

## THE RATIONAL/NON-RATIONAL DISTINCTION IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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PLATO's division of the soul in *Republic* 10 differs from the division in book 4 in a couple of obvious ways. First, the argument in book 10 is an argument for *two parts* of the soul, while the argument in book 4 defends a *tripartition* of the soul. Second, while the argument for tripartition at 436–41 focuses on strife among *desires*, the argument for bipartition at 602–3 introduces examples of conflict among *beliefs*. In spite of these differences, the two discussions seem to share the common goal of drawing a contrast between rational and non-rational psychological states.<sup>1</sup> My concern here is with this common goal of the two discussions. I shall be defending an interpretation of Plato's distinction between the rational and non-rational.

The arguments for dividing the soul in book 4 have received far more attention than those in book 10,<sup>2</sup> but there is a certain danger involved in attempting to understand either text in isolation from the other.<sup>3</sup> In both passages Plato hopes to establish the presence of non-rational psychological states in humans, and there is every reason to suppose that he takes the desires and beliefs in question

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<sup>1</sup> Plato's *logismos/alogiston* distinction figures prominently in both passages: see 439 D and 602 E–604 D.

<sup>2</sup> It is common for discussions of Plato's division of the soul to make no mention of Plato's arguments in book 10. I point out, as examples, the discussions which have had the greatest influence on my understanding of Plato's division: J. M. Cooper, 'Plato's Theory of Human Motivation', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1 (1984), 3–21; T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977), ch. 7; id., *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford, 1995), ch. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Irwin's identification of non-rationality with good-independence illustrates the pitfalls of focusing too narrowly on book 4 (see *Plato's Moral Theory*, 78 and 192). Surely Plato does not suppose that non-rational beliefs are non-rational in virtue of their good-independence.

to be non-rational *in the same sense*. Accordingly, our understanding of the conclusions reached in book 4 should be responsive to what is said in book 10, and vice versa. Ideally, we want an interpretation of the rational/non-rational distinction that fits both texts.

What accounts, then, for the relative neglect of the division in book 10 on the part of those interested in Plato's distinction between the rational and non-rational? There is, of course, the fact that the argument in book 4 lies at the heart of Plato's moral psychology and his response to Glaucon's challenge, whereas the argument in book 10 figures in an attack on poetry that seems somewhat peripheral to the central project of the *Republic*. Further, some have thought that in book 10 Plato is arguing for some sort of division within the rational part, not a division between the rational and non-rational as in book 4.<sup>4</sup> Yet another factor, I suspect, is that philosophers find Plato's appeal to conflicting desires in book 4 much more promising philosophically than his appeal to conflicting beliefs in book 10. The latter argument is seen more as an embarrassment best left aside. My overarching goal here is to counter this assessment of Plato's argument. Plato's attempt to distinguish rational from non-rational cognition should be recognized as one of the more impressive moments in the *Republic*.

But whatever the sources of past neglect may be, in the last few years the trend has changed. Consider first Hendrik Lorenz's recent book *The Brute Within*, which has an entire chapter devoted to the crucial argument in book 10 at 602–3.<sup>5</sup> Lorenz spends most of the chapter discrediting the view that Plato is here dividing reason into two parts. He offers a compelling defence of the idea that Plato is arguing for 'a division between reason on the one hand and a non-rational part on the other'.<sup>6</sup> But after showing that book 10 is in this respect consonant with book 4, Lorenz leaves us wondering what, exactly, this division between the rational and non-rational amounts to. In his treatment of the discussion of appetitive desire in book 4, Lorenz concludes that the rational part is distinctive because of its capacity for means–end reasoning—it is precisely

<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of this issue see H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 2006), ch. 5. Lorenz offers a compelling response to the suggestion that Plato is dividing the rational part.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 59–60.

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this form of reasoning that is lacking in the non-rational, appetitive part.<sup>7</sup> However, when the topic turns to book 10 and non-rational beliefs, Lorenz does not tell us how to extend this account of non-rationality to the case of belief. He does say in passing that our non-rational side forms beliefs *uncritically*,<sup>8</sup> but he never explains what makes non-rational beliefs non-rational.

Of course, it is always possible that Plato has changed the sense of 'rational' as the topic moves from desire to belief. It is unlikely, however, that Lorenz wants to propose an interpretation along these lines. As he notes, 'book 10 . . . contains a number of back-references to the argument for tripartition of the soul in book 4, all of which suggest continuity and none of which as much as hints at revision'.<sup>9</sup> Plato is evidently employing the same vocabulary to draw the same kind of contrast in both texts, a contrast between rational and non-rational psychological states.<sup>10</sup> With his appeal to conflict among beliefs in book 10, Plato is attempting to illustrate the same type of division he uncovered among desires through his examples of mental conflict in book 4.<sup>11</sup>

Lorenz has advanced discussion of Plato's division of the soul considerably by demonstrating continuity between Plato's aims in book 4 and book 10. What is needed still is an account of what, exactly, Plato is arguing for in these texts. What is this distinction between the rational and non-rational that applies as much to beliefs as to desires?

In her recent paper 'Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul' Jessica Moss confronts this question head on, developing a novel approach to Plato's distinction:

. . . we discover in Book 10 that what it is for a part of the soul to be non-rational, with all that that entails for its ethical status, is for it to ac-

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., ch. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 71. For the view that our non-rational side uncritically endorses appearances, see also J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic [Introduction]* (Oxford, 1981), 131; R. Barney, 'Appearances and Impressions', *Phronesis*, 37 (1992), 283–313 at 286–8; and J. Moss, 'Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), 35–68.

<sup>9</sup> Lorenz, *The Brute Within*, 71.

<sup>10</sup> See T. Penner, 'Thought and Desire in Plato' ['Thought and Desire'], in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato*, ii. *Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion* (Notre Dame, 1978), 96–118 at 100–1, and Moss, 'Appearances and Calculations', 36–7.

<sup>11</sup> Since Plato is defending a bipartition in book 10, there is nothing in book 10 that parallels the distinction in book 4 between appetite and spirit, nothing akin to Leontius' struggle at 439 E–440 A.

cept unreflectively that things are just as they appear to be, while what it is for the rational part to be rational, with all that that entails for its ethical status, is for it to be able to transcend appearances by calculating how things really are. These are the defining features of rationality and non-rationality, which unify and explain the various traits of the parts of the soul and their various characterizations throughout the dialogue.<sup>12</sup>

Book 10 reveals that the non-rational side of the soul is limited to cognizing appearances—it is incapable of weighing evidence or calculating which option is best.<sup>13</sup> What non-rational beliefs and desires have in common is that they are uncritical responses to appearances. The non-rational part just accepts as true however things appear to be and desires whatever appears good. One interesting consequence of this approach is that Moss is committed to rejecting the familiar view that Plato's appetitive desires are good-independent (i.e. having an appetite for something does not involve or depend upon cognizing it as good).<sup>14</sup>

In what follows I shall be developing a very different approach to Plato's distinction between the rational and non-rational, one in line with the view that appetites are good-independent. After setting out my reading, I raise some difficulties for Moss's account. I conclude with a positive assessment of Plato's strategy for distinguishing rational and non-rational parts of the soul.

## I

At *Republic* 602–3 Plato observes that someone subject to a visual illusion may at the same time make a correct judgement regarding what she sees. Plato takes these to be cases of *partially deceptive illusions*: although the subject has a correct judgement in the circumstances, she simultaneously holds a belief opposed to this cor-

<sup>12</sup> 'Appearances and Calculations', 40.

<sup>13</sup> I shall be assuming here, with Moss, that Plato thinks of the appetitive part as wholly devoid of the ability to make calculations. For an alternative reading, see J. Moline, 'Plato on the Complexity of the Psyche', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 60 (1978), 1–26. R. F. Stalley offers a response to Moline in 'Persuasion and the Tripartite Soul in Plato's *Republic*' ['Persuasion'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 32 (2007), 63–89 at 72–3.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of the good-independent interpretation, see the works cited in n. 2 above. Moss also confronts the good-independent interpretation in 'Pleasure and Illusion', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 72 (2006), 503–35.

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rect judgement. To borrow a nice example from Terry Penner,<sup>15</sup> consider a case where a subject familiar with the Müller-Lyer illusion is subject to the illusion. The one line appears longer than the other, though the subject is not *wholly* deceived—she correctly judges on the basis of measurement that the two lines are the same in length. The initial problem with examples of this sort is that they do not seem to involve a conflict among *beliefs*, though Plato's argument clearly requires that they do so.<sup>16</sup> The one line does in some sense appear longer than the other, but ordinarily the subject of this sort of illusion would not claim to believe that the one line is longer than the other. She is not deceived by the appearance.

There is an obvious way of accommodating the idea that the subject in this instance believes the one line to be longer than the other. It is commonplace at least since Locke's time to note that belief comes in degrees.<sup>17</sup> As Thomas Reid puts it, 'Belief admits of all degrees from the slightest suspicion to the fullest assurance.'<sup>18</sup> Even when one has measured the lines carefully and is satisfied for the purposes at hand that the two lines are equal in length, one subject to the Müller-Lyer illusion will reasonably place a very slight degree of credence in the appearance to the contrary. After all, our practices of measurement are hardly infallible. So here we have a perfectly good sense in which one believes that the one line is longer than the other—one believes it with a very low degree of credence.

While this way of talking about belief is familiar in contemporary epistemology, especially Bayesian epistemology, Plato is not accustomed to thinking of belief as coming in such a wide range of degrees. Furthermore, understanding the opposed belief in this manner would not serve Plato's purposes. First, the belief in question is not *opposed* in any interesting sense to the belief that the lines are the same in length. The two beliefs seem, rather, to complement one another: believing with great confidence that the lines are the same in length *involves* believing with only a very low degree of

<sup>15</sup> 'Thought and Desire', 102.

<sup>16</sup> From the very beginning of his discussion of parts of the soul, Plato takes belief and desire as his paradigm cases of mental states that can enter into conflict (see 437 B). A central premiss of Plato's argument at 602–3 is the claim that we find opposed *beliefs* within ourselves.

<sup>17</sup> See *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 4. 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (University Park, Pa., 2002), 228.

credence that they differ in length. Second, Plato is interested here in identifying a form of non-rational belief, but the belief that the one line is longer than the other is not non-rational in any obvious way. This belief with a very low degree of credence is a reasonable response to the evidence, which strongly suggests that the lines are the same in length.

A more natural alternative is to take Plato's talk of opposed beliefs as talk about *outright believing*, not *believing to degree n*, so it will be useful to say a few words about this notion of outright believing (i.e. believing full stop, without qualification, or *simpliciter*). A person may believe *p* to a certain degree—even a rather high degree—without counting as outright believing *p*. What might be missing in such cases? Perhaps outright believing *p* (in circumstance *c*<sup>19</sup>) presupposes a willingness or disposition to act (in *c*) as if *p*. It is plausible to suppose that something like this constraint on outright belief is guiding our everyday practices of ascribing beliefs, that we take a willingness or disposition to act (or behave<sup>20</sup>) as if *p* as a necessary condition for outright believing *p*.

The more pressing issue for present purposes is whether Plato takes a willingness or disposition to act as if *p* as *sufficient* for outright believing *p*. Consider, first, the possibility that Plato endorses what I shall call an *alethic notion of belief*. On this way of thinking about belief, believing that *p* requires more than merely being disposed to act as if *p*; one must also have the aim of believing *p* only if *p* is true. According to the alethic account, beliefs are products of goal-directed behaviour. Part of what makes something a belief is the way it comes about: beliefs are products of the practices we engage in with the aim of determining how things are. And precisely because believers *qua* believers have an aim or goal in acquiring their beliefs, we are able to assess their activities relative to this goal. An increase in confidence is *rational* when the increase is brought about by means that are generally truth-conducive; an increase in confidence is *irrational* when the subject is aiming at truth in a manner that is not generally truth-conducive.

<sup>19</sup> I include this qualification because there are some reasons to prefer a contextualist view of belief attribution. The issue of whether we ought to endorse some form of contextualism about belief is not relevant in the present context, so no further mention of this qualification will be made here.

<sup>20</sup> I shall speak of *acting* and *behaving* interchangeably here, without distinction.

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Given his aims in book 10, Plato has good reason to avoid an alethic conception of belief. For his purposes in establishing a distinction between rational and non-rational parts of the soul, Plato needs to convince us that his examples of partially deceptive illusions do in fact involve an opposition among *beliefs*. The problem for Plato, noted at the outset, is that it is far from obvious that the subject believes what her visual experience represents. After all, the evidence strongly speaks against what vision reports. Thinking of believers *qua* believers as aiming at the truth, we have a very hard time seeing how the subject outright believes the one line to be longer than the other. She has only a very low degree of confidence in what vision reports—not nearly enough confidence to be willing to act as if the one line is longer than the other and so not nearly enough confidence to count as outright believing.

Plato tells us that it is with the rational part of the soul that one aims at the truth, that the rational part is ‘always wholly straining to know where the truth lies’ (581 B 5–6). Because beliefs of the rational part arise in pursuit of truth, these beliefs are subject to assessment with respect to that goal, namely, as rational or irrational. In his defence of the distinction between rational and non-rational parts of the soul in book 10, Plato is attempting to identify beliefs that arise independently of any aim towards truth, beliefs that are not assessable as rational or irrational. Plato’s central example of this sort of non-rational psychological state is a sensory appearance. In the argument for parts of the soul at 602–3 Plato is suggesting that the appearance opposed to one’s calculation *is itself a belief*. Having a sensory appearance that *p* is quite different from believing *p* with the aim of believing only what is true: the subject has no aim relative to which the former might be assessed as rational or irrational. A subject’s sensory appearances are only coincidentally related to her aiming at the truth. Sensory appearances are brought about by affections of the body, the effects of impinging bodies in the environment—not by strivings towards the truth.

But why would Plato suppose that these sensory appearances are themselves beliefs? In thinking about our non-rational side Plato takes as a model the psychology of animals and small children, who lack the cognitive sophistication required to be aim-

ing at truth and goodness.<sup>21</sup> If Plato is going to follow common sense in appealing to beliefs and desires in explaining and predicting the behaviour of these creatures, then he presumably needs some alternative to the alethic conception of belief. But is it at all plausible to ascribe beliefs to a creature that lacks the concept of truth?

We naturally associate outright believing with *asserting*,<sup>22</sup> as Plato does at *Sophist* 263 E–264 B and *Theaetetus* 189 E–190 A, and it is far from obvious that all asserting is *asserting as true*, where the latter requires the concept of truth. Consider our sensory appearances or sense-perceptions.<sup>23</sup> It is plausible to think that they have an assertoric character. Unlike the state of imagining that *p*, one's very state of perceiving that *p* seems in some sense to assert *p* and so can be correct or incorrect in what it asserts. And presumably the kind of asserting that occurs in perceiving by the senses is also present in animals and young children, who do not possess any notion of truth. Here we have a perfectly good sense in which one's sense-perception is itself a belief that stands opposed to one's reasoned judgement—reason is rejecting precisely what one's perception asserts.

One might reasonably object that it makes little sense to speak of assertion without an asserter, but Plato avoids this awkwardness by insisting that a *part* of the subject is doing the asserting. Notice that this interpretation requires us to suppose that parts of the soul are not just *sources* of belief; they can also be *subjects* of belief.<sup>24</sup>

For those who are doubtful that Plato takes parts of the soul to be subjects of psychological states, there are still other ways to make sense of the idea that sensory appearances are themselves beliefs. For example, Plato might say that a representation with the content *p* counts as a belief that *p* provided it disposes one to act as if

<sup>21</sup> See 441 A–B for Plato's insistence that reason is lacking in animals and young children.

<sup>22</sup> Asserting *p* is often taken as a paradigm instance of acting as if *p*. One might suggest that asserting *p* (whether through an internal mental act or in a manner detectable by others) is sufficient for believing *p*, but that there are other ways of acting as if *p* that are also sufficient for believing *p*.

<sup>23</sup> For present purposes it is not necessary to distinguish sensory appearances and sense-perceptions. Note, though, that at *Soph.* 264 B appearance is said to be a mixture of perception and belief.

<sup>24</sup> Stalley, 'Persuasion', attempts to resist the natural temptation to think of Plato's parts as subjects of psychological states.



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*p.* On the assumption that Plato is working with some such non-alethic view of belief, it makes perfect sense for him to suppose that sensory appearances are beliefs. We can reasonably suppose that our subject of a partially deceptive illusion has just such a disposition to act as though the one line is longer than the other. As with all dispositions, this disposition can fail to be activated—the disposition to act as if the one line is longer than the other can be overridden or overruled (as Plato puts it<sup>25</sup>) in favour of the opposing disposition to act as if the lines are the same in length. No doubt various unspecified factors determine which, if either, state guides the subject's behaviour. Nevertheless, one seems to have two opposed inclinations: one to act as if the lines are the same in length and the other to act as if the one line is longer than the other. For example, even someone with great confidence in her measurement may find her visually guided behaviour dominated by how things look. And here it is the *subject*—not a *part* of the subject—that is so disposed.

This is not the place to defend the view that Plato takes parts of the soul to be subjects of psychological states. Note, though, how well this view fits with the discussion in book 10. Book 4 prepares us for the idea that assenting and dissenting are opposed mental states in just the same way that wanting and rejecting are (437 B). Then in book 10 Plato finally offers examples of the former type of conflict, cases of partially deceptive illusions. Based on one's rational calculation, one comes to reject what one's sensory experience asserts. Since the person as a whole is not making the latter assertion, Plato reasonably posits a subpersonal subject of the psychological state in question, the non-rational part.

So far we have focused on Plato's distinction between the rational and non-rational in the context of the argument in book 10, where Plato appeals to conflicts among beliefs. The same sort of argument occurs in book 4, though Plato's focus here is on the case of desire. With his example of the thirsty non-drinker, Plato hopes to establish a distinction between rational desires and non-rational, appetitive ones. In distinguishing these forms of desire, Plato emphasizes a difference in their origins:

Doesn't that which forbids in such cases come into play—if it comes into play at all—as a result of rational calculation, while what drives

<sup>25</sup> See 602 D; cf. 439 C.

and drags them to drink is a result of affections and diseases? (439 c 9–d 2)<sup>26</sup>

Our appetitive desires are products of physiological changes—bodily affections and diseases—whereas our rational desires are due to reasoning or calculating. Rational desires are acquired on the basis of reasons: they are products of our calculating and deliberating with the aim of pursuing what is best. By contrast, we do not have appetites for drink, food, or sex *because these things are taken to be good*. Indeed, in having appetites, we do not desire food, drink, and sex *as good things* at all (438 A).

This distinction between being moved by calculation and being moved by affection returns in book 10, where Plato is once again arguing for a distinction between rational and non-rational desires. Someone struck by personal tragedy is drawn by affection to mourn openly, but reason resists the temptation (604 A 10–B 1). This better part is moved by a rational calculation aimed at doing what is best (604 B 6–D 6).

In his efforts to distinguish rational and non-rational desires, Plato seems to be working with a conception of desire that parallels his view of belief. Just as he rejects the idea that belief (by its nature) aims at the true, Plato denies that desire (by its nature) aims at the good. In spite of the fact that they arise quite apart from the subject's aim towards the good, appetites can readily count as desires. For example, they might count as desires because of the role they play *vis-à-vis* our behaviour, a role they share with rational desires. Appetites and rational desires both seem to be capable of moving us to act, so we might say that desiring *A* is just a matter of being disposed to choose or select *A*. One need not judge that *A* is good or better than available alternatives.

In sum, the central difference between the psychological states of the rational part and those of the non-rational part lies in their origins. Desires and beliefs of the rational part come about through the activities of seeking goodness and truth, respectively. When these goals are pursued by means that are generally effective, the beliefs and desires that arise are rational; otherwise they are irrational. Non-rational beliefs and desires do not issue from the subject's ef-

<sup>26</sup> Here I have modified slightly the Grube–Reeve translation in J. M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 1992).

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forts to pursue aims or goals. Rather, they are due to physiological changes—bodily affections and diseases.

This idea in the *Republic* that our appetites are products of affections and diseases is one that Plato develops further in the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*. Consider first the discussion at *Philebus* 35, where Plato describes how appetites arise in response to affections of the body.<sup>27</sup> He distinguishes two stages of cognition involved in appetite formation:

- (1) An affection of the body that upsets the natural condition of the body gives rise to a perception of that affection. The perception is pain; the affection is painful.
- (2) The perception of this painful affection (i.e. pain) triggers a memory of an opposite affection previously cognized by way of perception. This opposite affection restores the natural condition of the body and it is pleasant when perceived.

The desire that results from this two-stage process is a desire for the pleasant affection that is a returning to or restoring of the body's natural condition, an affection cognized by way of memory. Take the case of thirst. A depletion of the body gives rise to a perception of this unpleasant affection of the body. This perception in turn gives rise to a memory of the opposite affection, the filling that restores the natural condition of the body. The appetite we call thirst is a desire for this pleasant filling.

This account of appetite formation helps us understand Plato's claim at *Timaeus* 70 D–71 A that appetites are aimed at the well-being of the body—the only exceptions being due to disease and other related corruptions (86 D–E). The appetitive part aims at bodily health only in the sense that its desires are teleologically ordered to this goal: we are designed in such a way that we naturally desire affections which restore the healthy state of the body.<sup>28</sup> As the *Philebus* makes clear, the process of appetite formation takes place independently of any grasp of the aim (bodily health) *as such*. The only forms of cognition involved are perception of a bodily

<sup>27</sup> My discussion here draws on two papers I have written on related topics: 'Appetitive Desire in Later Plato' ['Appetitive Desire'], *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 18 (2001), 227–37, and 'The Platonic Approach to Sense-Perception' ['Platonic Approach'], *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 22 (2005), 1–15.

<sup>28</sup> In 'Appetitive Desire' I argue that Plato introduced the idea that appetitive desires are teleologically ordered to bodily health in order to respond to the worry that there is insufficient unity to the desires of the appetitive part.

affection and a memory of the opposed affection (previously cognized by perception).

It is worth noting, finally, that sense-perceptions—the cognitive states which Plato consistently<sup>29</sup> attributes to the appetitive part<sup>30</sup>—are also products of bodily affections. Throughout his major discussions of the nature of sense-perception in the *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus*, and *Philebus*, Plato consistently maintains that sense-perceptions are brought about by affections (*Theaet.* 179 c; *Tim.* 42 A; *Phileb.* 34 A),<sup>31</sup> which are physical changes in the perceiving subject's body brought about by impinging external bodies (see *Phileb.* 33 D; *Tim.* 42 A; *Theaet.* 186 c).<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, sense-perceptions and appetites, the two psychological states Plato attributes to the appetitive part at *Timaeus* 77 B, are both brought about by alterations in our bodies, not by strivings for truth or goodness.

## II

Moss and I have rather different views about what makes our non-rational side<sup>33</sup> *non-rational*. On my reading, the relevant desires and beliefs are non-rational precisely because they arise independently of the subject's strivings for goodness and truth. For Moss, on the other hand, the non-rational side desires what it does *because it is taken to be good* and believes what it does *because it is taken to be true*, and so its aims are not unlike those of the rational part. However, Moss should not say that they have the same aims, exactly. Since the

<sup>29</sup> Plato clearly changed his view about what cognitive states the appetitive part can enjoy. The claim in the *Republic* that the appetitive part has beliefs is ultimately rejected at *Tim.* 77 B. This change of view goes hand in hand with his coming to accept an alethic notion of belief. See *Soph.* 263 E–264 B and *Theaet.* 189 E–190 A, where Plato defines belief as a conclusion drawn when thinking through a question about how things are. Plato consistently denies that the appetitive part aims at truth. When he decides that believing involves aiming at the truth, Plato has to give up on the idea that the appetitive part has beliefs. Though his interpretation is quite different in the details, Lorenz agrees that Plato gave up on the idea that the appetitive part has beliefs because he changed his view about what believing involves. See *The Brute Within*, ch. 6.

<sup>30</sup> For the claim that the appetitive part has sense-perceptions, see *Tim.* 77 B.

<sup>31</sup> These same affections are also *objects* of sense-perception (*Theaet.* 186 c; *Tim.* 64 D; *Phileb.* 33 E–34 A), a point I explore at length in 'Platonic Approach'.

<sup>32</sup> For a full defence of this last point see 'Platonic Approach'.

<sup>33</sup> I follow Moss in thinking that the non-rational side distinguished from the rational part in book 10 includes both the appetitive and spirited parts. See 'Appearances and Calculations', 41–6.

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rational part is capable of weighing goodness and evidence, Plato would do well to say that the rational part aims to desire more what is better and to put greater credence in what is more likely.<sup>34</sup> The latter aims are clearly not ones that our non-rational side can aspire towards, since it is incapable of any sort of weighing. This inability to transcend appearances by weighing or calculating is what makes our non-rational part non-rational, on Moss's view.

There is something deeply puzzling about non-rational cognition, on Moss's reading. Our non-rational side accepts things *as true*, just as it desires things *as good*, so it must have *some* conception of truth, however minimal. But in order for a creature to have a notion of truth or falsity, at the very least the creature must be able to draw a distinction between its representational states and how things are. Accordingly, it is problematic for Moss also to suppose that our non-rational side has no understanding of anything beyond appearances. Grasping the idea of *how things are—what is true*—is beyond a creature that draws no distinction between appearance and reality. Hence, it makes little sense to suppose that a subject wholly restricted to appearances accepts things as true.

On the reading of Plato I prefer, our non-rational side is the source and subject of sense-perceptions with an assertoric character, but it does not endorse anything *as true*. On Moss's reading, by contrast, the appetitive part accepts appearances as true, just as it cognizes pleasant things as good. The problem, I have suggested, is that the appetitive part does not seem to be in a position to accept things as true. The appetitive part is supposed to be incapable of transcending sensory appearances in its cognition, so it would seem to have no grasp of the distinction between representation and reality. It lacks the bare minimum required for possessing the concept of truth.

My second worry about Moss's interpretation is largely a terminological point. Moss takes Plato to be drawing a distinction between the *rational* and *non-rational*, but the distinction she draws is more naturally labelled a distinction between *rational* psychological states and *irrational* ones. To accept appearances unreflectively, without any weighing of the evidence, is to employ a poor strategy for getting at the truth. A subject employing this means for getting at the truth would be irrational. Recall that accepting *p* with the

<sup>34</sup> More precisely, the rational part aims to have its degree of confidence well calibrated to the evidence.

aim of believing what is true is very different from merely having a sensory appearance with the content  $p$ : in merely having a sensory appearance one is not subject to criticism as rational or irrational. What accounts for this difference? When there is an end or aim in place, it makes sense to praise activity that is generally conducive to that end and criticize what is not, and no relevant aim is present in the case of simply enjoying a sensory appearance. On the other hand, in the case of being moved to accept  $p$  because it appears that  $p$ , one has an aim in accepting  $p$ : one is aiming to believe what is true. Given this aim, the practice of always unreflectively accepting appearances is an irrational one.

This terminological point leads to a more serious worry. Plato defends his partitioning of the soul by appeal to cases of mental conflict such as the conflicts among beliefs discussed in book 10. On Moss's reading of book 10, these turn out to be conflicts between rational and irrational beliefs. The worry is that this argumentative strategy will yield more parts than Plato wants. The rational part too can endorse things unreflectively or otherwise fail to respond to the evidence appropriately, so there is nothing to prevent a conflict within the rational part that parallels exactly the sort of conflict Moss finds between our rational and non-rational sides. This sort of problem does not arise for my preferred reading, according to which Plato is interested in conflicts between rational and non-rational beliefs. The rational part's beliefs will never be non-rational, for, as Plato emphasizes, the rational part is always aiming towards the truth.

My next objection to Moss's interpretation is perhaps the most serious. Plato's argument for a division of the soul in book 10 is a poor argument, if we interpret it as Moss does. Plato begins with the idea that in having partially deceptive illusions we find within ourselves a conflict among our beliefs. According to Moss, this conflict will be a conflict between two states both of which came about with the aim of finding out how things are: one deriving from calculation and measurement, the other restricted merely to appearances. The problem is that one simply does not find a belief of the latter sort within oneself. On the assumption that one places a great deal of credence in one's calculation, one will have only the slightest suspicion that one's calculation is mistaken. *Qua* believer aiming at the truth, one lacks the degree of confidence needed to count as outright believing what the illusory experience reports

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(i.e. confidence enough to be willing to act in accord with what one's experience reports). Accordingly, Plato's argument cannot get started: we do not find the opposition among our beliefs that the argument requires.

To see more clearly the problem at hand, keep in mind that the belief opposed to one's calculation is *irrational* (arrived at by unreflectively accepting one's sensory appearance) and *recalcitrant* (staying put even though the evidence speaks decisively against the appearance).<sup>35</sup> Typically, when one discovers that one's belief that *p* was ill-formed and that the evidence speaks against *p*, one loses one's confidence in *p*. Returning to our example involving the Müller-Lyer illusion, once the calculations have been carried out one loses all inclination to endorse as true what vision reports. All that persists is the sensory appearance, which one takes to be illusory. Plato needs a case of synchronic opposition among one's beliefs, and Moss's reading fails to deliver.

The same sort of problem faces Moss's reading of Plato's argument in book 4. According to Moss, the upshot of the argument is that we each have two parts aiming at goodness, though one of them is better equipped to hit the target. But how does the case of the thirsty non-drinker help to support this conclusion? Presumably the sort of case Plato has in mind is one where the reasons available to the thirsty non-drinker speak decisively against drinking. (These are the reasons that motivate the subject to abstain from drinking.) The subject in this sort of case correctly assesses the value of the pleasures involved in drinking (along with the pains involved in not drinking), and determines that the goodness of not drinking overwhelms the goodness of the pleasures that stem from drinking now. A persistent, powerful desire for drink will not be viewed by the subject as a desire for drink *as good*. From the subject's point of view the value of drinking at this time is relatively slight. The subject does not find herself conflicted about the goodness of her options (drinking vs. abstaining from drink), so how does this sort of case provide evidence for two parts each striving towards goodness? Why would Plato interpret the conflict in this manner?

Finally, Moss's view of the non-rational part as aiming at goodness does not sit well with what Plato actually says in book 4. On Moss's reading, appetites are products of (ill-informed) aiming towards the good. Accordingly, when Plato states that our appetites

<sup>35</sup> See 602 E.

are caused by affections and diseases (439c 9–d 2), he will have to mean that affections and diseases give rise to appearances of goodness, which in turn produce appetites such as thirst and hunger. But it would be very odd for Plato to expect his readers to think of appetites as due to aiming at goodness when he says that they come about from affections and diseases—especially in this context where he has just made a special point of denying that desires always aim at good things (438A).

On Moss's account, then, Plato is defending an unattractive view of the beast within: the non-rational part is not cognitively sophisticated enough to have the goals that it is supposed to have, and Plato has no plausible argument for the existence of a part with these aims. By contrast, Plato's argument is quite powerful when interpreted in the manner I have suggested. I elaborate on this point in the following section.

### III

At first glance, Plato's argument for a distinction between rational and non-rational cognition in book 10 is rather curious. Philosophers sometimes appeal to the sorts of illusion Plato has in mind in order to cast doubt on the idea that sense-perception requires belief. They argue that one can be subject, for example, to the Müller-Lyer illusion, seeing the one line as longer than the other, without believing that the line is longer than the other.<sup>36</sup> With such an obvious point in mind, it is initially puzzling to find Plato insisting that such illusory appearances are themselves beliefs.

This *prima facie* worry about Plato's argument dissolves upon closer inspection. What is driving Plato's argument is the observation that we sometimes have reason to reject what our sensory experience is asserting about the world. These simultaneous acts of assent and dissent are supposed to parallel the simultaneous acts of wanting and rejecting discussed in book 4. We might not find it entirely natural to describe this sort of cognitive dissonance as a matter of conflict among *beliefs*, but there are a couple points to keep in mind. First, we can restate Plato's argument in terms of assent and dissent rather than belief and disbelief without com-

<sup>36</sup> See e.g. J. L. Bermúdez, 'Nonconceptual Content: From Perceptual Experience to Subpersonal Computational States', *Mind & Language*, 10 (1995), 333–69 at 335.



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promising the argument in any way. Indeed, Plato himself prefers the former way of talking about cognitive conflict at 437 B. Second, Plato takes belief to be a kind of assent (*Soph.* 263 E–264 B and *Theaet.* 189 E–190 A). If we adopt this way of thinking about belief, our initial resistance to the idea that we are dealing with conflict among beliefs fades.

Of course, we might have lingering doubts about the suggestion that Plato's examples of partially deceptive illusions involve conflicting acts of assent. Even if we allow that sensory experiences have an assertoric character, it is still far from obvious that any literal assenting is taking place here—the sort of thing that might genuinely come into conflict with one's considered judgement.

These lingering doubts are lessened if we keep in mind the explanatory power of the hypothesis that our sensory experiences involve assent in the familiar sense. Consider first the role that sensory experiences play in justifying our beliefs about how things are in our surroundings. Sense-perceptions seem especially well suited to this task precisely because they seem to be telling us what is going on around us. And because sensory experiences, unlike imaginings, are assertions, they can be mistaken in what they tell us, as in Plato's examples of illusions. Further, sense-perceptions are able to guide behaviour, just as judgements are. Perhaps they are both able to play this role because of their shared assertoric character. On the plausible assumption that sense-perceptions, like beliefs, can serve as premisses of action-yielding practical syllogisms, it is natural to think of sense-perceptions as assertions. The premisses of such practical syllogisms are not merely *entertained* propositions. Presumably the premisses are *assertions*.

In Plato's examples of partially deceptive illusions, the person does not assent to the false content. The lack of any obvious candidate for the role of assenter might seem to make trouble for the view that sense-perception involves assent, but Plato makes an ingenious move to accommodate our intuition that assent presupposes an assenter, positing a non-rational part that is the source and subject of our non-rational psychological states.

No less ingenious is Plato's manner of distinguishing between rational and non-rational cognition. One of the striking features of these acts of assent that are opposed to our considered judgements is how insulated they are from praise and blame: one is not called reasonable or unreasonable in having these sensory states. Plato's

remarkable suggestion is that this difference is grounded in a difference in the origins of these kinds of assent. Because the judgments that stand in opposition to what our senses report come about with the goal of arriving at the truth, they can be assessed relative to that goal: they are rational when they come about in a manner that is generally effective for attaining the goal; otherwise they count as irrational. By contrast, our sensory states are products of physical changes in the body due to interaction with our surroundings.

Plato's way of contrasting the rational and non-rational becomes all the more compelling when we see how naturally it extends to the case of desire. Consider again Plato's example of someone who rejects an appetite for drink as bad, all things considered. This desire opposed to one's appetite can be praised as rational or condemned as irrational, but no one counts as reasonable or unreasonable in virtue of being thirsty. What accounts for this difference? In rejecting one's appetite for drink, one has a goal relative to which this inclination to refrain from drinking can be assessed, namely, the goal of attaining the best available outcome. One can pursue this end by means that are generally effective or one can do so by means that are generally ineffective. In the former case the resulting desire is rational; in the latter the desire is irrational. On the other hand, our appetites come about through physiological changes, not through pursuit of any goals. Accordingly, they cannot be similarly assessed. Of course, this is not to say that appetites are beyond reproach. Due to their independence from reason, appetites are sometimes dangerous, wild, and lawless (*Republic* 571–2).

We can now see that Julia Annas was too quick in the following dismissal of Plato's argument in book 10:

Plato presumably fails to see that his argument will not work, that desire has nothing to do with optical illusions, because he thinks of the lower part of the soul as being *merely* the trashy and reason-resisting part.<sup>37</sup>

Plato is working with a much richer, more cohesive conception of our non-rational side than Annas suggests. Once we understand how Plato is distinguishing the rational and non-rational, we are able to appreciate just how powerful his arguments in favour of the distinction are.

*Oberlin College, Ohio*

<sup>37</sup> *Introduction*, 339.

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