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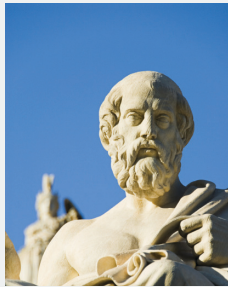
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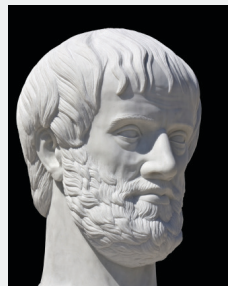
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# The Significance of a Bipartite/ Tripartite Division of the Psyche

Tiffany Harrington<sup>1</sup> and Monte R. Johnson



Plato



Aristotle

## ABSTRACT

Both Plato and Aristotle divide the soul into a distinct number of parts; Plato opts for a tripartite division, while Aristotle opts for a bipartite division. In most of his works, Plato defends a tripartite division of the soul, for example, in the Republic, Phaedrus, Apology, etc. dividing it into the appetitive, spirited and rational parts of the soul; however, in certain works, such as The Timaeus, a bipartite division is discussed, although he never abandons the tripartite division. Plato's division of the soul is mainly developed in the context of discussions of politics and corresponds to his ideal state, in which there are three kinds of citizens. Aristotle, on the other hand, defends a bipartite division of the soul, dividing it into the rational and the irrational. The motive for dividing the soul into a bipartite or tripartite division is partly political and to explain human behavior, motivations or character types. I will argue that both Plato and Aristotle's division of the soul agree that there are at least two, parts of the soul, namely, the rational and irrational; however, Aristotle's division is superior because it is a simpler, more elegant version of Plato's.

## THE ARGUMENT FOR PLATO'S TRIPARTE DIVISION:

The argument for Plato's tripartite division of the soul is based on his notion of the ideal city in which he assumes that there are three kinds of citizens: guardians, auxiliary forces and artisans. Plato believes that there is an isomorphic relation between the city in the soul in that they both have three parts which correspond to each other. Thus, Plato develops an analogy between the soul and a city. According to Plato, the three parts of the soul are the rational, spirited and appetitive parts. The rational part corresponds to the guardians in that

it performs the executive function in a soul just as it does in a city. The spirited part corresponds to the military or auxiliary forces because it is expected to display the virtue of courage. The appetitive part corresponds to the bankers or artisans who are only concerned with pleasure. Plato presents another analogy to illustrate the relationship between the parts of the soul in The Phaedrus in which a charioteer is attempting to drive two horses. One horse is of pure breed and the other is of ignoble breed. The horse of pure breed corresponds to the spirited element since it obeys reason and does not need to be whipped. The other horse corresponds to the appetitive element since it requires the whip and spur in order to obey reason. This analogy illustrates Plato's conception of the dynamic between the distinct parts of the soul.

According to Plato, the appetitive part of the soul is analogous to a many-headed beast, thus, can be sub-divided further, although he does not specify how many parts. Lorenz, however, argues that the appetitive part of the soul cannot be divided further on the grounds that the appetite does not possess instrumental desire. Lorenz believes that Plato integrates reason and appetite together, for example, in the case of someone who reasons against something that is pleasurable. However, Kamtekar argues that Lorenz is mistaken in this interpretation of Plato. Plato did not intend to integrate reason and appetitive desire together, rather, Plato argued that reason acted separately from the appetites. In the case of an individual who decides against something pleasurable, that individual is utilizing reason and deciding against the choice which favored the appetite. Reason does not act as a further subdivision of the appetite in Plato's scheme. Furthermore, simply because Plato describes the appetitive part as many-headed beast does not have to imply that he believed it was further divisible.

### CRITICISM OF PLATO'S TRIPARTITE DIVISION:

It can be argued that Plato did not draw the distinction clearly between emotions and appetitive drives with his tripartite psychology. By emphasizing that reason directs or is in charge of the spirited and appetitive parts, except one is conformable to reason and the other is not, he was suggesting that the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul were both irrational, thus, failing to draw the distinction clearly. Aristotle clearly distinguished the rational and irrational parts of the soul with his bipartite psychology. In Plato's tripartite division of the soul, emotions, such as anger, fear etc., represent the spirited part of the soul or the auxiliary forces in the city. Since the spirited part of the soul and the appetitive parts are suggested to be in the same category, it is not clear that emotions are separate from bodily drives.

Within Plato's Academy, there was debate as to whether emotion was a cognitive state or not. Aristotle, clearly recognizes that anger is a mental state, rather than a bodily drive by recognizing that anger possesses objects and grounds. An individual can feel a certain emotion towards someone, an object, and can identify on what grounds, the reason or justification for why he or she feels this emotion. Furthermore, one does not relieve or satisfy an emotion in the same way that one does for a bodily desire. Anger, for example, is a mental state that can be relieved by reasoned argument, while, hunger is a bodily desire that can only be satisfied by nourishment.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato argues in favor of a bipartite version of tripartition. According to Plato, "Having taken the immortal origin of the soul, they proceeded next to encase it within a round mortal body [the head], and to give it the entire body as its vehicle. And within the body they built another kind of soul as well, the mortal kind, which contains within it those dreadful but necessary disturbances" Hence, the spirited and appetitive parts are treated as both being mortal, while the rational part is immortal. Thus, a bipartite version of tripartition is presented. Furthermore, according to Plato, within the mortal soul is contained "pleasure, first of all, evil's most powerful lure; then, pains, that make us run away from what is good; besides these, boldness also and fear, foolish counselors both; then also the spirit of anger hard to assuage, and expectation easily led astray. These they fused with unreasoning sense perception and all-venturing lust, and so, as was necessary, they constructed the mortal type of soul." Thus, in the *Timaeus*, when Plato explains which part of the soul is responsible for sensation, he first connects it to the rational part and then to the appetitive part. Hence, both Plato and Aristotle believe that the irrational part of the soul is capable of obeying reason.

### ARISTOTLE'S BIPARTITE DIVISION OF SOUL:

Aristotle critiqued Plato's bipartite version of tripartition due to the issues that are presented in the *Timaeus*. For these reasons, Fortenbaugh argues that Aristotle's bipartite division of the soul is theoretically superior to Plato's tripartite division. Aristotle defends a bipartite division of the soul, dividing the soul rational and irrational parts. According to Aristotle, "the irrational element also appears to be twofold. For the vegetative element in no way shares in a rational principle, but the appetitive and in general the desiring element in a sense shares in it, in so far as it listens to and obeys it." Therefore, Aristotle claims that although the soul is divided into rational and irrational parts, the irrational part can be divided further. There is a part of the irrational part that obeys reason, namely the appetitive or desiring element as opposed to the vegetative element, which does not obey reason. Thus, there are further subdivisions within the rational and irrational parts implying that although Aristotle claims that his division is bipartite, essentially it is not. Aristotle's division cannot be bipartite because his irrational part can be divided further. Furthermore, the Academics also developed a bipartite division of the soul, which is committed to the notion of separable psychic parts or faculties, such as in the *Timaeus*. Thus, there are two distinct versions of a bipartite division of the psyche: there is the Academic version, and the version that Aristotle himself developed. It can be argued that Aristotle himself critiqued both his version of a bipartite psychology, and the Academic version for failing to distinguish between the different faculties of the soul. Thus, if Aristotle himself critiqued his own bipartite division of the soul and the Academic version of the bipartite division, it raises questions as to its accuracy. It may have been possible that Aristotle meant to divide the soul into three or more parts, since he apparently explicitly critiqued his own bipartite division, according to several scholars.

According to other scholars, such as Fortenbaugh, Aristotle's critique was not a self-criticism, rather, it was a critique of the Academic version of bipartition. Aristotle, although he ultimately utilizes a bipartite division, claims that "It already appeared, therefore, that such a power of the soul causes motion and it is what is called the appetitive [power]. If those who divide the soul [into parts], divide it according to powers, then they will find a great many parts, namely, the

nutritive, the sensitive, the understanding, the cogitative and the desiderative. For those are distinct from one another and more so than are the desiderative and likewise the irascible.” Hence, Aristotle claims that there may be infinite parts of the soul. Therefore, although Aristotle divides the soul into two parts, he does recognize that those parts can be further sub-divided, although this still counts as a bipartite division.

Like Plato, Aristotle’s motivation may have also been political. Aristotle claims that “At all events we may firstly observe in living creatures both a despotic and a constitutional rule; for the soul rules the body with a despotic rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule.” Thus, the relationship between the parts of the soul is analogous to the political relationship between master and slave. According to Aristotle, “surely the first human parts to acquire their end are the bodily ones, and later on the parts of the soul, and somehow the end of the better part always comes later than its coming to be. Surely the soul is posterior to the body, and intelligence is the final stage of the soul.” Hence, Aristotle, clearly believed that reason was superior to the appetites. Aristotle agreed with Plato that reason develops with age in a human being. Aristotle does not explicitly claim however that there are only two parts of the soul or how many parts there are in this passage.

### JUSTIFICATION FOR SPIRITED ELEMENT OF THE SOUL:

The spirited element of the soul is, arguably, identical to the rational element of the soul, thus, Plato’s division of the soul can be interpreted to be bipartite. It can be argued that there is no psychological basis for the spirited element, rather, it was simply added because Plato needed to account for the auxiliary forces in his ideal city. However, Plato holds that “even in small children, one can see that they are full of spirit right from birth, while as far as rational calculation is concerned, some never seem to get a share of it, while the majority do so quite late”. Thus, Plato utilizes empirical evidence to illustrate the distinct functions of the spirited and rational elements of the soul. One can witness in real life that small children possess the spirited element, but not the rational, and that some never acquire the rational element or acquire it late. Small children possess courage, yet lack the ability to rationally discern whether an action is correct or determine the consequences it might have, which is why they require supervision by adults or wiser individuals. Hence, both the rational and spirited elements both serve distinct functions in the soul. The purpose of the rational element is to utilize reason and logic in order for the soul to discover what is true and false. On the other hand, Plato posited the spirited element of the soul mainly to account for emotions, such as anger, fear, courage, etc. Thus, both elements are distinct and necessary in an individual. Furthermore, it is possible to possess the spirited element and not possess the rational element.

Although Plato mainly utilizes a tripartite division, he sometimes utilizes a bipartite division. According to Plato’s Principle of Opposites, the soul is divided into two parts. According to Plato, “It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. So if we ever find this happening in the soul, we’ll know that we aren’t dealing with one thing but many.” Plato utilizes the Principle of Opposites in order to explain how the distinct parts of the soul interact with each other. For example, one part of the soul may desire something, while another part may be averse to it. This principle does not take into account the third part of the soul, the spirited element, and mainly focuses on the appetitive and rational parts. Hence, it is not clear if Plato is insinuating that the spirited element should be integrated with the rational element or the appetitive element. In the Republic, Plato clearly holds that the spirited element is integrated with the appetitive element, since both are to be controlled by reason. For example, a person may desire to have a drink of water, but doesn’t because it is bad for him or her. In this case, the appetitive part and the rational part are in conflict with each other. This would be an example of the appetites and reason being in conflict. Thus, sometimes the parts of the soul may be in conflict with each other. Initially, Plato posits a bipartite division, but later adds the spirited part of the soul. This may indicate that, essentially, his division is also bipartite and the spirited part was simply an addition, but is not necessary to Plato’s division.

One of the main criticisms that I have of both Plato and Aristotle is in regards to the spirited element or the equivalent of the spirited element. Plato nor Aristotle realize that the guardians of the city may be acting not out of spirit or courage, but rather out of a sense of duty. Some guardians may feel that it is their duty to protect their country; however, they may not necessarily enjoy risking their lives. Hence, the spirited part or Aristotle’s equivalent of it may actually be entirely rational, rather than irrational. Thus, the spirited part of the soul is not necessarily justified.

**CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, the ultimate purpose in dividing the soul into parts for both Plato and Aristotle was political and to explain human behavior. Plato's tripartite division originated from the isomorphic relation between the soul and the city. Both Plato and Aristotle believe that there is some sort of spirited part of the soul and that it is irrational. Furthermore, Aristotle believed that the soul was further divisible; however, he did not specify how many parts it was divisible into. Thus, this raises questions as to its accuracy. Plato at least gave a definite number or parts. Furthermore, Aristotle critiqued the Academic version of bipartition which was very similar to his own. Thus, Aristotle posited a bipartite version that was essentially a tripartite division, with further parts that are not specified. Hence, Aristotle's division is a more accurate representation of the soul; however, both divisions misinterpret the role of the spirited part or of its equivalent.

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## Tiffany Harrington

Tiffany is a 3rd year, senior Philosophy major with a minor in Cognitive Science from Warren College. After graduating from UCSD this year, she plans to apply to graduate school in Philosophy or attend law school. In her spare time, she serves as the Vice President of the Philosophy Club and is in charge of organizing events and services in order to foster a sense of community among students and promote interest in research and other advanced areas of study.




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### Q: What motivated you to get involved in the field of research?

A : I began doing research in ancient philosophy during my sophomore year after taking a class devoted to the study of Aristotle. After taking this class, I was left with so many unanswered questions. As I became increasingly interested in the study of Aristotle, I realized that not much work had been done in this area and there was still much more to learn and discover. Also, I was fascinated that it was even possible to conduct research in a broad discipline, such as Philosophy.

### Q: What do you enjoy about doing research?

A : What I enjoy most is coming to a new conclusion after spending many hours studying all kinds of relevant sources. I also like how research is flexible. It is possible to analyze questions and find sources in any field, even in Philosophy.

### Q: What is your typical day like?

A : My typical day consists of going to classes, doing homework, managing events for the Philosophy Club and playing with my dog, Wallie.

### Q: How do you define research?

A : Research, from an individual's perspective, is the investigation or analysis of numerous, relevant sources in order to answer a question that you have.

### Q: What is a book/podcast/show that you would recommend?

A : I recommend the book, "*The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume I: The Revised Oxford Translation*," edited by Jonathan Barnes.

### Q: How does the theme of "exponential growth" relate to you?

A : The theme of "Exponential Growth" resonates with me in many ways. I feel that I have grown exponentially throughout my time at UCSD, especially through my experience researching ancient philosophy. All I have learned in this experience, I can now apply to my daily life.

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