The Bipolar Longings of Thumos: A Feminist Rereading of Plato’s Republic

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Plato’s treatment of thumos in the Republic might seem like an odd place to look for mining fresh feminist insights into the complex and political character of human desire. The dialogue itself is often seen as one in which human desire is downplayed in favor of the godlike and self-sufficient philosopher-kings who are quite unlike the erotic, needy, and striving Socrates of Plato’s Symposium (Bloom 1968, 423; Williams 1993, 98–102). For this very reason, feminists have usually looked to the latter dialogue in order to derive a notion of classical desire, either from the Aristophanic notion of eros as a striving for one’s better half or from Diotima’s notion of eros as a striving for wholeness and as the desire to give birth to a new self in the presence of the beloved. More problematically, Plato’s treatment of thumos in the Republic has primarily been co-opted by conservative, anti-feminist thinkers who see it as the manly and warlike passion of anger or spiritedness that animates men’s souls (Berns 1984, 335–348; Bloom 1968, 355, 376). Even commentators who do not share these kinds of political views tend to see Platonic thumos as that element of the soul which counters desire or eros because it counters those desires that are lodged in the epithumetic (appetitive/desiring) part of the soul (Koziak 2000, 75, 77; Allen 2000b, 252).

In this paper I hope to challenge all of these views of the Republic by looking at the complex bipolar longings that characterize Plato’s notion of thumos. While Plato does argue that thumos is different from the kinds of appetitive desires for sex, food, and drink that are lodged in the epithumetic part of the soul, he does not see thumos as lacking its own unique desires and longings. In Book Eight he makes it clear that the most political kinds of desires are lodged in this part of the soul when he declares that the thumotic element (to thumoeides) is both victory-loving and honor-loving (philonikon ... kai philotimon) (Rep. 581b1–2). Although Plato uses the traditional Greek notion of philia (affection/friendship) instead of eros (love/desire) in this passage to designate these longings (Liddell and Scott 1996, 1934, 691), his comprehensive teaching on thumos in the Republic is meant to show how these desires are distinct from the affection for those like us (philia) and from the desire for what is different from us (eros) because it involves the simultaneous desire to assert one’s difference from others and to be recognized as like
The Bipolar Longings of Thumos

three others. I will also argue that Plato's treatment of thumos and the bipolar longings that constitute it resonates more with contemporary psychoanalytic and feminist challenges to the classical Freudian theory of desire than either the complementarity of Aristophanes's teaching on eros or the autoeroticism of Diotima's teaching on eros. Here I will be looking at Andrew Morrison's work, *Shame: The Underside of Narcissism* and Jessica Benjamin's work, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, both of which challenge central tenets of Freud's theory of desire as well as his theory of infantile narcissism and omnipotence. I will argue that Plato's treatment of the bipolar or bidirectional longings of thumos involves a notion of the subtle interplay, harmony, and attunement between two needy and vulnerable beings, neither of whom seeks either complete domination over, or submission to, the other. Like Benjamin, Plato's theory of the fundamentally social and intersubjective character of human being requires seeing assertion and recognition, the desire for distinction and the desire for connection, as equally primordial longings that are in productive tension with one another in human life (Benjamin 1988, 12-28).

I will also argue that like Benjamin and Morrison, Plato saw the potential for a breakdown of this productive tension or mutuality into the problematic desires for domination and submission (Benjamin) or omnipotence (Morrison). Indeed my revision of the traditional interpretation of Platonic thumos also requires a reorientation in our way of thinking about the *Republic* and of Plato's complex relationship both to democratic Athens and to his teacher, Socrates. Instead of reading the *Republic* as an unambiguous defense of Socrates and his particular brand of philosophy, and as a total rejection of Athenian democratic politics, I see the *Republic* as actually containing Plato's own diagnosis of what it was about Socratic philosophy and Plato's Athenian contemporaries that resulted in such a problematic relationship between them. In Book One of the *Republic* Plato actually shows that there is a problematic desire for omnipotence and domination lurking in the souls of both Socrates and Socrates's interlocutors who secretly or not so secretly (Thrasymachus) admire the tyrant's domination of everyone around him. For Plato, such fantasies of omnipotence and domination were central to the Athenian imperialistic democratic imaginary, which predisposed the Athenians both collectively and individually to admire covertly the tyrant and his freedom from all forms of restraint as the model for a false kind of democratic freedom (Tarnopolsky 2004, 482–3). I believe that the next nine books of the *Republic* represent Plato's attempt to replace this very problematic normative imaginary with one that instantiates more reasonable norms of engagement between needy and vulnerable beings.

The flipside of this critique of the Athenians consists of Plato's critique of his teacher, Socrates. In coming to a deeper understanding of the thumotic element of the soul, Plato realized that if he were to effect a change in his fellow citizens or future democrats, then he would also have to change the method of his and their teacher, Socrates. He would have to temper not just the wildness and harshness of the Athenian's opposition to Socratic philosophy, but also the wildness and harshness of Socrates's philosophic nature (Bloom 1968, xvii) as this is dramatized in the first book of the *Republic*. Accordingly, in the first part of this paper I turn to the problematic character of the Socratic elenchus as this comes to light in the first book of the *Republic*. Here I argue that the aggressiveness and desire for omnipotence so central to the tyrant's soul also lurks within the soul of Socrates. I also show that the diagnosis Plato makes of the failed transference between Socrates and Thrasymachus bears striking similarities to the failed intersubjectivity between the patient and therapist or the child and caretaker diagnosed by Morrison and Benjamin, respectively.

Indeed, it is precisely because of Plato's deepening understanding of the bipolar desires characteristic of thumos that he is able to portray a gentler, more musical, and more caring Socrates in Books Two through Ten of the *Republic*. It is this Platonic Socrates whose newfound qualities will then reverberate in the souls of Glaucon and Adeimantus through a much more positive process of transference. In the second section of the paper, I argue that the characters of Glaucon and Adeimantus dramatically illustrate the two different elements of thumos, which need to be harmonized properly and balanced in human life in order to avoid the problematic desires for either total domination of (Glaucon) or subservience to (Adeimantus) others. In the third section of the paper, I argue that Platonic thumos is distinct from both philia (fondness for those like ourselves) and eros (desire for what is different from ourselves) because it involves the simultaneous recognition of our similarity and differences from others. In the conclusion of the paper I show precisely why the new Platonic musical education of thumos involves maintaining a harmonious balance or tension between its two poles of harshness and gentleness, self-assertion and caring for others. The masculine, war-like and angry guardian, so often taken as the paradigm of Platonic thumos, can now be seen as an overdevelopment of just one of the two poles or musical modes that ought to comprise the delicate harmony of a well-balanced and finely tuned thumos.
The Limitations of the Socratic Elenchus in Republic One

In Book One of the Republic, Socrates’s arguments with Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus dramatically illustrate that the Socratic elenchus cannot suffice to persuade one’s interlocutors to change their views even when they have been shown to be contradictory or inconsistent by this logical method of refutation. The most it can do is to make the person perplexed, and they may, like Cephalus, laugh the refutation off and run away to make sacrifices (Rep. 331d1–8), or like Polemarchus simply switch their views in response to the twists and turns of an argument (Rep. 334b–335d8), or finally, like Thrasymachus, be shamed into a kind of gentleness and submissiveness, agreeing to continue the conversation with Socrates only to gratify both Socrates and the audience and to get the painful embarrassment over as quickly as possible (Rep. 350d4–354c3). If men could be compelled simply by logical necessities rather than by erotic ones, then they would begin to change their views once these had been shown to be contradictory. However these very erotic attachments and admired “others” serve as the psychic barriers to any simple acceptance of the new “other” that Socrates is trying to inculcate in their souls. The frustration displayed by Socrates’s interlocutors—and indeed by Socrates himself at the end of Book I (Rep. 354b1–2)—and the dissatisfaction that most readers feel at Socrates’s step-by-step refutation in this book, vividly illustrate that reason alone can open people up to the necessity of further investigation, but it cannot persuade them that it is better to do so if they are to lead a happier life.

Thus, at the end of Book One of the Republic, Socrates himself is suffering from a bad case of “psychic indigestion.” His elenchic method has allowed him to refute Thrasymachus’s arguments about justice, but in such a way that both he and Thrasymachus have come out losers: Thrasymachus refuses to be an active participant in the argument, agreeing to things that he no longer believes or cares about (Rep. 349a7) and is finally shamed into submissiveness (Rep. 350d2). For his part, Socrates complains that he has acted “just like the gluttons who grab at whatever is set before them to get a taste of it, before they have in proper measure enjoyed what went before” (Rep. 354b1–2). Strikingly, Socrates’s own description of his elenchic activity evokes the very picture of immoderation and pleonexia (or taking more than one’s share) that he had used to describe the tyrant in the Gorgias and that he will later use to describe the tyrant in book Nine of the Republic. What is so fascinating about this utterance is Socrates’s admission that even in the realm of the higher and more unlimited pleasures involved in searching for the truth about our bodily desires and appetites, there is a kind of immoderation that can plague this dialectical interaction, thus harming both the “patient” and the “doctor” or “therapist.”

I want to argue that Socrates’s gluttony and indigestion dramatically illustrate Plato’s own diagnosis of the limitations of his teacher’s method of comportment towards others. In Book One, Socrates never allows either himself or his interlocutors to come to a fully adequate understanding of what justice is before proceeding to investigate whether it is a virtue or a vice, and then whether it is profitable or unprofitable for human beings (Rep. 354b2–10). What has been said about justice in Book I might well be truthful, but it has come out in such a way that none of Socrates’s interlocutors have been persuaded by the account. Thrasymachus’s account of the goodness of injustice for human beings has been refuted by Socrates’s rebuttals, but this refutation has not penetrated to his soul: at a certain point in the argument he simply refuses to take in or digest the truths in such a way that they could become conscious first principles of his actions. Twice he tells Socrates that he is simply saying things that will please Socrates (Rep. 350e4, 351c4). The agreements and disagreements between Socrates and his interlocutors have meaning only in relation to the battle for preeminence in an argument rather than in relation to their way of life and their desire for happiness, and the frustration at this fact prompts Glauccon and Adeimantus to enter the discussion. At most, Socrates has succeeded in entertaining some of his interlocutors, embarrassing others, or simply perplexing still others, but he has certainly not shown them how to make his arguments a part of their way of life when they leave Socrates.

What Book One illustrates, in its reference to Socrates’s greedy or gluttonous indigestion, is that there is a problematic aspect to Socrates’s own ambition and love of victory in pursuing the truth (which will later be ascribed to the thumotic element of the soul) which makes him the mirror image of the tyrant whose ambition and love of victory are focused on securing the bodily goods of money, sex, food, and drink. What makes them so similar or like mirror images of one another is not the particular goods that they are so focused on, but the fact that these goods are attained in a kind of zero-sum game. The game here is one in which the winner will have proven his own ability to attain the goods that his soul so desires without any assistance or relationship of mutuality with his fellow players. But as Socrates himself discovers, the competitive or agonistic model of argumentation—where one outdoes ones interlocutors as though they were one’s enemies by refuting whatever they say—ends up harming oneself: “the result of the discussion, as far as I’m concerned, is that I know nothing, for when I don’t know what justice is, I’ll hardly know whether it is a kind of virtue or not, or whether a person who has it is happy or unhappy” (Rep. 354b9–c3).
omnipotence so central to the "other" that haunts the tyrant's soul seems to be alive and well in the soul of Socrates throughout Book One of the Republic.

Here one can begin to see that this struggle for domination and omnipotence bears a striking resemblance to the failures that can plague either the therapeutic setting, as diagnosed by Andrew Morrison, or mother-infant interactions, as diagnosed by Jessica Benjamin. Plato's metaphor of Socrates's gluttonous feast bears a striking resemblance to Freud's mistaken notion that the first relationship a child has to others around him has to be based on a tyrannical, hostile, and oral drive for bodily satisfaction (Benjamin 1988, 16). Moreover, Thrasymachus's ever-growing shame or embarrassment in front of Socrates is not treated as an opportunity to examine their common vulnerabilities and perplexities about justice and injustice but rather, as Thrasymachus blurs out, as an opportunity for Socrates to "feast himself boldly on the argument" (Rep. 352b1). As Morrison (1989, 6) points out, one of the greatest obstacles to achieving a positive result in the "psychotherapy of shame" is the tendency of the therapist to deny his own shame-sensitive and therefore needy character: "Painful counter transference feelings may thus be generated in the analyst/therapist, feelings that he or she, like the patient, would just as soon avoid, feelings that not infrequently lead to a collusion, preventing investigation of the shame experience." It is all too easy for the therapist who is aware, as we all are, of the painful character of shame, to try to avoid this painful emotion in his interactions with his patients by assuming the position of an omnipotent expert who is only diagnosing and curing his patients, but who never has to feel ashamed at his own failings or misunderstandings of this patient. The result of such therapeutic interactions for the patient is more likely to be one of a new dependency on this "other" that is even more stultifying than the one that the person went to therapy to contest, or alternately a kind of rage at one's impotence and inability to solve these things for oneself. Even more problematically, the therapist (like the tyrannical child) who succumbs to his own desire to dominate and obliterate the other "must constantly fear the emptiness and loss of connection that result from his fearful power.... The painful result of success in the battle for omnipotence is that to win is to win nothing: the result is negation, emptiness, isolation" (Benjamin 1988, 35).

In contrast to this problematic outcome, dramatized so vividly by Socrates's condemnation of his own gluttony at the end of Book One, the next nine books of the Republic are an attempt to show how a different kind of interaction between the therapist and patient or Socrates and his Athenian interlocutors can avoid this seemingly inescapable dialectic of omnipotence and impotence in human interactions. Thus, instead of a Socrates who is greedy for agonistic argumentation with his interlocutors, Plato introduces a Socrates who is greedy for images (Rep. 488a2), and he continually constructs and reconstructs these images in response to the concerns and psychic disruptions of his interlocutors. As Danielle Allen (2000b, 246) puts it, "throughout these texts Plato revises key Athenian concepts by relying on symbols, narratives, and acts of mimesis." Books Two through Nine of the Republic dramatize a new kind of conversational feast where the interlocutors avoid "psychic indigestion" because they take the time to construct collectively a beautiful image of the just life that is tailored to the needs and desires of all the participants to the discussion. In the next section, I will argue that the character of this new relationship of mutuality is first shown by Socrates's response to the kinds of psychic predicaments that plague Glaucan and Adeimantus.

The Fantasy of Omnipotence and the Characters of Glaucan and Adeimantus

At the beginning of Book Two, Glaucan and Adeimantus enter the discussion with their own cases of indigestion: as Glaucan tells Socrates,

I'm not yet satisfied by the argument [for or against the just life] on either side.... I'm perplexed, indeed, and my ears are deafened listening to Thrasymachus and countless others. But I've yet to hear anyone defend justice in the way I want, proving that it is better than injustice. I want to hear it praised by itself, and I think that I'm most likely to hear this from you (Rep. 358b3–d1).

Glaucan's psychic predicament is complex: he constructs an image of the unjust life that appears to be logically coherent to him but which he professes not to be able to believe fully, that is, he refuses to give assent to it as the model for his own actions. He gives a vivid description of the life of the unjust man that makes him "like a god among humans," and that includes his ability to confiscate property, have sex with anyone he wishes, and to kill anyone with impunity (Rep. 360b9–c1).10 That Glaucan does not model his own actions on this image is evidenced by Socrates's subsequent mention of his (Glaucan's) own moral way of life (Rep. 368b1). Glaucan holds it in abeyance not because it is incoherent or improbable, but because it is erotically unappealing to him: it is logically compelling but erotically unattractive and somehow shameful to him. He also constructs an image of the just life that he wishes were true and that he wants Socrates to defend, but that he also claims not to be able to believe because he finds no support for it in the stories he has done.
been told or in the world around him (Rep. 358b1–361d2). It is held in abeyance by Glauc­on as erotically attractive but improbable.

Thus, Glauc­on’s predicament is that of the agnostic: he has not assented to or rejected either view, but these pictures or fantasies haunt his life as possible first principles of his existence which he cannot fully assent to and thus bring to life. There is a wealth of fantasy in Glauc­on that consists of his desire for a type of justice that will make its possessor completely invulnerable to chance and to those around him so that he can live like a god among human beings. Like Polus in the Gorgias, he asks Socrates to defend the life of justice even when the just man is whipped, racked, bound, has his eyes burned out, is made to suffer every kind of evil, and finally is crucified (Rep. 361e4–362a2). Thus the fantasy of omnipotence is also alive and well in Glauc­on and part of what the more Platonic Socrates’s does over the course of their discussion is to acknowledge these desires and concerns even while slowly purging them from his soul so that he will no longer be haunted by these fantasies of omnipotence.

Adeimantus then enters the discussion concerned not so much for himself and his own actions, but for how the stories fathers tell affect their sons (Rep. 362e3), and how the stories poets tell affect the souls of young people (Rep. 365a6). Adeimantus’s direction of concern then is not so much for himself and his own omnipotence or grandiosity but for the well being of those around him. Plato’s two brothers, Glauc­on and Adeimantus, exemplify the tensions within Plato’s and indeed every person’s soul, which point simultaneously in two directions: i.e., both inwards to one’s own advantage and outwards towards those whom one loves and cares about. It is this two-directional or bipolar self that Plato investigates in the logic of thumos. Here individual development or maturation is accomplished by overcoming the desire either to remake the world completely in one’s own image or alternately to remake oneself completely in the image of the others from whom one desires recognition (Benjamin 1988, 67). For Plato, as we will see below, these two desires and their opposite directions of concern are both lodged within the thumotic element of the soul, characterized by its love of victory and its love of honor (Rep. 581b2–3). The key to dealing with these two desires and their opposite directions lies not in expunging either of them but rather in harmonizing them so that they reverberate within the soul in a healthy fashion. The human being is characterized by an ongoing and dynamic tension between these two poles of trying to make all “others” like the actual self (exemplified by the love of victory) or trying to make the actual self like an idealized “other” (exemplified by the love of honor), and shame is the painful but beneficial emotion that accompanies any awareness that we have not fully merged with either side (Morrison 1989, 64–6).

There are thus problematic desires for a kind of omnipotence in Glauc­on and Adeimantus, an omnipotence that would make the just person completely oblivious to the vicissitudes of the world and his neediness for other human beings. Here it is interesting to note that the very omnipotence of the just man is similar to the kind of omnipotence that Socrates displayed in his elenchic refutations in Book One. But if Glauc­on and Adeimantus are going to be weaned from these sorts of fantasies about the just and unjust life that now haunt their lives, they will need a “therapist” who is willing at least to acknowledge their deepest concerns. The Platonic Socrates, who now responds to their predicament, reveals a much gentler “therapist” who acknowledges theirs and even his own uncertainties. After Glauc­on and Adeimantus have completed their depictions of justice and injustice, Socrates tells Adeimantus:

the more I trust you, the more I’m at a loss as to what I should do. On the one hand, I can’t help out. For in my opinion I’m not capable of it; my proof is that when I thought I showed in what I said to Thrasymachus that justice is better than injustice, you didn’t accept it from me. On the other hand, I can’t not help out. For I’m afraid it might be impious to be here when justice is being spoken badly of and give up and not bring help while I am still breathing and able to make a sound. So the best thing is to succour her as I am able (Rep. 368b2–368c2).

The Socrates who came across as such an expert in the agonistic competition with each of his successive interlocutors in Book One is now transformed into a Socrates who is willing to admit his own uncertainties and incapacities as a therapist, but who is nonetheless willing to offer sympathetic assistance to his interlocutors. Glauc­on and Adeimantus’s courage in professing their own perplexities is now mirrored in a Socrates more willing to voice his own uncertainties about the things under discussion, and this then sets up a mutual interplay of vulnerable interlocutors who make gains in the conversation from their very reciprocal willingness to express these vulnerabilities and uncertainties.

Indeed the most important discussions and “longer roads” of the Republic are only undertaken after Socrates’s interlocutors have voiced their concerns and uncertainties about the path they have already taken, and after Socrates himself admits that he is presenting arguments even when he is “in doubt and seeking” for the truth about these matters (Rep. 450d2–3).11 The negativity of the Socratic elenchus—which consisted primarily of showing people that they are not who they thought
they were—is now itself made the basis of a more positive and constructive relationship between Socrates and his interlocutors. Their willingness to acknowledge their own uncertainties and perplexities now bind Socrates and his interlocutors together in a common search for the truth about the things that concern them, and their mutual gains are parasitic upon this reciprocal willingness to acknowledge their own vulnerabilities. What Socrates does in the next nine books of the Republic is to get Glaucon and Adeimantus to join him in the construction of a model of the just regime that will serve as the pattern or higher law which both the poets and the guardians of this city will have to try to imitate and approximate in their own tales and laws (Rep. 379a1–5, 458c3–5). Part of this construction involves a rational critique of their own desires for omnipotence and for a god-like existence among human beings that would prevent them from ever having to suffer anything at the hands of others. It is significant that the Socrates who now joins them in this enterprise is one who will also recognize his own needy character.

The Introduction of Thumos

The thumotic element of the soul is first mentioned in connection with Socrates and Glaucon's discussion of the kind of nature that will be necessary for their guardians to be courageous enough to defend the city bravely from its enemies (Rep. 375a10). Socrates begins the discussion of spiritedness or thumos with a playful analogy between noble dogs and the guardians of their city. Here Socrates tells Glaucon, "You know, of course, that by nature the disposition of noble dogs is to be as gentle as can be with their familiars and people they know and the opposite with those they don't know" (Rep. 375d3–6). Plato's initial treatment of thumos thus explicitly alludes to the simultaneity of seemingly contradictory predicates: gentleness to one's own and harshness to what is alien. However even within the love of one's own, there are two poles that can potentially pull in contradictory directions: self-love and care for others. As I mentioned earlier, human beings always have to negotiate the tension between these two poles, which are exemplified by our love of honor or recognition from those we admire and our love of victory or our desire to be distinct and different from others. Again Plato will later state that what is most distinctive about thumos is its love of victories and honors (Rep. 548c5–6).

But complete merger or complete autonomy are both problematic goals for human beings who wish to maintain a relationship of equality and mutual recognition with others (Benjamin, 1988, 47). Thus our mature and waking life ought to involve a recognition of the continuing gap between the experience of our actual selves and these two fantastical and problematic goals of complete independence or complete dependence. As Socrates later tells Glaucon: "Doesn't dreaming, whether one is asleep or awake, consist of believing a likeness of something to be not a likeness, but rather the thing itself to which it is like" (Rep. 476c5–8)? To be awake then consists of maintaining the awareness of just how one is simultaneously like and different from any other self (Benjamin 1988, 30). It is precisely this kind of awareness of our simultaneous likeness and difference, or independence from and dependence on others, that distinguishes a proper thumotic awareness from the kind of awareness involved in both philia (affection for those like ourselves) and eros (desire for those unlike ourselves).

On the contrary, to think of oneself as either completely autonomous or completely merged with an "other" is for Plato to be in a pathological dream state. It is precisely this kind of dream state that will later be used to describe the tyrant or worst type of human being in Book IX of the Republic. "He is awake, presumably, what we described a dreaming man to be" (Rep. 576b2–3). What Plato means by a tyrant is similar to what Morrison describes as the pathological state of "mania" where the "real, the fantasized ideal, and the self-image are experienced as the same" (Morrison, 1996, 184). The tyrant refuses to recognize any gap between himself and his fantasized ideal of omnipotence and he tries to live out this fantasy of omnipotence in his waking life and his actions towards others. In doing so, such a person ends up enslaving not only those around him, but also himself:

If [tyrants] have need of anything from anyone, they themselves cringe and dare to assume any posture, acting as though they belonged to him, but when they have succeeded they become quite alien.... Therefore, they live their whole life without ever being friends of anyone, always one man's master or another's slave. The tyrannic nature never has a taste of freedom or true friendship (Rep. 575e8–576a5).

In contrast, the person who is awake and healthy is always aware of the gap between his actual self and his ideals or idealized "others" (Rep. 476d1–3). Thus the Socrates who came across as the mirror image of the tyrant in Book One of the Republic is portrayed in a significantly different light in the remainder of the dialogue. One of the significant differences between the philosopher and the tyrant can now be seen to consist of Socrates's ability to remain constantly aware of the gap between himself and the ideals or Forms with which he so wants to merge. As Plato makes clear in Book Seven, although the philosopher is
characterized by his erotic love of the truth and his desire to merge with or live in the full light of the sun, he is ultimately incapable of a full ascent into the sun's light. Here he describes the journey out of the cave as "the release from the bonds and the turning around from the shadows to the phantoms and the light, the way up from the cave to the sun; and once there, the persisting inability to look at the animals and the plants and the sun's light, and looking instead at the divine appearances in water and at shadows of the things that are..." [my italics] (Rep. 532b8–c1). The aim of the philosopher and the directedness of his longings are to live a life that is free of deception and of reliance on the images and shadows of things that are, to the extent that this is possible for a human being, and not as it is actually possible for a god or omnipotent being. The philosopher-kings of Plato's ideal regime ought to rule in the city and make decisions for it, not because they are able to live in the full light of the sun but because their thumotic awareness of the gap between themselves and the Forms or ideals they love makes them least likely to deceive themselves about their own mortal, vulnerable, and non-omnipotent natures.

Seen in this light one can understand what Plato is trying to do in one of the most interesting and strange passages in the entire Republic. This is the Leontius passage, where Socrates describes Leontius's desire to look at corpses lying by the public executioner outside the North Wall of Athens (Rep. 439e6–440a5). Here Socrates argues that Leontius's disgust at his desire to look at the corpses indicates that anger (orgë) "sometimes makes war against the desires as one thing against something else" (Rep. 440a3–5), and that, as in many other cases, thumos is often an ally of reason or calculation (logos) against the desires (epithumia) (Rep. 440b3). As Danielle Allen (2000a, 136) points out, Leontius's revulsion at looking at the corpses is actually a very un-Athenian reaction to such a spectacle: "The public display of wrongdoers was the crucial concluding moment of a punishment, according to the standard Athenian view.... The [friends] of a wrongdoer might find the spectacle of punishment painful, but everyone else could take pleasure in the wrongdoer's suffering." What Plato tries to do with his example of Leontius is to break the problematic relationship between thumos and orgë that was expressed in the Athenian agonistic ethic: "The Athenian who looked at the body of the condemned without displeasure was accepting the city's conceptual norms that wove the ethics of anger, honor, reciprocity, and spectacle together in such a way as to legitimate the execution and display of the corpse" (Allen 2000a, 139). Instead of expressing the desire for omnipotence and its problematic shadows of anger and harshness towards one's own and others' vulnerabilities, Plato suggests that the thumotic element of the soul can be aligned with reason and expressed instead as a kind of shame at taking pleasure in the vulnerabilities of others. As Allen points out, Socrates's turning away from the road back to Athens at the beginning of the Republic and Leontius's turning away from the corpses represent an attempt to turn their backs "on the politics of punishment as it was practiced in Athens" (Allen 2000a, 139).

**Conclusion: The Musical Education of Thumos**

Contra Allen, however, I would argue that the Socrates who turns his back on the Athenian politics of punishment is a much more Platonic Socrates who now acknowledges and understands the thumotic elements within his own soul. For Plato, Socrates did not give adequate attention to the fact that his dialectical engagements with those around him often exhibited a kind of harshness. This arose in part because the thumotic element of Socrates's own soul was insufficiently relaxed and harmonized by a certain salutary gentleness. Thus the musical education that Socrates undertakes to describe with Glaucon in Book Three of the Republic is really meant to counter the harshness of both of their souls. As the Platonic Socrates tells Glaucon, the children of their ideal regime are to be educated in music before they are educated in gymnastic (Rep. 403c6), because "rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them" (Rep. 401d3–5). Such an education, according to Plato, was also overlooked by the imperialistic Athens out of which both Glaucon and Socrates grew. Instead the war-like training of gymnastic was stressed and was treated by the Athenians as a "means to force" (Rep. 410b8). As Socrates tells Glaucon in this section, "those who make use of unmixed gymnastic turn out more savage than they ought" and are "likely to become cruel and harsh" (Rep. 410d2–8).

Although Socrates's refutations of his interlocutors were meant as a way of making them more conscious and critical of their individual and collective "others," the harshness of Socrates's soul actually reverberated within these interlocutors, often making them more angry and more likely to try to hide from what Socrates was showing them. Instead, a more musical Socrates and a more musical education for his guardians is intended by Plato to instill the gentleness and harmony necessary for the kind of friendship and concord that would underpin a more salutary form of democratic politics between sovereign and mutually dependent equals. As Plato makes clear, thumos is not a simple unity but a compound of two traits—both savageness and gentleness—which need to be harmonized by education (Newell 2000, 113). As Jessica Benjamin argues (1988, 90), the problem of domination and submission is not, as it was...
for Freud, natural and inevitable but rather one of social arrangements that "we can change or direct." Similarly for Plato, if the philosopher were to present himself in a less alienating and combative form and thus to acknowledge some of the many's concerns with respect to their vulnerability and mortality, then they might in turn be more gentle towards him, and perhaps even more accepting of their own limitations and mortality. They might like Leontius turn their backs on the whole Athenian spectacle of aggression and domination exhibited in their imperialistic politics. Interestingly enough, Plato will later make the suggestion that it is not, contra Aristotle, the few gentlemen who can be made gentle and open to philosophy but rather the many who are actually capable of this once the philosopher makes himself and his way of life more comprehensible to them:

[The many] will no doubt have another sort of opinion, if instead of indulging yourself in quarreling with them, you soothe them and do away with the slander against the love of learning by pointing out whom you mean by the philosophers, and by distinguishing, as was just done, their nature and the character of their practice so that the many won't believe you mean those whom they suppose to be philosophers... Or do you suppose anyone of an ungrudging and gentle character is harsh with the man who is not harsh or bears grudges against the man who bears none? I shall anticipate you and say that I believe that so hard a nature is in a few but not the multitude (Rep. 499d1–39).

Socrates's agonistic style of refutation, as this was exhibited in Book I of the Republic and in many earlier Socratic dialogues, bears at least a suspicious resemblance to the very philosophers Plato accuses of making the many so harshly disposed to philosophy, i.e., "those men from outside who don't belong and have burst in like drunken revelers, abusing one another and indulging a taste for quarreling" (Rep. 500b2–5). That Socrates's own form of refutation was directed primarily towards the benefits that would come from being shown that we are not who we thought we were, is missed by the many who have too much experience of those sophists and rhetors who compete for the pleasures of victory and power in imperialistic democratic Athens. This was combined with the fact that in Athens children were allowed to get a taste of arguments as a kind of play used simply to contradict and refute others, "like puppies enjoying pulling and tearing with argument at those who happen to be near" (Rep. 539b5–6). Both of these things caused the imperialistic Athenians to inculcate a model of philosophic debate where dominating and defeating one's opponents through clever and tricky argumentation became the goal of any dialectical interaction.

In contrast, Plato's philosophic guardians are not to imitate men engaged in this kind of "madness" but rather to "imitate the man who's willing to discuss and consider the truth rather than the one who plays and contradicts for the sake of the game. And he himself will be more sensible and will make the practice of discussion more honorable instead of more dishonorable" (Rep. 539c5–8). Plato felt that the particular philosophic "other" that the Athenians admired predisposed them to a kind of philosophical combat where the goal was to show up one's opponents and thus gain honor from the fact of one's victory, rather than from the fact that one was actually showing Athens something of common importance to all of them. Instead the kind of philosophic "other" that Plato attempts to inculcate in the souls of his guardians is one that will be a model of mutual interplay and reciprocity, rather than a combat for the sake of victory. Accordingly, Socrates tells Glaucan to allow a musical mode into their city that reflects this kind of mutual interplay and reciprocity:

And, again, leave another mode for a man who performs a peaceful deed, one that is not violent but voluntary, either persuading someone of something and making a request—whether a god by prayer or a human being by instruction and exhortation—or, on the contrary, holding himself in check for someone else who makes a request or instructs him or persuades him to change, and as a result acting intelligently, not behaving arrogantly, but in all these things acting moderately and in measure and being content with the consequences (Rep. 399a2–399c4).

In this passage, Plato attempts to attune his own guardians to a model of voluntary and reciprocal discussion that is quite different from the violent and agonistic battle of argumentation to which Athenian souls were so attuned. It is, not surprisingly, the musical mode that reflects just the kind of discussion that is exemplified by the conversation between Socrates, Glaucan, and Adeimantus in Books Two through Ten of the Republic.

I hope to have shown in this paper just how this image or paradigm of Platonic thumos is quite different from the aggressive and angry warrior that is so often associated with Platonic thumos and that is actually reflected in Freud's notion of the aggression characteristic of Thanatos or the death drive (Freud 1961, 68–9). It is my hope that this new image of thumos will continue to reverberate, not just through the paradigms of child/parent or patient/therapist interactions now being
advocated by feminist and psychoanalytic critics of Freud like Jessica Benjamin and Andrew Morrison, but also through all of our interactions with others both inside and outside the polity.

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Works Cited


Notes

1. Although thumos is often translated as spiritedness or, more problematically, as anger, I use the original Greek term throughout this paper in order to problematize these translations of Platonic thumos.

2. Barbara Koziak’s book, Retrieving Political Emotion: Thumos, Aristotle, and Gender is one of the first books that develops a feminist theory of political emotion using the classical conception of thumos, however, her book focuses primarily on Aristotle and sees Plato’s treatment of thumos as limited to anger and spiritedness. This paper is an attempt to continue her project and to correct some of the limitations of her views of Platonic thumos.

3. As Jessica Benjamin (1988, 26) puts it, "the reciprocal relationship between self and other can be compared with the optical illusion in which the figure and ground are constantly changing their relation even as their outlines remain clearly distinct—as in Escher’s birds, which appear to fly in both directions. What makes his drawings visually difficult is a parallel to what makes the idea of self-other reciprocity conceptually difficult: the drawing asks us to look two ways simultaneously, quite in opposition to our usual sequential orientation.” For a fuller treatment of the ways in which thumos involves looking in two directions at once see Christina Tarnopolsky, "Power’s Passionate Pathologies."

4. For the ways in which Plato’s tripartite soul and notion of thumos differ markedly from the doctrine of the unity of the virtues held by Socrates, see John Cooper, "Socrates and Plato in Plato’s Gorgias" and "Plato on Human Motivation” in Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory.

5. There is general agreement among Plato scholars that the first book of the Republic was written earlier than the remaining nine books and that it is strikingly similar to Plato’s earlier Socratic or elenchic dialogues. See Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates contra Socrates in Plato” in Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). I follow Vlastos in believing that this indicates Plato’s own desire to distinguish the historical Socrates (dramatized in Book One) from the Platonic Socrates (dramatized in Books Two through Ten).
6. As Benjamin (1988, 28) would put it, Thrasymachus’s submissiveness is the counterpart to the overly aggressive and domineering character of Socrates’s comportment towards him throughout Book One.

7. At Rep. 458d5–7, Glacon tells Socrates that the necessities they are speaking of (concerning the upbringing of men and women guardians) are not geometrical ones but erotic ones.


9. Socrates describes the soul of the tyrant as a gourmand at Rep. 579b5.

10. It is a description that will later be described, in Book Nine, as the lawless dream of a tyrant (Rep. 571d1–4), which the tyrant then carries out in his waking life (Rep. 574e3).

11. As Danielle Allen points out (2000, 401n30), "the Republic is full of ‘road’ metaphors and starts and ends with them (Rep. 328e, 614c).” Jessica Benjamin (1988, 126–9) suggests that spatial metaphors involving transitional or in-between spaces as well as dwelling places serve as much better symbols for the intersubjective character of human desire than the phallic of Freud. The Republic is full not just of the transitional spaces of roads (between Athens and the Piraeus or in and out of caves), but also new and extraordinary places and dwellings, the likes of which Glaucon and Adeimantus have never seen before (Rep. 515a).

12. See Benjamin 1988, 51–84, for a full discussion of how the master/slave dialectic, which involves a breakdown of the essential tension between being with and being independent from an other, is inevitable for both Freud and Hegel.

13. For the argument that it was Socrates’s inability to distinguish his philosophy from the eristic style of argumentation taught by the sophists and rhetors that actually lead to his trial and death, and not the suspected quarrel between philosophy and the polis, see Plato, Gorg. 486a4–b4 and Dustin Gish, "Rivals in Persuasion: Gorgianic Sophistic Versus Socratic Rhetoric," 48.