

Thumos and Psyche

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RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article vise à expliquer de manière philosophique l'organisation et le fonctionnement de notre *psyche* qui demeure à la recherche perpétuelle d'une harmonie entre les trois parties de l'âme telles que Platon les décrivait. Le rôle que jouent *thumos*, la colère, *eros*, la passion, le désir et *logos*, la raison s'y analysent du point de vue de l'individu ainsi que de la société.

ABSTRACT

This article provides a philosophical explanation of how our psyche organizes and operates while constantly seeking a balance among the three parts of the soul described by Plato. The roles of *thumos* (anger), *eros* (love)/(passion), and *logos* (reason) are analyzed from individual and societal perspectives.

I. The Rationalist Self

The model of a civilized self developed in the specifically political dialogues of Plato constitutes one of the major sources of the modern self in the West. However, the control of reason over passion advocated there has been misunderstood as frequently as it has been praised and invoked. These frequent misunderstandings seem to be largely responsible for the strong criticism levelled against the image of rationally controlled individuals who have subdued their passions.

Such criticism forms a salient feature of the modern spirit, namely the general disparaging and downgrading of the faculty of reason. Many modern thinkers have thus argued that the desires and passions constitute the very dynamism of human personality, and that reason is passive and really unable ever to control any desire or emotion. Reason can never be more than a tool for the calculation of the best means by which we may achieve the ends suggested to us by our passions. Reason can never be more than «the handmaiden of the passions».

If the ends calculated by reason coincide with the ends imposed by our desires, the individual appears to have full self-control. By contrast, the very frequent human experience of knowing better what to do, but being unable to do so,

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demonstrates the weakness of reason. Therefore, knowing what is good for me in no way means that I am also able to follow through. The most intelligent human remains helpless when confronted by powerful emotions which frequently pull in directions opposite to those suggested by reason.

The Platonic model of the self is hence an unreachable ideal, or an ideal that exacts a terrible price of unhappiness in the form of neuroses, which are largely based on repressed desires. Psychic suffering is the consequence of this modern unhappy consciousness of a divided self. Control over an individual's passions can come only from outside the individual by the fiat and will of sovereign legislators and guardians of morality. The illegitimate desires and passions of individuals can only be suppressed by the fear of certain punishment. Discipline of will must be beaten into individuals. The continued existence of unlawful desires, their return from repression, thus makes hypocrisy an essential constituent of public order.

Both the rationalist conception of self and its irrationalist critiques, briefly sketched above, are based on a misconception of Platonism. Accordingly, the *psyche* is seen to be endowed by two conflicting tendencies: one, reason, is meant to shape and control the other, passion. However, Plato does not envision a conflict in the *psyche* between merely two forces, but conceives of psychic order and harmony as the result of interplay between at least three parts of the soul and three tendencies. The rule of reason is seen to lie not so much in the possibility of the suppression of a singular passion, but in the arbitration and resolution of the struggle between two naturally antithetical parts of the *psyche*. Reason may achieve and guard its supremacy in the soul by using *thumos* as its natural ally in the control of *eros* or *epithymia* and in the defence and guidance of the whole soul.

The development of this conception for the regime of the soul in the *Republic* is as suggestive in what it reveals as in what it conceals. Both the overt and covert sides of this argument have far-reaching and not always harmonious implications. In the following section, these two strands are traced.

II. The Rule of Thumos

The incompleteness of the discussion of *eros* in the *Republic* is surpassed only by the sketchiness of the discussion of *thumos*. While the incompleteness of the former is largely remedied by explicit and full discussions in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, *inter alia*, there is no Platonic work dealing specifically and explicitly with *thumotic* passion. We are thus forced to have greater recourse to our own powers of imaginative reconstruction in regard to *thumos* than in regard

to many other topics of Platonic philosophy. Yet *thumos* seems by far a more important factor in the establishment of a monarchic or aristocratic regime of the soul than does *eros* or *epithymia*. Indeed, it may even be assumed that the agency of *thumos* is more important than reason itself, as it is indispensable in the attainment of humanity's salvation through the rule of reason. Reason needs the force of the passion to become active. Plato's choice of words to describe the beneficent activities in the soul of *thumos*, such as *sozein*, *soteria*, *diasozein*, indicate how serious he considered the consequences of a disordered soul both for its own sojourn in this cave of passionate struggles and for the welfare of human communities.

The experience of horrendous political struggle such as the Peloponnesian War would naturally confirm the sad truth of Euripides *Medea* as expressed in the following *passus*:

«And now I realize what horrors I intend to commit but vanquished are my powers of reasoning, by passionate anger, the cause of mortals' worst woes». (*Medea*, 1078-1080).

The natural alliance between anger and desire and anger's natural enmity toward the counsels of reasons, as suggested here, reflect both the reality of political conflicts as well as popular understanding. Indeed, the young and spirited partners of Socrates in the discussion concerning the tripartite nature of the soul initially suggest that *thumos* would seem simply to be an offshoot or a part of desire. In fact, at the beginning of the discussion of *thumos*, Socrates asks whether or not *thumos* and that part of the soul with which we feel anger is a separate, third part of the soul, or identical (*homophués*) with either reason or desire. Glaucon responds by saying that it is perhaps identical with desire (439c). It is against this popular understanding of the actions of anger in the soul and in political actuality that Socrates wishes to establish that the «form of *thumos*» is «naturally» the helper and co-fighter of the reasoning part of the soul.

Initially Glaucon recants his opinion shaped by popular understanding and readily assents to Socrates' suggestion that he undoubtedly would never have seen either in himself or in another an alliance between anger and desire against the better counsels of reason (440B). Immediately after this point in the discussion, however, Socrates himself restricts the natural alliance between reason and *thumos* to the «nobler» human beings. In noble souls, *thumos* fights on the side of reason in the pursuit of justice. When aroused by injustice, a noble soul's *thumos* seethes and grows fierce in its alliance with what is believed just and only stops with either victory or death, or when calmed by the counsels of reason. Conversely when a noble soul feels itself to be in the wrong, its anger is not aroused even though such a person may suffer cold, hunger and any other discomforts. Thus the independent actions and sufferings of the desiring part of the soul in a noble person, either reinforce the strength of anger when it believes to be fighting for

justice, or they do not help arouse its anger, when it believes itself to be in the wrong. In both cases, *thumos* remains the loyal helper, co-fighter and subordinate of the rational part of the noble soul. The discussion of *thumos* then ends with Glaucon and Socrates agreeing that *thumos* is a part of the soul, separate from both desire and reason. *Thumos* becomes this natural helper of reason when not corrupted by bad education. These opinions are corroborated by reference to the illogical rages of children and the majority of human beings who never attain reason or only attain it quite late in life. The suggested difference between reason and anger is further supported by a quote from the *Odyssey* (v, 17-18) in which the hero chides his own heart and rebukes himself in order to give himself courage.

Socrates' entire line of argument regarding *thumos* both asserts the possibility of a natural alliance between reason and *thumos* in the noble few, and the existence of unreasoning anger in the actual politics of the many. The tragic lesson given by the chorus at the end of *Oedipus* that no mortal should be counted happy «till he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain» is here affirmed. Yet Socrates likewise suggests an escape from this fate of the majority; the possibility of a radical ennobling and transfiguration of human nature, in principle open to all, but in fact attainable by only the few.

The passage of the *Republic* briefly discussed on the previous page suggests that the correct training and ennobling of *thumos* is the key to both individual happiness and a political reformation. The tragic experiences of human suffering induced by the ignobility and fierceness of political struggles may be overcome, at least for a few philosophic souls, by conscious attention to and cultivation of a reasonable and just anger. What exactly is it about the part of the soul for which Plato coins the term *thumoeides*, that would render it fit to be the helper of reason and a guardian of the soul?

We may begin a more detailed answer to this question by recalling to mind here the contradiction between the popular understanding, as reflected in tragedy, of *thumos* as a «natural» ally of desire, and the Socratic thesis of the «natural» alliance between *thumos* and *logos*, even against desire, actualized in noble souls. This might also be the moment to describe the basic framework of Platonic psychology as a background for the analysis of the dynamics of the just and unjust souls, as sketched by Socrates in the *Republic*.

The main point of the passage from *Medea* cited above would seem to be a description of the very common human experience of a conflict in the soul between better insight and passion. In this conflict, *thumos* is clearly on the side of desire, adding to its strength and rendering reason even more impotent. *Medea* finds herself in the position of being unable to prevent herself from doing what she fully knows to be evil and harmful, both to others and to herself. She is about to take vengeance against faithless Jason by killing their children, in full

awareness of the horror of her deed and with lucid insight into herself. Despite Medea's knowledge of the evil she is about to commit, she has to admit to herself that her *thumos* is stronger than her counsels of reasons. She is also aware that such unreasonable anger is the major cause of the sufferings of humans.

Similarly, Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytos* refers to the conflict between insight on the one hand, and pleasure and laziness on the other. Phaedra addresses the women of Troezen as follows:

«Many a time in night's long empty spaces I have pondered on the causes of a life's shipwreck. I think that our lives are worse than the mind's qualities would warrant. There are many who know virtue. We know the good, we apprehend it clearly. But we can't bring it to achievement. Some are betrayed by their own laziness, and others value some other pleasure above virtue» (*Hippolytos*, 375-383).

While this quote does not explicitly refer to a conflict between *thumos* and *logos*, it nevertheless describes the experience of the helplessness of *logos* before the counsels of the passions. Both sides of human passion thus would seem to be controllers of reason in most circumstances, rather than being its servants. Hence, humans knowingly harm themselves as well as others, and while knowing the good are unable to do it. The Socratic-Platonic *ethics*, according to which human sin is simply the consequence of ignorance, would appear to be an impossible idea. As a function of such considerations, this idea has also always been criticized, in particular in modern philosophy and especially since Hobbes.

Is then the description of the just soul in the *Republic* merely an impossible dream, a pattern of soul only existing truly in heaven? The following section presents the argument that Socrates' discussion points toward a practice of living, a meditative transcendence of the common condition of humanity by which the just and well-ordered soul in which reason governs the passions, becomes a distinct possibility and a realizable goal.

The starting point of the discussion in book IV is the explicit acknowledgement of conflict in the *psyche*. All human beings may be said to experience such conflict, a fact which is admitted both in the understanding of the tragedians and in popular understanding, as well as by the modern critics of Socratic-Platonic ethics.

When Socrates shifts the inquiry into justice back from the city erected in speech to the soul, the question becomes whether or not the soul also contains three parts corresponding to the three parts of the city (434d3-435a6). From the relationship between fundamental activities of the soul, both to one another and to their formal objects, Socrates then deduces, with the aid of the principle of contradiction, the existence of at least three distinct parts of the soul (436a5-440c2). At the beginning of this inquiry, Socrates explicitly warns Glaucon that the matter under discussion cannot be apprehended adequately with the methods being used (435d1-3). He further points to a «longer and harder road» leading to this goal (435d4-5).

The first point of the inquiry concerns the contradiction in the soul between desiring to drink and a reasoned reflection not to drink. If someone is thirsty, he is drawn like an animal to drink; but his reason may forbid him to drink (439a7-b4). This contradiction leads Socrates to conclude that there must be two forms in the soul, the *logistikón* and the *epithymetikon* (439b1-e3).

Socrates then infers from a third activity of the soul the existence of a third faculty of the soul: «to de tou thumou kai hoi thumoumetha» (439e3). He then proceeds to differentiate this *thumos* from both the *logistikón* and the *epithymetikon*. He presents three examples to show the crucial difference between *thumos* and *epithymetikon*. From the example of Leontius (439c6-440a8), who was caught in a conflict between an ignoble craving and his own anger at his craving, Socrates concludes that «sometimes our anger fights against our desires as one distinct thing against another» (440a6-7).

As a second argument Socrates refers to many instances in which we «observe when his desires constrain a man contrary to his reason that he reviles and is angry with that within which masters him» (440a9-b2). Immediately following upon this, Socrates then constrains Glaucon to assent to the notion that *thumos* is a co-fighter of reason (440b3) and that it has never been perceived to make common cause with the desires against reason (440b4-8). But when Glaucon assents to this general proposition, Socrates immediately draws a distinction between noble and ignoble souls. In noble souls, the nobler they are, the lesser their anger when they believe themselves to be in the wrong. But when they believe themselves to be justified, their anger becomes a mighty ally in the defense of justice and does not stop fighting until either victory or death or until it is calmed by reason (440c1-d5). In both of these cases of an obedient *thumos*, the voice of the desiring part, even though it may suffer severely, is either silent and subdued in the case of the perception of one's own wrong, but powerfully comes to the aid of *thumos* when the person perceives himself justified (440c4;d1). Glaucon eagerly assents to this, without being aware of the contradiction between this assent and two of his prior remarks to Socrates; (439e5, 440c1); perhaps he does not wish to be counted among the ignoble?

Thumos and *epithymetikon* having been distinguished, Socrates proceeds to investigate the possible distinction between *logistikón* and *thumos* (440eb-441c3). It is to be noted that Socrates does not provide any proof here, formally analogous to the proofs involving recourse to the principle of contradiction, used in distinguishing *logistikón* from *epithymetikon* and *epithymetikon* from *thumos*. Apparently such a clear distinction between *logistikón* and *thumos* would not serve Socrates' educative purposes which are precisely to present *thumos* as a «companion of true opinion» (*Phaedrus* 253d7), a loyal ally, helper of reason, and as a guardian of the noble soul, when rightly educated. Similarly, the clear implications of the fact of an alliance between *thumos* and *epithymetikon* against

reason in ignoble souls are not developed at this stage in the argument. These implications are developed later, chiefly in book IX, once the philosophical proofs for the proper rank ordering in the just soul of *logistikon* = high, *thumos* = middle, and *epithymetikon* = low, have been more fully considered.

This second omission may also be seen as serving the *psychagogic* purpose of Socrates. This purpose is the correct training and nurture of *thumos* away from baseness and toward nobility. The possibility of such an education is the key to an understanding and acceptance of the Socratic dictum that «no one commits injustice knowingly». It also points to a reconciliation of the apparent contradiction between the common understanding which holds fast to the normality of an alliance between *thumos* and *epithymetikon*, and Socratic knowledge.

The conclusion of the argument about the nature of justice in the soul is so well-known that a brief sketch may suffice here. The proper ordering of the royal or aristocratic soul involves rule by the *logistikon* over the *epithymetikon* and over *thumos*, whereby *thumos* is trained to fulfill its natural role of being the ally and helper of the *logistikon* in its struggles against the *epithymetikon*. Each of the three parts of the soul has its corresponding virtue, with justice being the virtue of the whole and the agreement among the three parts each to perform its proper function and not to meddle with the other parts and functions (443b9-444a6).

The background of this Platonic teaching involves three major points:

1. The recognition by Socrates and Plato, in common with the tragedians and with ordinary understanding, that the soul is a field of struggles, forces, conflicts and tensions which require ordering. Moreover, this ordering is a political problem tackled partly by education and partly by legislation. The aim of such ordering is to establish in the soul the rule of reason and the subduing of the passions, both in their form of pleonectic desire and unreasonable anger. The welfare of both the individual and the political community depend on the attainment of an ordered rule by reason. Lastly, any ordering, once achieved, remains inherently unstable and must be renewed continuously. Ordering thus depends on and results from the contradictions of the soul.

2. It may be posited that for Socrates and Plato reason alone is unable to achieve control over the passions. Let us assume here, without further demonstration, that for Plato the *logistikon*, or the *nous*, a passive-receptive part of the soul, and not a dynamic-active force. It may be likened to a mirror image which, indeed, conforms to the spirit of Platonic thinking. Here it suffices to refer to the importance of the image of the mirror and its reflection in the epistemological discussions of the divided line simile. The *nous* by itself could not move the soul; it can only effect motion by allying itself with the energy of one of the passions. It functions in the soul as a spectator, a *theoros*. Any movement it can achieve is borrowed, as it were, from the contradictory motions of the

thumotic guardians? Does the control of the *epithymetikon* depend at least partly on the deliberate misrepresentation of its nature to the simple minds of warrior souls? Such misrepresentation would then serve the attainment of independence by individuals.

If the description of the *epithymetikon* here is a noble lie, then the story of Leontius illustrates not so much a conflict between *thumos* and *epithymetikon*, as a conflict within *thumos* itself. It may be seen as a struggle between thumotic impulses, one of which is perhaps anger, urging Leontius to behold the spectacle of cruelty, the other, perhaps fear, restraining him. His actual behaviour is a mixture of righteous indignation with hypocrisy, in short, what Socrates called *aidos*.

Yet if *thumos* is entirely self-related, can a transcendental self related to a transcendental object ever gain energy to attain its goal? It may be that *thumos* needs the energy provided by the *epithymetikon* for this very conflict with itself. In this case the story of Leontius would illustrate a combination of the actions of *thumos* and *epithymetikon*. The poor *ratio* of Leontius is overcome by the combined operations and functioning of both his *thumos* and his *epithymetikon*. This evokes the possible development of the soul towards the condition of tyranny, in which the individual and his *ratio* are entirely in the service of the beasts within. Thumotically tinged erotic pleasures may be strong and tempting, but surely they are neither unmixed nor noble.

Leontius may represent a possible cultural development of character in a society as highly agonistic as ancient Greek society. In such a society, erotic pleasures may become inextricably allied with thumotic satisfactions in such a manner as to open the way to the commission of frightful and ignoble acts of cruelty. Cruelty as erotic pleasure may be the ignoble and corrupt development of *thumos* that Socrates wishes to avoid.

A second peculiarity of Leontius' story concerns the particular aspect of *thumos* here controlling and using the energy of *epithymia*. What is implied is that fear is one of the faces of *thumos*, the other face being anger. Fear may indeed be the «better» part of *thumos*, although it does not win out in the whole soul of Leontius, for the moment. But in principle, it may be more educable than anger, because it constitutes a much greater distance on the journey within; to use a phrase from the *Phaedo*, it is the «second voyage» in regard to *thumos*. If, already as anger, *thumos* is closer to the *logistikon* than mere *epithymia*, how much more so as fear.

«Sufficient are the two guardians, fear as well as awe» («deos te kai aidos», 465a9-b1) says Socrates. But sufficient to do what? To prevent that the «swelling of emotion (*thumos*) filling the angry might carry their anger to still greater quarrels» (465a2-3). Such emotions might lead the young to strike and hurt the elder.

The original reaction of anger, however, can only become «awe», if fear does not lead too far within, lest it end in withdrawal. Anger must, therefore, be discharged into an outside, permissible and reasonable form, as self defence against age-equals (464e6-7).

Awe must be made to counter-balance fear; in other words, awe to restrain the young from laying hands on their elders, fear to incite them to courageously help the weaker by being made aware of their own weakness in regard to someone stronger (465a1-4), a parent, sibling or son.

Both fear and awe must become «guardians» so intimately identified with the city within and unified with one another and with this city, as to achieve «salvation» (429c4). But salvation of what? Of the (true) opinion handed down by the law through education concerning the things truly terrible and those not to be feared («deinon»; 429c6-8). Only such a «guarded» opinion may truly be called courage (429c5). This true opinion has to be carried «through everything», for only when it survives «pains and pleasures, desires and fears» (429d1-2) is it fully capable of guarding the «whole community of the three» (442c7-8), that is to say, the three parts of the soul.

The thumos of warriors must be imbued by education in the same manner in which wool, initially white, becomes colour-fast only after a lengthy preparatory treatment. The right opinions concerning things to be feared and those not to be feared, must thus be made to cover *thumos* so that it becomes capable of maintaining the vision of its rightful transcendental object, namely courage, through all and everything.

Aided by its two guardians, fear and awe, the soul is able to withstand the tension of being suspended between the two poles of *thumos*, namely fear and anger. By holding fast to the understanding guarded by fear and awe, it will be able to resist and avoid the twin temptations of *thumos*. It will not sink totally into fear; indeed, it is prevented from so doing by awe. It will thus exhibit the cowardice of «feeble warriors». Neither will it follow completely the lure of anger, again prevented by awe, into the harshness of tyranny. Instead, it will infuse the striving for the transcendental object, courage and, in effect, the other virtues as well, with energy drawn from the *epithymetikon*. It will thus make the «multi-headed and irrational beast» within subservient to the lion (cf. 588c7-589c2). Only then will the human being within («ho entos anthropos», 589a9) transcend the condition of the ape. *Thumos*, the lion within, must aid the human or rather the divine within (589d2), to tame, befriend and habituate the multi-headed beast. Only in this way can thumos maintain its proper role as the guardian lion without slipping into the role of the ape (590b9). *Thumos* is thus the agency by which the beasts are humanized. If correctly educated by the right music and gymnastics, *thumos* is that which links the lower and the higher.

We may summarize this discussion about the double nature of *thumos* by examining the image that Socrates draws in book IX of the just soul (588d-589c). Accordingly, a human being is a community of three living entities, two of them beasts, one of them a small human within. They are joined together into the outer shape of humanity. The task of the noble life is to harmonize the three creatures into the unity of the just *politeia* and by so doing to strengthen the inner human and make that human realize his divine nature. In Socrates' words: «... he who says that justice is the more profitable affirms that all our actions and words should tend to give the man within us complete domination over the entire man and make him take charge of the many headed beast like a farmer who cherishes and trains the cultivated plants but checks the growth of the wild and he will make an ally of the lion's nature, and caring for all the beasts alike will first make them friendly to one another and to himself, and foster their growth» (589a5-b7).

The pre-condition of such governance of the soul is continuous self-awareness. This involves a division of a person's consciousness into a focusing of mental attention without and a simultaneous awareness of the processes within. In this way inner and outer become harmonized. This focusing of attention within into a continuous presence of mind to oneself, suppresses nothing into a subconsciousness and ignores nothing. Everything, and that means every evil thought and tendency, every impulse of lust and anger is fully acknowledged and utilized. The beasts within are fed sparingly and tended so that they become friendly to one another. The lion is the more intelligent because of his tendency to experience fear and anger. Hence the lion may be turned into the ally of the human.

The goal and direction of human existence lie within a condition of total awareness. Such awareness is the reflective action of the human within. It is the human within's specific contribution to the community of the three. The primary task of the multi-headed beast in its perpetual hunger is to maintain the «foreign relations» of the individual, as it were, and thus to «produce» the energy and life substance of the whole. The task of the lion in his fierceness is to guard the integrity of the whole and distribute its resources to the parts, which includes feeding the beast.

Full awareness of inner processes, combined with their correct naming and ordering, avoid psychic conflict, prevent blind repression and maintain psychic equilibrium. Such equilibrium, moreover, is not a condition which once achieved, merely has to be maintained, but rather involves a continuous process of adjustment, inner discourse and self-relatedness. Each part gets its due. Life becomes a «way» to a goal which is perhaps never reached, but the journey there is sufficient to unify the many into the one, thus maintaining the direction of willing. Individuality and independence then become the signs of this journey, in which freedom is realized by a continuous struggle to adjust inner necessities to one another and to other individuals.

IV. The Invincibility of Eros

In the *Phaedo* (99d1-3) Socrates refers to the «second voyage in quest of the cause» which he conducted when trying to understand the generation and decay of things in the visible world. This second voyage refers to the turning away from the things of sense to the *eide* that underlie them, and in which they participate as copies. The metaphor of the second voyage is taken from Greek navigation in which the «first» voyage refers to the powers of the winds that propel the ship by means of the sails, and the «second voyage» refers to the effort of the rowers in the stillness of the winds propelling the ships by means of oars. The «first voyage» relies on the favours of the powers of nature; in that the navigators depend on their circumstances. The «second voyage» requires human effort, exertion and much labour, which are necessitated by unfavourable circumstances. In this example, Socrates indicates that sensation constitutes the easy first step to knowledge, whereas reasoning is the hard second voyage involving much effort and mental concentration. The same metaphor may be used to illustrate the relationship between the erotic desires of the *epithymetikon* and *thumotic* desires.

In the striving of the *epithymetikon* the individual's attention is entirely focused on existential objects outside the self. Erotic desires are wholly oriented towards the things of sense. The *epithymetikon* is the «companion of various repletions and pleasures» (439d8). When thus focused on things of sense which give us pleasures by filling us up, we are entirely dependent on the good graces of nature as well as the cooperation of other. Life on this level is a continuous search for object after object; it is a search that ends only in death.

Given the nature of the sensible world, erotic desires for objects are as frequently frustrated as they are satisfied. The objects often «object», as it were, to their incorporation within us. This very resistance of existential objects makes us turn inward. When thus turned inward, we are obliged by our hungers to embark on the «second voyage» of reflection. In order to overcome the resistance of objects, we must study and understand both our inner selves and the world of sense. The frustrations of the *epithymetikon* awaken in us the emotions of anger or fear, depending on our relative perceptions of the force of resistance or the threat to our existence. Our thumotic desires are activated in this retreat from the objects of sense. This retreat is both a turning inward and a looking beyond the objects of sense to the causes of their objections. In this retreat we simultaneously gain access to transcendence and to our interiority. In thus losing the objects of our desires as existential objects, we gain them as transcendental objects.

When our thumotic desires are thus activated, the whole vast world of our interiority opens up to us. We become aware of ourselves as transcendental subjects. We acquire reason and understanding which are born out of our angers and fears.

Initially, however, thumotic desires are still entirely oriented towards the conquest of existential objects. We share these thumotic reactions of anger and fear with the beasts, as Socrates remarks in distinguishing *thumos* from the *epithymetikon* (441e3-4). Insofar as we remain beasts, we sacrifice our potential for freedom and power over objects of sense by being perpetual slaves of our hungers. Such freedom, however, may be acquired if we continue the turn within in a fundamental *psychagoge* of our whole existence. This requires the cultivation and exploration of our *thumos* to the point where it links up with the faculty of pure reflection, the *nous* that lies at the centre of existence.

The awakening of *thumos* in the frustration of desire leads to the understanding of the human condition, if the second voyage within is continued. In this case we become transcendently aware of our strengths and weaknesses, our virtues and vices. By continuing within, we are led to study and define the nature of the virtues. Such study involves both care of self and care of body, an *epimeleia* (For the «somaton epimeleia» see 476e7, and for the «epimeleia sautou» see Alcibiades I, 120d4). The *epimeleia* of both self and of bodies is an *epimelia aretes*, of the virtues (556a10). This *epimeleia* is a continuous struggle of self-overcoming in the direction of greater strength and freedom. This involves not only mere intellectual understanding, but a living transformation of our being.

Suspended between fear and anger, and torn between two goals, our thumotic selves lead us either to contemplation and wisdom, or to the struggle for power and recognition. The fundamental ambiguity in the movement of *thumos* is responsible both for tyrannical excesses and for the attainment of the heights of contemplation. Political power rests on the rightly cultivated anger of rulers and the fear of obedient subjects. Noble *thumos* would join power to wisdom, but ignoble *thumos* makes exercise of power tyrannical. Perhaps all exercise of power as such is inherently tyrannical.

Platonic education and *psychagoge* aim at ennobling *thumos* in the direction of wisdom. While the simultaneous insight into the *thumotic* foundations of power makes the ignoble direction of *thumos* very attractive, the roots of human existence in desire make it ineluctable. The great danger and temptation of a politicized Platonism lies precisely here in its flirtation with tyranny. The sufferings inflicted on humans by humans may indeed not cease until and unless wisdom and power are joined in the same persons. There is doubt whether the spiritualization of the warrior self proposed in the Republic is adequate to the task of such a joining. Thumotic education is entirely dependent on the desiring part of our souls. Our bodies are the material foundation of our existence. The fundamental tension of this existence between contemplative transcendence and tyrannical imperialism cannot be resolved. Spiritualization of the warrior self to the point where it becomes the «Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ» is impossible. The failure of political Christianity and the *Ecclesia militans* in this very endeavour is living proof of this impossibility.

V. Platonic Psychagoge

«Undefeated is eros in conflict», («Eros anikate machan», *Antigone* 781) says Sophocles, and Plato might well have agreed with him. Yet the tragic vision of the human condition implied by this statement is perhaps ameliorated by Socratic meditation. The teaching of the Republic about the self-cultivation of noble souls involves a threefold askesis. On this «longer way» in the eternal battle of natural forces, we are helped by the ability of our reason to play simultaneously three roles within our interior psycho-drama. We are exhorted to treat our desiring part in the same manner in which a farmer tends his fields, carefully removing unwanted growths and favouring desired growths, through selected feeding. Simultaneously, our *logos* is to play the part of a lion-tamer who achieves the obedience of the lion by feeding it measured doses of fear and anger, all the while stilling his hunger for aggression. Finally, the germ of divine intelligence within us is to be made to grow by the contemplation of the vastness of the cosmos and the cultivation of the dialectics of friendship and erotic love.

Love in this vision is a continuous struggle for self-overcoming, a strenuous care of the self, perhaps the only kind of progressive politics with lasting significance. In this manner then, the sense of human life is seen to lie in fully playing all the parts in this «most beautiful of all tragedies». (*Laus*, 817b4-5)

In conclusion, life has long been observed from a higher level and considered part of a fluid, balancing system described by the ancients. Many classic works reveal the philosophers' desire to explore the dark alongside the light inherent to all human emotion and behaviour. The ancients' view may appear rather neglected today, but could provide the distance required to understand current moral and ethical problems in politics, education and society at large.