

## Thumos's function in Plato's *Republic*<sup>1</sup>

As F. M. Cornford showed, *thumos* is the “weak point” of the city-soul analogy<sup>2</sup>, a psychic part created *ad hoc* to fit the tripartite city, but eventually referring to a fundamental aspect of social life and behaviour: “Self respect”. Similarly, M. Vegetti found three shifts in the city-soul analogy, two of them being explicitly caused by a certain interpretation of *thumos*, because its function in the *psyche* is hardly understandable without referring to the social structure in which the individual acts<sup>3</sup>. *Thumos*'s function is then difficult to define.

Moreover, *thumos* is linked with the ideology of honour and shame, and in the *Republic*, Plato aims at using *thumos*' energy, neutralizing it and converting its force to fit into a new frame of values. As A.-G. Wersinger showed<sup>4</sup>, Plato uses two distinct psychological models in the *Republic* : a first one centered on the Homeric *thumos* (*Rep.* III), and a second one, founded on an erotic psychology, which is responsible for a new function for the *thumos*.

Following this path, I'll try to explain Plato's strategy of converting the meaning of *thumos*, which is taken to be a function of *valuing things*. In doing so, we can understand how a misuse of *thumos* is responsible for the corruption of the *philotimos*' character, but also, conversely, how *thumos* is naturally the target of preliminary education. The aim of this paper is to show how this “weak-point” of tripartite psychology is coherent with Plato's aim of leading non-philosophers to virtue.

### 1. *Thumos* as intermediary part of the soul.

The first part of this paper is devoted to a brief analysis of IV, 439-441, where *thumos* is defined as an intermediary part, between reason and desire.

Following T. Penner's analysis<sup>5</sup> of this passage, I claim that Socrates does not demonstrate that *thumos* is an autonomous part of the soul (for the distinction between reason and desire does occur somehow, even when they are not explicitly mentioned).

However, and contrary to Penner's conclusions, it does not mean that *thumos* is reducible to either of them : the frontiers of *thumos* are deliberately kept *vague*, precisely because *thumos* denotes a deep “I” in action, in which cognitive judgments and conative forces are mixed.

Nevertheless, Penner is right about one very important thing: book IV lacks a point to make *thumos* autonomous : the delimitation of the very object of this function of the soul, which is, I claim, *timē*.

### 2. *Thumos* as a *valuing* function.

The second part of the paper tries to define more accurately the object of *thumos*' function. *Thumos* is the seat of a certain kind of emotions and actions. They are spontaneous, reactive, but also determined by a judgment of value. Following A. Hobbs' definition of *thumos*<sup>6</sup>, I try to justify a way of defining *thumos* as a *valuing* function (not, though, as an evaluative one, as reason is).

Thus, we can explain why the notion of *timē* receives two meanings which are closely related in the *Republic* : first the result of an operative capacity of valuing things, and second, the way a thing is interrelated within a larger frame of values that society confirms. The two meanings, which are assuredly differentiated in Plato, merge into what the *philotimos* seeks : honour, as a kind of object awarded by others. That's why, following now the analysis of A.-G. Wersinger, the act of valuing things is grounded, for the *philotimos*, on a *desire* of esteem or honour.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an outline of the french version; please refer to the full draft in french for the text and references.

<sup>2</sup> F.M. Cornford, « Psychology and Social Structure in the *Republic* of Plato », *The Classical Quarterly*, 6, n° 4, 1912, p. 246-265. Particularly pp. 262-265.

<sup>3</sup> M. Vegetti, *Platone, La Repubblica*, Traduzione e commento a cura di Mario Vegetti, Libro IV, coll. Elenchos XXVIII, 3, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1998. See pp. 40-41 of his introduction.

<sup>4</sup> A.-G. Wersinger, *Platon et la dysharmonie*, Paris, Vrin, 2001, ch. VII.

<sup>5</sup> T. Penner, « Thought and Desire in Plato », in G. Vlastos (éd.), *Plato II : Ethics, Politics, and the Philosophy of Art and Religion*, Garden City, Anchor Books, 1971, p. 96-118 (especially section V, pp. 111-113).

<sup>6</sup> A. Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero, Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

### 3. *Philotimia* as an educational tool.

Because it is obviously difficult to reify *timē* as Socrates sometimes does, and because the fact that *timē* is, besides being an object, a network of social relationships, *philotimia* as a natural tendency of one's *thumos* can be a target of an educational process in the *Republic*. In other words, Socrates seems to use *thumos*'s function to make the non-philosophers more concerned with virtue. How so ? Plato superimposes the archaic mechanism of honour-giving on the real system of values the reason has settled. In the *Laws* (V, 744e3), we find a clear example of this educational use of *philotimia* in a strange formula : "anyone who has the ambition to be virtuous" (*hostis philotimos ep' arête*).

*Thumos* must then be defined as a powerful tool in the education of the character, because it links the individual with his/her community. *Thumos* might be a "weak point" of the analogy in a sense, but it also helps to explain how the analogy can never be taken as a mere isomorphism.

Without reason, *thumos* acts according a frame of values which the community values, and does not question them as such : *thumos* "adheres" to them. If the worst comes to the worst, *thumos* transforms the individual into a man who makes of *honour* a mere object of value. But it is also true that Plato tries to dissociate *thumos* from the archaic ideology, and attempts to show the mechanism of *timē* in order that non-philosophers could realize what they esteems most, in a spontaneous way, by directing the competitive spirit to the values settled by reason.

*Thumos* is not the *ad hoc* analogous to the auxiliaries, it is a psychic function that guarantees the spontaneity and the commitment of individuals into the system of values of their political community.

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