Soul and Immortality in Republic X

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Several scholars have asserted that in Republic X only a part of soul is claimed to be immortal, and that the logistikon.¹ But, if one resists the temptation to import doctrine from the Timaeus² and Phaedrus,³ the important passage 611b-612a can, I think, be more plausibly seen as affirming the immortality of the entire soul, three parts and all.

Plato begins by saying that one cannot judge the true nature of the soul if one merely looks at that degraded state which it endures ici bas; what one must contemplate is the soul ‘when it is purified’⁴ as distinct from the soul ‘marred by communion with the body and other miseries’.⁵ This distinction is clearly brought out by the comparison of the soul we know to the sea-god Glaucus encrusted with barnacles and bits of stone.⁶ To call these unwelcome accretions the two ‘lower’ parts of soul, however, seems to me less plausible than to see them as blemishes necessarily resulting from any association with the body and the bodily.⁷ Among such blemishes will presumably be the four vices outlined at 609b11-c1. In the Gorgias the evil-doer was seen after death as marred, defiled and scarred by his vices in a former life.⁸ In the Republic Plato seems to suggest in the same way that blemishes and vices, brought on, no doubt, by a preoccupation with the bodily and its needs, distort and mar the soul or person; he is not living at that level of pure intellection and moral perfection of which he would have been theoretically capable had he not been joined to a body. The vicious soul is the soul at its most tainted and unrecognizable; but any soul still attached to a body – including that of the philosopher – is to that degree ‘tainted’, in at least the minimal sense that the cares and

¹ e.g. Adam, note ad loc.; Taylor, 496; Guthrie, 6-7.
² 41c-d.
³ 246aff. For the methodology see Festugière (ii), introd.
⁴ 611c3.
⁵ 611b10-c2. See Frutiger, 92.
⁶ 611c7-d7.
⁷ Frutiger, ibid. In defending this point of view he follows Blass, Raeder, von Arnim and Robin. For the references see 92, n. 1.
⁸ 524dff.
distructions of the bodily tend to divert its attention to some degree from those activities which are claimed to be the natural ones of soul in its pure state. In book Five a distinction was drawn between pure being, absolute non-being, and a twilight reality between the two, the objects of 'knowledge', 'ignorance', and 'opinion' respectively. The object of opinion was stated to be the world known to us by sense-perception; it was a world of fluid and shifting existence, with only a fleeting hold on reality, a world opined rather than known. Applying this view to the Republic X passage under discussion, one can argue that the soul on earth, being to a greater or lesser degree involved in the cares, worries, frustrations, irritations, etc., caused by the body and the bodily, is involved with realities whose status is somewhat unreal, and to that extent its own attitude to and appreciation of them will be unreal; the genuine cognition of the soul in its pure state is 'knowledge' (of the Ideas), and 'opinion' (the maximum degree of knowledge obtainable when dealing with sensibilia) will have the same dubious status in the world of cognition as material objects have in the world of ontological existence. The same might be said of the soul's desires; the genuine desire of the pure soul is for phronesis, but the presence of the body tends to divert its attention to desires of a less elevated nature. Such desires will be somewhat unreal so far as the soul's true nature is concerned, geared as they are to objects in a world of sense-perception which is itself only half-real. In other words the soul, however good, which we see on earth is never its fully real or genuine self; perhaps one should say that it never fully realizes itself, and indeed cannot, till it is separated from the body. The genuine state of soul is 'what it is when it is purified'. The soul bound in a body is by that very fact 'untrue' to its own nature; and the deeper it involves itself in the body and the material the more it defiles itself and distorts its own nature out of all recognition, just as Glaucus becomes covered with barnacles. To this degree we are back to the position of the Phaedo, where the body is definitely a kakon ti. But the differences are much greater. In the Phaedo the soul which was bound to the kakon ti which was the body was (in that particular context, at any