Choosing and Desire in Plato's *Republic* 4

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ABSTRACT

Donald Davidson's causal theory of action greatly influenced a dominant analytic interpretation of the argument, in *Republic* 4, for parts of the soul. According to Davidson, actions are caused by a combination of belief and desire (pro-attitude). In the interpretation inspired by this account, parts of the soul have distinctive beliefs and desires, which cause action; thus, parts are distinct agents. As well, the argument in *Republic* 4 is taken to show that, while reason desires the good, appetite is a desire which is good-independent. Then, since appetite is not a desire for the good, its being a distinct agent implies the possibility of *akrasia*—appetite could overcome reason's judgment about the better course of action. In fact, the possibility of akratic conflict is taken to be integral to the distinction among parts. By contrast, this paper offers an interpretation which shows that the causal theory is not needed to establish the parts of the soul. As a consequence, *akrasia* has no role to play in distinguishing parts of the soul.

Keywords: soul, desire, tripartite, reason, appetite, akrasia

https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-4105_24_3

I

In the middle of the last century, there was a lively philosophical controversy about reasons and causes. Roughly put, the idea was that reasons for acting are different from causes because the logic of reasons is different from the logic of causes. One might say, e.g., that the reason Socrates stayed in jail is that doing so was just; however, what caused him to act this way are certain psychological states. In a very influential article, however, Donald Davidson argued that reasons are just a kind of cause. The primary reason for an action is a combination of a desire—or pro-attitude—and a belief. The pro-attitude is a general desire for a kind of thing, e.g., a general desire for chocolate; the belief is that some specific object is an instance of what is desired (Davidson, 2001, pp. 4-9). The appeal of this account was that it makes the explanation of an action causal; desire and belief form a causal nexus. This causal nexus is effective because it works in a specific way: the desire for X, by itself, is not effective, does not move one to act. What triggers the desire is the belief that some specific object is X. Of course, the belief by itself does not lead to action either. For instance, my desire for chocolate leads to action only when I believe some specific object is chocolate. In turn, my belief that such-and-such is chocolate does not lead to action unless I also desire to have chocolate.

It is a thesis of this paper that the causal explanation made its way into the dominant analytic interpretations of the argument in *Republic* 4 for the subdivision of the soul. In these interpretations, subdivision of the soul implies the possibility of *akrasia*, of being overcome by pleasure or emotion, against one's better judgment. In this telling, before *Republic* 4, Socrates argued against *akrasia*; his argument was fitted into a framework that is essentially Davidsonian. All desire in the soul is for the good; so that, if one believes an action is good, she does it, *ceteris paribus*. However, if someone does what is not good, she does so because she holds a false belief about some particular's goodness; thus, the explanation of this mistake fits the causal model according to which an action is explained by the combination of desire and belief. However, the causal model is also found in the argument for subdividing the soul, which allows other desires than the desire for the good into the soul. These other desires, which are good-independent, can motivate actions that are not good. Still, the desire for the good persists in the rational part; and in the rational part the causal model appears again, where actions result from a combination of reason's desire for the good and its belief about what is good to do (Penner, 1990, pp. 37, 49, 50-53; Bobonich, 2002, pp. 217, 220, 235-242; Irwin, 1995, pp. 208-218). The distinction among parts, then, rests on this causal account. For instance, reason desires the good and follows its beliefs about the good; but appetite is different from reason because it is a desire that is good-independent and follows its belief-like grasp of what will satisfy it. The consequence is that, each part's being a distinct agent, the possibility of akratic action arises, where appetite, e.g., causes an action that reason holds is not good.

In the following, I will offer an interpretation of the argument for subdividing the soul which will challenge the idea that the causal theory is at work in *Republic* 4.[1] What I wish to show is that Socrates' argument lays the groundwork for an understanding of the way the soul functions in acting, which does not fit the causal model. Socrates gives us—in a non-technical vocabulary that depends on

periphrasis—an account of the soul choosing to act. This interpretation shows that Socrates' argument distinguishes between what the soul does and what its parts do; it does not dissolve the functions of the soul into the functions of its parts. The soul is distinguished from its parts in that the soul has the function of choosing to act; the parts offer motivations to act, which are not themselves choices to act. Socrates' argument for distinguishing among the parts of the soul depends on the way the different parts offer distinct motivations for acting to the soul, whose job, then, is to choose which to follow. As we shall see, the soul chooses what is good because it is good. To explain this choice there is no need to attribute to the soul a desire for the good as that is understood in the causal theory. As we shall see, this view of choice has important implications for the claim that the soul always pursues the good and does everything for the sake of the good (505d11-e2).

II

This interpretation, then, begins with the first two principles of the argument. The Principle of Opposites:

> (I) It is obvious that the same thing will never do or undergo opposite things in the same respect (κατὰ ταὐτόν) in relation to the same thing (πρὸς ταὐτὸν) at the same time (ἅμα) (436b8-9).

The principle itself does not refer to parts or subdivisions. Three occurrences of 'the same' in (I) seem to be clear enough. However, it is the referent of 'in the same respect' that is the hardest to grasp and it is the one that is the basis for the claim that the soul has subdivisions. The principle for subdividing the soul follows immediately.

> (II) So that if we ever find these things (ταῦτα) happening among those things (ἐν αὐτοῖς) we will know that there is not the same thing but many (436b9-c1).

It might be useful to point out one of the little-noted consequences of this principle. If a pair of opposites cannot be attributed to any of the last three terms of (I)—relation, time, or respect—then the pair cannot hold for the subject; the subject term is either P or not-P, or perhaps neither P nor not-P. This situation arises, in particular, with verbs that cannot be attributed to parts, subdivisions, or respects. For instance, it is not possible to say that Alice runs toward an object at a certain time in one respect (or with one part) and does not run toward the same object at the same time but in another respect (or with another part). The reason is that 'run' is a verb that belongs to the whole body and cannot be used of a part. In turn, as we will see, this distinction is relevant to Socrates' careful distinction, throughout this passage, between what the soul does and what the parts do.[2]

Since (II) is a very abstract principle, Socrates clarifies by applying it to two physical examples. Next, he turns to psychological opposites. However, he does not give an example but a list of opposites that the same thing might do or undergo.

> (III) Assent (ἐπινεύειν) is opposed to dissent (ἀνανεύειν), striving after something (ἐφίεσθαί) to rejecting (ἀπαρνεῖσθαι), embracing (προσάγεσθαι) to repelling (ἀπωθεῖσθαι); these are opposites either in the category of action or of passion (437b1-3).

This list of opposites seems fashioned to fit the opposites mentioned in the Principle of Opposites. However, instead of applying (II) to (III), as we might expect, he leaves the list of opposites aside in order to advance his argument in another direction. He asks, "What about hunger and thirst, and the appetites (ἐπιθυμίας) in general, and further wanting (ἐθέλειν) and wishing (βούλεσθαι)?" In the first place, he is talking about positive states and not pairs of opposites. Second, he adds another, and more abstract, terminology to striving after, embracing, and assenting: appetites (ἐπιθυμίας), then wanting (ἐθέλειν) and wishing (βούλεσθαι). He says that they should put all of these somewhere in the class of things they were just talking about (437b7-c1). The 'somewhere' indicates a qualification to the way they are classified, suggesting that ἐπιθυμίας, ἐθέλειν and βούλεσθαι are not exactly the same as assenting, dissenting, striving after, rejecting, embracing, and repelling. With these refinements made, Socrates then says:

> (IV) Always the soul of the one desiring (ἐπιθυμοῦντος) either strives after (ἐφίεσθαι) what it desires (ἐπιθυμῇ), or (ἢ) embraces (προσάγεσθαι) what it wishes (βούληταί) to have, or (ἢ), insofar as it wants (ἐθέλει) something to be provided to it, it assents (ἐπινεύειν) within itself to having this thing—as though someone were asking a question—stretching towards its attainment (437c1-6).

The first thing to notice is that desiring (ἐπιθυμοῦντος) is not like the desire in the causal account. The latter is inert without the belief that activates it, whereas desiring is already active, and no mention is made of a belief that activates this desire. Second, (III) mentions no subject for the actions listed whereas in (IV) the soul is the subject. Third, the three positive actions in (IV) are paired with desiring, wanting, and wishing; striving after is paired with desiring, embracing with wishing, and assenting with wanting.

This third feature is the most interesting. In other dialogues, ἐπιθῦμειν, βούλεσθαι, and ἐθέλειν are unadorned by these circumlocutions, borrowed from (III). Still, in these contexts, desiring, wishing for, and wanting are not just states of inclination; they are tied to acting to obtain what is desired, wished for, or wanted. When Socrates says, in the *Meno*, that everyone who desires fine things desires good things, it is understood that they will act to get what they desire when the time for acting arises (*Meno* 77b6-7). When, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates says that men do not wish for (βούλεσθαι) what they do each time but they wish for that for the sake of which they do what they do, he again assumes that wishing for wisdom, health, or wealth is tied to acting to get these things (*Gor.* 467c5-e1). But what he does not describe is the way desire, wishing for, and wanting pass over into action. In (IV), however, striving after, embracing, and assenting to are added to desiring, wishing for, and wanting. While the first set of verbs is more concrete than the second, the first set could just be redundant; so that the meaning of 'wishing for x' is not enhanced by adding 'embracing x' to it. However, if (IV) is not redundant but is making a substantive claim, then it means something like the following; desiring, wishing for, and wanting become specific by, or are actualized in, striving after, embracing, assenting to. Instead of assuming that the soul that wishes to drink, e.g., will move to have a drink, (IV) describes its moving to have a drink by saying this soul embraces what it wishes to have. The context

of (IV) makes clear that this description is not about embracing drinking as a policy but about embracing drinking in a particular situation.

In fact, (IV) is laying the groundwork for a notion of choice. Of course, choice suggests two alternatives, one of which is chosen. And in (IV) there are no alternatives to be chosen. Still, in it we find what is necessary for choice—the definitive direction of the soul, which leads to the physical act. Desire (ἐπιθυμῇ) in combination with 'strives after,' wishes for (βούληταί) in combination with 'embraces' and wants (ἐθέλει) in combination with 'assents to' show that the soul has adopted a definitive direction, that issues in action. This claim is especially clear with the last two clauses. It is hard not to see these phrases as describing a decision. If the soul of the desiring person, wishing to have some wine, embraces it, then one would drink. If the soul of the desiring person, insofar as it wants or wills wine to be provided to it, assents within itself to having wine, as though someone were asking a question ["Would you like some wine?"] one would drink. Suppose the opposite. The soul of the desiring person, wishing to have wine, embraces it; but one does not drink. The soul of the desiring person, insofar as it wants or wills wine to be provided to it, assents within itself to having wine, as though someone were asking a question; but one does not drink. Something else has happened. Perhaps, this person has changed her mind or has been denied what she wants. So, when the soul, wishing to have something, embraces it, it is taking a definitive direction.

To see this point, consider the following argument. If the sentence 'the soul embraces what it wishes for' does not describe a definitive direction for the soul, then it could occur with its opposite. However, the soul cannot embrace what it wishes for and, at the same time, reject what it wishes not to have. Nor can the soul, insofar as it wants wine to be provided to it, assent within itself to having wine and, at the same time, insofar as it wants not to have wine to be provided to it, dissent within itself to having wine. Since embracing and rejecting are opposites, the Principle of Opposites implies that the soul cannot do these opposite actions at the same time with respect to the same thing. Nor can the impossibility be resolved by attributing these opposites to different parts of the soul. Since the soul is the cause of motion in the body (*Phdr* 245c-246d; *Laws* 894c-897b), it would follow that one of the ways the soul causes such motion is by embracing what it wishes to have. If some soul, say Tom's, wishing to have a drink, embraced what it wishes to have but did not move the body to drink, then Tom would not drink. If Tom does not drink, then the claim 'Tom's soul, wishing to have a drink, embraces what it wishes to have' seems to have no meaning. Now, suppose one part of the soul embraces what it wishes to have, e.g., to drink this drink. On the one hand, if this part of the soul did not move the body to drink, then 'embracing what it wishes to have' when applied to a part of the soul does not mean the same as it means when applied to the soul. An analogous argument holds of 'rejecting what it wishes not to have.' So, if 'embracing what it wishes to have' and 'rejects what it wishes not to have' do not mean the same when said of the soul and of a part of the soul, then the problem of attributing opposites to the soul cannot be solved by attributing them to different parts. On the other hand, if the part which embraces what it wishes to have does move the body to drink this drink, then another part simultaneously rejecting what it wishes not to have would cause the body to refrain from drinking However, by

the Principle of Opposites, the body cannot, e.g., drink and refrain from drinking at the same time with respect to the same thing; nor can it drink with one part and refrain from drinking with another part, at the same time with respect to the same thing. Either the whole body moves to drink or the whole body refrains from drinking. Since the body cannot move and be at rest in these opposite ways, the parts of the soul cannot simultaneously cause the body to move and to refrain from moving. Consequently, it cannot be correct to say one part of the soul embraces what it wishes to have and another part rejects what it does wish not to have; and the problem of attributing opposites to the soul cannot be solved by attributing them to the parts.

In the next step, Socrates admits opposites to wish, want, and desire. These are to be unwilling (ἀβουλεῖν), not want nor desire (μὴ ἐθέλειν μηδ' ἐπιθυμεῖν) (437c8-10). There is a difference between not wishing to have something and wishing not to have something. If this list is to be of the opposites to desiring, wishing for, and wanting, it must have the second sense—as ἀβουλεῖν, to be unwilling, seems to indicate. If so, there should be a negative version of (IV); Using (III) as a guide, we can say:

> (IV') The soul of the one desiring-not either rejects what it does not desire, or repels what it does not wish to have, or, insofar as it does not want something to be provided to it, it dissents within itself to having this thing, as though someone were asking.

This formulation describes a definitive direction that is negative.

At this point, Socrates adds a significant qualification to ἐπιθῡμία, focusing on the bodily desires of hunger and thirst. He says that, insofar as it is thirst (καθ' ὅσον δίψα ἐστί), we do not say that it is for anything other than that of which it is a desire in the soul. Socrates explains this claim by an example: (we do not say) thirst is thirst for hot or cold drink, or for much or less drink. But if it is qualified by heat, it is thirst for cold drink (437d8-e2). The import of this claim is seen a few lines later when Socrates says that we should dismiss the idea that no one desires (ἐπιθυμεῖ) drink but good drink since everyone desires good things (438a1-4). This passage, of course, has been taken to imply a momentous innovation in the moral psychology of the dialogues—viz., that bodily desires for food, drink, and sex are independent of the good.

This claim implies that appetite, in seeking to be satisfied, is heedless of the good. For instance, Irwin (1995, p. 208) says "opposition to acting on appetite is opposition to acting without regard to the good." This claim means either that opposition to acting on appetite is the same as opposition to acting without regard to the good or that all opposition to acting on appetite is opposition to acting without regard to the good. At a minimum, then, all opposition to acting on appetite is opposition to acting without regard to the good. If so, all acting on appetite is acting without regard to the good. Otherwise, one might act on appetite but not act without regard to the good. But then not all opposition to acting on appetite would be opposition to acting without regard to the good. Acting without regard to the good implies that, if one discovers acting is not good, one would act anyway. So, acting without regard to the good is acting heedless of the good. If acting without regard to the good does not imply that, if one discovers acting is not good, one would act anyway, then reason would not always oppose acting without regard

to the good—because it is possible that acting without regard to the good is compatible with the fact that, if one discovers acting is not good, one would not act anyway.[3] In Irwin's account, then, appetite's being heedless of the good is the basis for distinguishing it from reason. However, as we shall see, it is doubtful that Socrates' account of *epithumia* will support such a notion of good-independence.

Although Socrates holds that the argument at 438a1-4 is wrong, Glaucon seems to think that there is something right about it. To back up his criticism of this argument, Socrates launches into a lengthy analogy about relative terms. Starting at a high level of abstraction, he says that relative terms which are of a particular sort are related to terms of a particular sort and other relative terms which are just themselves are related to terms that are just themselves. He illustrates the first type with greater and lesser; whatever is greater is greater with respect to what is lesser (438b-c). Before applying the analogy to appetite, Socrates extends it to include knowledge; in doing so, he introduces a distinction between knowledge as such and particular types of knowledge. Unfortunately, the distinction is not very clear; nevertheless, it is vital for this argument. Although he gives no example of knowledge as such, the knowledge of house-building is offered as a particular type. Knowledge as such is relative to (the vaguely described) whatever can be known, whereas the particular knowledge of house-building is relative to house-building. It seems unlikely that knowledge as such is something like the genus of knowledge because, then, knowledge as such would not exist apart from its species, i.e., particular forms of knowledge. So, it appears that knowledge as such is knowledge in a very general form—as knowledge of whatever is knowable—without respect to its being organized into disciplines, in contrast to knowledge specified in house-building or in medicine. Next, he now applies the knowledge analogy to thirst. Just as there is knowledge as such of whatever can be known, there is thirst as such for drink as such. However, just as knowledge can be specified by its relation to a particular kind of object of knowledge, thirst can be specified by its relation to a particular kind of object of desire (438e-439a).

By comparing thirst—and appetite in general—to knowledge, Socrates is introducing the idea that thirst is intentional. It aims at something just as knowledge aims at something. In addition, in the analogy between thirst and knowledge, Socrates distinguishes knowledge in itself from particular kinds of knowledge in order to make a distinction between thirst as such for drink as such and particular thirst for a particular kind of drink. So, given that they are intentional, thirst as such for drink as such aims at drink as such and particular kinds of thirst for particular kinds of drink aim at particular kinds of drink (Carone, 200, pp. 118-120). As a consequence, thirst as such for drink as such is distinguished from particular kinds of thirst because thirst as such does not aim at a particular kind of drink.

Now we can see that thirst as such for drink as such is not capable of overcoming one's judgment about the better course of action—as it would have to do according to the causal account. Thirst that is capable of overcoming one's better judgment is thirst for a drink whether the drink is good or not. This kind of thirst is different from thirst for a drink without reference to whether it is good or not. Suppose Tom is so thirsty that he wants to drink something whether it is good or not; this thirst would aim at drinking even if doing so is not good. This kind of thirst could overcome one's better judgment. Then suppose Tom is thirsty for something to drink

but he has not thought whether what he wants to drink is good or not; this thirst does not aim at drinking even if doing so is not good. This kind of thirst could not overcome one's better judgment. Now, thirst as such for drink as such aims at a drink without reference to whether the drink is good or not; so, it does not aim at a particular kind of drink. By contrast, thirst which aims at a drink whether it is good or not aims at a particular kind of drink; it aims at a drink even if the drink is not good. However, that thirst as such aims at a drink without reference to whether it is good or not still leaves it open whether actually satisfying such a thirst could have bad consequences. Even though his thirst aims at a kind of drink that is quite generic, Tom's actually satisfying it can still be bad for him.

However, this result only brings into relief the other two terms in (IV): ἐθέλειν and βούλεσθαι. If thirst as such aims at drinking without reference to whether the drink is good or not, wanting and wishing are essentially linked to the good. In the *Meno*, Socrates argues that no one wishes for (βούλεσθαι) bad things, knowing them to be bad. Everyone desires (ἐπιθῦμειν) good things. The idea that we want the good is also found in the *Gorgias* where Socrates argues that we wish for (βούλεσθαι) good things when we do anything. So, when people take medicine, which is neither good nor bad in itself, what they wish for (βούλεσθαι) is health, which is something good (*Gor.* 467c ff). So the use of βούλεσθαι in this context raises anew the idea that its object is the good (Irwin, 1995, p. 205-8). We have good reason to take seriously the fact that Socrates uses βούλεσθαι in this passage as aiming at the good. If he wanted to change its association with the good, he could have done so; βούλεσθαι and ἐθέλειν continue to have the sense of wishing for or wanting what is good.

At this point, Socrates has set the stage for the argument that the soul has distinct parts. In its first phase, the argument distinguishes between reason and appetite, by means of a conflict between the two. Steps (1) and (2) are moments in a dialectical development from a soul without conflict to one in conflict. To express the first, Socrates applies (IV) to a familiar situation:

> 1) The soul of the one who is thirsty, insofar as it is thirsty, wishes for (βούλεται) nothing except to drink; this is what it reaches out for (ὀρέγεται) and sets out to get (ὁρμᾶι). (439a9-b1)

First of all, what should not be overlooked is that, in (1), the soul is the subject of 'wishes for'—not appetite. Then, (1) qualifies the soul of the one who is thirsty by 'insofar as it is thirsty.' Since Socrates has just explained, at length, the notion of thirst as such for drink as such, it hard to deny that he is now describing a soul moved by thirst as such—a soul moved, not by thirst for hot drink or cold drink, for good drink or bad drink, but just by thirst as such. Next, Socrates specifies this wishing-for by 'reaches for' and 'sets out to get'. This combination of βούλεσθαι with 'reaches out to get' and 'sets out to get' recalls (IV) where βούλεσθαι is combined with 'embraces'. Once again, the definitive direction of the soul is set. This soul has decided to drink, driven by thirst as such for drink as such.

In the interpretation based on the causal account, the soul in (1) is acting on an appetite that is heedless of the good (Irwin, 1995, pp. 208-9). In fact, this step is the only one in this argument which might be construed in this way, as we shall see. So, we should pay close attention to this step to see how much it will bear the weight of this interpretation.

We will focus on two aspects of (1): the phrase 'insofar as it is thirsty' and the verb βούλεσθαι. According to the interpretation in question, the phrase must refer to a thirst that is heedless of the good. However, we have seen that the phrase refers to what Socrates has just been explaining, i.e., thirst as such for drink as such. So, this interpretation takes thirst as such for drink as such to be thirst that is heedless of the good; thus, it confuses thirst which aims at drinking without reference to its being good or bad with thirst which aims at drinking whether it is good or bad. Next, in this interpretation, the soul in the grip of thirst that is heedless of the good wishes for a drink whether it is good or bad. As a consequence, this reading contradicts the link between wishes for (βούλεσθαι) and the good since it implies that in (1) the soul wishes for something heedless of the good. However, if (1) is read so that thirst is too generic to be heedless of the good, then it does not imply that the soul wishes to drink heedless of the good. Still, even though thirst as such for drink as such is too generic to aim at good or bad drink, the soul, for its part, can wish to drink as something good to do.

In the next step, the situation changes and conflict is introduced into the soul. In addition, Socrates abruptly moves from talking about what the soul does to what the parts of the soul do:

> 2) Then if ever there is something that pulls the soul back (ἀνθέλκει) when it is thirsting (αὐτὴν … διψῶσαν), it would be something different in the soul from that which is thirsting and leading it (διψῶντος καὶ ἄγοντος) like a beast to drink (439b3-5).

These impulses come from different parts of the soul; at this point, the soul is not acting on either impulse. (2) does not describe an opposition between the soul deciding to drink and its deciding not to drink. In (2), the soul is not the agent, rather the putative parts are. Nor does (2) describe one part as having decided to drink and another part as having decided to refrain. One part has not embraced drinking as what it wishes to have and the other has not rejected drinking as what it wishes not to have. Rather, 'something that pulls the soul back when it is thirsting' describes a fluid situation in which nothing has been settled; opposing impulses are contending, indicated by Plato's use of present participles.

First of all, if partition depended on the soul's acting on an appetite that is heedless of the good, this step—which does not describe the soul acting on such an appetite—must at least be the beginning of an argument for the soul's so acting; but the rest of the argument is not about the soul acting on an appetite that is heedless of the good. In fact, by the end of the argument, the opposite happens, i.e., the soul follows the command of reason (439c5-7). The opposing impulses are not part of an argument for the possibility of *akrasia*; rather, they are competing motivations.[4] Motivation is a source of possible motion or action in the soul that itself does not lead to action; choice is the way motivation becomes the definitive direction of the soul. While I might have a motivation, impulse, or inclination to drink a cup of wine, I need not choose to drink. If I act on the motivation, I choose to drink.

In the next step, Socrates invokes (I), the Principle of Opposites, in order to back up the claim in (2) that there are two distinct parts of the soul. As Socrates says, in justifying (2):

> 3) For the same thing does not do opposite things with the same thing at the

same time in relation to the same thing (439b5-6).
We can specify (3):
(3') For the same thing (the soul) does not do opposite things (leading and holding back) with the same part at the same time in relation to the same thing (the act of drinking).

Not only is the soul's acting on an appetite that is heedless of the good not found in steps (2) – (5) of this argument, now we can see that the soul's acting on an appetite that is heedless of the good is not needed in the argument for subdividing the soul. By invoking (I) at this point, he shows that the distinction between parts depends only on their offering opposing motivations. It does not depend on the possibility of appetite overcoming reason since (2) does not describe the possibility of appetite overcoming reason. This interpretation of the argument for the tripartite soul, then, differs from the tradition which holds the parts of the soul are agents that can cause the body to move—and, thereby, implies the possibility of *akrasia*. Rather, this interpretation of tripartition places it in the framework of choice, where the differentiation of parts follows from their offering opposing motivations for acting, one offering a motivation to act and the other opposing this motivation.

Now that there are two alternatives facing the soul, we have the second feature of choice. The soul must choose between the two. (4) – (5) describe the choice. In these two steps, we find a pattern similar to that outlined in (IV). First:

> 4) Sometimes those who are thirsty want not to drink (οὐκ ἐθέλειν πιεῖν) (439c2-3)

Unlike the situation in (2), here a choice has been made, indicated by ἐθέλειν. Moreover, the situation in (4) also contrasts with that in (1), where the soul wishes to drink. In (1), there is no choice between drinking and not drinking; the soul, so to speak, sees no reason not to drink. In (4), there is a choice, elaborated in the next step:

> 5) There is within the soul of these people that which commands (τὸ κελεῦον) and something different within the soul, i.e., that which forbids (τὸ κωλῦον) to drink, that overpowers (κρατοῦν) that which commands (439c5-7).

In (5) the wanting not to drink is represented by the command not to drink overcoming the command to drink. The command not to drink overcomes the command to drink because, according to (4), a choice has been made not to drink.

Next, Socrates claims that what holds the soul back from such actions arises, when it arises, from calculation (ἐκ λογισμοῦ) and that which pushes and drags, from passions (παθημάτων) and diseases (439c9-d2). Then Socrates names that (thing) of the soul by which it reasons λογιστικὸν and that by which it feels erotic passion, hungers, and thirsts non-rational (ἀλόγιστόν) and ἐπιθυμητικόν (439d5-8). We have seen in (IV) and in (1) that the soul is the subject of choosing. In (5), when the counter-command of reason overcomes the command of appetite, a choice has been made. However, in (5) the soul is not said to be the subject of choosing. What is striking, then, is that this argument begins with two claims about what the soul does. Then it introduces parts of the soul. One might be tempted to think that the soul has been dissolved into its parts. In particular, the functions formerly attributed to the soul might now be attributed to the parts. This result would fit well

with our contemporary categories of thought. We know, roughly, how to talk about reason, emotions, and appetites; we do not know how to talk about the soul. At best, we indulge the Platonic conceit that the soul moves the body; somehow, it has the role of transforming thought into action. But if soul is reduced to its parts, then we can settle comfortably into the categories of contemporary moral psychology. All talk of the soul is, at best, a convenient way of talking about what the parts do. So, if this argument reduces the soul's agency to the agency of its parts, Socrates should talk as though functions formerly done by the soul are now done by the parts.

However, the soul remains a stubborn element in this account. After all, we have just seen that it is the soul that calculates by reason and feels desire by the appetite. And while (5) describes a choice, it does not follow the reductionist program by reassigning the function of choosing, mentioned in (1), from the soul to one of its parts. The obvious candidate for exercising the function of choosing would be the reasoning part (Cf. Penner, 1971, p. 107, p. 114; Cooper, 1999, pp. 124-5.). However, such a conclusion would not fit with (5). Reason does not choose; rather, it countermands what appetite commands. The thirsty person chooses not to drink only when the countermand of reason overcomes the command of appetite. So, the counter-command is not itself the choice.

In this argument, reason has two roles: calculating about the better and the worse (441b3-c2) and countermanding appetite (439c2-d2). The two functions go together. By calculating the consequences of following the urge of appetite with respect to the better and the worse, reason can arrive at the counter-command that forbids drinking. However, reason does not choose; the soul chooses when it follows reason. Reason gives a command that becomes the soul's choice when it overcomes the command of appetite. This role for reason conforms to what we find in Book 8. The only desire explicitly attributed to reason is the desire to know the truth (581b5-7). Reason's desire to know the truth includes, scil., the desire to know the truth about the good. This desire to know the truth about the good explains reason's job in Book 4 as calculating about the better and the worse. Calculating about the better and the worse in a particular situation is a form of pursuing the truth about the good because the desire that moves reason to pursue the truth moves it to calculate about the better and the worse. Finally, the counter-command is the conclusion of the calculation. One can speculate that reason in this case considers the consequences of following the command of appetite and sees that it is worse to follow this command and better not to. Then it arrives at its conclusion, the command not to drink.

In the light of this result, then, we can appreciate the importance of the shift in this argument between (2) and (5). In (2), the opposition in the soul is portrayed as analogous to physical force. Something leads or pulls the soul to drink; something else pulls it back from drinking. At this point in the argument, we seem to have competing motivations; if so, we might expect the stronger motivation would win. However, Socrates deviates from this path, seemingly laid out by (2). In (5) he transforms the opposition from one of competing forces or motivations to one of competing commands. One should not be tempted by the idea that the two ways of portraying the opposition amount to the same thing. Of course, both are analogies for the opposition between reason and appetite; but it makes a difference if we think of the opposition on the analogy of

strength or on the analogy of command. If the appropriate way of portraying the opposition coming from reason is as a command then the opposition coming from appetite has to be portrayed in a similar vein. What is remarkable about (5), then, is not that reason's role is portrayed as issuing a counter-command; it is that appetite's push to drink is transformed into a command to drink. It is remarkable because of the way it presents the concept of choice in the argument. Choice does not imply that one of two motivations moves the soul because it is stronger than the other; it implies a judgment about which should be followed. The transformation of motivations into commands sets the stage for a judgment between courses of action. A command functions in a logical context that is different from the logical context of motivations. The opposition between that which commands and that which forbids is now a dispute about which command to follow, about what ought to be done.

Thus, what should not be lost is that, by introducing a language internal to the soul, Socrates is presenting the competition between reason and appetite in a linguistic form. In (IV), the internal language of the soul is qualified by an analogy—"as though someone were asking." In (5), there is no analogy; what is to be done appears in the form of two imperatives. The soul is talking to itself in a dialectical framework that calls for following one or the other; the incompatibility of the two imperatives is clear. The difference between the two commands is that one results from calculation and the other does not. However, the counter-command of reason comes not just from calculation; reason—unlike appetite—is capable of conceiving of the over-all good of the soul (441c1-2). If so, the opposition between reason and appetite is the opposition between what can conceive of the over-all good and what cannot. Then one command, from appetite, articulates what ought to be done, without taking into account the good of the whole since appetite is incapable of conceiving of such a thing. The command from reason arises from reason's calculation about the better and the worse with respect to the consequences of following the command of appetite. The command of appetite simply commands to drink. However, at this point, we must be careful about the content of the command of appetite. According to the interpretation of appetite as good-independent, the command would be something like the command to drink no matter what the consequences for the good. According to our interpretation, however, it is simply the command to drink, which is oblivious of good or bad consequences. It is the command that follows from the simple urge to drink. Finally, (5) implies the command is just the command to drink.

(4) and (5) imply that when one chooses not to drink what forbids overcomes what commands. (5) suggests a way to understand how choosing not to drink implies that which forbids overcomes that which commands. First, that which commands is addressing a command to something that can follow a command and that which forbids is addressing a counter-command to something that can follow a counter-command. Second, whatever appetite is addressing is also what reason is addressing. Finally, since that which forbids overcomes that which commands, whatever the two are addressing follows the counter-command and not the command. Since (5) says the counter-command and the command occur in the soul, we have good reason for seeing the imperatives as addressed to the soul. After all, it is the soul that will move the body in carrying out the commands. In

(IV), insofar as it wants (ἐθέλει) something to be provided to it, the soul of the one desiring assents within itself to having this thing, as though a question were posed to it. Since in (IV) the soul is being asked a question, it is plausible to see the command of appetite and the counter-command of reason in (5) as addressed to the soul. If the two commands are addressed to the soul, choosing not to drink is the soul choosing to follow the command not to drink over the command to drink. In this way, choosing not to drink implies that that which forbids to drink overcomes that which commands to drink.

Finally, if, in (5), it is the soul that follows the command not to drink, we can understand how the command of reason overcomes the command of appetite. In (IV) the soul wishes for what it wishes for by embracing it or wants what it wants by assenting to having it. Since wish (βούλεσθαι) and want (ἐθέλειν) are tied to the good, the soul wishes for the good by embracing what it wishes for or wants the good by assenting to having what it wants. There is no reason to think in (5) the soul would not follow the pattern of taking a definitive direction by embracing what it wishes for or assenting to having what it wants. However, what the soul faces in (5) is different because it faces alternative possible actions. Then, embracing what it wishes for or assenting to having what it wants must now include choosing between the two. Embracing what it wishes for or assenting to having what it wants then becomes following one of the two commands. So, if the command of appetite does not touch on the over-all good and if the command of reason embodies the calculation about the over-all good, the soul chooses the latter because following the command of reason is the way the soul embraces or assents to having the good it wishes for or wants. The result is that the command of reason overcomes the command of appetite.

The great advantage of this interpretation of the argument for subdividing the soul is that it makes sense of a fundamental claim about the soul made in *Republic* 6:

> (V) Each soul pursues this (the good) and does everything for the sake of this, divining that it is something but also puzzled and unable to grasp adequately what it is… (ὅ δὴ διώκει μὲν ἅπασα ψυχὴ καὶ τούτου ἕνεκα πάντα πράττει, ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, ἀποροῦσα δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς τί ποτ' ἐστὶν οὐδὲ πίστει χρήσασθαι μονίμῳ οἵᾳ, καὶ περὶ τἆλλα…) (505d11-e2).[5]

According to the interpretation of this argument inspired by the causal account, (V) is false. Since one part of the soul, appetite, is heedless of the good, this part can move the soul to pursue what reason calculates is not good. When appetite moves the soul in this way, the soul is not pursuing the good. However, in our interpretation of the argument, the soul pursues the good. First of all, while appetite can give rise to a motivation for an action that reason calculates is not good, this motivation is not sufficient to move the soul to choose what is not good. Furthermore, in the situation described in (1) – (5)—where it is a question of only two parts, appetite and reason—the soul is in one of three states. In the first, i.e., (1), the desiring soul, in taking a definitive direction, i.e., when it wishes to drink, follows appetite. If we assume the link between βούλεται and the good, since it wishes for nothing except to drink and wishing (βούλεται) aims at the good, the soul wishes to drink as something good to do. In the second, i.e., (2), although it is thirsty, something is

pulling the soul back. The soul, in the grip of two competing motivations, does not take a definitive direction; it neither wishes to drink nor wishes not to drink. Finally, in the third, i.e., (4) – (5), the soul takes a definitive direction; under the guidance of reason, it wishes not to drink as the good thing to do. So, when the soul takes a definitive direction, it either wishes to drink or wishes not to drink. In either case, when it takes a definitive direction, it pursues the good.

III

Finally, those interpretations which hold that the argument for tripartition implies *akrasia* take the story of Leontius to be strong support. So, our account of choice is not complete until we look at the last part of this passage, which actually deals with the third part of the soul, the *thumos* (θῦμός). At this point, Socrates complicates matters by introducing a kind of conflict in the soul not yet seen. While previously there was conflict between reason and appetite, it was easily settled in reason's favor. In the third section of this argument, however, Socrates introduces a more persistent type of conflict. First, in the story of Leontius, there is a running conflict between *thumos* and appetite. Next, Socrates considers a conflict between reason and appetite to show that *thumos* is the ally of reason. Since this passage is thought to raise the topic of *akrasia*, we will have to consider that issue in the context of the account of choice; the latter is not compatible with *akrasia*.

It will be helpful to start with a distinction, made by Penner, between synchronic belief *akrasia* and diachronic belief *akrasia* (Penner, 1990, p.48). In synchronic belief *akrasia*, one does what she believes is not good while at the same time believing it not to be good; in diachronic belief *akrasia*, one does what she believed before the act was not good; but at the point of acting she believes it to be good. In diachronic belief *akrasia*, one's belief is unstable; in the other form of *akrasia* it is ineffective. Only synchronic belief *akrasia* is an instance of doing what one believes is not good, while simultaneously believing it is not good. So, only synchronic belief *akrasia* is incompatible with the concept of choice since, in it, the soul does not follow what reason holds to be good. Diachronic belief *akrasia* is compatible with choice because, in it, the soul does follow, at the moment of choosing, what reason holds to be good.

If the story of Leontius and its aftermath imply synchronous belief *akrasia*, it would undermine the account. However, the story of Leontius and its aftermath cannot be shown to do so. We can begin by noting that Leontius' story is not introduced as an account of appetite overcoming reason; reason is not even mentioned. The story is introduced to illustrate the conflict between appetite and *thumos* in order to show the two to be distinct. At first, it recounts his resisting the desire to look at the executed corpses, even covering his head. Then it says he is overcome (κρατούμενος) by the desire. Then, opening wide his eyes, he rushes toward the corpses, with the imprecation addressed to his eyes, "Behold you, wretches, fill up on the fine sight." (439e-440a). The reading that stays closest to the text would hold that the story is about a conflict between what the desire wants and what is honorable or dignified to *thumos* (Cf. Carone, 2001, pp. 136-140). Even if Leontius' being overcome involves reason, the omission of any mention of reason means that we cannot be sure whether being overcome is a case of synchronous belief *akrasia*

or diachronic. An obvious explanation for this lack of detail is that the story is meant to illustrate conflict between appetite and *thumos* and not *akrasia*.

However, once the story is finished, Socrates introduces reason into the account. Still, his point is to argue that *thumos* is the ally of reason when there is conflict between reason and appetite (*Rep.*440a8-b8). The chief reason for taking this section to illustrate synchronous belief *akrasia* is that Socrates says that whenever appetite forces (βιάζωνταί) someone contrary to his reason, he becomes angry with that in him which is forcing (or has forced him) (βιαζομένῳ) So that in the conflict of the two (δυοῖν στασιαζόντοιν), *thumos* becomes the ally (σύμμαχον)—i.e., fights alongside—reason (440a-b). βιάζω can mean either 'press hard' or 'overcome/overpower.' If it means that appetite presses hard contrary to the judgment of reason, it has not yet overcome.[6] In the present passage, the soul is again talking to itself, within itself. The *thumos* is reviling (λοιδοροῦντά) that which is forcing, i.e., the appetite; while reason is holding on to the idea that what the appetite urges should not be done (αἱροῦντος λόγου μὴ δεῖν ἀντιπράττειν), *thumos* makes common cause with it against the appetite. The angry words addressed to appetite are an attempt to make it give way to reason's command and to stop urging the opposite action. If it is successful, then the soul has chosen not to do the action; refraining is its definitive direction.

The idea that *thumos* opposes appetites' pressing hard has the advantage of making sense of *thumos*' being the ally of reason (σύμμαχον), i.e., of fighting alongside it. *Thumos* reinforces reason's side in the continuing fight with appetite by confronting the urging of appetite with indignation and anger. Socrates recounts a somewhat similar alliance (σύμμαχία) in *Republic* 8, where there is a *stasis* in the soul of the oligarchic youth (*Rep.* 559e5-560a2). While the fight is not about giving into a particular appetite but about the shape of a life, still the alliance (*summachia*) means weighing in on a continuing conflict in order to make it turn out in favor of one's ally. However, in the second reading of *biazô* this meaning is not possible. If *biazô* has the sense, not of forcing, but of overcoming or overpowering, the relevant sentence says that, when appetite overcomes someone contrary to his reason, *thumos* reviles and becomes angry with that in him that has overpowered. We still cannot be sure about what is happening with reason. If reason is undergoing diachronic belief *akrasia*, it has wavered. Then *thumos* is carrying on the fight, in spite of reason's wavering. If reason is undergoing synchronous belief *akrasia*, then what is supposed to be an account of *thumos* as the ally of reason is undermined. If *thumos* rises up in anger only when someone has been overpowered contrary to his reason, it is offering no aid to reason in the fight with appetite since appetite has already won. So, we cannot conclude that the passage containing the story of Leontius is a clear example of Socrates' describing someone doing what he simultaneously believes is not good.

IV

Finally, we can now see that the argument for subdividing the soul does not depend on the causal account. Each part of the soul is capable of giving rise to a motivation to act; but the soul acts by choosing which motivation to follow. The parts are distinct because they can give rise to opposing motivations; they are not distinct because each is an inde-

pendent agent. Thus, the non-rational parts being distinct from the rational part does not depend on these parts being capable of acting akratically—acting contrary to one's better judgment. Now, the causal account of action is attractive because it explains how each part is an independent agent, capable of acting akratically. However, if the parts are not independent agents, the causal account is not needed to understand the argument for subdividing the soul.

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ENDNOTES

1 Some commentators seem to evince hesitancy about the causal theory when they hold that desire itself has a cognitive dimension. Segvic, 2000, p.11; Lorenz, 2006, pp. 24-34.

2 This interpretation has some theoretical affinities with that of Moravcsik, 2001, pp. 41-2.

3 This interpretation has been influential, both for those who follow it and for those who oppose it. For instance, Kamtekar (2017, p. 134-40) argues that all parts of the soul seek good. The difference between the good sought by reason and that sought by appetite is in scope; reason seeks the over-all good whereas appetite seeks the narrower good of pleasure. Thus, arguing that appetite is essentially good directed (although the good is narrowly conceived) is the counter to the idea that appetite is essentially good indifferent.

4 The idea of motivation can be found in the following authors. Penner, 1971, vol.2, 105; Annas, 1981, pp. 133-7; Stalley, 1975, p. 124; Cooper, 1999, p.121 ff.

5 If (3') implies that, in leading with one part and holding back with another part, the soul *does* each of these with the respective part, then, in doing the first, it does not pursue the good, *contra* (V). However, this result overlooks the nuance of the general principle (I), of which (3') is a reiteration. (I) includes 'undergoing' with 'doing.' If we expand (3') to include 'undergoing' (3') would read: (3'') the same thing (the soul) does not do or undergo opposites things (leading and holding back) with the same part at the same time with respect to the same thing (the act of drinking).
If the soul undergoes the leading of appetite—as its being a passion suggests—then (3'') would be compatible with (V).

6 We can read βιαζομένῳ to mean that appetite is pressing hard but not yet succeeding. The Grube/Reeve translation captures the ambiguity in the Greek between the continuous activity of appetite's forcing (and thus not yet succeeding in causing someone to act contrary to calculation) and the finished act of appetite's having forced (and thus its succeeding). (G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve (trans), 1992, p. 116.)