Pierre Destrée

Plato famously begins Republic X by making Socrates say that the need to banish mimêtikê poetry is “still more plainly apparent now that [they] have distinguished the several parts of the soul (ta tês psuchês eidê)” (595a–b). Banishing mimêtikê poetry, as Socrates immediately explains, is the very condition that must be fulfilled if one wants to avoid having one’s own soul destroyed (lôbê ... dianoias), that is the destruction of one’s own soul’s proper order, which consists in the rule of its reasonable part, its logistikon. For mimêtikê poetry tends, Socrates explains through this second critique of poetry, to overthrow the reign of the soul’s reasoning part by fostering its ‘irrational’ part. There is thus an obvious link between this second critique of poetry and the main theme of Plato’s Republic, where justice is defined as the harmony of the parts of the soul, this harmony being provided by the rule of the reasonable part over the irrational part.

Yet, as has long since been noted in pertinent discussion, there is a curious discrepancy between the way Plato seems to conceive of the partition of the soul here, in Book X, and in the rest of the work. For in Book X, Plato only explicitly speaks of an ‘irrational’ (alogiston, 604d, or anoêtôn, 605b) part of the soul, where there seems to be no clear distinction between the appetitive part, and the spirited part, contrary to what has been argued for in Book IV and explicitly been repeated in Book IX. More precisely, when speaking of this ‘irrational’ part, which is presented as the lowest part in one’s soul, and the one at the furthest remove from truth, everything indicates that Plato is primarily, if not exclusively, thinking of the appetitive part, whereas there is no explicit mention of the spirited part: the very word thumoeides is not at all used in Book X.

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1 Various (and quite different) drafts of this chapter were presented at the Universities of Leuven, Arizona (Tucson), Minnesota, Northwestern, and the Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. I am very grateful to C. Steel, M. McPherran, E. Belfiore, R. Kraut and C. Calame for their respective invitations, and to them, and their audiences, for their comments, critiques, and further suggestions which forced me to reformulate,
This blatant difference in the presentation of the partition of the soul is certainly a major puzzle in the interpretation of the continuity and consistency of Plato’s psychology in the Republic (and beyond the Republic), but it is also a major interpretive puzzle, I want to add, if we are to understand the continuity between the two critiques against poetry in the Republic. For as several scholars have recognized since at least the important work of J.C.B. Gosling, the poetical education the future guardians are to receive in Kallipolis is primarily addressed to the spirited part.\(^2\) Or more precisely, as regards the guardians, who are representing the spirited part of one’s soul: their first ‘poetical’ education as outlined in Books II and III amounts to the education of the spirited part of one’s soul. How is one thus to explain that while in the first critique of poetry the thumoeidetic part of the soul appears to play a major role, it does not seem to play any role anymore in Book X?

In this chapter, I would like to argue that, contrary to first appearance, the thumoeidetic part of one’s soul does actually play an important, albeit implicit, role in the second critique of poetry in Book X, and that from the psychological perspective there is no real discrepancy between these two critiques.

1. Education of the Thumoeides in the First Critique of Poetry

Before getting on to the role the thumoeidetic part of the soul may have in Book X, I should first like to focus briefly on some relevant features of the first critique of poetry, in Books II and III.

As some recent interpreters have increasingly emphasized, the thumoeidetic part of the soul plays a major role in the very construction and aim of the Republic.\(^3\) This aim, if one can summarize this very briefly, consists in proving that being just is the only way to attain happiness, while justice is the order between the parts of the soul where reason rules; Socrates must thus ensure that reason can eventually rule, which means, basically, rule over the appetitive desires, i.e. the epithumetic part of the soul. And this can happen if, and only if, I take it, reason can

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