

Against Bare Urges and Good-Independent Desires: Appetites in *Republic IV*

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1. Bare Urges?

Thirst itself will never be an appetite for anything other than what it is for by nature, drink. (*Republic IV* 437e4-5)¹

It is widely held that with this line Plato commits himself to the view that an important class of human desires, our appetites (*epithumiai*) for food, drink, sex and the like, have a peculiar property: they are always directed toward totally unqualified objects like drink, and never toward qualified objects like cold drink, sweet drink, much drink, or good drink. They are “bare cravings,” “blind drives,” or “simple desires.”² As these descriptions suggest, our appetites are supposed to be limited to such generic objects because they belong to a part of the soul that is too cognitively simple to grasp the nuances that distinguish, say, cold beer from hot milk. Furthermore, it is this extreme simplicity or blindness that Plato has in mind when he calls this part of the soul and its desires ‘non-rational.’

Is this the right reading? We should hope not, for it makes a mess of Plato’s psychology.

First, as is widely noted, Plato in many other places refers to appetites for complex things like looking at corpses (439e) or having sex with one’s mother (571d). Some thus take Plato here to be relying on a simplified conception of appetite inconsistent with later passages, perhaps because the simplified conception helps him in his present purpose: distinguishing the appetitive from the rational part of the soul.³ But the inconsistency is starker than that: even the lines directly preceding the claim about thirst-itself acknowledge the existence of complex appetites:

If some heat is present in addition to thirst, it would further render the appetite one for cold drink, or if some coldness [is present, it would render it an appetite] for hot drink; and if on account of the presence of muchness the thirst were great, it would render the appetite an appetite for much drink.... (437d10-e3)

Socrates does not say that the desire for cold drink is something other than an appetite, nor a combination of two appetites, nor an appetite influenced by reason; he simply says that heat turns the appetite for drink “drink itself” (439a6) into the appetite for cold drink. Some appetites are simple, but others are complex.

Second, this is surely the right thing for him to say. The appetite for unqualified drink is by no means a typical appetite: thirst is usually for cool drink, or sweet drink, or hoppy drink, and so on. It is a very odd notion of appetite that would exclude these cases.

¹ Translations throughout are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Cornford 1941: 130 (“bare craving”), Penner 1990: 52, 59 (“blind desires,” “blind drives”), Anagnostopoulos 2006: 173 (“simple desires”). Annas (1981: 129) agrees that this is the implication of the argument (“simple cravings”), but takes this to conflict with Plato’s considered treatment of the appetitive part.

³ See for example Annas (1981: 129-30).

In fact, we should go further. The bare urge conception of the appetitive part not only fits poorly with Plato's characterization of appetites elsewhere and with our own understanding of appetites, but is nonsense. Why should a part of the soul so limited as to be unable to make distinctions between hot and cold have the power to make distinctions between drink and non-drink, and thereby to feel thirst rather than general emptiness? Defenders of the bare urge view in fact accept that it renders the appetitive part motivationally helpless (see Penner 1990: 58-61, and especially Anagnostopoulos 2006): their Plato has to hold that this part can only move us with help from reason. But this is a very steep price to pay. What about the clear implication of the political analogy that each part is independent from the others and can motivate us on its own? And how are we to explain the motivationally effective appetites of dogs and babies, who lack reason altogether?

I want to show that we can set these worries aside, for the text does not support the bare urge view at all. In fact, the claim about thirst-itself says nothing that is meant to distinguish appetites from other kinds of desire, nor the appetitive part of the soul from other parts. Plato wanted to show that there can be unqualified desires for unqualified objects, but he could just as well have taken *rational* desires as his examples.

The key to the correct interpretation is to determine precisely what role the claim about thirst plays in the text. Clearly it is meant as an important premise in the argument that distinguishes the rational and appetitive parts of the soul – henceforth the Division argument.⁴ Socrates' overall aim in the Division argument is to show that the psychological source of appetites is distinct from the psychological source of rational motivation; his strategy is to present a case in which someone has two motivations, one a paradigmatic appetite and one arising from reflection, which are opposed in a way that allegedly precludes them from belonging to a single non-complex subject. We can formalize the argument more or less uncontroversially as follows:

P1) Principle of Opposites: The same thing cannot do or undergo opposites in the same respect and in relation to the same thing at the same time. (436b9-10)

P2) Desiring and rejecting are opposites. (437b1-5)⁵

P3) Appetites (ἐπιθυμῖαι) like hunger and thirst, and also wishing and willing (τὸ ἐθέλειν, τὸ βούλεσθαι) are species of desire, and their opposites species of rejection. (437b6-9)⁶

⁴ Socrates goes on to distinguish a third element, the spirited part, but my concern in this paper is only with the first stage of the soul-division, between reason and appetite.

⁵ This is my paraphrase: Plato gives examples of various states which we would classify as desires and aversions, but offers no general term – presumably because he does not have one. (It is Aristotle who coins ὄρεξις as a general word for desire; Plato sometimes uses ἐπιθυμία, as we will see below, but in the present context he needs to reserve the term for a particular species of desire, appetite (see next premise).)

⁶ This is needed to establish that an appetite for x is genuinely opposite to a not-wishing for x: one is a want, the other a rejection. Note that the Greek phrases translated as 'not wishing' and 'not having an appetite' (τὸ ἀβουλεῖν καὶ μὴ ἐθέλειν μηδ' ἐπιθυμεῖν, 437c7) connote aversions rather than mere absence of desire; I sometimes translate them as 'wishing not [to φ]' or 'being appetitively averse [to φ-ing].'

P4) Thirst-itself is an appetite for nothing other than drink-itself – not for hot cold, much, little, or wholesome (γρηστοῦ) drink – and *mutatis mutandis* for the other appetites. (437d7-e6)

P5) Therefore the soul of the thirsting person, insofar as it thirsts, wants nothing other than to drink. (439a9-b1)

P6) Therefore, by P1, if anything ever holds that soul back from drinking, it must be something in it other than the thirsting thing. (439b3-6)

P7) It does sometimes happen that someone is thirsty but wishes not to drink (and therefore, by P3, has opposite attitudes toward drinking). (439c3-4)

Conclusion: Therefore, by P6 and P7, there are (at least) two distinct elements in the soul: the one that orders people to drink in such cases – the non-rational and appetitive part; and the one that hinders them from drinking – the rational part. (439c7-d8)

The crucial premises for the bare urge view are P4 and P5. To see if these do indeed support that view we need to understand what Plato means by them, and to do this we need to understand what role they play in the argument: why does Socrates need to establish that thirst-itself is not for any particular kind of drink? The answer to this will depend in turn on a fleshing out of P6 and P7: we need to know what kind of conflict Plato here envisages, for this will tell us why he wants one of the conflicting motivations to be an unqualified desire, thirst-itself.

It is widely agreed that the case of conflict Plato has in mind is one in which a thirsty person is averse to drink on the grounds that it is bad for her (perhaps, commentators conjecture, because she has dropsy and has been told that drinking will endanger her health). More specifically, her thought must be that drinking in the circumstances is “unwholesome.” This is clear from a passage that appears between P4 and P5:

Therefore let no one catch us off our guard and disturb us by claiming that no one has an appetite for drink but for wholesome (γρηστοῦ) drink, nor for food but for wholesome food. For indeed all people have appetites for good things. If then thirst is an appetite, it would be for wholesome stuff, whether drink or whatever it is an appetite for, and likewise with the other appetites. (438a1-5)

I discuss this passage in detail in section 2; my aim at present is to show how it explains the point of P4-5. In order for his conclusion to go through Socrates needs a case in which the Principle of Opposites applies: a case in which someone actually has conflicting conative attitudes, a desire and an aversion, toward the same thing. In P7 he envisions a case in which someone is thirsty (wants drink), but wishes not to drink (is averse to drink).⁷ In the passage just quoted, he anticipates an objection to his use of that case. How are we to understand the objection? The lines are compressed, but the emphasis on wholesomeness suggests that the objector has in mind the following:

Why is the person averse to drink? Because she thinks it unwholesome? Ah, but if she thinks drink unwholesome, she cannot actually have an appetite for it: thirst is the desire for *wholesome* drink. So you really haven't given me a case of

⁷ For not-wishing as aversion, see my note to P3.

conflicting attitudes at all – this person has an aversion to drink, but *no* desire for it – and thus haven't given me any reason to concede a division in the soul.

The point of P4-5 is to forestall the objection. There is a kind of appetite which is for drink, but not specifically for wholesome drink. Therefore it is possible for someone averse to drink *qua* unwholesome still to desire it *qua* drink – that is, to have an appetite for it.⁸ In other words, the main contribution P4-5 make to the argument is simply:

P4-5* Thirst can be for drink without being specifically for *wholesome* drink.

To establish this point, it is true, Socrates made a broader claim: there is a kind of thirst, thirst-itself, which is for drink without qualification, rather than for drink of any specific kind. Bare-urgeists take the existence of thirst-itself to reveal a distinctive feature of appetitive desire, even the definitive one, namely its blindness or simplicity. What I want to show is that this is not Plato's point at all. First, the existence of unqualified appetites is incidental rather than essential to his argument: he uses an example involving an unqualified appetite because that makes his case particularly clear, rather than because such appetites are typical, let alone because they are the only kind of appetites. Second, unqualified appetites are not “blind” in the sense of cognitively impoverished. Third, there is nothing distinctively appetitive about unqualified desires: Plato could just as well have used a case of an unqualified rational desire (desire belonging to the rational part of the soul).

As to the first point, we have already seen that Plato's main aim in P4-5 is to establish P4-5*: that one can have an appetite for drink without thereby having an appetite for wholesome drink. To establish this, he made the claim that insofar as one has an appetite for drink, one's appetite is only for drink, rather than for drink that is wholesome, hot, cold, or qualified in any other way. Bare-urgeists take his point to be that all appetites are like this, but this cannot be his view: as we saw above, in the course of arguing for P4 he mentions qualified appetites – appetites for qualified objects, like thirst for a cool drink. He does, however, claim that some appetites are unqualified: thirst-itself, hunger-itself, and so on. Why does he choose this kind of appetite to focus on in P6 and P7? Presumably for clarity's sake: to demonstrate that someone can desire *x* despite its having a particular quality to which she is averse, it is simplest to show that she can have a totally unqualified desire, one for which any instance of *x* will do completely regardless of its qualities.

Now to my second point: there is no reason to take the existence of unqualified appetites to reveal any cognitive limitation of the appetitive part of the soul.

⁸ One might worry that in this case the Principle of Opposites no longer applies, since even if the desire and aversion have the same object (rather than appetite wanting drink and reason being averse to unwholesome drink), they must have it in different respects (appetite wants drink *qua* drink while reason rejects it *qua* unwholesome). But all of Plato's examples of conflict seem vulnerable to this objection: Leontius wants to look at corpses insofar as doing so is pleasant, but is averse to looking at them insofar as doing so is shameful; Odysseus wants to kill the maidservants insofar as doing so is gratifying to his anger, but is averse to killing them insofar as it would be inopportune. The charitable conclusion is that this is simply not the sort of thing he has in mind with the “same respect” (κατὰ τὰυτόν) clause in the Principle at 436b, and this is confirmed by the fact that when he repeats the Principle later that phrase is replaced by “with the same [part, aspect] of itself” (τῷ αὐτῷ ἑαυτοῦ). A desire for *x* and an aversion to *x* (drinking, killing maids, etc.) are genuine opposites, even if they are held on different grounds.

What Plato claims in P4-5 is that there is such a thing as thirst-itself, which is for drink without being for any particular kind of drink. We want to know how is he conceiving of this desire: as a blind craving, or in some other way? We should begin with Socrates' own elaboration of the idea of thirst-itself:

For all things that are such as to be *of* something [i.e. relatives], those that have some quality (τὰ ποιῶ) are of something with a quality, while those that are just themselves (τὰ αὐτά) will be of things that are only themselves. (438a7-b2)

He goes on to give several examples of relatives (the greater, less, more, fewer, and so on), and develops one example in detail: knowledge-itself is of what-can-be-learned-itself (ἐπιστήμη μὲν αὐτὸ μαθήματος αὐτοῦ), while a particular sort of knowledge, qualified knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις καὶ ποιῶ τις), e.g. medical or house-building knowledge, is of a particular sort of thing that can be learned. I want to show that this analogy undermines the cognitive impoverishment interpretation of thirst-itself. Knowledge-itself is the determinable state that can be conceptually distinguished from any particular kind of knowledge; it is not blinder or less *able* to discriminate than specific kinds of knowledge, but simply a more general, abstract state.⁹ I know of three interpretations of thirst-itself that try, with varying degrees of success, to respect the analogy with knowledge-itself. Precisely because they try to follow Plato's own guidance in using that analogy to illuminate thirst-itself, none of them make thirst-itself a blind desire.

Reading 1: In saying that thirst-itself is for drink-itself Plato is making a point about the proper or formal objects of desire, along with other states and relations.¹⁰ A thirsty person may desire cold, much, or wholesome drink, but insofar as she is thirsty it is also true that she desires drink *simpliciter*, for what it is to be thirsty is to desire drink. Thus the person envisaged in P7 *does* desire the drink *qua* drink, even though she is averse to it *qua* unwholesome. She may have some particular kind of thirst (e.g. for cold drink), but will also thereby have thirst-itself, just as knowledge of building is also thereby knowledge, or a red thing is also thereby a colored thing.

Reading 2: Plato holds that sometimes one is simply thirsty, without being thirsty for any particular kind of drink.¹¹ Normally of course thirst is not so indiscriminate, as any thirsty person who is offered a hot black coffee or a lukewarm peach Schnapps will know. But sometimes it is, precisely in cases like that at issue in P7 (if what Plato pictures there is indeed a case in which the doctor has ordered someone not drink at all because of dropsy). If you are horribly parched because you've had nothing to drink all day, you will be so thirsty that any old drink will do. You just want drink, period. Thus the thirsty person in P7 has thirst-itself, without also having any particular kind of thirst.

Reading 3: Plato has in mind the claim, expounded in the lead-up to his definition of the philosopher in Book V, that to desire something is to desire the

⁹ Note especially the claim that knowledge-itself "becomes" knowledge of a particular sort when it acquires a particular kind of object (ἐγένετο, 438d1).

¹⁰ See Carone 2001: 118-21.

¹¹ See Lorenz 2004: 96.

whole of its kind or species (εἶδος).¹² Thus “drink-itself” means the whole class of drinks. Some people on some occasions merely have appetites for cool drink or hot drink, but sometimes someone has an appetite for drink-itself, where this means that she wants drinks of *all* kinds. Like the lover of wisdom in Book VI who desires the whole of wisdom rather than one part or kind, the person in P7 loves and desires the whole of drink rather than wanting only some particular kind.

I will not try to decide between these readings here; each has arguments in its favor, and I see no decisive arguments against any. (Reading 1 succeeds best in preserving the analogy with knowledge-itself, while Reading 3 does worst, since classes are quite unlike determinables; Reading 1 however needs to work hard to block division within the appetitive part itself: if someone thirsty for cold drink is thereby also thirsty for drink-itself, then if she is appetitively averse to hot drink she will have conflicting appetites.) The crucial point I want to make is that on none of them – nor on any reading that takes its clue from the analogy with knowledge-itself – is thirst-itself a cognitively impoverished desire. On Reading 1 it is on a par with every other mental state: it is for drink in precisely the same definitional sense that wish (*boulêsis*) is for the good, or *erôs* for the beautiful.¹³ On Readings 2 and 3 thirst-itself is a *liberal* desire: the issue is not that one’s appetitive part has any difficulty recognizing different varieties of drink, but rather that in its present state it wants any of them, or all of them.

This brings us to my third point against the bare urge reading. If thirst-itself is best understood in any of these three ways, then contrary to the standard interpretation on which P4-5 show that appetites are specially limited desires, these premises do not depend on *any* special feature distinctive of appetites by contrast with other desires. Just as thirst is defined as desire for drink (Reading 1), so rational wish is defined as desire for good. Just as one can be so thirsty that any old drink will do (Reading 2), so too can one be so desirous of victory (a spirited desire) that any old way of winning will do, or so desirous of wisdom (a rational desire) that any old subject of study will do. If we take Reading 3, the case is even clearer. For in Book V, just after claiming that one who desires something desires the whole of it (in the lines quoted above), Socrates explicitly applies that claim to rational desire:

Then won’t we also say that the philosopher is a desirer of (ἐπιθυμητήν) not one part of wisdom but not another, but rather the whole? (475b8-9)¹⁴

Bare-urgeists take the Division argument to show something distinctive about the appetitive part of the soul; I have argued that they are wrong. All Socrates needed, in P4-6, was to establish that desiderative conflict can occur, because one can desire something even though one believes it to have some quality to which one is averse – for example, one can sometimes desire drink even

¹² “Must you be reminded or do you remember that if one speaks correctly in saying that someone loves (φιλεῖν) something, he must not love one part of it but not another, but must love all of it (πᾶν στέργοντα)?...If we call someone desiderative of something, do we say that he desires (ἐπιθυμεῖν) the whole of that kind (εἶδους), or one part but not another? – The whole” (474c8-10; 475b4-7). Some take the “must you be reminded?” at 474c8 as a reference back to 438a-b; certainly there is no other clear precedent.

¹³ Carone 2001: 118, citing *Charmides* 167e.

¹⁴ Plato presumably uses “appetitive” (ἐπιθυμητήν) here in a broad sense – desirous, rather than desiring with the appetitive part of the soul – corresponding to the broad use of ἐπιθυμία at 580d7 ff. as a generic term for the desires of all three parts of the soul.

though one believes it to be unwholesome. If any of the proposed interpretations of thirst-itself are right, however, then Socrates thinks this is a feature of *all* species of desire, not just appetites. Indeed, he could just as well have reached the Division argument's conclusion by pitting an unqualified *rational* desire against an appetite, rather than vice versa. Consider a variation on the argument which begins with the same first three premises but continues as follows:

P4') The desire for wisdom is a desire for nothing other than wisdom-itself – not for arcane, popular, much, little, *comfortable* or *lucrative* wisdom.

P5') Therefore the soul of the wisdom-lover, insofar as it wants wisdom, wants nothing other than to acquire wisdom.

P6') Therefore, by P1, if anything ever holds back a wisdom-wanting soul from seeking wisdom, it must be something in it other than the wisdom-wanting thing.

P7') It does sometimes happen that someone wants wisdom but is appetitively averse to wisdom (and therefore, by P3, has opposite attitudes toward wisdom): for example, if the library is cold and smelly, or if she figures that there is much more money to be made by devoting herself to other pursuits.

Conclusion': Therefore, by P6' and P7', there are (at least) two distinct elements in the soul: the one that orders people to seek wisdom in such cases – the rational and wisdom-loving part,¹⁵ and the one that hinders them from seeking wisdom – the pleasure- and money-loving appetitive part.¹⁶

'Comfortable' and 'lucrative' – meant to denote species of the pleasant, and thereby objects of appetitive desire – here play the role of 'wholesome' in the original argument. The point of P4'-5' is to forestall an objection parallel to that imagined at 438a. Here the objector is a psychological hedonist (as Plato himself seems at times to be)¹⁷, and argues as follows: all desire is for the pleasant; therefore someone who believes wisdom not pleasant, insofar as it involves discomfort or poverty, does not really desire it; therefore the kind of case imagined in P7' could not occur. As the objector would put it:

Why is the person averse to acquiring wisdom? Because she thinks it unpleasant? Ah, but if she really thinks it unpleasant, she cannot actually have a wish for it: the wish for wisdom is the wish for *pleasant* wisdom. So you really haven't given me a case of conflicting attitudes at all – and thus haven't given me any reason to concede a division in the soul.

P4'-5' forestall the objection, because they entail:

P4-5*' The desire for wisdom need not be a desire for pleasant wisdom.

¹⁵ Plato characterizes the rational part as the part that loves wisdom (τὸ φιλοσοφόν, 411e6).

¹⁶ The appetitive part loves bodily pleasures (436b1-2 and 439d8) and wealth or gain (τὸ φιλοκερδές, 581a7)

¹⁷ Socrates experiments with psychological hedonism in the *Protagoras*, and the Athenian Visitor espouses it in the *Laws* (see especially 732e-33d). I am not insisting that he holds the view in the *Republic*, but simply noting that this variation on the argument is one that Plato himself might have found *prima facie* compelling.

To establish this point our counterfactual Socrates makes a broader one: there is a kind of desire, the desire for wisdom-itself, which is for wisdom without qualification. Could there be such a desire, or is it only appetites that can be unqualified? As we have seen, if we equate “without qualification” with “the whole rather than only some part” (Reading 3), Socrates explicitly recognizes just this kind of desire in Book V (475b). If we take “without qualification” instead to mean something like “indiscriminate,” along the lines of “any old drink will do” (Reading 2), I see no reason to doubt that the desire for wisdom could be like this too: a philosophical soul who has been deprived of the opportunity to learn, like a thirsty person deprived of drink, doesn’t much care where she starts. If we take Reading 1, the case is simple: the love of wisdom is defined by its proper object, wisdom.

Thus neither the logical structure of the Division argument nor the characterization of thirst-itself depend on any difference between appetitive desires and rational ones. There are indeed many such differences: most centrally, the former are non-rational and the latter of course rational. But it is a mistake to think that Plato is explaining that very distinction here.¹⁸

2. Good-independent desires?

So much for bare urges. In the rest of the paper I want to attack a subtler and superficially much more plausible interpretation of the argument: one on which it establishes that appetites are “good-independent desires” – desires depending in no way on the agent’s evaluation of their objects as good. The phrase is due to Irwin (see for example 1995: 209-11), but the interpretation is widespread.¹⁹

The evidence for this reading comes from a passage which comes between P4 and P5, one we saw briefly above. After asserting that thirst-itself is only for drink, Socrates adds:

Therefore let no one catch us off our guard and disturb us by claiming that (a) no one has an appetite for drink but for wholesome (χρηστοῦ) drink, nor for food but for wholesome food. For indeed (b) all people have appetites for good things (πάντες γὰρ ἄρα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν). (c) If then thirst is an appetite, it would be for wholesome stuff, whether drink or whatever it is an appetite for, and likewise with the other appetites. (438a1-5)²⁰

On the standard interpretation, Socrates here rejects the very doctrine he upheld in dialogues like the *Meno*, *Protagoras*, and *Gorgias*: that we only have appetites (and indeed desires of any kind) for good things, where this at least entails, and perhaps is equivalent to: if someone has an appetite for a particular thing, she must believe that that thing is good.²¹ Here, the story goes, Socrates recognizes a class of desires that make no reference to the good at all: one can have an

¹⁸ In Moss 2008 I argue that he explains it over the course of the *Republic*, and makes it particularly clear in the later arguments for the division of the soul, in Book X: a non-rational part of the soul is one that cannot question or criticize appearances, and so desires what appears good to it, while a rational part is one that can use reasoning or calculation (λογισμός) to get beyond appearances, and so can desire what is genuinely good rather than merely apparently so.

¹⁹ See e.g. Woods 1987; Reeve 1988: 135, Penner 1990: 52.

²⁰ Μή τοί τις... ἀσκέπτους ἡμᾶς ὄντας θορυβήσῃ, ὡς οὐδεὶς ποτοῦ ἐπιθυμεῖ ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ ποτοῦ, καὶ οὐ σίτου ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ σίτου. πάντες γὰρ ἄρα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν. εἰ οὖν ἡ δίψα ἐπιθυμία ἐστὶ, χρηστοῦ ἂν εἴη εἴτε πόματος εἴτε ἄλλου ὅτου ἐστὶν ἐπιθυμία, καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι οὕτω.

²¹ See most explicitly *Meno* 77c1 ff.

appetite for something without in any way finding it good. In other words, on the standard interpretation of 438a Socrates here rejects not only (a) and (c), but also (b).

In fact, this reading of the passage is by no means obvious. It has perhaps seemed so in part because translators typically write the rejection of (b) into the text. To take a prominent example, Grube's text as revised by Reeve has:

Therefore, let no one...disturb us by claiming that (a) no one has an appetite for drink but rather *good* drink nor food but *good* food, on the grounds that (b) everyone after all has appetite for *good* things, (c) so that if thirst is an appetite, it will be an appetite for *good* drink... [emphases mine]

This elides the difference between 'wholesome' (χρηστόν) in (a) and (c) and 'good' (ἀγαθόν) in (b).²² By choosing to put a comma rather than period before γὰρ ἄρα, and by translating it as "on the grounds that," it also puts (b) firmly in the objector's mouth. But (b) can stand grammatically on its own: on a neutral reading it might be a premise attributed solely to the objector, but it might just as well be one shared by Socrates and his interlocutors. And indeed, in favor of the latter reading we have Glaucon's response:

But all the same, the person who says these things does seem to be saying something right (Ἴσως γὰρ ἄν δοκοῖ τι λέγειν ὁ ταῦτα λέγων). (438a6)

Glaucon can be read as saying that the objection *merely* seems right, but he can just as well be read as saying that he thinks there is something to it; Socrates can be read as intending to disabuse Glaucon entirely, but can also be read as agreeing that the objection gets *something* right. The text alone, I hope to have shown, does not settle the matter.

Do we have other reasons, then, to think that the standard reading is right? For reasons I and others have given elsewhere, we should instead hope that it is wrong.²³ Plato seems to assert the good-dependence of all desire at 505d-e (on a straightforward reading), implies the good-dependence of appetites in particular in his description of the democratic city at 562b-c, and shows that the appetitive part is aware of normative considerations (such as what one should (δεῖν) do), at 442d. There are philosophical costs to the standard reading too, although this is not the place to discuss them in detail: for example, Bobonich argues that if the appetitive part does not take the drink to be good it is hard to see how there can be genuine conflict between it and the rational part, and I have argued that the standard reading deprives Plato of a compelling argument that we can otherwise interpret him as making in the *Republic*, namely that the appetitive part desires pleasure precisely because pleasure appears good to it.²⁴

What I want to show here is that the passage at hand in no way necessitates the standard reading – and therefore that we are under no pressure to think that Plato ever questioned the good-dependence of appetites. The interpretation I propose is very similar to Adam's (1902), and among other later writers Carone's (2001), and Weiss's (2006); I add to the pile because I want to show that their reading of this one passage in the Division argument is strongly supported by, and

²² For this complaint see also Weiss 2006: 171. The translation of χρηστοῦ ποτοῦ as "good drink" is widespread (see e.g., Jowett, Shorey, Griffith and Bloom).

²³ See my 2008 section 5 and 2006, section 4. Compare Lesses 1987, Carone 2001, Price 1995: 49-52; Bobonich 2002: 243-245; and Weiss 2006, chapter 6.

²⁴ Bobonich 2002: 253; Moss 2006 and 2008.

the standard reading undermined by, the account I gave in section 1 of the whole of that argument.

We saw above that the only claims Socrates needs to reject, in order for the Division argument to go through, are (a) and its equivalent, (c): he needs to show that appetites are what we might call *wholesome*-independent, i.e. that one can have an appetite for something without finding it wholesome. On the standard interpretation of 438a he takes (a) to follow from (b) – the claim that all appetites are for good things – and therefore rejects (b) as well. But does he really think that (a) follows from (b)? Surely the imaginary objector does, for the argument anticipated at 438a must be something like this:

As you Socrates have argued in other dialogues, (b) all appetites are for good things.
Good drink is wholesome drink.
Therefore, (a) all appetite for drink is appetite for wholesome drink.

Does Socrates have to reject his former view to resist the conclusion? No: all he need resist is the last step, the inference from (b) to (a). (For compelling arguments that this is precisely what he is doing, see Carone 2001: 118-19.) For what follows from (b) is simply this: if someone desires drink, she must believe drink to be good. Or rather – and here we have what I take to be the radical move in this argument, which does signal a break from the doctrine of the *Protagoras* – that part of her which desires the drink must believe drink to be good.²⁵

That the thirsty person's appetitive part must believe drink good says nothing about what *kind* of drink that part believes good. As a matter of fact wholesome drink is good; but her appetitive part might believe that hot drink is good, or cold drink, or sweet drink, or much drink, and so on. If or insofar as the thirst she is feeling is unqualified thirst-itself, however, what her appetitive part believes good is just drink-itself: drink as the object desired insofar as one's desire is thirst (Reading 1), or any old drink whatsoever (Reading 2), or drink as a whole (Reading 3).

In other words, drink can be an appetite for the good without 'good' – let alone the correct specification of 'good' in the case at hand, namely 'wholesome' – figuring into the description under which the object is desired. What the appetitive part must believe is that drink is good, not that *good* drink is good. And that is why Socrates can later rephrase 438a's point as follows:

Thirst-itself is not for much nor little drink, nor good (ἀγαθόν) nor bad drink, nor in a word drink of any particular sort, but only drink-itself. (439a4-7).

Probably he here uses 'good' merely as a synonym for 'wholesome,' but the point is general: thirst-itself need not be for pleasant drink, beneficial drink, ennobling or ambition-gratifying drink, nor for drink qualified by any other species of the good – but this is perfectly consistent with the claim that the thirsty person must see drink as good. (If so, she must see drink as good

²⁵ For evidence that the non-rational parts have their own beliefs, which can conflict with the rational part's beliefs, see the reformulation of the Principle of Opposites and the conclusion drawn from it in Book X, at 602e-603a: contrary beliefs must belong to different parts of the soul. If you think belief (δόξα) is something distinctively rational you will want to substitute another term for the lower part's representations (as Aristotle does in *de Anima* III.3: *phantasia*); Plato in the *Republic* evidently had no such thought. As to the claim that the appetitive part can believe drink *good*, Plato's idea it believes it worth-going-for, a quality it equates with, and indeed is completely unable to distinguish from, pleasantness. So I argue in the articles cited above.

under some guise or other – presumably, as pleasant. But she need not think that only *good* drink would be pleasant, nor that only *pleasant* drink would be pleasant: maybe any old drink would do.)

Similar interpretations of 438a have been proposed by others (cited above); I hope here to have strengthened their case by showing what the context does and does not demand. If my analysis of the Division argument is correct, then the point of 438a is merely to clear aside a possible objection to P4-5* – a possible objection to the thesis that thirst need not be for wholesome drink. Whether or not all desire is for something the agent finds good, under some guise, and with some part of her soul, is simply irrelevant to this point.

Again, we can bring out the point by considering the parallel Division argument proposed above. In order to establish the thesis parallel to P4-5* – that the desire for wisdom need not be a desire for wisdom *qua* pleasant – Socrates might have digressed after P4' as follows:

Therefore let no one catch us off our guard and disturb us by claiming that (a)' no one has a rational desire for wisdom, but for pleasant wisdom. For indeed (b)' all people have rational desire for good things. (c)' If then wisdom-loving is a rational desire, it would be for pleasant wisdom.

The imagined objector is arguing as follows:

As you Socrates surely think, (b)' all wishes are for things *qua* good.
Good wisdom is pleasant – as you will argue in Book IX.
Therefore, (a)' all wish for wisdom is wish for pleasant wisdom.

Socrates certainly accepts (b)'; what he rejects is the inference to (a)'. Someone who desires wisdom must believe – or more precisely, the wisdom-loving, rational part of her soul must believe – that wisdom is good. But this says nothing about what *kind* of wisdom that part believes good. As a matter of fact (and although there are other ways of identifying good wisdom), pleasant wisdom is good, since coming to know the Forms is the most pleasant thing of all (see Book IX). A wisdom-loving agent's rational part might believe that arcane wisdom is good, or mathematical wisdom, or much wisdom, and so on. But insofar as she has unqualified "desire for wisdom-itself," what her rational part believes good is just wisdom-itself. In other words, wisdom-loving can be a desire for the good without 'good' – let alone the correct specification of 'good,' which the imagined objector takes to be 'pleasant' – figuring into the description under which wisdom is desired. What the rational part must believe is that wisdom is good, not that *good* wisdom is good.

That is not the argument Plato gave. But, I have argued, it would have served his purposes in the Division argument just as well as the argument he did give, and therefore we should conclude that nothing in the characterization of thirst reveals any distinctive feature of the appetitive part of the soul.²⁶

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²⁶ I am grateful for comments from MM McCabe, Fiona Leigh, Anthony Price, and discussion with other participants in the Keeling Colloquium; I owe special thanks to Cian Dorr.

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