

THE MEANING OF THE TERM “THYMOS” AND ITS ROLE IN THE PLATONIC THEORY

Nora Grigore*

Abstract. The term “thymos” has, famously, a multiplicity of aspects. It is used in Plato’s texts and other ancient writings to mean something like “spirit” or “anger” or “vividness” or “animation”. Also famously, Plato uses it to designate a third part of the soul, the one concerned with courage and love of victory and honor. My aim is to offer an interpretation that a) would paint a coherent picture out of all of these different aspects, and b) would account for the theoretical role of the thymos in the Platonic framework.

Keywords: thymos, Plato, Plato’s Republic, tripartition of soul

Introduction

One of the problems raised by the hypothesis of tripartition of the soul in Plato’s *Republic* is the meaning and the theoretical status of the term “thymos”, often translated as “the spirited part”. More specific, the problem seems to be two-folded: on the one hand it is raised the problem of plausibility (i.e. if this tripartition corresponds somehow to our ordinary intuitions) and on the other hand appears the problem of the theoretical role inside the platonic doctrine (i.e. if the tripartition is an ad hoc explanatory device, an arbitrary hypothesis, a merely plausible one, or a hypothesis required by more deep reasons, reasons of coherence or of making explanation possible).

Both requirements (to be plausible and to have a serious theoretical role) seem justified: the platonic text seems to both rely on some well-known psychological facts and to build some abstract framework of human soul and city. To raise an abstract theoretical construction without major departure from reality, naturalness and familiar fact is a difficult task (maybe one of the most difficult and required in philosophy); but the platonic text is one of the most famous for generally succeeding in accomplishing this task. The present research is intended as inquiring about its success in the particular case of tripartition of soul.

* Romanian Academy, Philosophy and Psychology Institute. E-mail: noragrignore@utexas.edu

Problems: of translation, of theoretical coherence, of plausibility

The Greek term *θυμός*,¹ is usually translated as “the spirited part”, but there is no consensus about what that is supposed to mean exactly. It is supposed to have something to do with courage and aggression as the term seems to designate something like “vividness”, “being animated” or “anger”. Julia Annas (1981) has a proposal, but she admits it is difficult to see how the different meanings of the term could be made coherent:

'Spirit' is the traditional translation of *thumoeides*, the name for this part (...). At 581b it is called 'the part that loves honor and winning' (*to philonikon, to philotimon*) . This already brings out how hard it is to characterize this part in a way bringing out its character as a single source of motivation (indeed many have despaired and said that it has no real unity) . Plato seems to be talking about two very different kinds of thing. One is a tendency to aggression and violence. Thus, spirit is said to be found in children and animals (441 a-b, cf. 375a-b), and here Plato must mean assertiveness towards others in the pursuit of what one wants. However, at 581 a-b it is the part that delights in victory and honors, that is, not just in pushiness but in getting what one can be proud of, what is sanctioned by one's perception of what is right.²

So, on the one hand, thymos seems to designate the natural part of us that has a “tendency to aggression and violence” – and that is familiar enough. But, on the other hand, the same part seems to be made responsible for our love of honor and winning, which is different. Other authors underline the connection that thymos has with desire:

The word for spirit (thymos) is related to the word for desire (epithumia), a connection that Socrates plays upon to depict spirit as a kind of engine of the desires in general. Spiritedness may thus be considered , along with eros, as one of the primordial passions of the soul, (...) Each passion has a comprehensive scope, but a markedly different content.³

Newell also underlines the aggressive nature of thymos and the connection with honor:

In its pristine emergence, ungoverned by virtue, thymos is like the desperation of a cornered animal, lashing out at whoever or whatever might pose a threat. (...) Prior to education and redirection, spiritedness can erupt in impulsive killing or premeditated murder arising from a perceived slight to one's honor. ⁴

In a context larger than the Platonic text, thymos has also many facets, many aspects, but it seems to be something that has primarily to do with life and “being alive”:

In the earliest poetic sources, thumos is the source of some of the strongest emotions like anger, revenge, grief, victory, hope, and fear. (...) Thumos is variously described in terms of a swoon, breath, or as a life force that is “blown forth” from the body. In certain contexts, it seems to be coextensive with, life, heart, and soul – that is, with primary forces of human existence altogether. (Newell 2000: 105)⁵

I hope it is quite clear why establishing one certain meaning for “thymos” is a problem. Section 2 of the present essay will be dedicated to discussing the problem of the manifold thymos.

There are also other problems surrounding this concept, problems pertaining to coherence and theoretical function within the Platonic frame.

To suppose that the soul has two parts, reason and appetitive part seems to raise no problems regarding plausibility. One can easily find human actions that obviously belong to one, but not to the other. There is also a venerable tradition of thinking that separates between reason (as cognitive faculty) and desires (as the irrational, body-related part of the soul) . As to the theoretical role of this distinction, it can be left aside for the present purposes. But to add “thymos”, as a third part, seems to raise problems in both ways.

First, the plausibility of the thesis is a problem, because it is not at all obvious (at least, not for a reader today) how thymos is an independent part of the soul, different both from reason and from desires. That is, we cannot immediately or intuitively assign a clear-cut unitary role for this third part of the soul, as in the case of reason or desires. One obvious reason for this difficulty is that we cannot find anything from its characterization that would correspond to a single, unitary psychological function: it seems to correspond, in our terms today, to something similar to “anger”, but it is obviously much more than that. For example, Homeric poems, it was the “breath of life” leaving the bodies of dead heroes. Therefore, the term seems to designate something like “vividness”, “being animated”, “anger”, “bravery” or something in between.

Secondly, it is again not clear what exactly is the role of thymos in the platonic doctrine and especially in the articulation of the soul. Could not everything be manageable and explainable without it? Is it not a superfluous addition? There are, in the secondary literature, two main hypothesis about why Plato would have had to introduce thymos as part of the soul: one is to respect an old Homeric tradition and a common understanding of soul in his time (this would save plausibility, but has little to say about rigor, coherence and theoretical purposes); the other one is to have in the soul the corresponding-mirroring part for the military class, a class that could not be missing, obviously, in the city (in this case the hypothesis would have an explanatory

role, but it would not have good grounds for being sustained; it would be an *ad hoc* hypothesis).

Defending both plausibility and importance would have to rely on a combination between these two requirements. Namely, to make the tripartition thesis plausible can only mean to show some sound reasons for sustaining it within the framework of the platonic texts. To defend the plausibility cannot mean to make it intuitively, immediately plausible; it is obvious that this is not the case, and cannot be the case, given the cultural differences, the different tradition, different frameworks of thinking on which the intuitive plausibility depends on (i.e. we are already accustomed to regard soul in a different manner, with a different structure and a different kind of interacting parts- the soul is "carved up" differently in a contemporary framework). To defend plausibility can only mean to show that we could make sense of this account (not that we already do so), we could see it as coherent, given both the platonic context and our contemporary way of apprehension, i.e. that there is a way of looking back meaningfully to the platonic texts in this respect, even if we cannot have the "original" meaning. Therefore, the only thing that can be done is to have *a meaning*, even if we do not know - and we might never be able to know - if it is *the meaning* or not. Consequently, the attempt to give an account of the platonic theory of thymos should, probably, meet at least two requirements:

A) to show that all attributes ascribed to thymos by the platonic text can be somehow harmonized and can be reunited under a plausible headline that would designate this part of the soul as "one". This coherence between the different characterizations of thymos would make it a plausible candidate for being "*the* third part of the soul" and would show that once we choose to separate these different manifestations both from reason and from appetites, we do not commit ourselves to accepting more than three parts of the soul. One often-raised problem among commentators is that "is not at all obvious what Plato is trying to isolate with the term "thymos". The problem about the spirited element is, I suppose, fairly familiar: that it seems to be so many things" . Consequently, this should provide an answer to the question "why postulating three parts and only three, given that we accept manifestations different from reason and appetites?"

B) to show that postulating a third part of the soul is not only coherent with the purposes of the theoretical enterprise, but also required by it , i.e. to give a plausible answer to the question: "why postulating a third part at all?"

The many-folded thymos

Only in Plato "thymos" designates a third part of the soul, distinct from reason and appetites. However, it is a quite common word in Plato's time and very often used in Homeric texts⁶. In its wider usage, "thymos" has a multitude of meanings and it is difficult for the contemporary reader to find a unitary picture of the thymos. A very useful explanation and detailed list of usages of thymos, both in Homer and in Plato, can be found in Cairns' dictionary entry on "thymos"⁷. In short:

Thymos (or thumos), cognate with Indo-European words meaning “smoke” (including Latin *fumus*), is one of a number of terms in Greek which associate psychological activity with air and breath. In the Homeric poems, thymos is one of a family of terms associated with internal psychological process of thought, emotion, volition, and motivation. Though the range of the term’s applications in Homer is wide, that in itself gives us a sense of the unity of cognitive, affective, and desiderative processes in Homeric psychology. No post-Homeric author can rival that range, but something of the richness of the Homeric conception of thymos as an interrelated set of motivations re-emerges in Plato’s conception of the tripartite soul in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. (...) Elsewhere, thymos tends to mean “heart” or “mind” (as aspects of mental functioning), “spirit,” “inclination,” or “anger.”

Cairns promptly points out that “thymos” cannot be equated with either “breath” or “psyche”, i.e. soul. First, because there are noticeable differences in the meaning of each term – they are only partially overlapping:

One of these is psychē (conventionally “soul”), cognate with words meaning “cold” and associated in the Homeric poems especially with the passage from life to death. Thymos, by contrast, suggests heat rather than cold.⁸

Therefore, identifying thymos with psyche is unlikely. It seems equally unpalatable to identify thymos with “breath of life” because thymos seems to comprise the entire inner life of characters, sometimes assimilated to “heart” or the core (center) of someone’s being. In addition to these characteristics, Cairns identifies a whole multitude of other functions⁹. In someone’s thymos¹⁰ several mental processes are said to take place: thinking, deliberation (inner weighing of chances for an outcome, but not necessarily cold calculus – it can be mixed with emotion such as fear or anger), reflection, internal dialogue (Homer’s heroes speak to themselves “in their thymos”), wishing, wanting, desire¹¹, motivation, decision making, believing deeply in something¹², imagination¹³, memory (remembering something in one’s thymos); in addition, all kinds of emotions are said to have their *locus* in thymos: not only anger¹⁴, but also grief, sorrow, distress, together with joy, vivaciousness and feelings of pleasure¹⁵.

It is not only the manifold of all these manifestations that makes thymos confusing. I think that most confusing in this characterization of thymos is the propensity towards cutting across several well-established, commonsensical categories for our contemporary way of parsing the human being. We are used to distinguish between *cognitive and non-cognitive* functions, but thymos seems to cut across this distinction when it is made responsible for deliberation, thinking but also for anger

and sorrow. We also commonsensically distinguish between *bodily aspects and mental aspects* of ourselves – thymos seems to be somehow involved in both. That is because thymos is said to be weakened (depleted of energy) when food is lacking, and restored when the body is fed¹⁶, together with all the other mentally related aspects mentioned earlier. In short:

(...) thymos is the location of an undetectable psychological experience, one that takes place within the individual, depends on the body and its powers of perception, encompasses an element of desire or longing, and is clearly not without substantial emotional implications.¹⁷

It is no wonder, therefore, that thymos is such a puzzle for interpreters. Plato's usage of the term is more specific than the plethora of usages in the Homeric texts, but it does not seem to stray very far from its usual meaning. How and where is Plato using "thymos" is discussed in the next section.

The problem of thymos for Plato scholars

In the Platonic text, thymos designates something more precise (i.e. the third part of the soul) but it is not very far from the initial Homeric picture, of a multitude of functions. Thymos in Plato keeps its connection with anger and emotion, but now it is also connected with courage and war; it also keeps its spirited and motivational aspect (i.e. its function as something that pushes agents into action). So there is still a puzzle about what could be the common denominator of all these aspects.

There are, roughly, four kinds of scholarly reactions to the bedazzling many manifestations of thymos: i) cursory treatment; ii) noticing the difficulty and admitting defeat – i.e. saying that thymos cannot be brought to a unitary picture; iii) claiming that there is no problem to be solved, because thymos is just a theoretical *ad hoc* device brought into the picture by Plato to justify the existence of a warrior class in the perfect city (i.e. there is no genuine theoretical "one role" of thymos because it only has an artificially created role); iv) trying to give an account that would form a unitary picture from these many coordinates.

An example of cursory treatment can be found in Guthrie (1975) and Nussbaum (1986).¹⁸ Guthrie simply remarks that thymos "covers three things" without further inquiring into a possible unity for these three: "The spirited element covers three things, (a) fighting spirit, (b) what makes a man indignant at injustice and a coward when he feels himself in the wrong, (c) ambition and competitiveness."¹⁹

Nussbaum (1986) notices that the relation between reason and thymos is "complex" and that Plato's account of thymos is "cryptic" and "not consistently invoked"²⁰.

Other authors, such as Hobbs²¹ or Shields²² notice the difficulty posed by thymos and its strange multitude:

At first sight the thumos of the Republic seems one of the more bizarre creations of an already bizarrely creative period in Plato's life. At different points it is connected with a very wide range of characteristics, not all of which obviously cohere: anger, aggression and courage; self-disgust and shame; a sense of justice, indignation and the desire for revenge; obedience to the political authorities though not necessarily to one's father; a longing for honour, glory and worldly success; some interest in the arts but a fear of intellectualism; a preference for war over peace and increasing meanness over money. It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of critics, even amongst Plato's most sympathetic commentators, have been sceptical or puzzled in their treatment of the thumos.²³

Hobbs and Shields take the problem of thymos seriously, but they are among the very few authors to do so. More common is the claim that the problem is an artificially created one by Plato's need to have a warrior class in the ideal city²⁴ (corresponding to a part of the soul), i.e. it is an *ad hoc* theoretical device. I will not argue against this position, as I believe offering a unitary account of the thymos is in itself a kind of argumentation against this idea.

The attempts closest to giving a unitary picture of thymos are discussed by the end of the next section, after a more detailed discussion of the Platonic text.

The Platonic text and thymos

The main texts describing characteristic manifestations of thymos can be found in Book IV and VIII of the *Republic*. In addition to these, one other text where thymos plays an important role is in the metaphor of the chariot, in *Phaedrus*, where the soul is again pictured as having three parts.²⁵

The passage from Book IV (439a-448e) is especially concerned with establishing the tripartite structure of the soul. In argumentation it is guided by the plausible presupposition that where a conflict takes place, there must be at least two different opposite sides: "For it cannot be, we say, that the same thing with the same part of itself at the same time acts in opposite ways about the same thing." (439b). According to this principle reason and appetites are separable due to a familiar example: "Then if anything draws it back when thirsty it must be something different in its from that which thirsts and drives it like a beast to drink" (439b).

The same method is used in separating thymos from the appetitive part; the Homeric example of Leontius is considered relevant for the thesis that: "the principle of anger sometimes fights against desires as an alien thing against an alien" (440a). It is said that: "becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution at the same time felt a desire to see them and a repugnance and aversion" (439e).

The hidden premise of this method seems to be that when parts of the soul are not conflicting and are acting in agreement with each other, then their separation is unobservable. It is only in special cases, when the decision is hard to make, when we

can notice that these parts of the soul are separated; so, from the fact that sometimes conflict occurs (i.e. is possible) we can infer that there are different parts in the soul. However, in separating thymos from reasoning part, the method is not the same (i.e. pointing out a conflict); this is probably because thymos was presented very clearly as a natural ally of reason so that a conflict would not be characteristic for the relation between reason and thymos: "Does it not belong to the rational part to rule , being wise and exercising forethought in behalf of the entire soul and to the principle of high spirit to be subject to this and its ally" (441e).The relevant argument for distinguishing reason from thymos is pointing out situations where thymos is present , but we would agree that reason is not: children and animals:" for that much one can see in children that they are from their very birth chock-full of rage and high spirit , but as for reason, some of them to my thinking, never participate in it, and the majority quite late" (441b).

To summarize, the main manifestations of thymos presented in Book IV are: anger, especially with oneself (though not mere anger, but morally motivated anger: shame, outrage), courage and effectiveness (about this a passage can be found at 442b:" the one taking counsel, the other giving battle, attending upon the ruler, and by its courage executing the ruler's designs"), and obviously submission to reason.

The account in Book VIII, however, will be much more detailed and will add new features; it will not be contradicting the already given features, but will not follow analytically from them, either. It is this description that guides answers like "victory and honor":

It is less the moral ambiguity of thymos, though, than its extraordinary range of manifestations that concerns us now. For our hope is not so much to determine how thymos can be made to manifest itself in this way or that as to determine what, exactly, it is. One way to go about addressing this question would be to approach thymos as we approached eros and to ask, accordingly, what thymos wants. There are solid grounds for this approach. Socrates says in book 9 that each of the soul's three parts, including spiritedness, has desires (580d). And in fact Socrates provides an answer to our question. What spiritedness loves, he says, is victory and honor (581b).²⁶

In Book VIII thymos' manifestations can be followed both on social scale and on individual scale: both the type of person and the type of city in which thymos is ruling are presented.

In the same way thymos is placed between reason and appetites, the "timocratic" man is said to be something in between "philosophical" (ruled by reason) and "oligarchic" (ruled by appetites) characters; and following this symmetry the "timocracy" is said to be a government that has some features from aristocracy, some from oligarchy, and some features specific to itself. The resemblance to aristocracy is stated in the following manner: "(...) in honoring its rulers and in abstention of its

warrior class from farming and handicraft and money-making in general, and in provision of common public tables and the devotion to physical training and expertness in the game and contest of war (...)" (547d); the oligarchic traits are: "Such man, said I, will be avid of wealth, like those in an oligarchy, and will cherish a fierce secret lust for gold and silver, owning storehouses and private treasuries where they may hide them away." (548b) and also: "And will they not be stingy about the money, since they prize it and are not allowed to possess it openly, prodigal of other's wealth because of their appetites, enjoying their pleasures stealthily, and running away from the law as boys from a father, since they have not been educated by persuasion but by force because of their neglect of the true Muse, the companion of discussion and philosophy, and because of their preference of gymnastics to music." (548b)

The properties specific to timocracy ("fear to admit clever man to office, (...) and in its inclining rather to the more high-spirited and simple minded type, who are better suited for war than for peace"-548a) are very close to the ones attributed to the "timocratic" man: "He will have to be somewhat self-willed and lacking in culture, yet a lover of music and fond of listening to talk and speeches, though by no means himself a rhetorician. And to slaves such one would be harsh (...) but he will be gentle with the freeborn and very submissive to officials, a lover of office and honor, not basing his claim to office an ability to speak or anything of that sort but on his exploits in war or preparation for war, and he would be a devotee of gymnastics and hunting." (549a).

This picture, though psychologically plausible, it is still, not at all obvious. Obviously, there is no compelling reason to associate for example, the love of honors with irascibility (or predisposition to anger) or with courage (quite the contrary some would say); or to see any obvious connection between contentiousness and the love for war, hunting and gymnastics. Moreover, why would such a character be "submissive to officials" but "harsh with the slaves"? And through what process someone who loves war is doomed to also love fortunes and money-making after some time? Somehow obvious, every described pattern of behavior is connected with a way of understanding a "sense of honor", so that the person dominated by thymos will do whatever appears to be "honorable": courageous, moral or reckless acts, spending money or attending pleasures if this seems to be the way of acquiring respect and "honorability"; this would suggest that the behavior dictated by thymos is focused upon following some kind of value in which the "honorability" would consist. The problem is: what kind or which of the many possible values? Any of them? It seems obvious that once we could identify such value, the whole picture would become coherent, ordered and explainable by the following of that specific value.

In his article "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation", J. M. Cooper attempts to identify such a value. He is ranking the multitude of manifestation of thymos:

So the spirited part expresses itself first of all in ordinary anger of various sorts; secondly in the moral feelings of shame, outrage, and the

offended sense of justice; and thirdly, in the desire to assert oneself, to be effective both in one's private life and in the community's.²⁷

His questions are similar to mine:

What is it that in Plato's eyes links these things together- what is the principle of unity here?- and why does he think that together they constitute a third sort of motivation, coordinate with desires of reason and appetitive desires?²⁸

The answer Cooper gives may be helpful. He concludes that competitiveness and self-esteem are the central value always pursued by someone dominated by thymos:

The central idea suggested by these and other passages of Book VIII is that thymos is understood by Plato as that wherein one feels (a) the competitive drive to distinguish oneself from the run-of-the-mill person, to do and be something noteworthy within the context provided by one's society and its scheme of values; (b) pride in oneself and one's accomplishments, to the extent that one succeeds in this effort; (c) esteem for noteworthy others and (especially) the desire to be esteemed by others and by oneself. (...)

I suggest, then, that the motivations that Plato classifies under the heading of spirit are to be understood as having their root in competitiveness and the desire for self-esteem and (as a normal presupposition of this) esteem by others.²⁹

However, this account seems to have several problems. First, as the author himself acknowledges, this hypothesis will leave several characteristic manifestations of thymos unexplained: the presence of thymos in animals (like barking dogs) and small children :

The other two examples of thymos appealed to in Book IV argument are less easy to accommodate. Screaming two-week-old babies and ferocious dogs presumably have no self-conception and so though their anger may express some primitive form of competitiveness, it is at any rate not a form that has anything to do with self-esteem that their anger expresses.³⁰

But these are not randomly given examples that could be easily left aside: they are supposed to be exactly the grounds on which reason is distinguished from thymos in Book IV; eliminating them as irrelevant, means to lose sight of the difference Plato

was trying to establish between reason and thymos and to have no grounds for the difference (at least inside the platonic framework).

Secondly, no matter how much pedantry is involved in this observation, it must be said, that Cooper's solution does not provide the unity required for the thymos for the mere, simple reason that he finds *not one, but three values* to be centered upon: "competitiveness, desire for esteem and self-esteem". Even if we accept that is likely that esteem and self-esteem to mean one and the same thing and to be strongly related, still, this is not so obvious in the case of their relationship with competitiveness. To show that this is not a merely verbal objection (in the sense that there are simply three words expressing three aspects of the same thing) is enough to regard as plausible the situation in which the drive towards competitiveness is present, but the self-esteem is absent or the other way around; I think is very likely to imagine situations when a person has self-esteem but no impulse to competitiveness; in ancient Greek framework this would be the situation of a wise person. In this respect, the problem was not solved, but only shifted: instead of looking for the unity between many manifestations of thymos we should look for the unity between the two proposed values. However, I do not think that this account is entirely wrong; moreover, I think that this is, somehow the right direction in solving the problem; only that the arguments brought until now do not seem sufficient to support the thesis announced in the beginning.

The unitary thymos

My own attempt of unifying the manifestations of thymos might need several preliminary remarks. It might be useful to notice that among the three parts of the soul (as given in Plato), only thymos has the necessary resources (i.e. given features) to differentiate an individual from another: desires do not distinguish one individual from another and their naturalness does not distinguish human race from other animals; neither can reason distinguish individuals among them because the truths of knowledge and the Forms are the same for everyone (only the different ways in which truth would be lacking could distinguish individuals). In order to account for one person as an independent, self-standing, unique being, something else than reason and desires might be needed; something that would point at someone's particular way of being. Besides "individuation" or "particularity" the picture composed only from reason and appetites seem also to lack something else: if natural needs establish certain requirements and reason some other ones (conflicting or not), then, what would be needed is some "natural impulse" in fulfilling them, the "mechanism" that would lead by default at pursuing the established goals.

Adding these two requirements, my suggestion is that thymos might be seen, in order to have a coherent picture, as the particular "vital force" that animates any living being. In the case of humans, the particularity would be that everyone's own "vital force" will be "a faithful servant" to reason. This way, thymos will have some other features for humans compared to animals. For example, the "vital force" educated by reason will result in courage, though we cannot speak about "courage" in

the case of animals. Consequently, the specific function of thymos would be to defend and promote each individual's life, "vital force" or existence, qua individual. That is, thymos' function should be to defend and promote that very individual, not a species or a principle or "life as such"; in this interpretation, thymos would be the force affirming each one's identity as opposed to the others, the force stressing upon the value of the uniqueness of each. It would not be "a force" or "some impulse" to attend "some goals" but each individual's particular impulse to attend her/his own goals. Using a technical logical language to construct a metaphor, we might say that thymos can be seen as a vital force "indexed" to every individual. Its main rule would be, then: fighting against anything that would be seen as alien, as an alien menacing someone's own being.

If we choose to see thymos as representing this kind of "vital force", then it is plausible enough to account for the problematic case of aggressiveness in case of animals and babies (i.e. is very plausible that thymos as vital force can be made responsible for aggressiveness both in humans and in animals). Defending the chance to survive is one of the most obvious reasons for aggressiveness as a result of fear (fear is a constant companion of thymos especially in the Homeric view upon thymos as a cluster of affections). So, both the examples of dogs and crying babies can be accounted for in this hypothesis, as well as the main feature of the "timocratic" man: the preoccupation for war. A warrior-type of person is very likely to be seen as either defending something that is his own (life or city, etc.) or attacking in order to affirm his own power, i.e. his own vital force, in the presupposition that "attack is the best way of defense". It is also important to notice the tendency of a "timocratic" person to consider everything as a zero-sum-game: everything that one loses, the others are winning and everything that others lose, one is winning; the consequence is that the best strategy is considered to be the permanent aggressiveness because there is no indifferent score or situation.

But where reason comes into picture (as a leading part), there thymos' manifestation becomes more subtle than mere aggressiveness, though it still acts as a "vital force": in this way the moral connotation of anger is obtained. When reason is present, awareness and reflection are also present so that defending and promoting your own form of life becomes a conscious process: defending and promoting your own form of life involves in this case being aware of your own uniqueness and of your qualities; in this way involves pride, or, at least striving for acquiring pride and self-esteem. But, as it has been said already, self-esteem or sense of honor can be obtained with respect to a certain value. Depending upon what someone considers to be representative for himself and helpful in promoting what he identifies as "his own vital force", some pattern of behavior or another will be adopted: if someone thinks that wealth is the most important attribute of himself, then she will pursue it, being a lover of wealth (and identifying herself with some of her desires) ; if someone thinks that his rational part is the most important one, she will try to conform herself to its principles and will become angry with herself when she does not. In this sense, thymos is an ally of reason fighting against supremacy of desires; the formulation from

the text is very relevant: thymos is fighting only against something that perceives as being alien from himself in alliance with reason: "the principle of anger sometimes fights against desires as an alien thing against an alien"(440a). Finally, if someone identifies herself simply with her own vital force, then its defense and promotion will have priority: she will love manifesting her force (in making the life of others –man or animals- to depend on her: war and hunting) and power: both political power ("a lover of office and honor") and physical power (gymnastics); most plausibly he will not occupy himself with study or, in particular, with philosophy. This can be explained by the fact that this would contradict his tendency to regard himself as self-sufficient (revealing insufficiency in knowledge would not be welcomed) and by the fact that submitting to reason would mean an unwanted limitation to his vital force (he would have to obey some interdictions or to follow principles- regarded as alien to what himself is, for example).

If the description above can plausibly give a coherent picture of thymos as unitary, then something should be said also about the second task proposed in the beginning: justifying the theoretical role of thymos. If we take into account the proposed hypothesis (i.e. to see thymos as a "vital force"), then a position in this regard can be sketched.

Firstly, we might consider the question "why would reason need an ally as thymos?" I think an answer can be given along the following lines: reason in its ethical part (as knowledge of Good, or of what a good conduct is) does not have means to apply its judgements or to react promptly, immediately in given circumstances (reason has as a result something essentially mediate: discursivity) ; but thymos as impulse to action and reaction , having the features of immediate instinct, can provide the necessary efficiency for reason and can bring its prescriptions into realization; for this a certain "aggressiveness" is needed, the boldness and determinacy required from the courageous man of acting according to reason.

Secondly, supposing that only appetites and reason would compose the soul, then the resulting picture would be the one of reason fighting against "nature" or natural impulses or, to put it in another way, of reason de-vitalizing a person fighting against life itself. But if the "vital force" (the impulse for life) is separated from desires (which would remain simple passive requirements) and said to be an ally of reason, then the result is that though reason is fighting against desires, still does not appear as fighting against life itself anymore or as a de-vitalizing force. The theoretical result of this assumption would be that "life" is conceived as being something else than mere "nature", life would be on the side of reason. I think that this result can be regarded as a precious one for the theoretical framework of the Platonic doctrine.

References

¹ It is sometimes written also as "thumos". I have adopted an equally common form, "thymos".

² Annas, J., *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Clarendon Press, 1981, 126-7.

³ Newell, W. R., *Ruling Passion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2000, 103.

⁴ Newell, W. R., 2000, 104.

⁵ Newell, W. R., 2000, 105.

⁶ Douglas Cairns, in his article "Ψυχή, Θυμός, and Metaphor in Homer and Plato", describes convincingly the continuity between Platonic usage of the term and its Homeric usage, on par. 42: "Plato's conception of θυμός as one of the three elements of the tripartite soul is clearly and explicitly indebted to Homer. In that model's first outing in Republic 4 (441b-c), the distinction between 'that which makes calculations about better and worse' (τὸ ἀναλογισάμενον περὶ τοῦ βελτιονός τε καὶ χείρονος) and 'that which rages without reason' (τῷ ἀλογίστεως θυμουμένῳ) is drawn with reference to Odysseus' celebrated rebuke to his heart (καρδίη) at Odyssey 20. 17-24. The passage is so well known that Plato needs to quote only a single line (20. 17),⁶² but knowledge of the whole passage is clearly assumed (...)"

⁷ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8180>.

⁸ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8180>. See also Cairns, D., "Psyche, Thymos, and Metaphor in Homer and Plato" in *Les Études Platoniciennes* 11 (2014).

⁹ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary : "As an instrument, locus, or agent of thought and feeling, the thymos covers a wide range of cognitive, affective, desiderative, and motivational states."

¹⁰ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary: "Interiority. The most basic function of thymos in Homer is to highlight the inwardness of mental processes. States of mind that are not expressed in behaviour can be said to be "hidden in the thymos"."

¹¹ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary : "Wishing and wanting regularly take place in or by means of the thymos or are predicated of the thymos as personified agent (see, e.g., the post-Homeric *epithymia*, desire): there is no functional difference between the two forms of expression."

¹² Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary : "Though "knowing x in/with one's thymos" may sometimes mean only that knowledge is an internal mental state, there is often a further implication that the knowledge in question is something that one should "take to heart" as a matter of conviction."

¹³ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary : "Both hope and expectation require the capacity to think about hypothetical states of affairs; the same is true of many of the emotional, desiderative, and motivational applications of the term thymos considered so far."

¹⁴ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary : "Besides anger, thymos also has prominent associations with various forms of grief, sorrow, distress, and worry. Odysseus in his wanderings suffered many pains in his thymos, and similar expressions abound in both poems. Another substantial cluster of passages associates thymos with fear. It is likewise associated with foreboding, awe, and respect. Similarly, the thymos can (in the Odyssey) be the seat of wonder, or (in the Iliad) a container for the *aidōs* (shame, self-respect) that should prevent warriors slacking in battle."

¹⁵ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary: "The thymos is the source of sexual desire, but is also associated with appetites for food and drink, and with pleasures of all kinds. To say "restrain your thymos from x" is to say "resist your desire to do x"."

¹⁶ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary : “Food and drink restore thymos to the chest, allowing renewed physical effort. It is the thymos that allows one to endure, though it can be worn down by physical exertion.”

¹⁷ Cairns, D. thymos. Oxford Classical Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8180>.

¹⁸ Guthrie, W. K. C., *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. iv. Cambridge, 1975, Nussbaum, M. C., *The Fragility of Goodness*, Cambridge, 1986.

¹⁹ Guthrie, W. K. C., 1975, 476.

²⁰ Nussbaum, M. C., 1986, 272 and notes.

²¹ Hobbs, A., *Plato and the Hero*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

²²“Plato calls this third element spirit (thumoeides). Spirit poses some interesting challenges to Plato’s interpreters, since it is not at all clear how its various functions and activities unify into a single element. It engages in self-rebuke (Rep. 440a); it wells up in anger when it perceives a slight or senses injustice (Rep. 441d); it allies itself with reason against appetite, when called to do so, like a dog to a shepherd (Rep. 440c–d). In general, it seems to be a psychic element with a reflexive awareness of the self and its social standing, able to combat desires and easily incited to anger when it perceives something as amiss.” Shields, C., “Plato’s Divided Soul” in *Partitioning the Soul: Debates from Plato to Leibniz*, eds. Corcilius, Klaus, and Dominik Perler, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014, 24.

²³ Hobbs, A., 2000, 3.

²⁴ “ It is more difficult to understand why so few have been concerned to see whether its various features form an intelligible and important motivational set. Hardie and Penner, for example, hold that Plato never really provides justification for anything more than a bipartite division of the *psuche* into rational and irrational faculties, and Penner in particular is uncompromising in his belief that the thumos is only created in Book 4 for ad hoc political and moral purposes, chief of which is the completion of the analogy between soul and state.” Hobbs, A., 2000, 3-4. Angela Hobbs is referring here to Hardie, W. F. R., *A Study in Plato*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1936 and Penner, T. “Thought and desire in Plato”, in *Plato*, ed. Gregory Vlastos, Anchor Books, 1971.

²⁵ Plato, *Republic*, Princeton University Press, 1996. All the references in my text are made to this edition.

²⁶ Cooper, L. D., “Beyond the Tripartite Soul: the Dynamic Psychology of the Republic” in *Review of Politics*, vol 63, Spring 2001, 363.

²⁷ Cooper, John M., “ *Plato’s Theory of Motivation*” in *Plato*, ed. Gail Fine, Oxford UP, 2000, 200.

²⁸ Cooper, John M., 2000, 200.

²⁹ Cooper, John M., 2000, 203.

³⁰ Cooper, John M., 2000, 204.