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IX Symposium Platonicum: Plato's *Republic*

Abstract Submission

(Shorter format: 20 -minute presentation)

Psychic unity and partition in Plato's *Republic*

In this paper I argue that Plato in the *Republic* is committed to the view that the human soul is a unitary, essentially rational entity. This view is not incompatible with the soul's complexity but it excludes considering the lower parts as independent subjects of action. The lower parts of the soul are conceived as being dependent on reason, which can be identified with the whole, and they share in rationality because of their association with reason.

In Book 4 the arguments for the division of the soul (436a ff.) establish that the human soul consists of distinct elements. However, they fail to address the prior question whether the soul as a whole, in which the parts are said to be (439c6-7), is essentially and unqualifiedly something and what it is. Thus, they do not establish the soul's unity. Furthermore, if the whole is something, the parts, in so far as they are parts of the whole, should not be defined only in terms of their difference, but also by reference to what they share in common, which unifies them. The soul in Book 4 looks like the Wooden Horse at *Theaetetus* 184d, a container which does not constitute *mia idea* and which fails to unify its contents. Socrates rejects this account not only in the *Theaetetus*, but also in the *Republic*, as it is clear at 462c-d, a passage very similar to *Theaetetus* 184d.

One expects that the question of the nature of the soul would be addressed in the 'longer way', which Plato introduces in Book 6 (504b). The 'longer way' involves the dialectical method, which aims at determining what each thing is (532a-b, 533b). An exact account of something (504d-e) requires knowledge of the idea of the Good that dialectic reaches at the end of its ascent in the intelligible realm (511b, 532b). Book 10 (611a-612a), which provides the first steps of the ascent to the nature of the soul, indicates that the soul is essentially unitary and rational and desires the good as a whole.

Dialectic's descent involves a movement from the higher level of reality to the lower and an elucidation of the lower by considering it in its relation to the higher, as derivative from it. I suggest that dialectic's descent would continue into the 'cave' and would reach a teleological account of the sensible world. In the case of the soul it would involve an examination of the sensible parts in their relation to the whole. The parts would be considered as dependent on the whole and ultimately on the Good. The epistemological priority of the whole over the part (cf. *Meno* 79b-d) suggests that the whole is essential to the parts, and that an account of the parts requires reference to

the whole. Hence, if the soul is essentially rational, the lower parts should be viewed as being related to and dependent on rationality. This association makes them into psychic parts properly speaking.

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