortal type of soul” or simply “the mortal soul,” while he refers to the higher soul as “the immortal origin of the soul,” “the divine soul,” and “the best part among them all” (69c–70b). He also finally identifies the latter clearly as “reason” (λόγος, 70b), and in the next page he refers to it variously as “the part that takes counsel” (τὸ βουλευόμενον, 70e), “reason” (λόγος, 71a), “mind” (νοῦς, twice 71b), “thought” (διάνοια, 71c), and “power of understanding” (ἡ τῆς φρονήσεως δύναμις, 71e).

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has been crafted by Intellect (Νοῦς)” while the second half is in terms of “the things that have come about by Necessity” (47e).

To my knowledge, this passage states more clearly than any other passage in the Platonic corpus that the rational part of the soul alone is immortal. Although Timaeus does not say so, we can take this idea together with thoughts from the last chapter to create an argument on his behalf for the conclusion that the rational part is the self:

1. The rational part of the soul is the only part of a human being that is immortal (as opposed to the body, the lower parts of the soul, and the whole composite which are mortal).
2. If some part of a human being is the only immortal part, then it alone is that which survives death through cycles of reincarnation, receives posthumous punishment and reward, and is capable of reaching our ideal condition (whatever that may be).
3. That which survives death through cycles of reincarnation, receives posthumous punishment and reward, and is capable of reaching our ideal condition has a better claim to being the self than any other candidate, i.e. it is the *true* or *real* self.
4. Therefore, the rational part of the soul is the true self.

As it stands, we have some *prima facie* reasons to doubt whether Timaeus (much less Plato) would endorse each of these premises. Premise (1) seems clear enough from the passage we have just examined, but perhaps Timaeus would not take the further step and endorse premise (2). Perhaps “mortal” and “immortal” here are simply meant as value terms of disgust and admiration because of the associations that these kinds of soul have with other things which are actually mortal and immortal. For example, perhaps Timaeus only calls one kind of soul “immortal” because it *has to do with* the eternal while he calls the other kind “mortal” because it *has to do with* the body and its needs. On this reading, the whole soul, three parts and all, survives throughout the cycle of reincarnation, even though its lower aspects are essentially directed toward the embodied phases of the cycle. We must, however, rule out this reading because the whole point of the Demiurge handing off the construction of the mortal soul to the celestial gods is that he himself cannot create



something that comes apart. Throughout, Timaeus seems to intend the terms “mortal” and “immortal” in a fairly straightforward, albeit evaluatively loaded, way.

Further, perhaps Timaeus (or Plato) would reject premise (3). In the last chapter, I have argued for a strong connection between the notion of something which survives death, receives posthumous punishment and reward, and is capable of reaching our ideal condition and the notion of a true self underneath the total human organism. I also attempted to show that the language that Socrates chooses to use in some passages of the *Phaedo* strongly implies that this connection is implicit in the way that he is thinking about himself and his survival. Nevertheless, I freely confess that I can find no passage in any dialogue that makes this link truly explicit, much less the conclusion of a well-considered argument.

## 5. Conclusion

Considering the evidence of the dialogues together, there is no simple answer to the question with which we began: “Which of the three parts of the soul is the self?” The answer must depend upon the kind of person one becomes, the kinds of drives and aspirations one identifies with, and the voice one makes one’s own. Underneath this variability of personality, however, there can be no doubt that in all the dialogues the ideal condition of our soul centers around reason—whatever the exact metaphysical status of this condition turns out to be. Moving away from the various identities one *may* adopt to the identity one *ought* to adopt involves moving away from the idiosyncratic flair that we have seen in previous chapters is characteristic of our embodied human life. This pushes us toward the idea that my ideal self is qualitatively indistinguishable from other ideal selves because reason in me is qualitatively indistinguishable from reason in them. None of the Platonic characters ever quite say this exactly, but the logic of many of the ethical arguments

and especially the powerful ethical metaphors lend themselves readily to this ideal. In the next chapter we will examine whether or not we can draw from this qualitative identity of ideal selves any stronger identity with Universal Reason or God. For now, however, let me end by noting that even on the strongest interpretation—that the true self is the rational part of the soul plain and simple—one is not required to hold that my true self is one and the same as your true self. For all we know, Plato may conceive an ideal plurality of perfectly rational minds. In any case, as hard as it is to pin any Platonic character to a definite view of the self with respect to tripartition in general we can scarcely hope to extract a view of the self with respect to the rational part as it is instantiated in distinct individuals. We should leave *that* question to a Plotinus or a Proclus.

## Chapter 5

### Noûs and the Divine in Us

But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil should be destroyed—for there must always be something opposed to the good; nor is it possible that it should have its seat in heaven. But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth. That is why a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God (*ὁμοίωσις θεῶ*) as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just and pious, with understanding (*μετὰ φρονήσεως*). (*Theaetetus* 176a–b)<sup>1</sup>

According to a common interpretation, Plato holds that all reality can be divided into the eternal Forms on the one hand and their concrete participants on the other: the realm of being over the realm of becoming; the divine over the mortal. When we hold to this schematization too dogmatically, however, it becomes difficult to see where he would locate the true self. We find many texts which indicate that the soul, especially the rational aspect of the soul, plays an intermediary roll in the total picture. At the risk of oversimplifying, we can sketch a tripartite rather than a bipartite Platonic ontology: (i) the Forms, grounding the intelligibility we see in the cosmos; (ii) concrete particulars, the immediately intelligible objects that make up the cosmos; and (iii) rational souls, the centers receptive to this intelligibility, lo-

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1. Trans. M. J. Levett as revised by Myles Burnyeat.

cated within the cosmos yet rooted outside it.<sup>2</sup> By actively imitating the motions of the cosmos and ultimately the intelligible standards governing those motions, the rational soul becomes ever more assimilated to its model and ever more receptive to it. We may call it, therefore, “divine” in an analogous sense. I think something like this sketch lies behind the various references we find in the dialogues to *νοῦς*, *τὸ λογιστικόν*, or “immortal soul” as something divine within us.

By drawing our attention to this tripartite picture I also hope to undermine those interpretations that locate the true self within the bipartite picture wholly on the side of the divine. I can find no text in the dialogues that identifies the self with a Form, with Universal Reason, or with God.<sup>3</sup> I do find, however, a number of passages that connect the self in a deep and essential way with the Forms, with reason, and with the divine. As with the previous chapters, I do not wish to explicate what Plato himself truly believed about all this in his heart of hearts. Instead, I hope to examine only those texts that more or less explicitly identify a divine element

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2. For a similar take on the intermediary status of rational soul see J.B. McMinn, “Plato as a Philosophical Theologian,” *Phronesis* 5, no. 1 (1960), 24: “[In the *Phaedo* the soul] is something godlike (*θεοειδές*), i.e. its intrinsic character bespeaks its ‘deiformity’ and consequent indestructibility. As indicated, the soul is not out of the realm of change like the Ideas, although it is uniquely related to them.”

3. For the idea that there is a Form of Self see R.E. Allen, “Note on Alcibiades I, 129B 1,” *The American Journal of Philology* 83, no. 2 (April 1962), 189. For the identification of the self with Universal Reason see Sorabji, *Self*, 2, 6, 34–35, 115. For the identification of the true self with God see Annas, “Self Knowledge in Early Plato,” 129–31, and Johnson, “God as the True Self,” 3. These last two are somewhat complicated because neither Annas nor Johnson exactly specify the sense in which the self is God. Johnson, 11, speaks of “God outside the soul” so he presumably cannot mean strict numerical identity when he says that the true self “is ultimately to be identified with God,” 3. Similarly, Annas never quite says that the self and God are numerically identical, but she does think, 131, that the identification of the self with God precludes my self being any more *my* self than *your* self. Whatever interpretation of these authors turns out to be exactly correct, they must mean something stronger than what I will argue can be drawn from the text of the dialogues.

within the makeup of human beings and interpret these texts on their own terms.

## 1. Background

Throughout the dialogues, Plato employs a variety of terms to refer to the mind. As we saw in Chapter 2, some passages of the *Phaedo* seem to use *ψυχή* in a thin sense to mean the conscious subject. In other contexts, *φρόνησις* can come close to this meaning as well (e.g. at *Phaedo* 70b and 76c *φρόνησις* could reasonably be translated as “consciousness”). More often, however, we find Plato using *νοῦς* (or *τὸ λογιστικόν* in the *Republic*) to refer to that aspect of the soul capable of thought.

*Νοῦς* itself, however, exhibits a wide range of meanings and is famously hard to translate. For Homer, *νοῦς* originally refers to “appreciating the situation” in a military sense where appreciating also implies making a plan. In different contexts it can mean (i) the mental process of “appreciating the situation,” (ii) the agent of that process, and (iii) the result of the process, i.e. the plan or intention itself.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of our present discussion sense (ii) is the most important, but we must keep in mind that even when *νοῦς* clearly refers to the agent of thought, the normative coloring of a well-considered plan is never completely absent. “To have *νοῦς*” frequently means “to think sensibly,” but *νοῦς* can also refer to the thought or plan that someone forms—whether this thought is reasonable or not.<sup>5</sup> For example, Homer uses *νόος* to refer to Ajax’s stubborn (*ἀπηνήης*) way of thinking at *Iliad* 23, 484. On the whole, however, *νοῦς* refers to the mind thinking rightly or sensibly *in contrast to* irrational or uncontrolled psychological impulses and processes. In *Oedipus*

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4. For an account of this historical usage with an impressive collection of citations in Homer and Greek drama, see T.B.L. Webster, “Some Psychological Terms in Greek Tragedy,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957), 149. For a condensed but precise account of the various meanings of “*νοῦς*,” see Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, 14–15.

5. Webster, “Some Psychological Terms in Greek Tragedy,” 153.

*Colonus*, for example, Theseus comments to Oedipus that men often make blustering threats in anger (*θυμῶ*) which disappear when *νοῦς* gains control of itself (*ὁ νοῦς ὅταν / αὐτοῦ γένηται*; 656–660).<sup>6</sup> Here, *νοῦς* appears to be the agent himself who gains control with the emphasis upon an identification between the agent’s reasonability and his true self as against the irrational, emotional aspects of his psychology from which he wishes to distance himself. Stephen Menn argues, however, that the sense of *νοῦς* as the subject of reasonable thought is less common in Plato than the sense of *νοῦς* as the virtue of reasonability itself.<sup>7</sup> This comes out especially where Plato uses *νοῦς* in lists of intellectual virtues like *σοφία* or *φρόνησις*.<sup>8</sup>

This sense that the meaning of *νοῦς* involves not only a mind thinking but a mind thinking reasonably and reasonability itself becomes inescapable when Socrates describes his dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras. From what we know, Anaxagoras is the first to posit a fundamental distinction between mind (*νοῦς*) and matter, the latter being a passive, inert kind of stuff and the former being the active principle which imposes organization upon it.<sup>9</sup> According to Anthony Long, although Anaxagoras does not explicitly call this principle “divine” or even attribute to it good and sensible motivations for doing what it does, he clearly understands it as “the world’s generative power...required to make sense of the orderly universe that we inhabit and observe.”<sup>10</sup> As we discussed in Chapter 3, the idea implicit in Socrates’s complaints against Anaxagoras is that the meaning of *νοῦς* involves not just the idea of something seeming or appearing to someone but something seeming *best* to someone. In going on to give a purely mechanical account of causality in the cosmos, Anaxagoras fails to make use of the normative quality of the *Noûs*

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6. *Ibid.*, 153.

7. Menn, *Plato on God as Nous* Chapter 3, “What does ‘*Nous*’ Mean?”

8. See *ibid.*, 16. for a compiled list of passages.

9. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 171.

10. *Ibid.*, 172.

that he has already posited.<sup>11</sup>

In the epic and dramatic tradition preceding Plato, therefore, we find *νοῦς* coming close to our contemporary concepts of both an agent's mind and the normative rationality that ought to govern that agency. In the philosophical tradition, these notions are written much larger onto a cosmic scale in order to account (unsuccessfully, says Socrates) for the intelligible order and rationality we observe in the universe.<sup>12</sup> We have, then, little-*nu* *νοῦς* in us and big-*nu* *Νοῦς* behind the cosmos, and the relationship between the two begins to suggest why a Greek person might begin to think of *νοῦς* in us as something divine.

Often enough in Greek, "divine" (*θεῖος*) is a term in contrast to "mortal" or "human." In Homer, we humans are the mortals (*βροτοί, θνητοί*), while the gods are untouched by our ills, destined never to die. The gods are *not us*. Being divine means being *not human*, belonging to a sphere elevated above the mortal plane. In Chapter 2, we saw Socrates use this common opposition between being human and being divine in the contrasting pairs of the Kinship Argument. We also saw, however, that Socrates surprisingly locates *us* on the side of the divine rather than

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11. See Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, 1–2, 25–33, especially Chapter 5, "Nous in Anaxagoras and Other Pre-Socratics" for an excellent discussion of the concept of *νοῦς* in Anaxagoras and the ways that Plato both takes over the pre-Socratic project of explaining the order of the cosmos in terms of *Νοῦς* and does it better than they. There is one aspect of his account, however, that I take issue with. In emphasizing the sense of *νοῦς* as the virtue of rationality, Menn wants to downplay the meaning of *νοῦς* as mind or subject of rationality because this meaning is all-too-easily injected by modern interpreters. In Fragment 12 of Anaxagoras, however, *Νοῦς* both orders the cosmos and *knows* all things. While I agree that Anaxagoras primarily has in mind the virtue of rationality expanded to a cosmic scale, surely this language implies that he is personifying this virtue to some degree, thinking of rationality as though it were *also* a subject or a mind that is rational.

12. For interesting comments on the way that Anaxagoras begins with an ordinary notion of human mind and "projects" this onto the universe see Burger, *The Phaedo*, 140.

on the side of the human. In this chapter we will try to make sense of this. To do so, however, we must be careful about how we use the word “divine.”

I want to distinguish a number of senses in which we might call something “divine.” First, we might say that something is divine in a strict sense, that it is numerically identical to God or a god. Second, we might say that something is divine in a material sense, that it is made out of God or a god or a part of either. Something like this may lie behind the idea that we all contain a divine spark, a little piece of some great reservoir of god-stuff.<sup>13</sup> Third, we might say that something is divine in an analogous sense, that it somehow mirrors or reflects God or a god. Christian authors frequently have this sense in mind when they invoke the idea that we are made in the image of God. Fourth, we might say that something is divine in a qualitative sense, that it possesses a quality central to what it means to be God or a god. Someone might exclaim, for instance, that a painting is “simply divine” because it captures a certain kind of beauty. Fifth, we might say that something is divine in a proximate sense, that it has some contact or association with God or a god. In this way, the Greeks frequently refer to a grove, a wind, or a particular bend in the river as divine because a god is thought to dwell there or have dealings with it in some special way.

It may seem that what I have called the analogous and the qualitative senses amount to the same thing, but I want to hold them apart carefully. Something may be an analogue of an original in part because it faithfully reproduces qualities that the original possesses. A photograph may capture just the same color or a sculpture may have just the same shape around the jaw. It takes more, however,

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13. See, for example, Epictetus’s *Discourses* 1.1.10–12, where Zeus gives Epictetus a portion of himself by giving him the power of choice, or again *Discourses* 2.8.11 where Epictetus claims that we all contain a particle of God within us.



to be an analogue. A paint sample with the exact shade of my son's eyes is not an analogue of my son. It may even be possible for an analogue to share no relevant qualities with the original at all. For example, the thousands of magnetic switches on my hard-drive that store this dissertation are a reflection or transposition of the words printed out on my desk, but it is hard to see what shared quality accounts for this. This last point becomes important when we begin to talk about something bearing an analogous relationship to the divine since we might worry about the metaphysical accuracy or at least the piety of identifying *any* quality which we can univocally attribute to gods and us. Upon further reflection we may decide that these two senses really collapse or we may decide that our worries were unfounded, but for the sake of exploring what the dialogues have to say about something divine in us we should leave these two senses separate.

With all these senses readily available, therefore, we should not make too quick a leap into big metaphysical claims when Plato describes something in our own psychology as divine. We should pause to consider the point because an all-too-easy line of interpretation lies just around the corner. According to some philosophies, the true self is divine in the strict sense.<sup>14</sup> This perspective has far reaching philosophical ramifications, especially for monotheists. If my true self is God, your true self is God, and there is only one God, then I may infer that the distinction between my self and your self is illusory. If my true self is God, then I may begin to think that discovering myself and coming to contemplate myself turns out to be just the same as discovering and contemplating God, and vice versa. One

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14. See, for example, this claim exactly in Annas's interpretation of the *Alcibiades*, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 133: "the true self turns out to be God, the ultimate reality." She also comments on the frequent occurrence of this thought in the history of philosophy: "It is a thought which...we find perennially tempting and perennially repulsive."

need not look far to find such claims in various spiritual and philosophical traditions throughout the world—sometimes heavily influenced by Plato.<sup>15</sup> But do we find such things explicitly written in the dialogues themselves? Do we even find such things strongly implied by the logic of arguments in the dialogues themselves? As we will see, there are many passages in the dialogues where something in us is called divine. I will argue, however, that we can make good sense of all these passages if we stick to weaker senses of “divine.”

Primarily, I have in mind the analogous and proximate senses, while I think we can downplay the material and qualitative senses. One might attempt to draw the material sense out of a chain of reasoning from *Philebus* 29b–30a where Socrates compares soul in us to soul in the cosmos by analogy with elemental fire in us and elemental fire in the cosmos.<sup>16</sup> Even less plausibly, one might attempt to extract this point from the mixing bowl passage of the *Timaeus* (see below).<sup>17</sup> In both cases, however, the point is rather a certain relationship between soul in us and soul in the cosmos and we must take a large leap to make Socrates or Timaeus say that our true self is a fragment of God. We can also readily find Platonic characters calling various things “divine” in the qualitative sense as a term of praise, singling out a quality that something shares with the gods. In Book I of the *Laws* (626c), for example, Megillus addresses the Athenian Stranger by saying ὦ θεῖε because, like the gods, the Stranger evokes admiration and respect through his wisdom. While this sense is common enough, I do not think that a mere qualitative identity is at

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15. As a testament to the widespread and perennial appeal of this line of thinking even at a popular level see the climactic scene of Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist* (HarperCollins, 1993).

16. See Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 142 n. 8. for references to Neoplatonic thinkers that interpreted the passage in this way.

17. Robinson, 144, argues that the impurity of our soul-mixture implies just the reverse: “[the mixing-bowl metaphor] suggests the antithesis of pantheism; we are hardly meant to be parts of, or derivations from, or emanations of World Soul.”

stake when we come to texts that describe a divine element within us. At *Timaeus* 69d, for example, we hear about “the divine soul” in contrast to the “mortal soul” within us. Timaeus could simply mean that this element of our psychology shares with the gods the quality of being rational, but I hope to show that he has the richer analogous sense in mind. This element within us mirrors the rational activity of the cosmos by imitating its movements. Further, I will argue that several texts involve the proximate sense applied to the rational part of the soul. The typical Platonic picture of cognition imagines a kind of contact or at least closeness between knower and thing known. Since the objects of genuine knowledge are thought of as “divine” in some sense, the knower comes to inherit the epithet “divine” by proximity. As we will see below, Socrates has something like this in mind when he refers to “those realities by being close to which the gods are divine” (*Phaedrus* 249c).

We will begin, then, by examining the *Timaeus* and *Philebus* where Timaeus and Socrates discuss cosmic *Noûs* which we can call “divine” in the strict sense. This will make it possible to ask about the relationship between this cosmic *Noûs* and *νοûς* in us. We will then examine the relationship between us and the gods in the chariot myth of the *Phaedrus* and the relationship that both we and the gods have to the Forms. Finally, we will examine a passage from the end of the *Alcibiades* which presents the greatest challenge to my claim that we do not find in the dialogues anything in us which is divine in the strict sense.

## 2. Divinity and *Noûs* in the *Timaeus*

When one examines the occurrences of the terms *θεός* and *θεῖος* in the *Timaeus*, one immediately notices that they do not refer invariably to a single reality. Instead, “being divine” and even “being a god” admit of degrees. As we ascend the hierarchy of being that Timaeus lays out, we find higher and higher divinities and as

we descend we find entities participating in divinity in more and more derivative ways. Alongside the medieval *scala entis* we might speak here of a *scala divinitatis*. On rung (i) of this ladder we have the Demiurge (although, perhaps, the model to which he looks is higher still). One step down (ii) we find the living cosmos itself. Timaeus refers to the Demiurge as the “eternal god” (*ὄν ἀεὶ θεός*) while he calls the universe that the Demiurge creates the “god that was yet to be” (*ὁ ποτὲ ἐσόμενος θεός*; 34b). Going down another step (iii), we find the great variety of gods associated with the various celestial bodies. At this stage we might plausibly suppose that Timaeus would locate the traditional Olympian deities.<sup>18</sup> Timaeus also mentions but does not discuss, (iv) the class of *daimones* at 40d, lower than “the gods” but higher than mortal beings, and also (v) the offspring of the gods at 40d–e. Finally, he arrives at (vi) those mortal beings which nevertheless have a divine part (41a–47e). In this passage, together with its parallel at 69c–90d, we find more clearly and repeatedly than anywhere else in the Platonic corpus the idea that we human beings have something divine within us.

When he gets to the production of mortal living things, the Demiurge addresses “the gods.” The Demiurge explains first that the sense in which the gods are immortal is derivative rather than absolute. Because they have been bound together, they are liable to being undone (41b). Destruction, therefore, is for them a logical possibility. But while they *can* be undone, the Demiurge promises that they *will not* be undone (41b). The Demiurge justifies this guarantee by saying, “whatever has come to be by my hands cannot be undone but by my consent” (41a), and he promises the gods that this consent will never be given (41b). He can guarantee this latter promise because he, being perfectly good, would never consent to

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18. For example Timaeus mentions Hermes at 38d and alludes to the standard theogonic account of the Titans and Olympians at 40d–41a.

something evil, and the dissolution of something “well fitted together and in a fine condition” would be something evil (41b).

In this transition from the Demiurge to the gods, we begin to flesh out our understanding of what a derivative or diminished mode of being divine might mean. Remember that for Greek religious thinking being divine is deeply associated with being immortal. In drawing a distinction, therefore between two modes of immortality, Timaeus also makes room for two modes of divinity. We find no hint in the text that the Demiurge and his model could fail to be. Instead, insofar as the Demiurge is that which ultimately binds together he cannot himself be something bound, and therefore is not liable to come apart by the logic of 41a. The Demiurge, then, within the structure of the myth, is immortal—and therefore divine—in an ultimate sense, while the gods are immortal—and therefore divine—in a derivative sense.<sup>19</sup> This sense is derivative both because the gods possess an immortality of an attenuated form and because their possession of it depends entirely upon the Demiurge. The Demiurge is immortal in himself, whereas the gods receive their divinity and immortality from him and count on his continued consent moment by moment for its maintenance.

The foregoing logic implies that only these two levels of being would exist (the Demiurge and the gods) if the Demiurge made everything himself since everything the Demiurge makes himself would be “well fitted together” and “in a fine condition.” If only these two levels existed, however, there would be a gap in the plenitude of creatures that the universe ought to contain (40a, 41b–c). The

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19. I think Robinson, “The Tripartite Soul in the ‘Timaeus’,” 103–4, overlooks the word “altogether” at 41a. He infers from the claim that the gods are “not immortal nor indissoluble altogether” that they *are* “mortal” while still being “everlasting.” As I read the passage, the Demiurge does not say that the gods are mortal, only that they are not *altogether* or perfectly immortal. Instead, they are immortal in the diminished or derivative sense that I specify.

Demiurge, therefore, ingeniously farms out the task of creating mortal living beings to the gods. Creatures fashioned by this lower rank of divinity are capable of being undone, perhaps because they are not as “well fitted together” as the gods and capable of winding up in something other than “a fine condition.”

This process accounts for the purely mortal living things that populate the universe, but right at this stage the Demiurge inserts a striking intermediate possibility: He mentions that to some extent it will be fitting for some mortal beings “to possess something that shares our name of ‘immortal’ ” (40c). We have, then, three senses of being immortal. Alongside our previous two, we have creatures that really are mortal yet have within them a mysterious “something” that shares the name “immortal.” I take it that the phrase “shares our name ‘immortal’ ” rather than the more straight forward “*is* immortal” is meant to distance this “something” even further from true divinity than “the gods” have already been distanced. Timaeus underlines this distancing when he describes the process by which the Demiurge fashions this “something.” In order to qualify as immortal in any sense it must be made by the Demiurge himself, who then hands the “seed” off to the gods to be woven into the mortal creature (41d), but he fashions this seed from the leftover ingredients from which he made the souls of the universe and the gods. These leftovers, Timaeus says, the Demiurge mixes together only in “somewhat the same” (*τινα τὸν αὐτόν*) manner as those previous souls and the mixture is not “invariably and consistently pure, but of a second and third grade of purity” (*ἀκήρατα δὲ οὐκέτι κατὰ ταῦτὰ ὡσαύτως, ἀλλὰ δεύτερα καὶ τρίτα*, 41d).

This “something,” then, stands in an interesting intermediate position.<sup>20</sup> To its glory, it is worthy of the same name, “immortal,” as the Demiurge and the gods,

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20. For a discussion of the intermediate position in the *Timaeus* of soul more generally and of human soul in particular see Hall, “*Ψυχή* as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato,” 80–81.

crafted by the Demiurge himself, and made from the same basic ingredients as the Soul of the Cosmos. To its shame, however, it is not invariably and consistently pure and it is fated, unlike the gods, to be woven together inside the coils of a mortal animal. But what exactly is this “something”? The only thing the Demiurge says in his speech to characterize it is that it is “something described as divine and ruling within those of them who always consent to follow after justice and after you [the gods]” (41c). Already, this should remind us of the rational aspect of the soul in the *Republic*, that aspect that *ought* to rule and *does* rule within “those of them who always consent to follow after justice.” Within the *Timaeus* itself, however, we find more details when Timaeus returns to this theme in his second account (69c–90d). Out of all the living things in the cosmos, Timaeus says that “[the Demiurge] himself fashioned those that were divine, but assigned his own progeny the task of fashioning the generation of those that were mortal” (69c). In order to carry out their task, the gods take from the Demiurge “the immortal origin of the soul” (*ἀρχὴ ψυχῆς ἀθάνατος*) and encase it in the head (69c). We have already examined in Chapter 4, the way that this passage speaks of two different “kinds” of soul, the mortal and the immortal, but I want to emphasize again the way that Timaeus freely mixes “immortal” with “divine,” even referring to this “immortal origin of the soul” as simply “the divine soul” (69d). We also saw in Chapter 4 that this passage is the most explicit, finally identifying our mysterious “something” from 40c as “reason” (*λόγος*, three times, 70a–b) or “mind” (*νοῦς*, 71b).<sup>21</sup>

It would be easy for a modern reader to take the claim that reason is “the divine soul” in human beings and think that Timaeus is saying something like this:

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21. For further discussion of the identification of the “divine part” as *νοῦς* see Robinson, “The Tripartite Soul in the ‘Timaeus,’” 104: “The claim that only *nous* is immortal establishes that the human soul contains something divine, something that gives it kinship with the gods and which enables the soul to improve itself.”

“The Demiurge, the Cosmos, and all the lower gods are rational in the sense of possessing a mode of consciousness capable of making deductive inferences. Therefore, humans are ‘divine’ just insofar as they too possess this mode of consciousness.” This reading, however, does not capture the way the *Timaeus* consistently construes reason not in terms of consciousness and deductive inference but primarily in terms of reasonability, order, and proportion. We can find our way toward a correct reading by considering carefully several passages that connect both reason and divinity to rotation. Timaeus thinks that he can capture something about reason by using the image of circular motion and he also thinks he can capture something about divinity with the same image. The metaphor of rotation, therefore, acts as a kind of middle term bridging the gap from what it means for something to be divine to what it means for something to be rational. The exact terms of this analogy can help us understand what exactly Timaeus means by calling *νοûς* in us “the divine soul.”

We first hear about circular movement when the Demiurge grants this movement to the cosmos because this movement is “suited to its body” (34a). Here, Timaeus describes rotation as “that one of the seven motions which is especially associated with understanding and intelligence (*περὶ νοῦν καὶ φρόνησιν*),” but he does not give any argument for this association. What he does do is simply characterize that motion as “turning continuously in the same place, spinning around upon itself (*κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ*).”<sup>22</sup> Later, at 37a–d, Timaeus gives an account of the cognition that takes place in the soul of the cosmos in terms of the “circles” of the Different and the Same. The former gives rise to true opinion, while

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22. Compare 40a–b where Timaeus describes the motions of the celestial gods as “an unvarying movement in the same place, by which the god would always think the same thoughts about the same things (*ἐν ταῦτῳ κατὰ ταῦτά, περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀεὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἑαυτῷ διανοοῦμένῳ*)”



the latter gives rise to understanding (*νοῦς*) and knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*). Timaeus says that

*because [the soul] circles round upon itself, whenever it comes into contact with something whose being is scatterable or else with something whose being is indivisible, it is stirred through out its whole self.* (37a)

I have added emphasis here because the complex middle clause of this sentence may obscure the connection between the circling metaphor and the pervasive character of the soul's cognition; the former is meant in some way to explain the latter. So far, we have simply seen Timaeus use the notion of circling in connection with ideal forms of cognition, but we have yet to see *why* this one of the seven motions makes a suitable metaphor as opposed to the other six, which are characterized as "wanderings" (e.g. 34a, 40b).<sup>23</sup>

We may shed some light on this question if we look to a parallel passage in *Laws X* where the Stranger asks Clinias about the "nature of rational motion" (*τίνα οὖν δὴ νοῦ κίνησις φύσει ἔχει*; 897d).<sup>24</sup> Before Clinias can answer, however, the Stranger claims that the question is difficult to answer and he warns that:

In answering this question we mustn't assume that mortal eyes will ever be able to look upon reason (*νοῦς*) and get to know it adequately: let's not produce darkness at noon, so to speak, by looking at the sun direct. We can save our sight by looking at an *image* of the object we're asking about. (897d–e)

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23. For similar comments about the assertion of the metaphor in the *Timaeus* without much explanation see Edward N. Lee, "Reason and Rotation: Circular Movement as the Model of Mind (Nous) in Later Plato," in *Facets of Plato's Philosophy*, ed. W.H. Werkmeister (Van Gorcum, 1976), 70–73.

24. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 151, thinks that there is a shift in Plato's thinking about this metaphor from the *Timaeus* to the *Laws*. He argues that rotation in the former is entirely spatial, while rotation in the latter is described in terms that are "personal" or "spiritual." I attribute this slight shift in language to the very imagistic mode of description throughout the *Timaeus*, and of course, the Stranger presents this as a spatial *image* in the *Laws* too.

The Stranger helps Clinias to recall the kind of motion that takes place “in a single location” and “necessarily implies continuous revolution round a central point.” He claims that “this kind of motion bears the closest possible affinity and likeness to the cyclical movement of reason” (τοῦ νοῦ περίοδος, 898a). When Clinias asks (as we might also wish to do) what this image means, the Stranger replies:

Take reason (*νοῦς*) on the one hand, and motion in a single location on the other. If we were to point out that in both cases the motion was (i) determined by a single plan and procedure (ἓνα λόγον καὶ τάξιν μίαν) and that it was (ii) regular (κατὰ ταῦτά), (iii) uniform (ὡσαύτως), (iv) always at the same point in space (ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ), (v) around a fixed center (περὶ τὰ αὐτά),<sup>25</sup> (vi) moving in the same direction (πρὸς τὰ αὐτά)<sup>26</sup> and were to illustrate both by the example of a sphere being turned on a lathe, then no one could ever show us up for incompetent makers of verbal images. (898a–b)

This enumeration of points brings out with special clarity the sense that both Timaeus and the Stranger want to associate rotation with *stability* and *consistency*.<sup>27</sup> Rotation is like reason because both are consistent, providing something firm and reliable. Through this dimension of the metaphor we also see a connection with the immortality that characterizes divinity. Human life falls apart. Human beings wander

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25. The Stranger here plays off the cognitive (“about” a topic) and the spatial (“about” a place) meanings of the word “περὶ.” While it is true that these uses of the preposition sometimes take different cases (genitive in the former and accusative in the latter), this tendency is not absolute. See Lee, “Reason and Rotation,” 76, n. 11. for argument and examples of other passages in Plato that exploit this play on meaning.

26. Accepting Lee’s translation rather than Saunders’s “in the same position relative to other objects.” See *ibid.*, 76, n. 12. for argument.

27. See Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology*, 83: “If a body is to have intelligent motion, it must have circular motion, this being of all motions the most stable and the most uniform. For intelligence has dealings solely with the stable, unchanging, and uniform—i.e., with Ideas.” For the second half of this quote and the connection between the stability of the motion and the stability of that which it is “about” see below.

and fail. The gods, however, are not subject to these ills and enjoy a life that need never stop, that abides ever the same, firm, sure, fixed.

In noticing the stability of rotation, however, we notice also a paradox. Rotation is a *motion* that gains its special character by having a center at *rest*.<sup>28</sup> Motion as such involves not staying the same, yet everything that the Stranger wants to emphasize about this first of all motions has to do with sameness: *κατὰ ταὐτά, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ, περὶ τὰ αὐτά, πρὸς τὰ αὐτά*. This paradox rests upon an asymmetry—essential to circular motion—between the rotating body, which moves as a whole throughout, and the stable axis which all this motion is *about*. I take it that both the Stranger and Timaeus wish to convey by this metaphor that there is an essential asymmetry between *νοῦς* and that which *νοῦς* is “about” (see the pun with *περὶ* above). *Νοῦς* itself involves activity—a kind of life—but the stable, regular, and measured character of this life derives from the center “about” which that life “revolves,” a center that abides wholly at rest.<sup>29</sup> We might appeal here to the essential difference between “immortality” in the sense of everlastingness and “immortality” in the sense of atemporality. The gods may be immortal by possessing an everlasting activity, but the unending character of this activity derives from the wholly atemporal center toward which that activity is directed. If we maintain our connection between divinity and immortality, then, we have discovered another sense in which the di-

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28. For a discussion of the essential asymmetry involved in rotation see Lee, “Reason and Rotation,” 88–89. Lee argues that there is a striking contrast between this model of mind and that presented in so-called “middle” works like the *Phaedo* where cognition of Forms depends on the mind becoming *like* its object (e.g. the requirement that the soul be *αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτήν* in order to behold the Forms which are *αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ* at *Phaedo* 79c; see Chapter 2). He further argues that this contrast need not involve Plato changing his mind but rather may merely signal the different rhetorical perspectives required by different dialogues.

29. For the connection between the rotation metaphor and the idea that *νοῦς* involves activity see *ibid.*, 86. Lee argues that this marks a shift from understanding *νοῦς* as a state (e.g. *φρόνησις* described as a *πάθημα* at *Phaedo* 79d).

vinity of the gods may be characterized as derivative. If my interpretation is correct, we can make better sense of what Socrates says in the *Phaedrus* when he refers to “those realities by being close to which the gods are divine” (249c; see below).

This image also helps illuminate the relationship between *νοῦς* in the sense of cognitive act and *νοῦς* in the sense of virtue. In the case of circular motion, we have on the one hand the ongoing *activity* of the motion and on the other the virtuous *regularity* of the motion in virtue of which the activity participates in measure, proportion, and orderliness.<sup>30</sup> We might think, for example, of the perpetual cycle of day and night. Rotation (whether we think of it as the Earth’s or the sun’s) imparts to this cycle the steadily fluctuating proportion of day to night and the perfectly regular measure from dawn to dawn. Human intelligence can discern these measures and proportions, and because we are capable of this discovery we find it predictable, providing a stable foundation around which we organize our life.<sup>31</sup> We may even, especially if we are Greek, find an austere kind of beauty in this unstoppable, majestic dance. In the case of *νοῦς*, recall that “*νοῦν ἐχεῖν*” means “to be reasonable,” and that Plato often uses *νοῦς* alongside other virtue terms like *σοφία* to indicate that feature of a person or a system that accounts for measure, proportion, and orderliness (all of which are understood as the *best* way for things to be). Just as the rotation of the sphere imposes a determinate order upon everything connected to it, the activity of *νοῦς* concerning its object imposes a determinate order on everything that it governs.

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30. For the connection between the circular motion of *νοῦς* and the virtuous sense of orderliness and regularity (as opposed to the “madness” of the wandering motions) see Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, 18. For interesting comments on the connection between *νοῦς* and the notion of regularity throughout ancient thought, especially in connection with the motion of the planets, see Frede, *A Free Will*, 13.

31. On the connection between *νοῦς* as capable of perceiving order and *νοῦς* as capable of causing order see Robinson, “The Tripartite Soul in the ‘Timaeus,’” 106.

By understanding the several senses in which the gods themselves are characterized in the *Timaeus* as possessing a derivative sense of divinity and by understanding the connection between the divine activity of *νοῦς* and rotation, we are now in a position to understand the even more derivative sense of divinity in human beings by looking at the presence of *νοῦς* in the human soul and the interference that “wandering” linear motions cause to its circular motion. Again, Timaeus relies on the metaphor of circular motion to connect conceptual threads that may otherwise remain disconnected. As just one example of how far he exploits this metaphor, Timaeus even explains the physical shape of the head in terms of the gods “copying the revolving shape of the universe.” The head, he asserts, is “the most divine part of us, and master of all our other parts” (44d). In this description, even a physical part of a mortal organism is described as “divine” in virtue of its connection with circular motion and the role that it plays in housing the divine part of the soul. Timaeus again appeals to the notion of imitating the rotating movements in the cosmos a few pages later when he describes the “supreme good” that eyesight offers when it turns us toward philosophy:

The god invented sight and gave it to us so that we might observe the orbits of intelligence (*νοῦς*) in the universe and apply them to the revolutions of our own understanding (*διανόησις*). For there is a kinship between them, even though our revolutions are disturbed, whereas the universal orbits are undisturbed. So once we have come to know them and to share in the ability to make correct calculations according to nature, we should stabilize the straying revolutions within ourselves by imitating the completely unstraying revolutions of the god. (47b–c)

This passage alone should challenge the notion that there is a strong numerical identity between the rational part of the soul and Universal Reason.<sup>32</sup> In this description

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32. See Sorabji, *Self*, 2, 6, 34–35, 115, for this thesis. Robert Hall, “*Ψυχή* as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato,” 64, discusses this view, which he

we find a clear distinction between “our own understanding” and the “intelligence in the universe.” Our whole trouble, in fact, stems from a misalignment of these two. And our goal is not to *merge with* the noetic activity of the World Soul, but to *imitate* it.<sup>33</sup> All this is possible, however, because the two are “akin” (*συγγενεῖς*) to one another. Something in us is capable of “rotation” in the sense of an activity deriving its stable character from its centeredness on its fixed object. This kinship remains even when we take into account that the mixture of our souls from the mixing bowl is not “invariably and consistently pure, but of a second and third grade of purity” (41d). We face trouble because our revolutions are not perfectly *περὶ τὰ ἀντά*; they stray and they wander because they are disturbed. Our goal, however, is to apply our astronomical observations correctly, massaging our rotations into a

calls “the traditional approach” to the question of the identity of the immortal soul.

33. My perspective here, I take it, does not ultimately disagree with Lee’s interpretation of the rotation metaphor as involving a “canceling of perspectivity,” and involving “all the participating parts’ full self-effacement and full reabsorption in their joint activity of circling the center,” “Reason and Rotation,” 80–81. Lee argues that the image of a rotating sphere represents “a sort of concrete *unanimity* concerning the center that pervades and thus defines the entire body,” and that this “conveys a compelling sense of a fully focused and yet totally distributed, or non-localized, consciousness.” He calls this mode of consciousness “totally impersonal, pure ‘aboutness,’ ” 82. I agree with him so long as “impersonal” means the cancellation of what we have previously called “personality” and so long as “self-effacement” or “full reabsorption” means the abeyance of the idiosyncratic flair characteristic of human individuals. Insofar as Lee can speak of *νοῦς* involving “consciousness,” I take it that he cannot intend his interpretation to exclude subjectivity entirely. On this point, I agree with Gerson, *Knowing Persons*, 10, who argues that we should distinguish the idea of subjectivity from the idiosyncratic content of subjectivity and that there is no reason in principle to reject a numerical plurality of subjects all qualitatively identical because they are devoid of any idiosyncratic content, 193, 279. I can speak of being *cognitively* “merged” with or “absorbed” in the thoughts of the universe because there is a qualitative identity of content—an alignment—while not being *ontologically* “merged” with or “absorbed” in the universe because my mind remains one thing while the universe remains another.

more and more perfect imitation of the perfect rotations we find in the heavens.<sup>34</sup> Hence, we discover ourselves as caught between two poles, as divine within the human, as immortal within the mortal. We find a certain nobility within ourselves because we are capable of an activity that reflects the divine, measured activity of the cosmos, but we also find ourselves vexed by wanderings, liable to suffer disturbances that require us to work hard at recovering the alignment we have lost.

Timaeus introduces the notion of kinship between us and the divine again in the remarkable metaphor of humans as upside-down plants growing from heaven:

Now we ought to think of the most sovereign part of our soul as god's gift to us, given to be our guiding spirit. This, of course, is the type of soul that, as we maintain, resides in the top part of our bodies. It raises us up away from the earth and toward what is akin to us in heaven (*πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἐν οὐρανῷ συγγένειαν*), as though we are plants grown not from the earth but from heaven. In saying this, we speak absolutely correctly.<sup>35</sup> For it is from heaven, the place from which our souls were originally born, that the divine part suspends our head, i.e. our root, and so keeps our whole body erect. (90a–b)

This metaphor again points to the idea that, although we exist on the mortal, terrestrial plane, we yet possess an inner dimension that pokes beyond it. Furthermore, this dimension is central rather than peripheral to the human being because it is the “most sovereign part” of the soul and it is rooted in that place “from which our souls were originally born.”

This metaphor also extends the idea of kinship to include the idea of nourishment. Timaeus insists that “there is but one way to care for anything, and that is to provide for it the nourishment and the motions that are proper to it” (90c). A plant possesses an organ, the root, through which it draws nourishment from a certain

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34. For a thoughtful analysis of how this process is supposed to take place see Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast*, 358–60.

35. Surely we should picture Timaeus winking when he describes his marvelous yet absurd picture of sky-plants as speaking “absolutely correctly.”

place, the soil. The material found in the soil is proper to the plant whereas the material found in, say, the clouds is not. In our case, Timaeus says, “the motions that have an affinity to the divine part within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe” (τῶ δ’ ἐν ἡμῶν θείῳ συγγενεῖς εἰσὼν κινήσεις αἱ τοῦ παντὸς διανοήσεις καὶ περιφοραί, 90c–d). If we feed ourselves then on the divine we nourish the divine within ourselves and so “partake of immortality” – to the extent that this is possible for a human being (90c). This means becoming “seriously devoted” to “the love of learning and to true wisdom” which causes our thoughts to be “immortal and divine” (φρονεῖν ἀθάνατα καὶ θεῖα, 90b–c). Conversely, Timaeus warns that we can feed the mortal within us by becoming absorbed in our appetites and ambitions and doing everything we can to further them. Should we do this, all our thoughts are “bound to become merely mortal” (90b) and in the end we will become “thoroughly mortal” ourselves – to the extent that this is possible for a human being (90b). Being human, then, involves two affinities that run in contrary directions. On the one hand human beings possess within themselves an element with an affinity for the divine. This element grows strong and flourishes through contact with the divine because it is akin to it. On the other hand human beings also possess an element that increases itself through contact with the mortal because of a kinship with it. That *our* good has to do with the nurture of the former and the suppression of the latter – as though it were a weed – suggests again that we *ought* to identify ourselves with the divine and immortal element of our human constitution rather than the mortal.

So far we have seen that there are various levels of divinity in the *Timaeus* and we have connected being divine with *νοῦς*. It remains somewhat unclear, however, what *νοῦς* is precisely. Some of this unclarity comes from the mythical nature of Timaeus’s account since he does not even attempt a rigorous dialectical definition of *νοῦς*. We can, however, venture a few observations that will come further into focus



as we take up the *Philebus*. First, *νοῦς* and related terms (e.g. *φρόνησις*, *σοφία*) have as their object *that which is* (τὸ ὄν), in contrast to *δόξα* which has as its object *that which becomes* (τὸ γιγνόμενον, 27d–28a).<sup>36</sup> Second, Timaeus describes his first account as “what has been crafted by *νοῦς*,” in which he tells how the Demiurge crafted the world and his reasons for acting as he does, and this he contrasts with “things which have come about by Necessity” (47e).<sup>37</sup> Whether or not we wish to identify the Demiurge as the mythical representation of ultimate *Noûs*, we certainly have *Noûs* as an explanatory principle of the order we find in the cosmos.<sup>38</sup> Third, we see an analogous relationship between *Noûs* as the principle of order and proportion and *νοῦς* as the faculty or activity in us that is receptive to this order and proportion.<sup>39</sup> This gives us the ethical project we have just seen of bringing the operation of our *νοῦς* into alignment with the *Noûs* which explains the order of the cosmos.

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36. For a discussion of these two modes of cognition see Hall, “*Ψυχὴ* as Differentiated Unity in the Philosophy of Plato,” 81.

37. Notice that Timaeus later replaces the contrasting pair *νοῦς*–necessity with divine–necessary at 68e–69a.

38. For the identification of the Demiurge as a mythic representation of transcendent *Noûs* which orders the cosmos see R. Hackforth, “Plato’s Theism,” *The Classical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (January 1936), 4, and Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, ch. 2.

39. While Menn wants to insist upon the primacy of the “virtue” meaning of *νοῦς* he also concedes that the term can be used, especially applied to us, to refer to the rational faculty or the cognitive act whereby we apprehend the rationality of something, 14–15. This sense that having *νοῦς* involves subjectivity comes out especially when Timaeus describes the third kind of soul which lacks *νοῦς*: “Throughout its existence it is completely passive, and its formation has not entrusted it with a natural ability to discern and reflect upon any of its own characteristics, by revolving within and about itself, repelling movement from without and exercising its own inherent movement” (77b–c). For comments on the connection between this passage and the notion of self-awareness in *νοῦς* see Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 281.

### 3. Divine *Noûs* in the *Philebus*

In the main line of argument of the *Philebus*, Socrates maintains that neither pleasure nor reason (*νοῦς, φρόνησις*) is best—but reason is still *better* than pleasure. The reasons for the first half of this conclusion are rather simple. Socrates asks Philebus and Protarchus to imagine a life completely full of pleasure yet also completely lacking reason. Such a life, they all agree, would not be desirable because, without understanding, a person would not even know that he was experiencing pleasure nor remember it when it had passed. Such a life would be just as desirable as the life of a mollusk (21b–d). Next, Socrates shows that the converse is also true. The life of reason without any pleasure would mean “living in total insensitivity” (21e).<sup>40</sup> Instead, the mixed life is preferable to either of the two pure lives. Now the conclusion that Socrates draws from this brief thought experiment establishes the ground for the rest of the dialogue: neither reason nor pleasure is the good. If either were the good, it would be “sufficient, perfect, and worthy of choice for any of the plants and animals that can sustain them throughout their lifetime” (22b). In other words, the good must be complete and desirable just on its own; it must be a self-sufficient object of choice. If one has the good, one has all one needs. If one needs something else, this is sufficient evidence that what one has is not the good. Because the life of pleasure needs reason in order to be desirable and likewise the life of reason needs pleasure, neither is self-sufficiently desirable.

Immediately after stating his main conclusion, however, Socrates inserts a striking qualification:

It may apply to *my* reason (*ὁ γ' ἐμός [νοῦς]*), Philebus, but certainly not to the true, the divine reason (*θεῖος νοῦς*), I should think. It is in quite a different condition. (22c)

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40. All translations from the *Philebus* are from Dorothea Frede.

We must be careful not to miss this qualification because of its brevity. The conclusion that the life of the mind is not self-sufficient only comes when we are thinking about *our* minds. Socrates holds out, however, for another kind of *νοῦς*, a “divine” *νοῦς* that may not be subject to the same conditions.<sup>41</sup> Presumably, “quite a different condition” here means that the activity of *θεῖος νοῦς* *would* be desirable just on its own.

While the central discussion of the *Philebus* continues to center on our minds, Socrates comes back to cosmic or divine mind at 28c. He begins his account with a received opinion:

For all the wise are agreed, in true self-exaltation, that reason (*νοῦς*) is our king both over heaven and earth.<sup>42</sup>

Socrates is not, however, content to leave things with a received opinion. Instead, he insists that they take up the teaching passed on to them from their ancestors as a question for themselves and agree upon it.

Let us proceed by taking up this question:...whether we hold the view that the universe and this whole world order are ruled by unreason and irregularity, as chance would have it, or whether they are not rather, as our forebears taught us, governed by reason and by the order of a wonderful intelligence (*νοῦν καὶ φρόνησίν τινα θαυμαστὴν συντάπτουσαν διακυβερνᾶν*). (28d)

We can learn something about what Socrates has in mind in the terms “reason” (*νοῦς*) and “intelligence” (*φρόνησις*) by paying attention to their antonyms in the pas-

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41. While Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, pays close attention to the notion of *θεῖος νοῦς* throughout the *Philebus*, he does not remark on this sentence at all. This absence may help to explain why I am more ready than Menn to interpret some instances of *νοῦς* as references to individual human minds rather than to a universal virtue (e.g. *σοφία*).

42. For a discussion of whom Socrates might mean by “all the wise” and which views exactly he means to take up and extend see Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, 3, 16, 25–33.

sage, “unreason” (τὸ ἄλογον), “irregularity” (εἰκῆ),<sup>43</sup> and “as chance would have it” (τὸ ὅπῃ ἔτυχεν). Thus, we should understand the notion of *νοῦς* here as whatever it is that opposes these arbitrary, disorderly, or unintentional qualities in the cosmos. The idea, I take it, is that *νοῦς* is just *whatever it is that causes or calls for* λόγος—an ordered, intelligible structure that is more than mere happenstance.<sup>44</sup>

Protarchus protests that there is not really a discussion to be had because the alternative view would be blasphemous:

How can you even think of a comparison here, Socrates? What you suggest now is downright impious, I would say. The only account that can do justice to the wonderful spectacle presented by the cosmic order of sun, moon, and stars and the revolution of the whole heaven, is that reason arranges it all (νοῦν πάντα διακοσμεῖν), and I for my part would never waver in saying or believing it. (28d–e)

We should note that Socrates earlier uses the regularity of the seasons as an example of the “fourth kind” causing the imposition of limit upon the unlimited in his first discussion of the four kinds at 26b. Here again in Protarchus’s comments, it is the *regularity* and *order* of cosmic phenomena that demands an explanation in terms of *νοῦς*.

Socrates again encourages Protarchus not to simply take on the view of “earlier thinkers” but rather to face up to the consequences of his own position (29a). This leads him through a chain of considerations comparing human beings to “the

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43. Note that LSJ has “without a plan or purpose, at random.”

44. For a discussion of the many texts that connect *νοῦς* with the process of ordering or governing the cosmos see Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, 8. Menn also discusses the similarity in the language used to discuss this aspect of *νοῦς* throughout the dialogues and the language used in the *Timaeus* to describe the activity of the Demiurge: “Stepping back from the particular words Plato uses, we may say that the gods of the *Timaeus* and *Statesman*, like the *nous* of the *Philebus*, *Phaedo*, and *Laws*, all introduce limit, and thus some degree of intelligibility, into a sensible totality, which without their causality would not reflect the intelligible forms in any orderly way.” On the connection between the *Philebus* and the *Timaeus* see below.

all.” Just as a human being is composed of body and soul, so too, Socrates argues, the all must be composed of body and soul. As the conclusion of this chain, Socrates claims that it would be “inconceivable” to maintain that “all-encompassing wisdom” (*παντοίαν σοφίαν*) operates as the “fourth kind”—that which causes the imposition of limit upon the unlimited—on the human level but *not* on the cosmic level (30b). He continues:

But if that is inconceivable, we had better pursue the alternative account and affirm, as we have said often, that there is plenty of the unlimited in the universe as well as sufficient limit, and that there is, above them, a certain cause, of no small significance, that orders and coordinates the years, seasons, and months, and which has every right to the title of wisdom (*σοφία*) and reason (*νοῦς*).<sup>45</sup> (30c)

The point here behind the whole chain of argument from 29a to 30d seems to be that *νοῦς* is not merely a human reality, but rather that the whole cosmos from the stars and planets down to the composition of the elements requires *νοῦς* as an *αἰτία*, a cause explaining why it is the way it is.

This brief argument from 29a to 30d relates back to the distinction Socrates made earlier in an aside at 22c between his own *νοῦς* and divine *νοῦς*. Human minds cannot be the *αἰτία* of the order that we find in the cosmos. The planets keep their regular orbits and the seasons their ratios before we ever arrive on the scene and we did not, in any case, think their order into being. Indeed the model of human rationality throughout the dialogues is one of *responding* to an independent, eternal, and necessarily existing order. Human beings do not cause this order, but we must account for the remarkable fact that each particular object we encounter in the world *is* intelligible. If *we* did not cause this intelligibility where did it come from?

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45. For the way that Plato often links *νοῦς* with other virtue terms like *σοφία*, *ἐπιστήμη*, or *φρόνησις* see *ibid.*, 16.

Whatever it turns out to be, such a cause would seem to have every right to be called “divine.” Socrates is even willing to let Protarchus go on with a mythological way of putting these insights:

You will therefore say that in the nature of Zeus there is the soul of a king, as well as a king’s reason (*βασιλικός νοῦς*), in virtue of this power displayed by the cause, while paying tribute for other fine qualities in the other divinities, in conformity with the names by which they like to be addressed. (30d)

The contrast between this claim and the last at 30c is important. Above, at 30c Socrates endorses the position by including himself (“we”). At 30d, by contrast, he begins his description of the mind of Zeus with “You will therefore say...” At 30c, Socrates uses rather circumspect language. First, he identifies merely “a certain cause” (*τις αἰτία*) rather than some particular entity, as if to say, “there must be *something* that causes this and *whatever* it is...” Second, he uses the phrase “has every right to the title of” to signal that the terms “mind” and “wisdom” are being taken out of ordinary usage and applied to “a certain cause.” 30d, by contrast, rushes head-long into making explicit claims about the nature of Zeus and the other divinities.

I have sometimes employed the word “mind” as the most generic and flexible translation of *νοῦς*, but here we must be careful. The idea does not seem to be (in Socrates’s more careful exposition at any rate) that there is some center of consciousness responsible for ordering the universe. Instead, we should understand Socrates to mean that the same normative standards that govern “good sense” in human thinking and thereby leads to “good order” in human acting also govern the good order of the cosmos.<sup>46</sup>

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46. On this point and in this context I am in full agreement with *ibid.* ch. 3, that we should emphasize the side of the word “*νοῦς*” which denotes the virtue of reasonability. For Menn’s discussion of this passage in particular see 16–17.

This contrast between the mythological manner that Socrates allows to Protarchus and the denuded language he sometimes adopts for himself recalls his earlier argument that there must be a “fourth kind” in addition to (i) the unlimited, (ii) limit, and (iii) mixture:

1. “Everything that comes to be comes to be through a cause (*διὰ τινα αἰτίαν*)” (26e).
2. That which “produces” (*τοῦ ποιούντος*) and the “cause” (*τῆς αἰτίας*) differ only in name (26e).
3. That which produces (*τοῦ ποιούντος*) is always superior in the order of nature to that which is produced (27a).
4. Therefore:

That which fashions (*τὸ δημιουργοῦν*) all these must be the fourth kind, the cause (*τὴν αἰτίαν*), since it has been demonstrated sufficiently that it differs from the others. (27b)

After the previous section on the *Timaeus*, the phrase *τὸ δημιουργοῦν* and premise (1) at 26e should strike us as highly provocative, yet we should note that *τὸ δημιουργοῦν* is neuter rather than masculine and a participle rather than a personal noun (“that which fashions” rather than “the fashioner”). Further, *τὸ δημιουργοῦν* and *τὸ ποιοῦν* are simply equated with *ἡ αἰτία*—Socrates even insists that they differ “in name only.” All of this points to a less mythological characterization of the cause of all becoming. We are instructed explicitly to understand thick descriptive terms like “producing” and “making”—terms that rely on the conceptual repertoire of crafting—on the basis of the thinner term *αἰτία* that signifies simply an explanatory principle.<sup>47</sup>

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47. For a discussion of the previous scholarship on the connection between *νοῦς* and the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* see *ibid.*, 6–13. While remaining neutral about the precise identity of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*, I want to note simply that we can understand why Socrates would think of *νοῦς* as being “divine” if he attributed to it (whatever it turns out exactly to be) a causal role in explaining the order and intelligibility of the cosmos. On the whole, I find convincing Hackforth’s argument,

This account, then, describes *νοῦς* as the “fourth kind” the *αἰτία* of the intelligibility we find in particular instances where limit has been imposed upon the unlimited.<sup>48</sup> This cause “has every right to the title of wisdom (*σοφία*) and reason (*νοῦς*)” because of the link “reason” and “wisdom” have in ordinary usage to the intelligible order of things. Ordinarily, *νοῦς* refers to that aspect of us that establishes contact with the intelligible order. The difference between this ordinary usage and what we mean when we call this “certain cause” by the “title of wisdom and reason” comes when we note that our *νοῦς* is merely *receptive* to this intelligible order while *θεῖος νοῦς* *causes* it. Because of this relationship, the latter establishes a normative ideal that the former must live up to and achieve. When my *νοῦς* fails to conform to the order established by *θεῖος νοῦς*, it fails *qua* *νοῦς*. This interpretation has two advantages. First, it makes sense of why Socrates might call cosmic *Νοῦς* “divine” (*θεῖος*), since being divine means (in part) being the source of the order we see in things. Second, it makes sense of why Timaeus might call our *νοῦς* “divine” since this element of human psychology has an affinity for cosmic *Νοῦς* by being receptive to it.

#### 4. Our Divinity in the *Phaedrus*

In the *Phaedrus*, especially in the Palinode, we find an unforgettable portrait of the human soul. As we saw in the last chapter, Socrates uses a myth about our state before birth, riding chariots with the gods in heaven, to tell us something about ourselves now. We have already examined the ways that this myth encourages us to identify ourselves first with the *ψυχή* and then with the rational aspect of the

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“Plato’s Theism,” 4, that “the Demiurge is to be identified with *νοῦς*, i.e. he is the ‘mythical’ equivalent of *νοῦς*.”

48. For a thorough account of the four kinds see Miller, “A More ‘Exact Grasp’ of the Soul?”.



ψυχή. Now we must consider the ways that this myth encourages us to think of our true selves as “divine.” The myth does not claim that we are divine in the strict sense (if my reading of ψυχή πᾶσα in Chapter 3 is correct). Our souls are clearly distinguished throughout the myth from the Olympian gods on the one hand and from the Beings (presumably the Forms) on the other. Instead, the sense in which we are “divine” in the myth is much weaker: simply that in our original condition we are *in the presence of* the gods and the Forms, and thereby *receptive to* intelligible reality. We can be numbered among that company albeit on a much lower rank. Further, at the height of our journey we not only behold the Forms, we are also nourished by them. This requires that our souls must be doubly fitted to the Forms. First, we must be so constituted so as to be able to behold them—rocks cannot do this. Second, we must be constituted such that this beholding is *good for us* like food is good for our bodies.

In the *Timaeus* and the *Philebus* we saw Socrates working with a notion of cosmic, divine Νοῦς. In both dialogues, we also saw hints that there was some kind of relationship between Νοῦς at the cosmic level and νοῦς in us. In the *Phaedrus*, this relationship between the divine intelligibility of the cosmos and our intelligent souls becomes a little clearer, but our principal text is still heavily mythological. In this section, I will argue that we can make sense of the relationship between νοῦς in us and the Forms without resorting to the the view, sometimes ascribed to Plato, that our mind *just is* universal Reason or Intellect.<sup>49</sup>

At the beginning of the Palinode, Socrates sets out to describe “the nature of the soul, divine or human” (245c). I have already mentioned that this phrase might be interpreted in a way that challenges my distinction between the soul which is

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49. For an example of someone who takes Plato to hold this view see Sorabji, *Self*, 2, 6, 34–35, 115.

the self and the human being which is the composite organism. The implicit distinction between human souls and divine souls might also be taken to contradict the idea, which we find elsewhere, that *our* souls are “divine.” *Our* souls, it might be thought, are clearly of the “human” variety, and therefore *not* divine. It seems to me, however, that we can make perfect sense of why Socrates starts off this way without running into this problem. In the myth which follows, Socrates draws a distinction between those souls that have bad horses, and thus are liable to fall from heaven, and those that do not. The former, as we have seen, are the only kind of soul which can end up in a composite human organism even though they were not humans up above. Hence, it makes sense to refer to this group as the group of “human” souls. By contrast, the latter group of souls is straightforwardly “divine” in a strong sense, because in the myth, these souls are the souls of the Olympian gods.<sup>50</sup> This simple grouping does not seem to threaten the idea that even our fallen souls can be called “divine” in a weaker sense because they originated outside the mortal sphere—like the upside down trees of the *Timaeus* which have their roots in heaven.

Just a page later, we see Socrates use the contrast between what is human and what is divine for another purpose. He claims that “to describe what the soul actually is would require a very long account, altogether a task for a god in every way” (246a). This should, perhaps, remind us of “the longer way” in the *Republic* or the “quite a lot of study” that Socrates does not attempt in the *Alcibiades*, both of which have as their object an exact account of the soul’s nature. We are not, however, left altogether helpless for “to say what it is like is humanly possible and takes less time” (246a). Hence, in the mode of inquiry and the kind of understanding that

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50. For a discussion of the consistent division between the *θεοί* in the myth and the other souls see McGibbon, “The Fall of the Soul in Plato’s *Phaedrus*,” 61–62.

this inquiry results in we find something suitable for the gods that Socrates does not even attempt here, but we also find another mode of inquiry and another kind of understanding suitable for humans. Furthermore, the human kind approaches or images the divine kind while remaining a long way off.

As he begins to recount his remarkable chariot image, Socrates contrasts the souls of the gods with the souls of “everyone else” (246b). The gods have only good horses (notice that Socrates does not say just how many) and charioteers, while “everyone else” has a mixture. We are meant to place ourselves in this latter class because, in the next sentence, Socrates says that “our” driver is in charge of one good and one bad horse (246b). We further learn about the gods that it is “pure fiction” to say that they are immortal beings composed of body and soul because a soul–body composite could not be immortal “on any reasonable account” (246c). This aside relies on the traditional axiom of Greek religious thinking that being divine means being immortal, but Socrates’s tale has expanded the class of immortal beings from the gods proper to “all soul” (245c–246c), even when a particular soul shows up for a time as the principle animating a composite mortal organism. In this sense, our souls—which is to say *we ourselves*—are really immortal and therefore divine, although we do not belong to the ranks of the Olympian gods proper because our immortal souls are prone to falling into mortal organisms while theirs are not.

Along with immortality we also learn about heaven as Socrates structures the myth around a basic spatial polarity between up and down. The wings of a soul naturally carry it “aloft” which is “where the gods all dwell” (246d). Hence, out of all physical organs, wings are “akin to the divine” (246e). The gods and their followers undergo a cyclical journey of ascent and return, but the emphasis of the myth is on the goodness of the upward trajectory, led by Zeus, as opposed to the

downward fall, occasioned by the heaviness, rebellion, and unmanagability of the bad horse. Hence, we have a picture of heaven, the divine space, as “up there” and a picture of earth, the mortal human space, as “down here.” The thing that makes heaven such a good place, however, does not lie within heaven’s own borders, despite its “many wonderful places” (247a). Instead, we learn about a mysterious “place beyond heaven.” We want to go *up* in heaven because its uppermost limit, the “rim of heaven,” looks out upon something else (247b–c).

What then is this something else? How should we imagine it within the myth? Socrates describes it thus:

What is in this place is without color and without shape and without solidity, a being that really is what it is (*οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα*), the subject of all true knowledge, visible only to intelligence, the soul’s steersman (*ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῇ νῶ*). Now a god’s mind is nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge (*θεοῦ διάνοια νῶ τε καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἀκηράτῳ τρεφομένη*), as is the mind of any soul that is concerned to take in what is appropriate to it, and so it is delighted at last to be seeing what is real and watching what is true, feeding on all this and feeling wonderful, until the circular motion brings it around to where it started. On the way around it has a view of Justice as it is; it has a view of Self-control; it has a view of Knowledge —not the knowledge that is close to change, that becomes different as it knows the different things which we consider real down here. No, it is the knowledge of what really is what it is (*τὴν ἐν τῶ ὅ ἐστιν ὄν ὄντως ἐπιστήμην*). And when the soul has seen all the things that are as they are (*τὰ ὄντα ὄντως*) and feasted on them, it sinks back inside heaven and goes home. (247c–e)

Notice right away that we are being asked to imagine mythically something colorless and shapeless and further being asked to imagine souls “seeing” and “watching” such a thing, “visible only to intelligence.” I suspect that Socrates juxtaposes a reliance on a visual metaphor for intelligence with explicit claims about the impossibility of seeing such a thing to provoke the careful reader into perplexity and protect the metaphor from flat interpretation. Further, notice that Socrates empha-

sizes the changelessness of what the soul sees while also emphasizing the constant circular motion of the soul's perch. This juxtaposition seems to ensure that we mark an inescapable asymmetry between seer and thing seen. This also means that the changeless Knowledge seen by the soul cannot refer to its current rotating and temporary experience.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Socrates does us the service of explicitly identifying the steersman of the chariot as *νοῦς*, the aspect of the soul to which the realities beyond heaven are visible (*ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνω θεατῆ νῶ*; 247c). In the very next sentence, however, Socrates seems to identify the very same aspect of the soul as *διάνοια* and uses *νοῦς* (along with *ἐπιστήμη*) to refer to that which nourishes the mind. *Νοῦς*, therefore, does double duty as a term, referring to both subject and object. On the one hand, *νοῦς* refers to that intelligible object glimpsed by the soul beyond heaven and on the other to the soul considered as a subject suitably receptive to that intelligibility. In a similar way, Socrates names *ἐπιστήμη* as one of the realities that the soul beholds but it also seems to name (although not explicitly in this paragraph) the resulting experience or state in the soul that does the beholding. The minds of the gods are definitely nourished by this experience, but there seems to be some question about the minds of other souls for Socrates qualifies what he says by restricting it to "any soul that is concerned to take in what is appropriate to it" (247d). At the least, however, this experience is open to souls besides the gods and there is a relationship of aptness between the realities beheld and any mind capable of beholding.

We can learn something about the nourishment of the mind by the realities it beholds if we look back to the way Socrates uses a similar idea of nourishment in connection with the soul's wings. As we saw, Socrates says that wings are "akin to the divine, which has beauty, wisdom, goodness, and everything of that sort".

These things possessed by what is divine “nourish the soul’s wings, which grow best in their presence; but foulness and ugliness make the wings shrink and disappear” (246e). To generalize, the idea seems to be that if *A* is akin to *B*, *A* will be nourished by the presence of what *B* has. Again, the underlying idea seems to be that the kinship between *A* and *B* means that what is proper to *B* will in some way be suitable to or good for *A*. Conversely, what is opposed to *B* will be harmful to or even destructive of *A*.

Turning back to our central passage, Socrates uses four verbs connected with eating: (i) “nourished,” (ii) “take in,” (iii) “feeding on,” (247d) and (iv) “feasting” (247e). These verbs are interwoven with six verbs connected with sight: (i) “seeing,” (ii) “watching,” (iii–v) “has a view” (three times; 247e), (vi) “seen” (247d). Throughout, the objects of both sets of verbs seem to be one and the same, i.e. the “beings” beyond heaven. We have, then, a two-fold relation between the mind and these realities being characterized by the metaphors of gazing upon and feeding upon. Both metaphors depend upon the idea of receptivity and suitability. For sight, the eye is specifically receptive to colors, but not receptive to tones. Hence, colors are appropriate to the eye in a way that tones are not. We might say that the eye has a certain affinity for or kinship with colors, and this is not erased when we notice that colors and eyes are wholly different kinds of things. Likewise, racehorses are nourished best by grass grown on Kentucky limestone. Their bones grow strong and they flourish to their full potential on farms where they can regularly take this in. Again, we might say that racehorses have a certain affinity for or kinship with Kentucky grass even though a horse is not a kind of grass. Socrates’s brief explanation in the next paragraph confirms this connection between the seeing and eating metaphors and a receptivity in the soul to that which is suitable to and good for it:

The reason there is so much eagerness to see the plain where truth stands is that this pasture has the grass that is the right food for the best part of the soul, and it is the nature of the wings that lift up the soul to be nourished by it. (248b–c)

The mind, then, from its perch on the rim of heaven, gazes upon and in gazing is nourished by Justice, Self-control, and Knowledge even though it does not belong to this class of realities at all. Being “in the presence” of these realities does not involve the mind crossing over into the region beyond heaven. Instead, the presence is on the ever-moving threshold.<sup>51</sup> But from this vantage point, the mind receives its special birthright, a double receptivity to what is beyond heaven, seeing and eating it.

The whole cyclical journey culminating in this act of seeing and eating Socrates calls “the life of the gods” (248a). He does not, however, limit this to the gods proper:

As for the other souls, one that follows a god most closely, making itself most like that god, raises the head of its charioteer up to the place outside and is carried around in the circular motion with the others. (248a).

Before, at 247d, the qualification that the other souls must meet was being “concerned to take in what is appropriate.” Here, souls besides those of the gods must (i) follow a god most closely and (ii) make itself most like that god. These seem to be one and the same. Emulating a god means concerning oneself with beholding and

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51. On this point I am in agreement with Robinson, “The Tripartite Soul in the ‘Timaeus’,” 109: “The *Phaedrus* makes no mention of an existence [for us] beyond the heavens.” I am hesitant, however, to conclude from this that there is no “permanent escape from the cycle of rebirth.” For the controversy over whether permanent escape is possible in the myth see Bluck, “The *Phaedrus* and Reincarnation.”, and McGibbon, “The Fall of the Soul in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.” For my part, I think the evidence for both sides is inconclusive.

feasting upon Justice, Self-control, Knowledge and the rest since this is the culmination of the divine way of life. The other souls still differ from the gods, however, in the degree and duration of their culminating vision. Socrates says that “this soul does have a view of Reality, just barely” (248a). Another kind of soul that perhaps follows its god without doing so “most” closely “rises at one time and falls at another, and because its horses pull it violently in different directions, it sees some real things and misses others” (248a). This kind of vision differs from that of the soul’s god in that it is intermittent rather than steady and partial rather than complete. The final class of souls does not succeed in gaining this vision at all. Instead, they “depend on what they think is nourishment—their own opinions” (248b). As we learned in Chapter 3, if a soul never on any cycle gains a vision of that which is beyond heaven it cannot become the soul in a human soul–body composite. Our souls, therefore, must have belonged to the first or second category on at least one cycle. This marks a clear set of differences between our capacities and those of the gods proper, but it also gives a sense in which we can be called divine. We may not be gods, capable of reliably gaining and maintaining a stable and complete vision of Reality, but we gaze and feast with them on the same summit because we too are noetic beings.

After enumerating the various fates of souls in the cyclic process of rebirth, Socrates gives us an important clue to his understanding of divinity when he describes what happens to the philosopher:

For just this reason it is fair that only a philosopher’s mind grows wings, since its memory always keeps it as close as possible to those realities by being close to which the gods are divine. A man who uses reminders of these things correctly is always at the highest, most perfect level of initiation, and he is the only one who is perfect as perfect can be. He stands outside human concerns and draws close to the divine; ordinary people think he is disturbed and rebuke him



for this, unaware that he is possessed by god. (249c–d)

One might have thought that the gods were divine simply by being gods, but Socrates says that the gods are divine in virtue of “being close to” those realities beyond heaven. While this does not negate the differences we have already noticed between us and the gods proper, this claim means that we—insofar as we too draw close to these beings through philosophy—can participate in that very mode of life in virtue of which the gods are divine. To the extent that we do this, even while we find ourselves in a human body–soul composite, we can stand “outside human concerns.” As we saw in Chapter 3, all human souls are souls that at one time saw the Forms and thereby are capable of understanding “speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity” (249b–c; cf. 249e). It follows, then, that all human souls have a basic potency for transcending the merely human—even if the vast majority of human souls we see never exercise this potency in the practice of philosophy because they face various obstacles to the act of recollection (see 250a). Someone who carries to perfection this human potential for transcending the human not only stands outside ordinary human life in his internal thoughts and concerns, but also comes to stand outside the ordinary human community since “ordinary people think he is disturbed and rebuke him for this.” The philosopher here does not accomplish a merely negative motion, standing outside the human. Instead, he accompanies this negative motion with a positive one, he “draws close to the divine” (249d). This “highest level of initiation” even amounts to “being possessed by god” (249d).

## 5. Self-Knowledge and the Divine in the *Alcibiades*

In the entire Platonic corpus, the closest thing that I can find to a direct statement that the true self is divine in the strict sense comes from this line near the end of the *Alcibiades*:

Then that region in [the soul, where knowledge and understanding take place] resembles God,<sup>52</sup> and someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine—God<sup>53</sup> and understanding—would have the best grasp of himself as well.

τῷ θεῷ ἄρα τοῦτ' ἔοικεν αὐτῆς, καί τις εἰς τοῦτο βλέπων καὶ πᾶν τὸ θεῖον γνούς, θεόν τε καὶ φρόνησιν, οὕτω καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἂν γνοίη μάλιστα. (133c)

In order to understand this provocative sentence we must back up and understand the framing metaphor that Socrates uses to get us to this point.

Socrates begins, at 132d, by asking Alcibiades what we should do if the Delphic inscription had ordered our eyes to “see thyself,” thinking that the eyes were men themselves. The trouble seems to be that the eye is the very thing by which an eye sees, and the gaze of that eye is always directed outward. We may think of the gaze as a ray that originates from the eye and proceeds in a straight line never to double back or bend upon itself. While the eye may freely turn this gaze in any direction toward any other object in the whole visible cosmos and may roam about

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52. Reading θεῷ with Burnet rather than θεῖω. While I think the latter is more probable (in agreement with Johnson’s reasoning, “God as the True Self,” 10, n. 23.), the former lends the strongest support to the interpretation I wish to deny. The variation in meaning between the two, however, is minimal if we grant θεόν in the next line.

53. Reading θεόν with Burnet rather than the emendation θέαν both because I think it is correct and because this reading would lend the strongest support to the interpretation I wish to deny. See *ibid.*, 11, n. 25. for references to those who wish to emend to θέαν. Annas, “Self Knowledge in Early Plato,” 131, n. 50: “[the emendation to θέαν] is both unwarranted and ludicrous.”

in order to get different angles onto objects, the one thing that it cannot gaze upon from any vantage point is itself. This metaphor tells us something important about the self and self-knowledge that may not have occurred to us without it. In the metaphor, the eye represents the self, while its gaze represent knowledge. The self is fundamentally the subject of its own act of knowing and must direct that act toward an object, away from itself. If we are after self-knowledge, then, we must find some trick whereby the self that knows can also become the self that is known.<sup>54</sup>

Alcibiades immediately suggests an easy answer: obviously, eyes can come to see themselves in mirrors. A reflective surface provides a place for the ray of sight proceeding out from the eye to bounce back and return home. The eye that sees becomes also the eye that is seen by existing, as it were, as a miniature copy on the surface of the mirror. But Socrates, even while agreeing to this, presses his own version of a mirror: “Isn’t there something like that [i.e. a mirror] in the eye, which we see with?” Socrates points out that if one person looks carefully into another’s eye he will see his own face including, I suppose, his own eye. This is true especially of the very center of the eye, the pupil, where a miniature version of the man looking on can be seen.<sup>55</sup> But why should Socrates make this point rather than sticking with Alcibiades’s suggestion about mirrors? If I have something in my eye, I do not rush to my wife and say, “Here, let me look into your eye so that I can see my own and get this out.” A polished piece of metal or even the smooth surface of a pond would certainly be more effective if all I wanted were a reflection.

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54. See Johnson, “God as the True Self,” 8–9, for a discussion of the difficulties created by the notion of reflexivity in self-knowledge and how this compares with vision.

55. The word “κόρη” can mean both “pupil” and “puppet, doll” or “small votive image” (LSJ). See Johnson, “God as the True Self,” 9, especially n. 17, for a discussion of the role that this miniature image played in ancient theories of vision. See Annas, “Self Knowledge in Early Plato,” 131, for a discussion of the understanding of self-knowledge involved in the eye metaphor.

Suppose, however, that I were a scientist that wanted to learn *what sort* of thing my own eye is. Under these conditions it would make sense for me to go to my wife and ask to examine her eye for the light it would shed on eyes in general and, by extension, my own eye. Socrates seems to have both modes of learning in view. Certainly he does make a point of the eye reflecting the eye of the beholder, but I suspect that he pushes Alcibiades to think about using other people's eyes because he also wants to incorporate the second mode of learning whereby we learn about ourselves by encountering and examining something of our own kind.

Socrates also has an ulterior motive for switching from mirrors to eyes. Just before this interchange, at 131e–132a, Socrates makes their whole discussion personal. He takes the claims about the true self being the soul rather than the body and concludes that he, Socrates, is the only one who truly loves Alcibiades himself—the others only love his body. Here again, the force of the eye metaphor seems to be more than an abstract philosophical point. If Alcibiades wants to know himself and so gain virtue he will need to look deeply into another, and Socrates just so happens to be right here ready to hand.

Furthermore, eyes have a structural feature essential for Socrates's point, that mirrors and ponds do not. Eyes have an internal division between whites, irises, and pupils in a concentric arrangement. It is only in the center of the eye, Socrates insists, that the reflection we are after can be found. What is more, the central part of the eye is also the part of the eye where its most proper activity, sight, occurs. In this place, Socrates says that we find the ἀρετή of the eye. Because the eye in the metaphor stands for the soul, Socrates's move from flat and homogeneous mirrors to eyes is also a move toward thinking about the internal complexity of the soul. So far, the dialogue has treated the soul as a simple entity and the identification between the self and the soul has rested upon a negative answer to

the question whether there is anything more authoritative about us than the soul (130d). Here, however, Socrates uses the structure of the eye to suggest concentric complexity within the soul itself and that the central region (τόπος) of the soul is the region where the ἀρετή of the soul, σοφία, accrues to it (133b). Although Socrates does not name this region, it seems clear enough that he is talking about νοῦς or τὸ λογιστικόν, where we are liable to find σοφία, τὸ εἰδέναι, and τὸ φρονεῖν (see below). By implication, this region of the soul may be more authoritative than the soul as a whole, calling into question the conclusion that the soul *simpliciter* is the self.

So far so good. If we stopped the chain of argument right here, we would have a clear lesson. Socrates would be saying to Alcibiades, in effect, “Alcibiades, if you want to know yourself you must look at the soul of another (I just so happen to be right here, ready and willing). Not just this, but you will need to look at the region of the other person’s soul where the soul’s proper excellence and activity are, that is, at the other person’s νοῦς, if you want to truly understand yourself.” But just at this point, Socrates introduces a whole new conceptual category into the discussion: divinity. He asks Alcibiades,

Can we say that there is anything about the soul which is more divine (τῆς ψυχῆς θειότερον) than that where knowing and understanding take place (περὶ ὃ τὸ εἰδέναι τε καὶ φρονεῖν ἐστίν)? (133c)

Securing an agreement to this question allows Socrates to draw the provocative conclusion with which we began:

Then that region in it resembles God, and someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine—God and understanding— would have the best grasp of himself as well. (133c)

Much of the interpretation of this passage hangs on how we understand the inference from Socrates’s question to his conclusion. We might think that he reasons like this:

1. Nothing about the soul is more divine [in the strict sense] than the aspect that knows and understands.
2. This part is the self.
3. So the person who understands God and everything divine will have the best understanding of himself.<sup>56</sup>

Notice that (3) is just a repetition of Socrates's conclusion and, although (2) has not been argued for, it seems to be where Socrates is leading us with the eye metaphor.<sup>57</sup> The crux of this reconstruction, then, hangs on reading "nothing more divine" in the strict sense.<sup>58</sup> Do we really need, however, the strict sense of "divine" to yield the conclusion that Socrates makes? Certainly if he had the strict sense in mind it would be big news, something that should be the conclusion of an argument rather than merely slipped in quietly. Instead, I suggest that he has something much weaker in mind:

1. Nothing about the soul is more divine [in the analogous sense] than the aspect that knows and understands.
2. This part is the self.
3. One can come to understand something best by understanding the model to which it is analogous.
4. So the person who understands God and everything divine will have the best understanding of himself.

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56. This reconstruction seems to be what Johnson, "God as the True Self," 3, thinks: "[Socrates] suggests through the analogy with vision that one's truest self is the intellectual part of the soul, and that this intellect, being divine, is ultimately to be identified with God." This also seems implied by Annas's reading, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 132: "[in this passage] knowing one's real self is knowing God."

57. Johnson, "God as the True Self," 8, attempts to reconstruct an argument on Socrates's behalf for this conclusion using the premises from 128a–130c.

58. See for example Annas, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 133: "Self-knowledge is not of the paradigmatically subjective, the embodied individual; it is of the paradigmatically objective, so that the true self turns out to be God, the ultimate reality." A similar thought seems to underly G.M.A. Grube's claims in *Plato's Thought*, 148. (quoted in Chapter 1).

On this interpretation, Socrates is silently drawing upon the notion of kinship between *νοῦς* in us and God. We continue learning about the self by looking at the soul of another but we deepen what we learn by attending to that aspect of the other by which he knows and understands and the way that this aspect more than anything else about him mirrors the divine. Hence, we broaden our gaze to include both God and everything divine for the light all this can shed on our own nature.<sup>59</sup>

A few textual points support this interpretation. At 133b, using the eye metaphor, Socrates says that the soul, if it is going to know itself, should look at another soul, “and especially at that region in which what makes a soul good (*ἡ ψυχῆς ἀρετή*), wisdom, occurs, and at anything else which is similar to it (*καὶ εἰς ἄλλο ὧ τοῦτο τυγχάνει ὅμοιον ὄν*).”<sup>60</sup> He cannot mean that we should look to wisdom and anything similar to wisdom, but instead must mean that we must look at *that thing we have been talking about*, the aspect of the soul where we find wisdom (presumably *νοῦς* or *τὸ λογιστικόν*) and *anything similar to it*. This addition expands the metaphor from eyes looking directly at the pupil of another eye to eyes looking at *anything else* that is similar to a pupil, presumably on the principle that looking at things similar to *X* will help someone understand *X*. Further, in the primary sentence that we have been examining, Socrates does not limit the range of things that will help someone to understand himself to God, but rather includes “everything

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59. The phrase “and someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine,” is ambiguous between two readings. Socrates could have in mind two separate cognitive acts: (i) looking at the rational aspect of another person’s soul *and as a separate act* (ii) grasping everything divine. Or Socrates could mean a single cognitive act, taking *καί* as epexegetic: looking at the rational aspect of another person’s soul *and thereby* grasping everything divine. In neither case do we need to suppose a strict identity between the rational aspect of another person’s soul and everything divine. The second reading makes good sense on the principle that one can come to grasp something in the act of looking carefully at its analogue.

60. I agree with Johnson, “God as the True Self,” 10, that the final phrase which I have emphasized must be retained as essential to the argument.

divine (πᾶν τὸ θεῖον),” listing “God and understanding (θεόν τε καὶ φρόνησιν)” as examples. Surely the highest aspect of the soul is to be identified in the strict sense to *everything* that qualifies as “divine.” This advice makes sense, however, if the tacit principle is that if *X* belongs to class *Y*, or is at least akin to members of *Y*, then any member of *Y* will help us understand *X*.

So far, I have omitted any discussion of the disputed lines 133c8–17 because I think that a fairly clear picture of what Socrates means emerges without them.<sup>61</sup> When we consider these lines, however, we find further support for the idea that looking at God helps us to understand ourselves without implying that the self *just is* God:

Just as mirrors are clearer, purer, and brighter than the reflecting surface of the eye, isn't God both purer and brighter than the best part of the soul (καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ψυχῇ βελτίστου καθαρώτερόν τε καὶ λαμπρότερον τυγχάνει ὄν)?...So the way that we can best see and know ourselves is to use the finest mirror available and look at God and, on the human level, at the virtue of the soul (εἰς τὸν θεὸν ἄρα βλέποντες ἐκείνῳ καλλίστῳ ἐνόπτρῳ χρώμεθ' ἂν καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων εἰς τὴν ψυχῆς ἀρετήν, καὶ οὕτως ὁρῶμεν καὶ γινγνωσκομεν ἡμᾶς αὐτούς).

If this text is genuine, Socrates returns to the option of looking to mirrors that he had earlier suppressed. Just as looking at a mirror will be a clearer, more effective way for an eye to see itself than looking at another eye, so too looking at God will be a clearer, more effective way for someone to come to understand himself than looking at the best part of another human soul. These lines give us a clear distinc-

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61. For a review of the relevant facts for and against inclusion of these lines see *ibid.*, 11–14, who favors their inclusion. See Annas, “Self Knowledge in Early Plato,” 132, n. 51. for an argument against. Whether these lines are genuine or not does not greatly affect my argument. Annas thinks that the inclusion of these lines “spoils the metaphor” of looking into another’s pupil, but only because she thinks the earlier passage means that “a soul should look at another soul, and *there* see God,” i.e. that God is “inside the soul.” As I have tried to argue above, the earlier passage does not actually say this.



tion between these two modes, one horizontal and the other vertical. The former may be useful but murky, while the latter is much more direct and clear. No one would think that looking at a mirror would help an eye see itself because the mirror *just is* the eye that is looking into it. At best, by applying Socrates's comments about the pupil, we find in the mirror a miniature copy, the reflection of that which is set before it. This would mean that somehow by standing before God and gazing into the divine nature one might find oneself in miniature. This would happen, however, not because the divine nature *just is* the self, but because, like a mirror, it presents back a reflection of *whatever* one sets before it. At the risk of reading this passage anachronistically (after all, it may be a later addition), the underlying idea may be that, just as a mirror formally contains in potentiality all visible things, so too the divine nature formally contains all things *simpliciter*. Be that as it may, this much is clear: God, along with "everything which is divine," is intrinsically more intelligible than anything in the human sphere. After all, while looking at the highest part of another human soul, one must sort through any layers of vice along with any lower aspects of human psychology that may get in the way. Looking straight at God (*ὁ θεός*), by contrast, provides a clear field for inquiry into what being divine (*θεῖος*) means. Ultimately this understanding will give us the best insight into our own true self because there is not "anything about the soul which is more divine."

In this whole discussion about self-knowledge and reflections two key concepts have emerged as crucial: (i) the region of the soul in which we can find *σοφία*, *τὸ εἰδέναι*, and *τὸ φρονεῖν*, presumably *νοῦς* or *τὸ λογιστικόν* and (ii) the divine. With these two notions in hand, we may return to a very puzzling passage earlier in the dialogue where Socrates alludes to an investigation into *αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό* (130d). We may now ask whether Socrates means to foreshadow by this phrase either (i) or

(ii),<sup>62</sup> or whether it instead refers to some entirely different notion.<sup>63</sup>

As we saw in Chapter 2, Socrates argues from 128a to 130c that the soul, rather than the body or the soul–body composite, is the self (ὁ ἄνθρωπος). At the end of this portion of argument, however, he qualifies their conclusion by commenting that what he and Alcibiades have agreed upon so far is proven “fairly well, although perhaps not rigorously” (μὴ ἀκριβῶς ἀλλὰ καὶ μετρίως). Instead, Socrates says they will have “a rigorous proof when we find out what we skipped over, because it would have taken quite a lot of study” (130c–d).<sup>64</sup> This refers back to 129a–b where Socrates alludes to another way of inquiring into “what we are”:

Tell me, how can we find out what ‘itself’ is, in itself (τίν’ ἂν τρόπον εὐρεθείη αὐτὸ ταυτό)? Maybe this is the way to find out what we ourselves might be (τί ποτ’ ἐσμὲν αὐτοί)—maybe it’s the only possible way.

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62. Johnson, “God as the True Self,” 7: “I will argue that rather than being a reference to a form or to the intellectual part of soul, αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό is ultimately identified with God, who is both form-like and intellectual.”

63. R.E. Allen, for example, “Note on Alcibiades I, 129B 1,” 188–89, argues that αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό refers to “the Form of Self” in contrast to each individual self. He does this by eliminating the meanings of “it” and “same” for αὐτό at 129a–b and 130d and argues for “self” instead. He argues further that since “the *F* itself” is standard Platonic language for “the Form of *F*” that we have a clear reference here to “the Form of Self.”

64. The failure of the discussion to be ἀκριβῶς is precisely the failure that Socrates notes in *Republic* IV 435d when discussing the nature of the soul. For even further striking similarities in the language see Johnson, “God as the True Self,” 6. For a thorough analysis of this term as it is used in the *Republic*, see Miller, “A More ‘Exact Grasp’ of the Soul?”. Johnson thinks that this comment is evidence that the foregoing claims about the self and the soul should be left behind in favor of the new and different account involving other souls and God. I disagree because I do not take “the part we skipped over, because it would have taken quite a lot of study” to refer to 132–133. This brief and cryptic passage cannot be the thoroughgoing and ἀκριβῶς analysis involving “quite a lot of study” that Socrates has in mind. Instead, I think that this “part we skipped over” is merely gestured at without being undertaken within the dialogue—in just the same way that the “longer way” is referred to but not taken in *Republic* IV. I do agree, however, that Socrates’s comment indicates that the simple identification between self and soul is, at best, incomplete.

He expands on his requirements for the longer path that they are not taking:

We should first consider what 'itself' is, in itself (εἴη αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό). But in fact, we've been considering what an individual self is, instead of what 'itself' is (νῦν δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ αὐτὸν ἕκαστον ἐσκέμμεθα ὅτι ἐστὶ).<sup>65</sup> Perhaps that was enough for us, for surely nothing about us has more authority (κυριώτερόν) than the soul, wouldn't you agree? (130d)

The cryptic and abbreviated nature of these comments makes it impossible to say anything conclusive about the nature of what Socrates means by αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό.<sup>66</sup> To make matters worse, because the authorship of the dialogue is in doubt we cannot look to other works with any certainty to flesh out our picture. Nevertheless, the reference to a thorough analysis of αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό is too juicy to pass up without speculating about what it means. The Neoplatonic commentators Olympiodorus and Proclus identify it as the rational soul (τὴν λογικὴν ψυχὴν).<sup>67</sup> I think that this identification, i.e. (i) above, is more probable than Johnson's identification of αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό ultimately with God, i.e. (ii) above. As I read it, a clear implication of the mirror passage is that the rational part of the soul is a better candidate for the self than the soul *simpliciter*. A rigorous discussion of the rational part of the soul and its relationship to the divine, however, lies outside the scope of what Socrates hopes to achieve with the young Alcibiades here and now. On this reading, Socrates would

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65. The manuscript text reads αὐτὸν ἕκαστον and this is the reading adopted by both Hutchinson and Johnson. Burnet emends to αὐτὸ ἕκαστον. See Allen, "Note on Alcibiades I, 129B 1," 188 n. 4, for support.

66. I agree with Allen, 187–88, that we can make some headway in ruling out some interpretations that are grammatically impossible. Primarily, I agree that it must be substantival rather than pronomial.

67. See *ibid.*, 189 n. 5, Annas, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 131 esp. n. 47, and Johnson, "God as the True Self," 15, for discussion of the interpretations of Proclus and Olympiodorus. Out of the three, only Annas favors the Neoplatonic reading. As we will see below, however, she does not clearly specify whether the "impersonality" of this rational soul precludes its numeric plurality in multiple individuals.

be saying that he and Alcibiades know enough now to “pick out” each individual self (*αὐτὸς ἕκαστος*) from the vast field of other objects by distinguishing the soul from the body, but they have not properly understood the “true self” or “what exactly it means to be this ‘self’ that we have been talking about” (paraphrasing *αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό*) because they have not undertaken a dialectical analysis of the self on its own terms.<sup>68</sup> In order to begin *that* discussion they would need to properly answer Socrates’s question whether there is anything “about us” that has “more authority than the soul.” While Alcibiades does not think that there is, Socrates is foreshadowing that “region” of the soul where wisdom, knowing, and understanding are (i.e. *νοῦς*).

While I favor this reading there are two potential problems. First, the inclusion of *ἕκαστος* in the first phrase suggests that the more rigorous account will move away from a plurality of distinct individuals. For example, Richard Sorabji understands *αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό* as the rational part of the soul but he also thinks that the contrast with *αὐτὸς ἕκαστος* precludes its numerical plurality in multiple individuals. He concludes, therefore, that we must identify the rational part of the soul, and by extension the self, with Universal Reason. Hence, the mind of Socrates (his true self) is numerically identical to the mind of Alcibiades.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Julia Annas argues that “my real self, if you like, is just the self-itself, and is not *my* self in any intuitive sense at all, since it is just as much your real self as mine.”<sup>70</sup> This particular

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68. This comes very close to Allen’s interpretation of *αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό* as “the Form of Self,” “Note on Alcibiades I, 129B 1,” 189. I am not quite so ready, however, to read into this passage a full-blown theory of the Forms. See Annas, “Self Knowledge in Early Plato,” 131 esp. n. 48. for some further reservations, slightly different from mine, about interpreting *αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό* as a reference to a universal Form.

69. *Self*, 116.

70. “Self Knowledge in Early Plato,” 131. She has further grounds for thinking this since she thinks that the identification of the self with the soul rather than the body means that the self must lose its individual personality. The implicit prin-

shift and the interpretation of it as a shift from plurality to singularity appears to be the crucial piece that Johnson needs for his argument that the self is ultimately God in the mirror passage.<sup>71</sup> Second, the shift from the masculine in *αὐτὸν ἕκαστον* to the neuter in *αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό* suggests a shift away from the personal into an impersonal register.<sup>72</sup> This problem works in conjunction with the first because it reinforces the suspicions of those who want to ultimately identify the true self with a single impersonal reality whether that is God (Johnson) or Reason (Sorabji, Annas) or the Form of Self (Allen).

I think both of these problems can be addressed, however, by taking a more careful look at what a shift from the masculine to the neuter might signal. On any interpretation, Socrates is urging Alcibiades to reconsider his entirely conventional understanding of himself. So far, Socrates achieved a major victory with the handsome Athenian by getting him to consider the features of his body as external to his true self. The identification of the self with the soul as against the body, however, leaves untouched many other features of one's idiosyncratic "personality" that conventionally belong to one's identity.<sup>73</sup> A rigorous and thoroughgoing move from the soul in general to the rational part of the soul would complete this process by stripping away even those more psychological features of individuals that serve to distinguish one from another. In the end, after removing Alcibiades's body and removing Alcibiades's personality we will be left with a bare, naked mind, indistinguishable seems to be that souls cannot be individuated without bodies. Throughout, however, she does not make clear whether she means that there are a numerical plurality of selves that are qualitatively indistinguishable or simply a single self shared by all.

71. Johnson, "God as the True Self," 16.

72. So Annas "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 131, and Johnson, "God as the True Self," 7.

73. Contra Annas, "Self Knowledge in Early Plato," 130–31, who suggests that the ideas of embodiment and personality are bound up together.

guishable, perhaps, from every other mind. It does not follow from this, however, that we have arrived at God or Reason or a Form. Interpretive moves which collapse the numerical plurality of distinct selves should not be taken lightly, and if Socrates had meant to say that my true self and your true self were really one and the same, with all the enormous ethical implications that would flow from this, he certainly could have been a lot more clear about it.

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## **Vita**

### SPECIALIZATION AND COMPETENCE

**Specialization:** Ancient Philosophy.

**Competence:** Philosophy of Religion, Contemporary Metaphysics (especially metaphysics of free will and metaphysics of time), and Medieval Philosophy.

### EDUCATION

M.A., Philosophy, University of Kentucky, 2012.

M.A., Classics, University of Kentucky, 2010.

B.A., Philosophy and Classics, University of Kentucky, 2010.

### PRESENTATIONS

“Why Molinism Does Not Help with the Rollback Argument,” Society of Christian Philosophers, Trinity College, March 2014.

“The Sun and the Good: the Allegory of the Sun in *Republic VI*,” Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, Fordham University, October 2013.

“A Complex Eternity,” Society of Christian Philosophers, Georgetown University, April 2013.

## AWARDS

Best graduate student paper (\$500) awarded by Society of Christian Philosophers for "A Complex Eternity," April 2013.

Accepted into University Scholars program at the University of Kentucky for classics, 2008–2010.

Research grant from University of Kentucky Eureka fund (\$2,000), 2006.

## TEACHING

### **Georgetown College**

Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Spring 2016–Spring 2017.

Business Ethics, Spring 2017.

Ethics, Fall 2016.

### **Asbury University**

Introduction to Philosophy (on-line course), Fall 2015.

Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Spring 2015.

Philosophy of C.S. Lewis, Spring 2014.

Social and Political Philosophy, Fall 2012, Fall 2014.

Introduction to Philosophy, Fall 2013–Fall 2014.

### **University of Kentucky**

Introduction to Philosophy, Fall 2013–Spring 2017.

Business Ethics, Spring 2013–Fall 2013.

Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2012–Fall 2012.

Symbolic Logic, Fall 2010–Fall 2011.

## Vita

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Latin 1 and 2, Fall 2009–Spring 2010.

Medical Terminology (on-line course), Summer 2010.

### **Mars Hill Christian Academy**

Traditional Logic, 2008–2017.

Latin years 3 and 4, 2009–2017.

### LANGUAGE

Advanced ability in Greek with extensive reading experience in Homeric, Attic, Ionic, Hellenistic, Koine, Late Antique, and Patristic authors.

Advanced ability and teaching experience in Latin with extensive reading experience in Early, Augustan, Late Imperial, Christian, and Medieval authors.