

How Smart is the Appetitive Part of the Soul?

In recent years there has been a surge of interest among Plato scholars in the tripartition of the soul in the *Republic*. Particular attention has been devoted to the nature of the soul-parts, and whether or not each part is agent-like. A key element in this debate has been the question whether or not the non-rational parts have access to significant cognitive and conceptual resources. That this is the case, and that appetite cannot be entirely unreasoning, is the widely accepted view, shared by Annas, Bobonich, Cooper, and Irwin among others. A number of scholars – most notably Lorenz and Stalley – have recently criticized this reading of Plato's tripartition, and argued that the text does not in fact support such a reading. I believe that the weight of evidence remains in favour of the mainstream view, despite the interesting objections raised by the critics. I argue that these critics fail to appreciate the variety of ways in which the non-rational parts employ cognitive and conceptual resources. I also explain that their alternative interpretations of the relevant passages are unconvincing.

A critical question here is whether appetite is capable of employing means-ends reasoning, the primary evidence for this being that appetite has a desire for money. Lorenz has argued that, contrary to proponents of the mainstream view, the desire for money does *not* result from reasoning that money is a means to satisfying the desires for food, drink, sex and the like. He offers an alternative explanation of the desire for money according to which people gradually acquire a taste for money-making itself. But his view of appetite as unreasoning and brutish is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons: (i) The notion that all desire for wealth, and furthermore *all* appetitive desires, can be explained without the aid of means-ends reasoning is implausible; (ii) Even if Lorenz is right that there are no appetitive *desires* formed with the aid of means-ends reasoning, there clearly are appetitive *pleasures* that require means-ends reasoning; (iii) There are appetitive desires/pleasures which require cognitive and conceptual resources in different ways than simple means-ends reasoning, taking the form of desiring/enjoying X *as* Y; (iv) Plato's claim that the three parts of the just man's soul are in agreement about which part should rule shows that the non-rational parts have access to significant cognitive resources, despite Stalley's alternative reading of this claim.

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I would prefer a shorter session.