



Plato's Social Psychology

William Charlton*

Yearhaugh Farm, West Woodburn, Hexham, United Kingdom

***Corresponding author:** William Charlton, Yearhaugh Farm, West Woodburn, Hexham, United Kingdom.

Received Date: March 06, 2023

Published Date: March 21, 2023

Abstract

Plato divides the human psyche into three parts. I explain the interpretation of this trisection which I favour: that he is distinguishing types of motivation, and that he attributes to us aims and feelings as essentially social beings. What I call his 'social psychology' is his use of this idea. I examine three uses he makes of it: in his depiction of different types of society and different types of individual in the Republic, in his definition of statesmanship in the Statesman, and in his educational proposals. And I compare what he says sympathetically with what is said by later thinkers and widely held today.

Social psychology is defined by G W Allport as 'the scientific study of how people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others.' (Allport 1985) Plato has plenty to say about this, but he also thought that there is a social element in the individual psyche, something not recognised either by modern psychology or by modern economics. This appears in his writing under the name to thumoeides, a phrase often translated 'the spirited part'. It is one of the three parts into which he divides the soul, the others being 'the calculating' (logistikon) and the 'desiring' (epithumêtikon). Plato's trisection has been much discussed in recent times, but the discussion has centred on Republic 4 where it is introduced, and on the two questions 'What does it mean?' – that is, 'What are these parts? What is the principle of division?' - and 'Is it defensible?' I must try to make clear the interpretation I favour, but shall be concerned principally with the use of the doctrine in Republic 8-9 and in Plato's teaching on statesmanship and on education. These uses have received little attention from critical readers – chiefly, perhaps, because they have either failed to grasp the notion of a social element in the psyche, or thought it fanciful.

Plato's Spirited Part

Plato's trisection is not primarily a division of some kind of spiritual substance into parts, even if he does in the Timaeus associate the Calculating part with the head, the Spirited with the heart and the Desiring with the liver [1-6]. His Calculating, Spirited and Desiring Parts have affinities with Freud's Ego, Superego and Id, and these are explored by Anthony Kenny (1969) and Anthony Price (1990). Colin Strang (1982) has matched them illuminatingly with W.H. Sheldon's 'cerebronic', 'somatotonic' and 'viscerotomic' temperaments. Julia Annas (1981) sees them as homunculi. J.C. Gosling (1973) connects the Spirited Part with our tendency towards hero-worship. In a paper published in 1996 I argued that, though it may be impossible to find a doctrine which both is convincing in itself and consistent with everything Plato says, the

principle of division is most fruitfully taken to be between types of motivation. Each Part, we are told Plato (Republic 9 580 D) has its 'pleasures, desires and principles'. We have three types of motivation, each involving different feelings, different objectives and a different type of rationality [7-15].

One objective is our own good as individual organisms. That includes survival, experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain and boredom. Anything which makes a course of action conducive to this is a reason to a person for pursuing it insofar as the person is a more or less isolated individual. The part of us that is influenced by these reasons and pursues these goals coincides pretty largely with what Plato calls the 'Desiring' Part.

Secondly we sometimes aim at the good of another person for that other person's own sake. The good of others is an objective to us as altruists, and anything which makes a course beneficial to another person, or indeed to any other living thing, makes it reasonable for us as altruists. I use the word 'altruism' for action to benefit another individual which is both intentional and disinterested; this usage is different from that of some scientists, for whom it is enough that behaviour should in fact benefit another, whether it is intentional or not, but who also require that it should be injurious to the interests of the agent as an individual; so Richard Dawkins ('behaves in such a way as to increase another such entity's welfare at the expense of its own', 1989, 4), and Edward O. Wilson, ('self-destructive behaviour performed for the benefit of others', 1975, 578). Plato a little surprisingly associates altruism in my sense with academic study: (Rep 2 375 E- 376 C): surprisingly because the arts and sciences fascinate us as individuals and we can be highly selfish in pursuing them, whereas people without learning and even animals display disinterested concern for their children and friends. Still, Plato calls the part of the psyche by virtue of which we are gentle (praii, 375 C 1) and kind the 'Calculating' Part [16-20].

Thirdly we aim at victory, at honour (timê), that is, celebrity and high social status, and also at sharing in the life of the society to which we belong by conforming to its laws and customs. These are objectives we have as social beings, and anything which makes doing something conducive to honour, or conducive to victory, or which makes it a duty in our society to do it, makes it reasonable for us as members of that society. The 'Spirited' Part of my psyche is me as a social being. The social being in us is not to be confused with the altruist. Self-sacrifice is possible for both, but as a social being what I have as an end in itself is a common good, the thriving of my society, not the good of another individual. We can have friendship with people who are enemies to our society, and disinterested concern for animals with which we can have nothing resembling friendship. The social and altruistic parts of the psyche develop together and reinforce each other, but they also come into agonising conflict. When to protect a friend is to violate the laws and the generally held beliefs of our society we have the materials for tragedy.

I do not wish to add to the arguments I offered for this interpretation in 1996, and there is the less need to, since independent arguments for the conclusion most important here, that the Spirited Part is the agent as a social being, have been offered by Myles Burnyeat (2006). But it is worthwhile to emphasise the difference between Plato's psychology and current orthodoxy. This is that we have only the first kind of motivation; we aim only at our own good as individuals, and only what makes a course conducive to that is a reason for pursuing it. We act to benefit other individuals, it is said, partly because doing so makes us feel good, but chiefly in order that they may reciprocate; genes that caused us to benefit others without regard to their reciprocating would be eliminated by natural selection. And we conform to our society's mores because we need protection and fear punishment. Modern

social psychology, therefore, studies not Plato's Spirited Part, but his Desiring Part in its dealings with other people.

Plato does not share the modern view of altruism: he believes we really can work for the good of others for their own sake. Nor does he try to reduce our social motivations to self-interest. Hume gives a complicated reductive account of 'love of fame', a phrase probably intended to translate the Greek philotimia (Treatise 2.1.11), but that we desire honour for its own sake is accepted as uncontroversial by Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics 1 1095a23, b22-3), who remarks that it is 'pretty well the aim of political life'. Liberal writers have praise for competition, but they mean competition in commerce, which they think motivated by desire for gain. Plato distinguishes desire for gain (philokerdia) quite sharply from desire for conquest (philonikia) and refers it to the desiring part of the psyche. In this he resembles Mill. Mill takes the desire to accumulate wealth (that is, 'things useful and agreeable' and the power to command them) to be one of 'the purely self-regarding desires' that 'appertain to man as a mere individual, and do not presuppose, as a necessary condition, the existence of other individuals except, perhaps, as mere instruments or means,' in contrast with 'feelings called forth in a human being by other individual human or intelligent beings, as such, namely the affections, the conscience or feeling of duty, and the love of approbation.' Within the individual, according to Mill, desire for wealth is directly opposed only by the 'antagonising principles' of 'aversion to labour and desire of the present enjoyment of costly indulgences.' I shall suggest presently that Plato and Mill take too simple a view of the desire for gain, but in any case desire for conquest extends more widely than economic competition; it appears in sports, politics and war, and in war it motivates warriors not only to vanquish their enemies but to surpass their comrades in gallantry, what the Greeks called aristeuein. As for conforming to the laws and customs of our society, Plato thinks the purpose of education is precisely to make this an end in itself to us, as will appear below.

The use of the Spirited Part in Republic 8-9

In Republic 8 545 B 4 Plato attributes 'characters', êthê, to states or societies, analogous to the characters of individuals. This is the second part of his social psychology I want to consider. In Books 2-4 he had taken it as an uncontroversial assumption that the virtues of prudence, courage, temperance and justice can be found in states, but he did not explain how this is possible or offer any kind of psychology of societies. He merely uses the assumption to reach a conclusion about justice in individuals. In Books 8-9, however, he spells out his characterisations both of states and individuals, and it is clear that he does not imagine that states have souls or that they are living organisms over and above their citizens. They derive their characters from the individuals that make them up. We don't suppose, he says, that the types of state arise out of oak trees or rocks rather than out of the characters of the people in them, which, leaning one way or another, draw the rest after them (Rep 8 544 D-E, cf 4 435 E). Virtue or vice in a state, however, is not simply the aggregate of the virtues and vices of the citizens. States have good

and bad qualities of their own, as collectivities or systems, which they derive from the good or bad qualities of their citizens.

The Book 8 discussion concerns four kinds of state that are inferior to the ideal state described in Books 5-7, and the kinds of individual that resemble and give rise to them. The first is the timocratic state. Land in this has been appropriated, and the population is divided between proprietors and those who are not proprietors but serve those who are. The offices are held by proprietors who are more 'spirited' than intelligent (*sophoi*). These people, he says, are 'rather simple' in their make-up, naturally disposed more to war than to peace, and are full of esteem for stratagems and novelties in armaments. . . . They are greedy for possessions, and fiercely admire money that is hidden away from view in banks and strong-rooms, and walls to seclude them and private nests in which they lavish money on their women and other favourites. They are parsimonious with their own wealth because they value it but do not want to proclaim it, and they take their pleasures secretly, and they prefer athletic exercise to study . . . Such a society is dominated by desire for honour and victory.' (547 E - 548 C)

This sounds like a characterisation of timocratic individuals. In fact Plato's sketch of the timocratic individuals is slightly different. He is rather obstinate (*authadesteron*) and thinly educated; he is fond of music and speeches, though not himself a good speaker. He will be harsh to slaves, not unruffled by them like someone who has been really well brought up; polite to free citizens; excessively deferential to people in office; desirous of office and honours, but basing his claim not on capacity for giving counsel but on his military record; fond of athletic sports and hunting.' (Rep 8 548 E - 549 A). Timocratic individuals, that is, individuals in whom the spirited part is dominant, with their love of music and field sports, and their high regard for rules and for the social distinctions their society recognises, will crop up in any kind of society. But in a timocratic state they hold the offices, and there are features of the state, like the secrecy about wealth and the fascination with espionage and advances in military technology, which might not be found in timocratic individuals in an oligarchic or democratic state.

Plato takes the spirited part to be the seat of courage (Rep 4 442 C), in that a person cannot be courageous without having a desire to outdo rivals and avenge injuries, and a horror of being thought cowardly. But courage, as distinct from reckless ferocity, also depends on the spirited part's being guided by the calculating part, and by concern for the common good. Its own peculiar objectives must not become dominant. It is obvious that love of victory and status can lead us astray. But Plato wants the spirited part, like Freud's *Superego*, to control our visceral desires (Republic 4 440 B, 440 E - 441 A). Though Plato does not say so in so many words, it does this largely through our adherence to laws and general principles. Now Plato is emphatic that no general rule can prescribe what is best in every circumstance (Statesman 294-5). Adherence to rules must always be tempered by calculation. Unlike Kant, Plato thinks it is possible to have too much respect for law. That is one of the ways in which the Spirited Part may be dominant, and I think

that rule-worship is a characteristic both of Plato's timocratic and of his oligarchic individual.

The oligarchic state is described by Plato as follows. Offices are restricted to people with a property qualification (550 C-551 B), and riches and rich people are esteemed and admired (551 A, 553 D). There is economic freedom to alienate and accumulate without limit, and this (Plato cannot have read Mandeville or Adam Smith) results in a large class of citizens without means of subsistence (552 A-B) who are alienated from the rich (551 D). Oligarchic states are militarily weak, both because the rulers are unwilling to spend money (implied 555 A) and because they are afraid to arm the poor (551 D-E). Britain at the end of the nineteenth century was an oligarchic state by Plato's criteria, and its military weakness appeared in the Boer War.

The oligarchic individual has striking affinities with Max Weber's worldly ascetic Protestants. Characterised by 'self-righteous and sober legality' those Protestants regard waste of time as a deadly sin, they feel a duty to make themselves rich if God gives them the chance, they value wealth as a sign of divine favour, and they are against 'spontaneous enjoyment of life'. Plato's oligarchic individual is hard working, averse to spending, fond of hoarding, and satisfies only the basic desires for food, drink and (lawful) sex (544 A); he is a dry stick (*aukhmeros*, 544 A), and inclined to dishonesty as a trustee (544 C). He is ill educated, and therefore restrains his base desires not by the intellectual conviction that it is bad to indulge them, but through fear of loss of money (554 D) and by force from his Spirited Part (stern conscience and sense of duty, 554 c, cf. 4. 440 b, 440 e - 441 a); so there is an internal division in him, like that between the rich and the poor in the oligarchic state (554 D). On the whole the repression works, so he looks a model of respectability (554 E). He does not desire victory over rivals in the state, but only wealth (554 A, 555 E - 556 A). Weber explains the characteristics of his capitalists at least partly by the religious revolution of the Reformation: the Reformers taught people that God is calling them not to withdraw from the world but to work hard within it. Since Plato finds similar characteristics in societies that know nothing of Christianity, let alone its Reformed version, and explains them in purely psychological terms, we may wonder if Weber puts too much emphasis on religion.

It may seem that there is little conceptual difference between the timocratic and the oligarchic individual. Plato's models for the timocratic and the oligarchic states were probably Sparta and Corinth, but historians today count them both as oligarchic, and we do not have the knowledge of classical Corinth from ancient literature that we have of Sparta and Athens; Corinth has bequeathed to us beautifully decorated vases, but no poetry - in that respect at least it resembles Calvin's Geneva. Some centuries later Corinth appears as a good place for a self-indulgent holiday - *non cuius homini contingit adire Corinthum* - and an early centre of Christianity, perhaps with a thriving Jewish community. We might think at first that Plato's oligarchic man is ruled by the desire for wealth, but Plato, as I said just now, assigns this to the Desiring Part of the psyche, and he will go on to describe the tyrannical individual

as a person ruled by one of the desires in this part.

Plato certainly says that the desire for money makes the Calculating and Spirited Parts of an individual subservient to it, so that the one calculates only how to get richer, and other honours only riches (Republic 8 553 D). Nevertheless I think we do best to understand that in his oligarchic individual the Spirited Part is still dominant, but whereas in the timocratic individual it honours what it is natural for it to honour, excellence in warfare, athletics, and so forth, the qualities, one might say, of Homer's Achilles, in the oligarchic man it is stunted and twisted. Plato would have prevented misunderstanding if he qualified his attribution of desire for wealth to the Desiring Part. Wealth does enable people to satisfy their needs as individual organisms (Republic 9 580 E – 581 A). But in fact very little money is needed for that. I think (with Burnyeat 2006, 17) that in opulent societies the desire for wealth as a motivation is largely social. So, perhaps, is the motivation of many libertines: they fear the mockery of their peers and wish to wish to impress them. If we say that desire for sexual conquest or desire for money monopolises our calculations and determines what we most esteem, we should recognise that these motivations have themselves changed and become desires of the Spirited Part.

Plato calls 'democratic' a state in which the offices are held by all citizens, either simultaneously, as in the Athenian Assembly, or successively and by lot, as in the Athenian Council and Courts. This is quite different, of course, from what we call 'democracy'. We are deeply mistrustful of rule by referendum, and the idea that judges and ministers of state might be chosen by lot from the whole population fills us with horror. We want offices to be restricted to the people best qualified (by character, education and experience) to discharge them, and we want these people to be chosen not, in general, by direct election, but by a few specially trustworthy leaders who really are chosen by some system of universal suffrage. This is precisely what Plato thinks best and recommends in the Laws – the electoral system described in Laws 6 753 resembles that of the United States of America or France more than that of England – but he calls it 'aristocracy' (545 C 9). His democratic state is characterised by freedom of speech and permissiveness in behaviour, and also by increasing numbers of indebted and disenfranchised persons (555 D-E). His democratic individual is one in whom the desiring part is dominant, and as in a state like classical Athens different kinds of individual hold office in turn, so in a 'democratic' individual different desires are indulged in turn:

He lives day by day, indulging the desire to hand, sometimes drinking wine and enjoying music, sometimes drinking water and slimming; sometimes taking gymnastic exercises, sometimes idling, sometimes dabbling in study. He sometimes enters political life, moving from side to side, sometimes envies and emulates military men, and sometimes men of business. . . . That is the life of the man devoted to equality. It is full of every kind of characteristic, and such an individual contains variety and beauty, like the democratic state. (561 c-e).

Plato has not failed to grasp the modern liberal ideal. His democratic individuals satisfy Mary Warnock's glowing description:

They can give themselves goals to pursue, which may be totally new and idiosyncratic, or which they have learned from people they have, unpredictably, met or read about, admired or loved. (2001, 147)

It is an oversimplification, however, to say simply that the desiring part is dominant in the democratic individual, and leave it at that. As in the democratic state there is discord between democratic and oligarchic individuals, so in the individual there is tension between the desires approved in oligarchies (which are those for the organism's necessities) and desires for unnecessary luxuries and indulgences (559 A, 560 A). In most individuals, at least as they get older, an unstable compromise is reached (560 A – 561 E), thanks to the influence of their fathers and oligarchically constituted relations (559 E – 560 A). Plato, like Freud, associates fathers with repressive psychological influences (cf. 575 D), though as his Spirited Part is more attractive than Freud's Iddish Superego, so his fathers are on the whole more reasonable and amiable than the tyrannical, cruel and incestuous fathers that stalk the pages of Freud. The beautiful but unstable balance and freedom of the democratic life depends upon the influence of the social part of the psyche on the desiring. Oligarchy and democracy mark diminishing degrees of this influence, not its complete disappearance.

That rather characterises the advent of tyranny. Plato's account of tyrant-ruled states is more historical than psychological. He simply says that they arise when a populist leader persuades the people to give him a bodyguard to protect this soi-disant friend and protector of theirs. The budding tyrant's measures include cancelling debts, redistributing land and freeing slaves, whom he then recruits to enlarge his bodyguard. And he looks for enemies abroad, both to make people believe they need a leader, and to weaken the propertied classes by war-taxes (566 B-567 A). We are not told the ethos of a dictatorship as we were of a timocracy and an oligarchy; perhaps Plato does not think we need to be. He does, however, offer a psychology of the tyrannical individual. He really is ruled by a single dominant passion of the desiring part, which expels correct opinions and desires (573 B) and conscripts as bodyguards opinions which were formerly repressed in waking life but which appeared in dreams (574 D). Plato's theory of dreams is not developed, but I think the opinions which are normally repressed must be practical opinions to the effect that murder, incest and so forth are all right, and they are repressed by the Spirited Part and the Calculating Part acting together. In Freud they are repressed only by the Superego, but Plato's Calculating Part, besides, like the Ego, having self-awareness (571 d), is trained by good education to have strong correct practical opinions which probably operate unconsciously.

Such are Plato's characterisations in Republic 8-9. Of the many questions to which they might give rise I shall consider two. First, how do his characterisations of individuals compare with those offered by other philosophers? As timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical states are progressive aberrations (544 a 2) from the ideal society, so the corresponding individuals decline from the ideal psychological state, in which the Parts are in harmony; their characteristics are progressively bad. They are not, however, like the

vices Aristotle describes, cowardice, profligacy (akolasia), ambition (philotimia) and so on; they not so much vices, what Aristotle calls kakia and we 'vice', as diseases, states of spiritual ill health (Rep 4 444). Aristotle's good and bad qualities of character are primarily acquired dispositions to feel emotion rightly or wrongly. They are not states of good or bad attunement between types of motivation. Moreover in describing ethical virtues and vices Aristotle does not distinguish between emotions which belong to the Spirited Part, like those of the ambitious, and emotions that belong to the Desiring Part, like those of the (physical) coward. Aristotle recognises other bad qualities besides ethical vices, notably lack of self control (akrasia) and softness (malakia), but Plato's bad qualities are different from these too. Persons lacking in self-control have the same principles and way of viewing situations as people with the acquired virtue of temperance, but under the influence of desire for pleasant sensations they do things from which most people with those principles would refrain. Persons who are soft have the same principles as the courageous, but out of aversion to bodily suffering they refrain from doing things that most people with those principles would do. The desires and aversions in terms of which Aristotle's softness and lack of control are defined belong to Plato's Desiring Part, whereas the good dispositions belong to the Spirited and Calculating Parts, but Aristotle makes no mention of such Parts, and Plato makes no mention of statistics. The two philosophers use different psychological ideas somewhat as different painters (Botticelli and Leonardo, Constable and Cezanne) use different ideas in depicting similar subjects. One might say, however, that both are richer in psychological concepts than philosophers from Descartes to Russell (with the exception, perhaps, of Spinoza). Not only do these philosophers not recognise different kind of motivation; as Anthony Kenny (1963) observed, they assimilate all feelings to bodily sensations, and thereby deprive themselves of the concept of an acquired disposition to feel.

The comparison with painting leads to my second question: to what kind of truth do Plato's characterisations aspire? Aristotle's descriptions of good and bad qualities are most easily seen as analyses of concepts current in his society. Conceptual analysis in ethics, however, is a different enterprise from logic or pure mathematics, where we start with definitions and try to derive theorems by deductive reasoning. It has a strong affinity with poetry as described by Pope:

Something whose truth convinced at sight we find, that gives us back the image of our mind. (Essay on Criticism 298-9). Aristotle might like us to say 'Yes, that's what I mean by "courage"' or 'That's a vice I recognise, though we haven't a word for it' (cf. EN 2 1108a5). Plato's descriptions of individuals in Republic 8-9 can hardly be said to analyse concepts his readers would already have had, but he might wish them to agree that they provide illuminating ways of looking at the flawed personalities around them. Is it the same with his descriptions of societies? Historians describe the characters of the societies in the periods they study, the character of the Roman Republic, the character of the England under the Whig oligarchy and so forth. Plato is not describing actual states but kinds of state, and he claims that a state formed as he described by people

with the characters he described will have certain characteristics. To that extent his characterisation of societies aspires to being, as Allport puts it, scientific. It makes predictions which could be falsified by observation. It differs from modern social science in that the characteristics he predicts are not so defined as to allow exact measurements, and he does not believe that human behaviour is determined by physical factors but by what the people behaving think best (Phaedo 98-9). Their individual characters are a function of dispositions to think outcomes good or bad, and to resist or give in to influences that skew calculation of what is best. The kind of truth, then, at which he aims is correctness in explaining behaviour in terms of reasons and purposes. This is more like the truth aimed at by historians than that aimed at in physics and modern psychology; it is similar, also, to the kind of truth aimed at in law courts, when what has to be decided is the purpose of actions and the beliefs and intentions of agents.

The Spirited Part and Statesmanship

In the Republic Plato distinguishes Calculating and Spirited Parts in the psyche, and bad states of character in which these Parts and the Desiring Part are out of attunement. In the Statesman 306 A – 307 C he distinguishes two kinds of temperament. There are people who are keen, quick and emphatic and vigorous, and people who are quiet, gentle, orderly and thoughtful. Both these temperaments are good (306 B); they are found in people whose Parts are in good attunement. The first are not people in whom the Spirited Part is dominant, or the second people in whom a taste for knowledge and learning has been allowed to run riot. Plato does not have a special word for temperament, but his concept of these temperaments is similar to Aristotle's concept of natural as distinct from acquired character (EN 6 1144b1-9). It is something we have from birth (Rep 7 535 B); at Statesman 307 D 2 he uses the word *sungennaia*, which might be translated 'natural constitution' The words he uses for these temperaments are *andreia* and *sôphrosunê*. In the Republic *andreia* is his word for courage, a virtue particularly connected with the Spirited Part, and *sôphrosunê* for temperance, a virtue that belong to people whose Parts are in agreement about their mutual relations (Republic 4 432 A). In the Statesman *andreia* is not courage but a spirited temperament, and *sôphrosunê* is not temperance but a reflective temperament. In The Varieties of Temperament (1942, the work on which Strang drew in the paper mentioned above) W. H. Sheldon argued on empirical grounds that natural traits of character are not scattered at random through individuals but come in recognisable groups, and that is the view Plato takes in the Statesman.

The use he makes of these notions is perhaps unexpected. The Statesman starts with an attempt to characterise the statesman as a kind of shepherd of his people (258-68). Then, with the aid of an extravagant cosmological myth (268-274) this apparently natural model is set aside: if would work only statesmen were not human but divine. Orwell was writing more than two millennia later, but Plato might have said that Animal Farm shows what happens if you expect human beings to be shepherds of other human beings. Plato then puts forward a much more modest proposal: that the whole

art of statesmanship consists in assembling and weaving together persons of these divergent temperaments (305 E, 308 B – 309 B). In developing the model of weaving, he emphasises the difference, essential to good cloth, between warp and weft (281-2). This difference makes apt his use of the model in the Sophist to explain how truth and falsehood enter speech – the predicate is wrapped around the subject - and he apparently thought it fits the model to explain how unity is achieved in states.

At first we may think that such interweaving is quite alien to statesmanship. In modern democracies, however, elected leaders fill administrative, judicial and some senior legislative posts by appointment: they appoint high court judges, cabinet ministers and chairmen of committees. Plato thought that the most important quality in a political leader is an ability to make good appointments. According to R.A.H. King this view was shared by early Confucian thinkers. Today it would be agreed to be at least one quality we want in our leaders. And we may ask them to preserve a balance in juridical bodies like the United States American Supreme Court, in legislative chambers like the now largely appointed British House of Lords and in their cabinets. But while our leaders sometimes congratulate themselves on balancing people of different political views, and even different sexes, religions or ethnic origins, it does not occur to anyone today to seek a balance between people of different temperaments. Perhaps it did to Disraeli. In his novel *Endymion* he says of Lord Roehampton, his ideal of a cabinet minister, he was the man from whose combined force and flexibility of character the country had confidence that in all their councils there would be no lack of courage, yet tempered with adroit discretion.

Should we regard Plato's proposal as a mere eccentricity, arising out of his love of psychological distinctions? Certainly Plato likes to use psychology where we use other disciplines, economics or, in Weber's case, theology, but perhaps his strategy deserves a trial. In our democracies the gentle, thoughtful types and the spirited types gravitate into opposed political parties. They see themselves as belonging to the right or the left, terms which have lost their original association with pre-Revolutionary France, and come to signify clusters of policies of which those who count themselves 'right' or 'left' approve or disapprove. Plato might say that this produces more heat than light. He was perfectly familiar with stasis, party strife, a classical Greek phenomenon brilliantly described by Thucydides in his *History* 3 82-5. Our modern terms 'hawk' and 'dove' are a gesture towards psychology, and at *Statesman* 307 e – 308 a Plato warns of the dangers of allowing either hawks or doves to control foreign policy. Instead of trying to weave the two together, however, those who take part in political life today aim at the triumph of one or the other. In Plato's words we have only *stasiastikoi*, party politicians, not statesmen.

Trisection and Education

In the *Statesman* Plato wants individuals of spirited temperament to cooperate with individuals of thoughtful temperament. In *Republic* 2 education comes up as a topic because societies require a blending of the spirited and the thoughtful in each individual; they need people who are both spirited and 'gentle' (*praoi*, 375 B-C). Plato connects gentleness with a taste for

knowledge and learning (*philosophia*, *philomatheia*, 375 E, 376 B) on the interesting ground that this combination is found in good dogs; and he says that, to bring about in citizens a blending of these qualities with dash, force and indomitable energy, we cannot improve on the traditional educational syllabus (376 E): literature, starting with simple stories for small children, singing, dancing and athletic exercises. This system works because literature, music and dance reduce the savagery (*agriotês*) of the spirited part and make it flexible and useful, while gymnastics prevent the knowledge-loving part of the psyche from becoming excessively soft and laid back, and make it calm and orderly (*hêmêrês*, *kosmios* *Republic* 4 410 C – 411 B). As in the *Statesman* the Spirited Part is associated with warp and the knowledge-loving with weft, but education prevents the one from being too rigid and the other too flexible. The products of this system will have a firm belief that they ought to do what is best for the state, and can neither be forced nor tricked out of this (412 E, 413 C). They will be forced out of it if they yield to pain, and tricked if they abandon it from desire for pleasure or fear of future suffering (413 C, cf. *Republic* 9 573 E – 574 A). Plato sums up: 'Our sole purpose [in educating people with music and gymnastic] is that so far as possible they should be convinced and receive the laws as a dye, so that their opinion should be deep-dyed . . . and not washed out' (*Republic* 4 430 A); 'Education is drawing and leading children to the right opinion embodied in the law, and approved as genuinely correct by the experience of persons who are of the best character and oldest' (*Laws* 2 659 D).

Plato does not mention, (perhaps because he spoke only Greek he overlooks,) a means of securing this end fully as powerful as 'music and gymnastic', namely language. The vocabulary of any language, besides words not for natural kinds like 'horse' and 'water' contains psychological and social or political terms. Different societies pick out different characteristics. English, besides many others, includes the adjectives 'devious', 'open', 'sexist', 'exclusive', 'perceptive', 'smug', 'considerate', 'understanding', 'snobbish', 'loyal', 'serious', 'frivolous', and these words are laudatory or pejorative, carry with them ideas of what is good and bad according to local custom. Words like 'doctor', 'priest' and 'soldier' signify social roles have different duties and rights attached to them in different societies, as do 'husband' and 'wife', 'father' and 'son', 'man', 'woman' and 'child' and, in many societies, single words for an old man and an old woman. The words children are taught impress on them the society's norms.

Plato's view of education contrasts with one that has been common among liberals at least since the time of Mill, that education should foster individuality, an ability to choose one's own way and enjoy solitude. Lady Warnock, after the passage quoted earlier, says 'It is this ability to set new goals, newly invented or traditional, but either way, taken on individually by the unique human being, which lies at the root of ethics.' (Warnock 2001, 147). Adjudicating between Plato and modern liberals would be a thankless task and falls outside the scope of this paper, but I shall consider two questions about Plato's account.

First, education is concentrated on the Spirited and Calculating parts of the psyche. Why is nothing done for the Desiring Part?

One reason, I suggest, is that Plato sharply distinguishes education (*paideia*) from technical training. The skills in which we are trained minister, for the most part, to our wants and needs as individual organisms, so technical training to some extent replaces education for the desiring part. But more important, the desiring part cannot be educated because it is fixed by our physical make-up. The calculating part is not fixed by our physical make-up at all; this is arguable even if we do not accept Plato's own argument, that it is divine, immortal, created separately from the body and merely inserted into it (*Timaeus* 69 C – 70 A). The spirited part is fixed by our genes up to a point. In the *Timaeus* Plato says it is mortal, and in the *Statesman* he presents it as a fact about us as animals that we are gregarious, living in herds, not solitary (*Statesman* 261-4). But our nature as social beings is clearly plastic, since different societies have different customs and laws. A Greek infant adopted at birth in Persia or Egypt would presumably take on the social nature of a Persian or Egyptian. Insofar, then, as education is matter of forming personality, it must be directed to the spirited and calculating parts.

Secondly, why is it that the curriculum is not intended to impart knowledge but only opinions? At *Rep* 3 412 E Plato speaks of the opinion (*dogma* E 6; *doxa* E 8) that we ought to do what is expedient or best for the city. Although a well educated youth might readily assent to the statement 'We should do what is best for the city' that is statement is highly abstract and lacking in content. What Plato means, surely, is that education should implant the belief that what the laws prescribe is right or good and what they forbid is bad. To put the point more formally, Plato is saying, not 'Education should make us think that for all *x*, if *x* is prescribed by our laws, *x* is right', but 'For all *x*, if *x* is prescribed by our laws, education should make us think that *x* is right.' What is best for the city is not that it should become rich or powerful but that citizens should live according to its laws, and what the laws enjoin is, as such, what is best for the citizens as social beings. If, for instance, the law says that children should support their parents in old age, then Oedipus's being Polyneices's father should make supporting him an end in itself to Polyneices as a social being; in giving him a home Polyneices would be sharing in the life of his society - or so Plato might have thought watching the Oedipus Colonus. At *Republic* 4 429 C – 430 C he talks of the opinion (*doxa*) about what things are 'terrible' (*deina*). This rather surprising emphasis on objects of fear is illuminated by *Laws* 1 646 E – 647 A. The Athenian there distinguishes two kinds of 'fear' (*phobos*): one is of evils we expect to befall us, the other is of ill repute or ignominy. He goes on, according to the text we have (*A* 4-6), 'of these the latter is indeed opposed to pain and the other fearful things (*phoboi*), but it is opposed to the greatest and most intense pleasures.' The Greek is awkward, as my literal translation indicates, and I think that a couple of repeated words (*ho heteros*) have dropped out (by haplography) and the text should be: 'of these one is opposed to pain and the other fearful things, whereas the other is opposed the greatest and most intense pleasures.' Whatever the correct text may be, it is fairly clear that Plato is distinguishing fear as commonly understood from fear of ignominy or, as he himself says, shame (*aiskhunê*, 647 A 2). Aristotle defines fear as 'distress or disturbance arising from the appearance of approaching evil that will be destructive or painful' (*Rhetoric* 2

1382a21-2). That is Plato's first kind of fear. His second kind is not, strictly speaking, fear of the emotion of shame, but rather of what law stigmatises as shameful. The English word 'fear' and the Greek word we translate by it have, in fact, a wider and a narrower use. The narrower use is for the emotion defined by Aristotle, but the wider is for any kind of aversion. (The wider use appears in the phrase 'for fear that', which does not imply the emotion of fear, but simply introduces an object of aversion, as in 'He put the butter in the shade for fear that the sun should melt it.')

The opinion, then, that Plato wants education to implant is that the things forbidden by the laws are indeed bad and shameful. If the law forbids sleeping with your step-mother the fact that Phaedra is his step-mother will, if Hippolytus has been well educated, make sleeping with her an object of aversion to him of its own sake. The aversion will be the particular kind of aversion, amounting almost to horror, which we feel as social beings for what our society taboos.

These opinions, that the laws are good and it is right to obey them, are not implanted by means of proofs, like theorems in mathematics. They could not possibly be, since 'law can never prescribe accurately what is best and most right for everyone' (*Statesman* 294 A-B). For this reason all generalisations in morals are matters of opinion, not knowledge. Conviction is instilled by stories and music – poetry in Plato's time was recited or sung rather than read, and singing was often accompanied by dancing. To us today Plato's education (which starts in the womb: *Laws* 7 789) may look like conditioning, and he himself may have seen it partly in that light. He insists on extreme conservatism in music and dancing; changing the modes (*tropoi*) will result in changing the laws and customs of the society (*Rep* 4 424 C 5-6; similarly in *Laws* 7 797 A-B, 799 A, where he says dances and tunes should be made sacred, as in Egypt.) Conditioning of the Pavlovian type, however, proceeds by giving painful and pleasant sensations; it operates on an organism as a solitary individual or on what Plato would call the desiring part. His own education is applied only to the spirited and calculating parts, and bodily sensations play a subordinate role in it: people are trained not to be affected by them. The opinions to be instilled are to seem reasonable and correct to intelligent beings, but Plato thinks this is to be achieved rather by habituation in which people keep their wits about them than by deductive reasoning.

This seems dubious or unintelligible to us because we have so little conception either of a social or of an altruistic part of the psyche. Popular psychology recognises nothing between bodily sensations and deductive reasoning, and even philosophers are inclined to think that since there can be no logical or scientific proof of the rightness or wrongness of a law or practice, its rightness or wrongness can be determined only by a kind of sensitivity similar to our ability to differentiate shades of colour or kinds of claret. This sensitivity can be trained, no doubt, by stories and other educational aids, but it remains, in the end, irrational; we are reduced to a 'defused' (Bernard Williams 1972, 40-51) or 'sensible' (David Wiggins 1987 Ch. 5) subjectivism. If, however, there really are social and altruistic parts to the psyche with their own kinds of reason and objective, then we may expect them also to have their own forms of rationality and persuasion. I said that statements

about what an agent knows or intends have their own kinds of proof. So have claims about the goodness or badness of laws and customs and claims about how the demands of society and those of humanity and disinterested love are to be balanced. It is no accident that the same people speak in law-courts and in legislative assemblies. Skill at arguing about such matters is what used to be called 'the art of rhetoric'. Today the word 'rhetoric' has become pejorative: it signifies demagoguery, or deceitful appeals to emotion and a cynical disregard for sound reasoning. But that is because we lack the notion of a social part of the psyche. There is a kind of rationality that we use as social beings; since we are in fact social beings we cannot avoid using it; but we think we are being either purely logical or else subjective, and because we do not recognise it, it is poorly developed in us.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of interest.

References

1. GW Allport (1985) 'The Historical Background of Social Psychology', in: *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, G. Lindzey E. Aronson (ed.) New York, McGraw Hill.
2. Anthony Kenny (1969) *Mental Health in Plato's Republic*, in *Proceedings of the British Academy*.
3. Anthony Price (1990) *Plato and Freud*, in *The Person and the Human Mind*, ed. C. Gill, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
4. Colin Strang (1982) 'Tripartite Soul, Ancient and Modern: Plato and Sheldon', *Apeiron* 6: 1-11.
5. Julia Annas (1981) *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
6. J.C. Gosling (1973) *Plato*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
7. 'Trisecting the Psyche' *Philosophical Writings* 1: 92-106.
8. Richard Dawkins (1989) *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
9. Edward O (1975) *Wilson, Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.
10. Myles Burnyeat, 'The Truth of Tripartition,' *Aristotelian Society Proceedings* 106 (2006) 1-23.
11. *Principles of Political Economy*, Preliminary remarks.
12. *Essay on the Definition of Political Economy* (1844), in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 4, pp.318-21 (University of Toronto Press, 1967)
13. Max Weber (1968) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. Talcott Parsons. London, Unwin University Books.
14. Mary Warnock (2001) *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics*, London Duckbacks.
15. Anthony Kenny (1963) *Action, Emotion and Will*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
16. Aristotle und Xun Kuang ((2008)) ueber das Wissen, wie man handeln soll' *Polylog* 19: 83-98.
17. Benjamin Disraeli (1881) *Endymion*, London, Longmans, Green, p. 168.
18. See, for instance, *Principles of Political Economy* 4. 6. 2; 4. 7. 2-3.
19. Bernard Williams (1973) *Morality* London, Penguin.
20. David Wiggins (1987) *Needs, Values, Truth*, Oxford, Blackwell.