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Plato's Theory of Soul

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and *online*

19 October	9:00–10:10	FILIP KARFÍK	Between Form and Body: On the Soul in Plato
	10:20–11:30	JONATHAN GRIFFITHS	Plato on the Priority of Soul to Body
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	10:20–11:30	MATILDE BERTI	Circularity and Circular Motion in Plato's Metaphysics and Psychology
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21 October	9:30–10:40	BEATRIZ BOSSI	Desire and Rationality in the Myth of Er: Hasty Souls, Punished Heroes and "Unlucky" Philosophers
	10:50–12:00	FLAVIA PALMIERI	Plato's Individual Soul and Xenocrates' Personal <i>Daimon</i> : The Pupil Correcting the Master?
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MATILDE BERTI

Circularity and Circular Motion in Plato's Metaphysics and Psychology

In Early Greek philosophy, the importance of circularity is never really argued for, but rather taken for granted. Circularity seems to be a prominent feature of perfection for Early Greek thinkers, who employ it mainly in physics, while in the *Hippocratic Corpus* (e.g., *On Reg.*) it explains physiological processes. Circularity and circular motion pervade Plato's dialogues, too (e.g., *Phaedr.* 246e4–247e4, *Tim.* 33b1–c1, *Leg.* 897e4–898b3). However, with few exceptions, scholars do not dwell on the implications circularity has for Plato's philosophy. Like his predecessors, Plato never explains why circularity is "the source of all wonders" (*Leg.* 893c–d5). In this paper, I argue that Plato uses circularity as an explanatory model for core aspects of his philosophy, with particular focus on psychology and metaphysics. First, I argue that Plato developed his use of circularity and its philosophical relevance from the application of mathematical circularity in astronomy and in medicine. Next, I consider the (World-)Soul's connection to circularity and its impacts on ethics, and cosmology. Finally, I concentrate on the *Nous*' relation to circularity in psychology, examining its impact on epistemology, and metaphysics. I conclude that circularity is structural to Plato's psychology and metaphysics. On the one hand, Plato likens circular motion to the motion of *Nous*. For it is a principle that both directs and informs the cosmos through the (World-)Soul. Furthermore, *Nous* is the principle that with its motion allows the knowledge of the Forms. On the other one, Plato uses circularity to link ethics to cosmology. For thanks to circularity he can structurally link the perfect turning of the cosmos performed by the World-Soul to the perfect turnings of individual souls, which make it truly virtuous.

BEATRIZ BOSSI

Desire and Rationality in the Myth of Er: Hasty Souls, Punished Heroes and "Unlucky" Philosophers

The myth of Er is a controversial text. As many scholars have noticed, it raises problems of construction and theoretical consistency with the rest of the dialogue. Some interpreters attribute it an infinite regress, a vulgar consequentialist reason for being just, which undermines Plato's general view, and an irresolvable tension between what the philosopher demands and the tragicomedy of human life. I will attempt to offer a more positive perspective which I find consistent with other passages of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, as an exhortation to the conversion of the soul to philosophy. I will set the moral content of the myth in a kind of virtue pyramid that turns out to be somehow new in Plato, and also paradoxical in some respects, as if he wanted to combine his ideal project of *Kallipolis* with more down to earth reflections about feasible chances and constraints. At the base of the pyramid, 'demotic' virtue plays a paradoxical role because it cannot protect the soul from the power of excessive wild desires, which push it to rush onto a wrong life-model, even when having enjoyed the reward of a thousand-year heavenly visions for correct social and political behaviour in a former life. On the second stage there is an intermediate kind of virtue that involves practical knowledge and desire, born out of painful past experience that is enough for choosing an acceptable life, free from ambition. On top of the pyramid, philosophical virtue is enough to choose the best possible life. However, when deprived of luck, this type of soul could be constrained to choose the best available life, namely, just a good life. Philosophers may have to lead a 'normal' life. However, we could assume, he would be able to choose the best in all circumstances for it would not be deprived of philosophical wisdom. In general terms, I assume that there is some freedom involved in the cosmic process of learning. Though past lives and their corresponding fates may 'condition' choice, they do not 'determine' it, for the soul has

the potential capacity to analyse thoroughly the content of each life model, instead of rushing to choose the most attractive one. Thus, the degree of critical thought involved is the clue to face the dangerous decision.

FRANCESCA EUSTACCHI

Interferences Between Soul and Body in Human Beings: The Multifocal Platonic Discourse

Platonic reflection considers the relationship between soul and body from two distinct perspectives: that of opposition and that of interaction. While both perspectives are present in the Platonic dialogues, the majority of critical literature tends to focus on the conflictual dimensions, according to the traditional dualistic interpretation. Conversely, my contribution seeks to demonstrate how Plato equally values the perspective of dualism and that of interrelation between body and soul, without contradiction, because he uses different perspectives to analyze and describe this relationship, thus presenting a complex and multifocal picture.

The Platonic view of reality is intrinsically uni-multiple: each reality is a whole composed of parts, which in turn are wholes composed of other parts. This structure applies to both sensible entities and intelligible realities such as the Ideas. The Ideas are formed by other Ideas and are “parts” of higher Ideas. This is evident as early as the *Phaedrus* (265e1–2) in the presentation of dialectics as the activity of uniting and dividing: the first process involves bringing dispersed things together into a single Idea, and the second process involves dividing inversely by Ideas according to their natural modulations and trying not to break any part.

Plato reasons like a modern supporter of the systems theory: each Idea (as a whole) is composed of other Ideas (as parts) and is, in turn, a part of another Idea (i.e., it is part of a higher whole). Consequently,

it is possible to investigate the same object from at least two perspectives: if we consider the parts in relation to the whole, the unitary aspect emerges, as the whole expresses the principle of order and manifests the Idea, which is “superior” to the parts themselves (in a vertical relationship); if we consider the parts in relation to other parts, the aspect of diversity emerges, and hence the multiple, as the parts themselves exist on the same level (in a horizontal relationship).

The human soul, as a system composed of different parts, and the human being, as a system composed of soul and body clarify this “game of perspective”. We can consider the soul as a whole made up of different parts which, due to a radical ontological difference, opposes another whole, which is the body (dualistic perspective); as part of whole-human being, which collaborates and interacts with the other part of the human being, which is the body (interference perspective).

JONATHAN GRIFFITHS

Plato on the Priority of Soul to Body

The priority of soul to body is a key tenet of Plato’s later thought. In three dialogues – *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus* and *Laws* – three different interlocutors discuss the soul’s priority to body in three very different conversational contexts. In the *Timaeus*, the title-speaker asserts the soul’s priority to the body, even though he has just elected to describe the generation of the cosmos’ body before that of the cosmos’ soul (34b–c). In the *Phaedrus*, soul’s priority to body is implied by the characterisation of the soul, insofar as it is self-moving, as a starting-point or principle (*arkhê*) for all the other (*bodily*) things that are in motion (245c–246a). Finally, in the *Laws* the Athenian stranger argues for the soul’s priority to body within a refutation of a group of atheistic natural philosophers, by showing that self-motion, which is essential to the soul, is the first or primary kind of motion in contrast to all other kinds of motion (891a–896c).

Traditionally commentators have emphasised the differences and alleged discontinuities between these three works. Most notoriously, they have pointed to an apparent contradiction between the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*: whereas in the *Timaeus* the soul is presented as brought into being by the demiurge, in the *Phaedrus* soul is regarded as un-generated (*agenêton*) inasmuch as it is a starting-point of cosmic motion. In my paper, I will carry out a comparative analysis of the three works by focussing on the nature of priority which is at stake in each case. Commentators have characterised the priority relation in various ways, using terms such as ‘temporal’, ‘metaphysical’, ‘causal’, and ‘essential’. My discussion will aim to clarify how different features of the soul’s priority to body are highlighted in each dialogue, but it will show that these features are not contradictory but complementary to one another. Therefore, I conclude that Plato offers a coherent picture of the soul’s nature, its role in the cosmos, and its priority to body in his later works. Finally, I will examine some passages in Aristotle in which he traces various notions of priority to Plato and consider their significance for Plato’s theory of soul and its relationship to the body.

FILIP KARFÍK

Between Form and Body: On the Soul in Plato

The soul, as Plato presents it in the dialogues, differs not only from the body but also from intelligible Forms. However, it enters no less into communion with the former than with the latter. The paper examines these two different kinds of communion. On the one hand, there is intelligible Being, which is itself impassible but of which the soul is receptive; on the other hand, there is the body, which has a capacity to act and to be acted upon in relation both to other bodies and to souls. Between these two terms, we find the soul, which possesses the capacity to act and to be acted upon in relation to bodies and to other souls, but also, unlike the body, in relation to itself, namely self-motion.

The latter capacity is what makes the soul an entity *sui generis*, different from both the body and the intelligible Form, but also capable of entering into communion with both of them and making itself more similar to the one or to the other.

COLIN KING

Soul, Time, and Celestial Motion in Plato’s Timaeus

In Plato’s *Timaeus* we are presented with a theory of the cosmos as the moving image of an eternal and changeless living entity (37c6–38b5). This part of the *Timaeus* has received abundant attention by commentators, important as it is for the history of ancient Greek astronomy and science. In this paper I will consider how the astronomical model can be related to divine cognition and animal motion.

That celestial motion is related to divine cognition is clear from several statements which precede the astronomical passages. When *Timaeus* recounts the reasoning (*λογισμός*, 30b4) of the God who created the world, he emphasizes that its construction relates to non-visible entities. The God thought that no whole composed of that which is by nature visible and without mind (*άνόητον*) could ever be better in its result (*έργον*) than the whole of that which possesses mind (*νοῦν έχοντος*) (30b1–3). The theory of celestial motion and time is inscribed within this account, the explanation of how reason enters the soul of the world and the soul moves celestial bodies. As *Timaeus* affirms that not just the heavens or universe is a living being, but that also the celestial bodies are living beings (40b5), their motions too must be referred back to reasoned psychic activity. And so his account of celestial motion and time may be understood in the context of a theory of animal motion (as indeed it was by Aristotle).

One implication of this reading for our understanding of the *Timaeus* is that we are led to view the astronomical material as appropriated for the sake of the likeliness of the larger claim regarding the God’s

procedure of instilling mind in soul and soul in the body of the world. A further difference this interpretation makes can be illustrated with regard to Plato's description of the planets as *ὄργανα χρόνων* (41e5) and *ὄργανα χρόνου* (42d5), sometimes rendered as "instruments of time" (Cornford). If the celestial bodies are instrumental because they are the bodily tools of celestial souls, we must consider the possibility that Timaeus' account is motivated not primarily by astronomical theory, but by claims regarding the correspondence between certain "reasoned" patterns and the particular case of celestial animal motion. In this way, astronomy serves a further theoretical purpose. We also may find in this reading a new answer to the question of Earth's motion in *Tim.* 40b8–c3.

SUZANNE OBDRZALEK

What are Platonic Souls Made of?

It is frequently objected that substance dualism has no account to give of the mental substance that makes up the mind. Thus, for example, Churchland: "Can the dualist tell us anything about the internal constitution of mind-stuff? Of the nonmaterial elements that make it up? ... The fact is, the dualist can do none of these things, because no detailed theory of mind-stuff has ever been formulated" (1984, 19). Any student of Plato will recognize that this complaint is misplaced: in the *Timaeus*, Plato provides a detailed account of how the demiurge fashions immortal soul out of divisible and indivisible portions of being, sameness and difference (35a1–36d7, 41d4–7). While the *Timaeus* contains Plato's most detailed and extensive discussion of the composition of the soul, in this talk, I propose that it is not his only one. I argue that Plato provides an alternate analysis in the flux passage of the *Symposium* (207c8–208b6), when he suggests that, just as the body is composed of "hair, flesh, bones and blood," so the soul is composed of "habits, characteristics, beliefs, desires, pleasures,

pains and fears" as well as knowledge. Whereas Plato's position in the *Timaeus* has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion, the *Symposium* view has gone largely unexplored. But as we shall see, it furnishes an intriguing alternative to the position he advocates in the *Timaeus*. On the *Symposium* view, the soul is composed of beliefs, desires, fears, pleasures etc.—what we might collectively refer to as mental states; I refer to this as the bundle theory of the soul. The bundle theory merits our philosophical attention in its own right, but also because understanding it can help us to appreciate the explanatory motivations for Plato's alternate account of the composition of the soul in the *Timaeus*.

FLAVIA PALMIERI

Plato's Individual Soul and Xenocrates' personal Daimon: The Pupil Correcting the Master?

One aspect of Platonic psychology worthy of further investigation is the link between the individual *ψυχή* and the figure of the *δαίμων*. It appears several times, but in different ways, in Plato's dialogues. What is important to investigate further is what kind of soul and demon is taken into account in each dialogue, what kind of relationship exists between them, and above all whether there is an ontological or metaphorical identification between the two. This leads to an investigation of both the individual's capacity for choice and the attribution of ethical responsibility. To try to answer these questions by widening the investigation beyond the Platonic text, it is possible to compare Plato's doctrines with the doctrines developed by the third scholarch of the Academy, i.e. Xenocrates, in order to understand which thematic nuclei were particularly problematic in Platonic doctrine and how they were interpreted or modified by his students. Xenocrates, in developing his conception of the individual soul as a demon proper to each person (F. 154 Isnardi Parente = Aristot. *Top.* II 6, 112a32–37) that can be both

good and bad and therefore happy (*εὐδαίμων*) or not (F. 157 Isnardi Parente = Stob. *Flor.* IV 40, 24), seems to critically reinterpret Plato's position, in order to make it more coherent, in the light of a general resetting of his ontological and psychological conception. He starts from a critical reading of both the *Timaeus* 90a–c (where the interiorized demon is identified only with the rational soul) and the *Republic* X 617e, 620d–e (where the disembodied soul chooses its own demon, which sanctions its destiny). Instead, considering the whole human soul a demon because of its being unique, immortal, and divine, but subject to human passions, he provides continuity with certain aspects of the *Phaedrus*, e.g. in considering the soul-demon immortal as a whole but subject to the influence of that black horse present in the myth of the winged chariot. In identifying the human soul as an intermediate being that can become, through personal effort, either good or bad, aware or ignorant, therefore, Xenocrates aims to increase the possibility that it is within our power to develop ourselves and to achieve happiness as a revisited form of *ὁμοίωσις θεῶ* (*Tim.* 90c–d), against the deterministic framework of a pre-natal choice.

JULIA PFEFFERKORN

Plato on Moral Responsibility and the Immortality of the Soul

This paper takes its start from the observation that the two passages in Plato's oeuvre which most explicitly discuss a notion of personal moral responsibility, *Republic* X 617e4–5 (Myth of Er) and *Laws* X 904b8–c2, both argue on the basis of a person's afterlife and reincarnation. Hence they presuppose that the soul continues to exist after our death. Responsibility on the one hand and the immortality of the soul on the other seem to be closely related in these arguments. Why is this so? While the Myth of Er has often been the object of close scrutiny, *Laws* X is usually not consulted in the context of its interpretation. As

I shall argue, despite some differences between both passages, reading them alongside each other helps us understand how these two concepts are related: both passages aim to assert the responsibility we have for the development of our character during our lives. Within this perspective, the imagination of the immortality of our souls, i.e. of a time span both before and after our lives, creates the impression of a temporal circle in which the key moment to make a difference is now.

ALLAN SILVERMAN

How to Make a Soul

Plato offers two ways to make a soul. The locus classicus for one way to make a soul is the *Timaeus*. There both the world-soul and our individual rational souls are said to be made. (Henceforth, unless explicitly noted, 'soul' refers to rational soul.) A Demiurge makes them from strange, seemingly immaterial ingredients, a blend of blends of two kinds each of Being, Sameness, and Difference. The Demiurge is an agent, external to and distinct from the product they make. In the first section of the paper, I will argue against literalist accounts of individual soul-making. Two metaphysical issues complicate the debate. The first concerns the individuation of a soul. This takes on two forms: (a) what is the individuating factor; and (b) what are the persistence conditions. The second is whether, according to Plato's metaphysics, a 'made' soul can be immortal and essentially self-moving. With respect to the coherence of a generated essential self-mover, I will argue that there is no satisfactory account of such a possibility for Plato. (Indeed, it is unclear to me that it is a metaphysical possibility by our own lights.) Rather individual souls are metaphysical primitives on Plato's account. In this regard I defend a non-literalist reading of *Timaeus*.

Traditionally, the non-literalist embraces the formula inherited from the vast majority of ancient readers of *Timaeus*, that it is for the sake of instruction. I believe that the subject matter of the instruction

is the Art of Living. This provides the entrée into the second way of making a soul, namely making one's soul better or virtuous.

The provenance for this conception of soul-making takes us back to the *Apology*, where Socrates urges that caring for one's soul is all that matters. Every Platonic dialogue is, in its own way, about caring for the soul. Some dialogues, e.g., *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, primarily address epistemic improvement. Others seem more focused on ethical or political concerns, e.g., *Politicus*, *Philebus*. Common to this project is the notion that it is the individual, i.e., the individual soul that is the agent of its own making. This is an agent not external to its product. In the second part of the paper, I will show how to combine the metaphysical theses that individual souls are metaphysically primitive, essentially self-movers with the fundamental (ethical) principle of Plato's philosophy, The Form of the Good.

KAREL THEIN

Two Functions of the Soul's Immortality: Between Ethics and Cosmology

My paper will focus on two less discussed functions of the soul's immortality, including their partial overlap. The first of these functions, an ethical one, is to ensure justice in the simple sense of reward or retribution for the deeds committed in the soul's incarnate state. This kind of justice has always received less attention than justice as a virtue, a central motif of Plato's moral psychology based on intellectual achievement. It is clear, however, that the more direct sense of justice plays a central role in Plato's eschatological myths, where justice is guaranteed by divine omniscience, exactly as the old Cephalus suggests in the first book of the *Republic*. It is the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* that state the moral need for this justice most clearly: were the souls mortal, those who are unjust could escape all judgment and die happy (*Phaedo* 107c–d, *Republic* X 608c–610d). That said, my

interest is less in justice as the post-mortem reward or punishment and more in how Plato uses this kind of justice in relation to his scheme of transmigration. This scheme, present with variations in several dialogues, is not required by the need for justice. Therefore, the primary role of repeated incarnations is cosmological, and the distribution of the souls into different animal species or human characters is part of maintaining the stability of the vast cosmic structure, which is typically described as consisting of a scale of life forms that seem equally necessary for the overall perfection of the cosmos. There is no doubt that Plato describes this situation in a language that modern readers find more poetic than philosophical, but I hope to show that transmigration, including its intersection with justice, offers answers to some Platonic questions that cannot be resolved by argument alone.

ENRICO VOLPE

What does the World Soul do? Some Reflection about the Role and the Ontological Status of the World Soul Between the Timaeus and the Epinomis

The *Epinomis* is universally recognized as a spurious dialogue. Although it is not possible to establish with certainty who the author of the *Epinomis* is, the starting point is that it is a dialogue that belongs to the historical-philosophical context of the old Academy, which presents substantial differences with some dialogues, such as the *Timaeus*, in which the theme of knowledge of the stars as way to happiness and the role of the world soul are crucial.

The main aspect to be considered is that in the *Timaeus*, the main actors from the point of view of the constitution of the cosmos are the paradigm, the demiurge, and the world soul. The relation of the soul to the body of the world is clarified within Timaeus' discourse itself. Even though the body of the world is presented by Timaeus before the soul,

it is nevertheless the latter that has ontological (and chronological) priority over the body of the world (*Tim.* 34c). Nevertheless, the divine dimension of the cosmos, defined by Plato as happy and sensitive God (*Tim.* 34b7; 92c7) is also a very well-known topic in the *Timaeus*.

On the other hand, in the *Epinomis* there is a sort of simplification of the cosmological model. The entities are divided solely between corporeal and incorporeal, while both the soul and the stars are defined as divine, even though in a different way.

The soul itself is at the center of the *Epinomis*' metaphysical conception. The figure of the demiurge disappears altogether, leaving to the soul with the capacity to compose and produce (981b5–8 *πλάττειν καὶ δημιουργεῖν*). The demiurgic soul is ontologically opposed to the dimension of the body, which undergoes generation. The superiority of the soul over the body is constantly reaffirmed in the *Epinomis*, as far as it is defined as the cause of everything; thus, it assumes a role of absolute preeminence in the metaphysical context of the dialogue.

My investigation intends to dwell on a few points in order to identify some elements that differentiate the *Epinomis* from the *Timaeus* and reflect on them. Firstly, it is necessary to ask in what sense the soul is demiurgic. Secondly, are the stars divine due to the presence of the soul or not? Is the soul identic with the God, or we must admit a sort of variation within the discourse of the author? Last, but not least, which is the role of the metaphysical entities in the *Epinomis*, are the ideas absent or simply taken for granted on the background?