

# PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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**Nemo Veritatem Regit**

**Nobody Governs Truth**

## Plato's Super-Ego

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### Abstract

Plato's *Politeia*, commonly known as *The Republic*, is generally considered a political work, aimed at answering the question of how to establish a just state. The author contends that the *Politeia* is a psychological or psychophilosophical work, aimed at answering the question of how to establish a just/healthy psyche, or internal government. The author will show that rather than the triadic model of the psyche that is commonly ascribed to Plato, and compared to Freud's Structural Model, there is a crucial fourth part that is the key to understanding both the *Politeia* and psychological health. Plato's *Alcibiades* will be shown to contain this Tetradic Model as well, and to be effective as the gateway to self-knowledge and self-care. The author hopes to make a convincing argument for the statement, "You shouldn't do philosophical counseling with a person who does not know their Self." Finally, the author will present a modern version of the Tetradic Model for use in psychotherapy and philosophical counseling.

**Keywords:** *Plato, republic, triad, constitution, psyche, self*

### Politeia vs. Republic

As the reader may know, the original title in Greek is *Politeia*, which translates to 'constitution' in English, and is related to the word 'polis' from which we get a number of common words including politics and police. In ancient Greece one might be a citizen of a polis or city-state, and all poleis had some form of politeia, or constitution (written or more likely unwritten) which was an organizing set of principles or rules that outlined how the polis was governed. Unfortunately, the Roman statesman Cicero referred to the dialogue as 'de Res Publica,' meaning something like 'The Public Matters,' and it has stuck. I will refer to the work using its original title, not merely because I'm somewhat of a traditionalist, but because I believe (and hope to demonstrate to the reader) that this is a significant case of some important meaning being lost in translation.

### Triads and Tetrads

In the *Politeia*, while it does indeed speak a great deal about how to set up an ideal political (or actual) government, the main reason Plato (through Socrates) is discussing politics is to figure out what justice is 'writ large,' so that he can ultimately understand what it means to be a just person. This is discussed in book 2, Stephanus section 368 (2-368):

*Socrates:* The inquiry we are undertaking is no easy one but calls for keen vision, as it seems to me. So, since we are not clever persons, I think we should employ the method of search that we should use if we, with not very keen vision, were bidden to read small letters from a distance, and then someone had observed that these same letters exist elsewhere larger and on a larger surface. We should have accounted it a godsend, I fancy, to be allowed to read those letters first, and examine the smaller, if they are the same.

Throughout the *Politeia* are found topics or analogies discussed in related groups of sometimes four, but usually three, items or parts. The author has found that most of what on the surface appear to be three-part (triadic) examples actually include a crucial fourth part, which results in a Tetradic Model that is the key to understanding both the *Politeia* and the Psyche, or Self.

### Three Classes of Citizens

The first example of a triad is the “Noble Lie” in book 3, Stephanus section 415 (3-415):

[415a] I said; “but all the same hear the rest of the story. While all of you in the city are brothers, we will say in our tale, yet God in fashioning those of you who are fitted to hold rule mingled gold in their generation, for which reason they are the most precious—but in the helpers silver, and iron and brass [or bronze] in the farmers and other craftsmen. [see figure 1 below]

### Four Virtues

The first example of the tetrad is in the cardinal virtues found at 4-427e:

“I expect then,” said I, “that we shall find it in this way. I think our city, if it has been rightly founded is good in the full sense of the word.” “Necessarily,” he said. “Clearly, then, it will be wise, brave, sober, and just.” “Clearly.” “Then if we find any of these qualities in it, the remainder will be that which we have not found?”

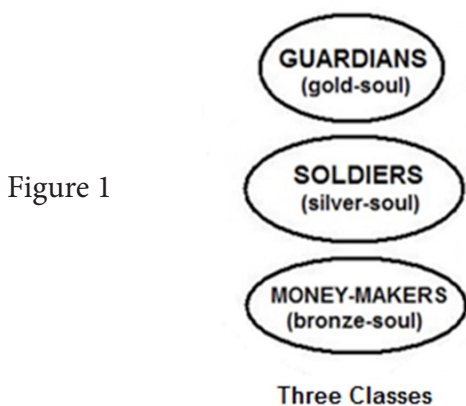


Figure 1

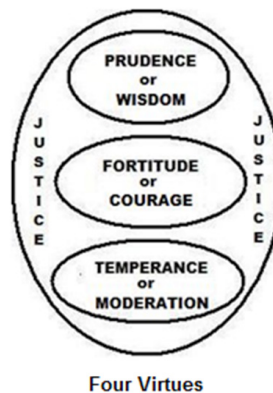


Figure 2

The four virtues are then matched to the three classes, each class having its own particular virtue, with justice the “remainder” that is not associated with any one class, but rather involves the relationship between the three classes (4-433):

For what we laid down in the beginning as a universal requirement when we were founding our city ... is justice. And what we did lay down, and often said, you recall, was that each one man must perform one social service in the state for which his nature is best adapted ... And again that to do one’s own business and not to be a busybody is justice (*ta hautou prattein kai mē polupragmonein dikaiosunē esti*) ... I think that this is the remaining virtue in the

state after our consideration of soberness, courage, and intelligence, a quality which made it possible for them all to grow up in the body politic and which when they have sprung up preserves them as long as it is present. And I hardly need to remind you that we said that justice would be the residue after we had found the other three. [see figure 3 below]

The expression “mind your own business” in modern usage is generally a somewhat impolite way to tell someone else to “butt out” of one’s affairs, and unfortunately the Greek ‘*to heautou pratein*’ is often translated in similar terms. But it is more accurately translated as ‘doing’ or ‘attending to’ one’s own business or responsibilities. This is the positive, or prescriptive side of the coin of Justice. Guardians do the work of Guardians, Soldiers the work of Soldiers, etc.

The negative or proscriptive side is to not be ‘*polupragmonein*’. This term is often translated as ‘busybody’, but more accurately translates as ‘doing many things’, the implication being that at least some of these things are not your own business. Soldiers should not try to rule, and Money-Makers should not make war, etc. When Socrates refers to Justice at other points in the *Politeia*, he simply mentions the prescriptive aspect, as it implies the proscriptive counterpart (if one is truly attending to one’s own business, then one is not meddling in that of another).

Thus an ideal just polis would be tetradic in form; composed of the three classes unified by a fourth thing, the relationship between them, based on the rule of ‘*to heauto pratein*’.

### Parts of the Psyche

Having defined Justice as it would look in an ideal, or beautiful city (Kallipolis), Socrates turns back to explore how this sheds light on how Justice operates within the individual psyche:

“Then a just man too [435b] will not differ at all from a just city in respect of the very form of justice, but will be like it.” “Yes, like.” “But now the city was thought to be just because three natural kinds existing in it performed each its own function, and again it was sober, brave, and wise because of certain other affections and habits of these three kinds.” “True,” he said. “Then, my friend, we shall thus expect the individual also to have these same forms [435c] in his soul, and by reason of identical affections of these with those in the city to receive properly the same appellations.”

Socrates finds that just as in the city, the Psyche is made up of three parts, Reason, Spirit, and the Appetites, which correspond to the three classes in the city:

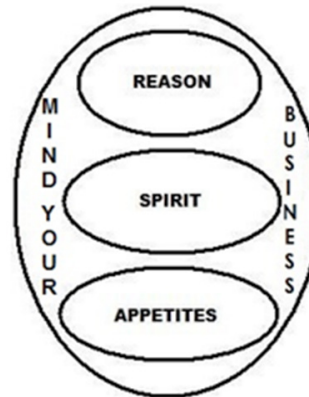
“Not unreasonably,” said I, “shall we claim that they are two and different from one another, naming that in the soul whereby it reckons and reasons the rational and that with which it loves, hungers, thirsts, and feels the flutter and titillation of other desires, the irrational and appetitive—companion of various repletions and pleasures.” “It would not be unreasonable but quite natural,” [439e] he said, “for us to think this.” “These two forms, then, let us assume to have been marked off as actually existing in the soul. But now the Thumos or principle of high spirit, that with which we feel anger...”

Figure 3



Classes Minding Business

Figure 4



Psyche Minding Business

And just as in the just city, the three parts of the just Psyche are unified by the rule of ‘*to heauto prattein*’:

“It really was, it seems, Glaucon, which is why it helps, a sort of adumbration of justice [*ei-dōlon ti tēs dikaiosunēs*], this principle [*to heautou prattein*] that it is right for the cobbler by nature to cobble and occupy himself with nothing else, and the carpenter to practice carpentry, and similarly all others. But the truth of the matter was, as it seems, [443d] that justice is indeed something of this kind, yet not in regard to the doing of one’s own business externally, but with regard to that which is within and in the true sense concerns one’s self, and the things of one’s self—it means that a man must not suffer the principles in his soul to do each the work of some other and interfere and meddle with one another...”

### Tetradic Model of Reality and Cognition

The next place we find a tetradic model is none other than the Analogy of the Divided Line and the related Allegory of the Cave (6-509 through 7-521):

...and now, answering to these four sections, assume these four affections occurring in the soul: intellection or reason for the highest, [511e] understanding for the second; assign belief to the third, and to the last picture-thinking or conjecture, and arrange them in a proportion, considering that they participate in clearness and precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality. [see figure 5 below]

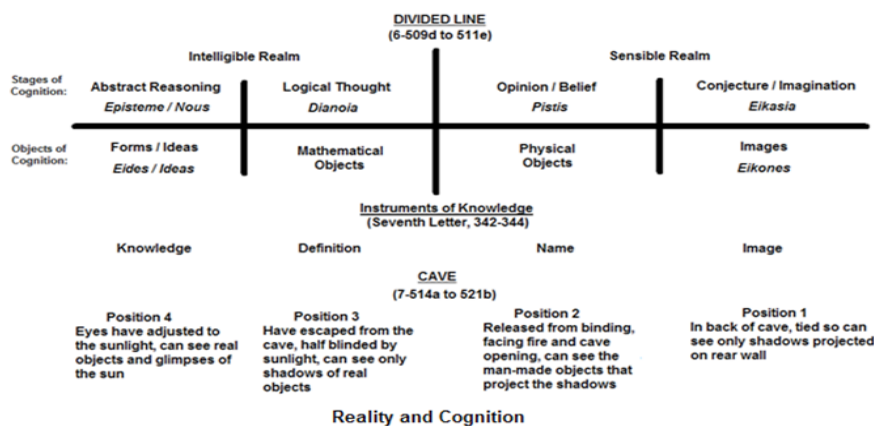


Figure 5

While not found directly in the *Politeia*, there is a clear relationship between the four stages of cognition, the four objects of cognition, and the four instruments of knowledge (from Plato's *Seventh Letter*). Plato's letter emphasizes the centrality and importance of the instruments to obtaining knowledge of any object:

Every existing object has three things which are the necessary means by which knowledge of that object is acquired; and the knowledge itself is a fourth thing; and as a fifth one must postulate the object itself which is cognizable [342b] and true. First of these comes the name; secondly the definition; thirdly the image; fourthly the knowledge ... And of those four [342d] intelligence approaches most nearly in kinship and similarity to the fifth, and the rest are further removed ... For unless [342e] a man somehow or other grasps the four of these, he will never perfectly acquire knowledge of the fifth.

### **Constitutions (Politeion) in the Polis and in the Psyche (4-445, 8-544 to 9-580)**

At the end of book four, Socrates was about to continue his comparison between the Polis and the Psyche by enumerating the various types of constitutions that can exist of each:

“As many as are the varieties of political constitutions that constitute specific types, so many, it seems likely, [445d] are the characters of soul.” “How many, pray?” “There are five kinds of constitutions,” said I, “and five kinds of soul.” “Tell me what they are,” he said. “I tell you,” said I, “that one way of government would be the constitution that we have just expounded, but the names that might be applied to it are two. If one man of surpassing merit rose among the rulers, it would be denominated royalty; if more than one, aristocracy.”

What Socrates goes on to describe is really a total of six types of constitutions, consisting in three main types (which correspond with three parts of the psyche) with 3 subtypes:

- 1) a) Monarchy: rule by the best man or woman in the polis; rule by reason in the psyche  
b) Aristocracy: rule by the best few in the polis; rule by reason in the psyche
- 2) Timocracy: rule by the soldiers in the polis; rule by spirit in the psyche
- 3) a) Oligarchy: rule by the rich in the polis; rule by necessary appetites in the psyche  
b) Democracy: rule by all the citizens in the polis, rule by necessary and unnecessary appetites in the psyche  
c) Tyranny: rule by a tyrant in the polis; rule by lawless appetites in the psyche

Socrates discusses these at length in books eight and nine, describing how each type (of both Polis and Psyche) may devolve over time and through generations from the best, ruled by reason, to the worst, ruled by lawlessness. Below is just one example of this process, that of a Timocratic father raising a son who turns away from Timocracy to Oligarchy. I include this because it demonstrates that Socrates always has the triadic model in mind, when discussing either Polis or Psyche, but that he continues to describe the importance of a fourth part, the constitution, which determines which of the other three parts will sit on the 'psyche's throne' and rule:

“And the son... thrusts headlong from his psyche's throne [553c] that principle of love of honor and that high spirit, and being humbled by poverty turns to the getting of money...

Do you not suppose that such a one will then establish on that throne the principle of appetite and avarice, and set it up as the great king in his soul ... And under this domination he will force the rational [553d] and high-spirited principles to crouch lowly to right and left as slaves, and will allow the one to calculate and consider nothing but the ways of making more money from a little, and the other to admire and honor nothing but riches and rich men...”

### Three Loves + Arkhōn

In book 9 Socrates describes different types of men in terms of the object of their love, based again upon which part of their Psyche is placed upon its throne as the Arkhōn, or ruling principle:

“Is it not also true, [581c] that the ruling principle [arkhōn] of men’s souls is in some cases this faculty and in others one of the other two, as it may happen... And that is why we say that the primary classes of men also are three, the philosopher or lover of wisdom [philosophon], the lover of victory [philonikon] and the lover of gain [philokerdes]... And also that there are three forms of pleasure, corresponding respectively to each... [and] that if you should choose to ask men of these three classes, each in turn, which is the most pleasurable of these lives, each will chiefly commend his own...” [see figure 6 below]

Figure 6



### Tetradic Image of the Psyche

The last comment above, that ‘each will chiefly commend his own’ preferred love, and thus way of life, brings up the Sophistic view of relativism. This was Thrasymachus’ challenge to Socrates about Justice back in book 1: not only to show what justice is, but to show that living a just life is always better than living an unjust life, even if the ‘perfectly unjust’ man could ‘get away with’ being unjust by somehow maintaining a reputation of being ‘perfectly just.’ Socrates wants to return to this issue:

By fashioning in our discourse a symbolic image of the soul, that the maintainer of that proposition may see precisely what it is that he was saying... [588c] One of those natures that the ancient fables tell of, as that of the Chimaera or Scylla or Cerberus, and the numerous other examples that are told of many forms grown together in one... [588d] Then fashion one other form of a lion and one of a man ... Join the three in one, then, so as in

some sort to grow together... Then mould about them outside the likeness of one, that of the man, so that to anyone who is unable [588e] to look within but who can see only the external sheath it appears to be one living creature, the man.

In Socrates' imagery, the Scylla or any of the 'numerous other examples' illustrate the nature of the appetites, the lion represents our spirited part, and the man represents reason. These three natures or parts are described as wrapped with the sheath of the 'outer man', so that for those who don't have the 'power of insight' (*dunamenō ta entos horan*) they simply see each person as human in form, which is Thrasymachus' error.

There are two issues this image brings up related to the purpose of this article. First, it is the clearest example of Plato's view of the Psyche as being composed of four parts, rather than three. But the fourth, the outer-man, looks a lot like the inner-man, representing reason. This fourth part is an aspect of reason: a matter of education, self discipline, and choice in which of the parts are going to rule one's life. The other issue is that this image is surprisingly similar to a model of the brain used in modern neuroscience, which will be discussed shortly.

### **Auto-Politeia (9-590 to 592)**

Socrates goes on to argue that the life of the unjust man will inevitably devolve into pain and displeasure, because he will feed and empower the 'snake-like' appetites and the spirited lion disproportionately, while the best part becomes weak and eventually enslaved by the other parts. Thus the unjust man, who by definition is unable to rule himself properly, is better off being the slave of a just man, or to be incarcerated by society, so that the just rules (*nomoi*) he is unable to develop from within can be forced upon him from without, for his own best interest (whether he realizes it or not). This is also the goal in parenting, to foster a just Auto-Politeia, or Self-Constitution, within the child:

[590e] "And it is plain, that this is the purpose of the law [*nomos*], which is the ally of all classes in the state, and this is the aim of our control of children, our not leaving them free before we have established, so to speak, a constitutional government within them [*auto politeia*] and, by fostering the best element in them with the aid of the like in ourselves, have set up in its place a similar guardian and ruler in the child, and then, and then only, we leave it free..."

Now we have reached the apex of the *Politeia*. At the end of book 9, Plato (through Socrates) essentially states that the whole purpose of this dialogue, the long and the short of it, is to help the reader to establish and maintain a just Auto Politeia, and to live autonomously (self-ruled) no matter what external government one lives under:

The wise man will "...[591e] keep his eyes fixed on the constitution in his soul, [*hautō politeia*] and guarding lest he disturb anything there either by excess or deficiency of wealth... and in the matter of honors and office too this will be his guiding principle: He will gladly take part in and enjoy those which he thinks will make him a better man, but in public and private life he will shun those that may overthrow the established habit of his soul."



“Then, if that is his chief concern,” he said, “he will not willingly take part in politics.”

“Yes, by the dog,” said I, “in his own city he certainly will, yet perhaps not in the city of his birth, except in some providential conjuncture.”

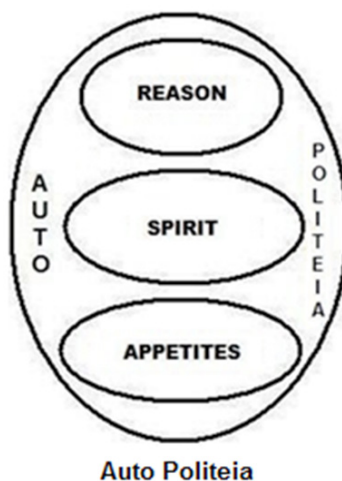
“I understand,” he said; “you mean the city whose establishment we have described, the city whose home is in the ideal; for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth.”

“Well,” said I, “perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city only will be his and of none other.”

### Plato’s Tetradic Psyche

So here we have Plato’s model of the Psyche: Reason, Spirit, and the Appetites unified and managed by the fourth part, the Auto-Politeia.

Figure 7



The Auto-Politeia is the key to understanding Plato’s Republic. The first clue is in its proper name, Politeia, which fell into disuse two thousand years ago due to historical circumstance and tradition. Auto-Politeia is also the key to understanding the Psyche, and how to live a just and healthy life. We all have a Self-Constitution that determines the relationship between the parts; a set of rules given to us by our parents and other authorities, our culture, our experiences. These rules may be healthy or unhealthy; the part of our Psyche that rules upon its throne may be just or unjust. If unjust and unhealthy, these rules can be changed. But in order to help a person change their Auto-Politeia in order to take better care of their Self, we must first make sure that they know their Self, which means to be aware and understand the Psyche’s various parts. Before I present my treatment model, I shall briefly compare and integrate Plato’s Psyche with modern psychology and neuroscience.

### Freud’s Structural Model

Surprisingly, given his own adoption of a tripartite theory of the self, Freud was utterly silent about Plato’s tripartite theory of the soul, even though aspects of it were powerfully

developed in the *Phaedrus*, the *Republic*, and the *Timaeus*. It is certainly plausible, in fact, that the influence of some key aspect of Plato's philosophy occurred on a subliminal level. (Askey & Farquhar, 2006)

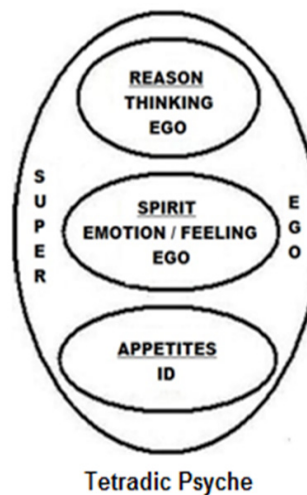
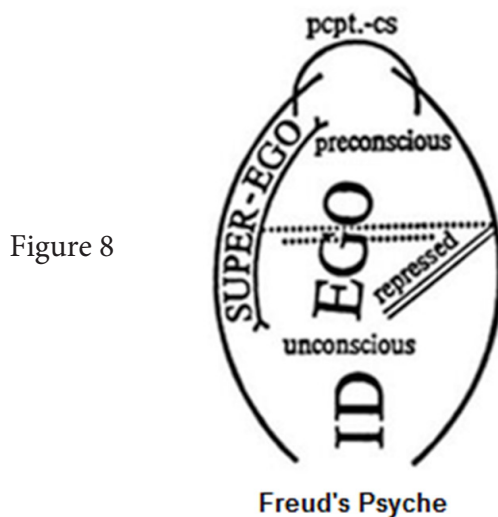
As the quote above indicates, Freud's model of the Psyche was 'surprisingly' similar to Plato's model, and despite the fact that Freud used ancient Greek myths to illustrate his theories (such as the Oedipal complex), he gives no credit to Plato. I'm not sure I buy the 'subliminal' theory above, but I do believe Freud 'borrowed' from Plato for his final version of the Psyche. [see Figure 8 below]

This model is called 'structural' because its main features are the three structures translated into English as Id or 'It', Ego or 'Me', and Super-Ego or 'Above Me'. Freud used the term 'It' because we often find this aspect of human nature as foreign to our sense of self. The Id operates under the Pleasure Principle, or "If it feels good, do it." This part of the mind consists of animalistic impulses, with a strong desire for immediate gratification.

Freud referred to the Ego as the 'Me' because this is where consciousness begins. The Ego operates under the Reality Principle. It is the interface between the animalistic drives and the restrictions of what we perceive as 'civilization', between irrational impulses and the limitations placed on us by the reality of our circumstances.

The Super-Ego or 'Above Me' operates under the 'Morality Principle', and is the seat of our conscience and 'Ego Ideal'; our internalization of parental and cultural rules. This is an interesting mix of Plato's model. On the one hand, Freud has made the same mistake that most make in only seeing three parts. On the other hand, his Super-Ego is essentially what is usually missed in Plato's model, the Auto Politeia. Conversely, the Auto-Politeia is Plato's Super-Ego.

So if Freud's three-part model contains the Auto-Politeia, which is not part of Plato's traditional three-part model, how do the others line up? This has caused problems for people trying to compare these two models for nearly a century. I believe there is a way to integrate the two models.



The Super-Ego is essentially equal to the Auto-Politeia as a general concept. One of the weaknesses with Freud's model is that it views the Super-Ego as primarily a punitive force, rather than identifying unhealthy or unjust rules for the patient, and fostering justice. Freud's Ego needs to be separated

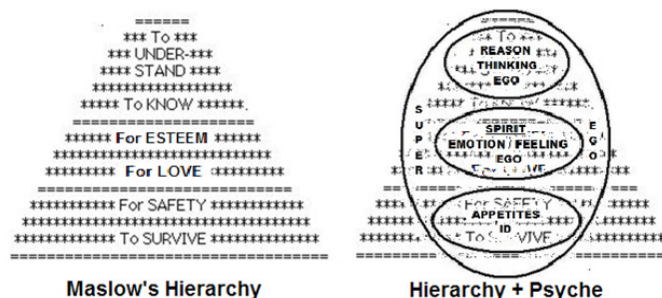
into the intellectual or reasoning part, and the emotional or feeling part. Freud never addressed the emotions adequately in his psychology (from the authors point of view), and essentially lumped them into the Id. Plato recognized the separate and important nature of the emotions which he called Spirit. When he (via Socrates) talks about the Spirited part, he focuses on it being a ‘helper’ to the Reason, having the courage (no cowardly lion) to follow Reason’s guidance and reacting with anger in order to fight any injustice. The Id and the appetites match up well.

### Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

In his 1943 paper, “A Theory of Human Motivation” written for the *Psychological Review*, Abraham Maslow proposed a new way to explain human behavior that has had significant influence over the decades, which also shows a correlation to the different parts of the Psyche:

There are at least five sets of goals, which we may call basic needs. These are briefly physiological [survival], safety, love, ‘esteem, and self-actualization [to know and understand]. In addition, we are motivated by the desire to achieve or maintain the various conditions upon which these basic satisfactions rest and by certain more intellectual desires... These basic goals are related to each other, being arranged in a hierarchy of prepotency.

Figure 10



### The Triune Brain

The triune brain is a model of the evolution of the human brain and behavior proposed by neuroscientist Paul D. MacLean in the 1960s, and discussed in more detail in his 1990 book *The Triune Brain in Evolution*. He describes three parts—the reptilian, mammalian and human—and their functions that strongly correspond to the Appetites, Spirit, and Reason. Most compelling is how this model was prefigured by the imagery in book 9 of the *Politeia*. Remember the ‘many headed beast’ was described in several ways, but the consistent image was that of ‘snake-like’, or reptilian, and of course the lion is a mammal, and the final figure was human.

### On Intelligence

Jeff Hawkins and Sandra Blakeslee’s book *On Intelligence* (2004) explores the nature of neo-cortical intelligence (they do not address the other parts of the brain dealing with emotions and basic survival), and what they find is a hierarchical algorithm that functions in every region of the cortex, regardless of input. This algorithm is essentially Platonic and tetradic, with four basic steps repeated over and over:

1. Sensory Input
2. Recognition of Temporal Sequences or Patterns
3. Predictive Autoassociative Recall
4. Invariant Representations or Forms

The authors (unlike Freud) do give some passing (perhaps unfairly critical) credit to Plato's work, and use his own example of the concept of 'circle' that Plato used to illustrate the four Instruments of Knowledge in the *Seventh Letter*:

However, the problem of understanding how your cortex forms invariant representations remains one of the biggest mysteries in all of science. How difficult, you ask? So much so that no one, not even using the most powerful computers in the world, has been able to solve it. And it isn't for a lack of trying... Speculation on this problem has an ancient pedigree. It traces back to Plato, twenty-three centuries ago. Plato wondered how people are able to think and know about the world. He pointed out that real-world instances of things and ideas are always imperfect and are always different. For example, you have a concept of a perfect circle, yet you have never actually seen one. All drawings of circles are imperfect. Even if drafted with a geometer's compass a so-called circle is represented by a dark line, whereas the circumference of a true circle has no thickness at all. How then did you ever acquire the concept of a perfect circle? ... Plato was perplexed. How is it possible that we learn and apply concepts in this world of infinitely various forms and ever-shifting sensations? Plato's solution was his famous Theory of Forms... It's all quite loopy from a modern perspective. But if you strip away the high-flown metaphysics, you can see that he was really talking about invariance. His system of explanation was wildly off the mark, but his intuition that this was one of the most important questions we can ask about our own nature was a bull's-eye. (pp. 78-79)

### **The Cortical Super-Ego**

Modern neuroscience has also identified a region of the cortex that is a strong contender for identification of the physical manifestation of the Super-Ego / Auto Politeia: the region of the brain called the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC). This area handles the 'executive functions', a set of processes that all have to do with managing oneself and one's resources in order to achieve a goal. It is an umbrella term for the neurologically-based skills involving mental control and self-regulation.

The Medial Prefrontal Cortex (mPFC) is an area of the PFC involved in self-referential reflection, and has both a ventral area (vmPFC) where emotional processes become linked to self-awareness, as well as a more cognitive dorsal region (dmPFC).

### **Alcibiades I and 'Know Thyself'**

One of the goals of this paper is to justify the statement that, "You shouldn't do philosophical counseling with a person who does not know their Self." I believe that *Alcibiades I* exemplifies this as a tenet of Socratic and Platonic philosophy: that the life of philosophy is much more than an intellectual exercise, it is the path to living a good life. And in order to utilize the power of philosophy to care for the Self, we first have to know what that Self is.

In order to best help a psychotherapy patient, we start with what is called an ‘intrapsychic’ focus. Some people seek help from a counselor or psychotherapist because they realize that they have an internal problem, that they are having some kind of intrapsychic crisis, and they want an expert to help them sort it out. But this is relatively rare in psychotherapy. Most people seek help because of external problems and stressors. There may be some level of awareness that there is a problem within themselves that is adding to these external problems, but their focus is more often outward. Even with a relatively healthy Psyche seeking further skills in life through the use of philosophical knowledge, the person will be better able to utilize that knowledge effectively if they are more fully aware of how their mind works. It is the first task of the psychotherapist to help them look within, and I suggest this is the best place for the Philosophical Practitioner to start as well.

*Alcibiades I* gives us a model of how to begin. In it we see Socrates waylaying Alcibiades, who is on his way to enter public life, with the desire to be a leader of the government. Socrates questions Alcibiades in order to show him that he does not know the most important knowledge needed for his task: knowledge of justice. He points out that Alcibiades’ true rivals in leading Athens are not his fellow Athenians, but rather their greatest enemy, the Persians. He also points out that the Persian prince’s education is clearly superior to Alcibiades’, and it happens to be tetradic in form, covering the four cardinal virtues:

And when the boy reaches fourteen years he is taken over by the royal tutors, as they call them there: these are four men chosen as the most highly esteemed among the Persians of mature age, namely, the wisest one, the justest one, the most temperate one, [122a] and the bravest one.

His line of questioning brings Alcibiades to identify one half of the Platonic definition of Justice: to mind your business. Socrates continues to point out the incompleteness of Alcibiades definition, but his purpose is not to help Alcibiades identify or learn what justice is. Rather than ‘doing philosophy’ with Alcibiades in order to gain external knowledge, Socrates goal is to bring Alcibiades to an intrapsychic crisis so that he will admit his ignorance in caring for his self, which starts with knowing the self:

*Alcibiades:* Well, by Heaven, Socrates, I do not even know what I mean myself, and I fear that for some time past I have lived unawares in a disgraceful condition.

*Socrates:* But you must take heart. For had you perceived your plight [127e] at fifty, it would be hard for you to take pains with yourself (*epimelēthēnai sautou*, to take care of yourself); whereas here you are at the time of life when one ought to perceive it.

*Alcibiades:* Then what should one do on perceiving it, Socrates?

*Socrates:* Answer the questions asked, Alcibiades: only do that, and with Heaven’s favor—if we are to put any trust in my divination—you and I shall both be in better case.

*Socrates:* Come then, what is “taking pains over oneself”— [128a] for we may perchance be taking, unawares, no care of ourselves, though we think we are—and when does a man actually do it? Does he take care of himself at the same time as over his own things?

Socrates goes on to point out what ‘taking pains’ over the self is not: it is not taking care of one’s belongings (such as the body), nor is it taking care of the ‘belongings of our belongings’ (such as a ring which ‘belongs’ to the finger):

*Socrates:* Well then, could we ever know what art makes the man himself better, if we were ignorant of what we are ourselves? [129a]

*Alcibiades:* Impossible.

*Socrates:* Well, and is it an easy thing to know oneself, and was it a mere scamp who inscribed these words on the temple at Delphi; or is it a hard thing, and not a task for anybody?

*Alcibiades:* I have often thought, Socrates, that it was for anybody; but often, too, that it was very hard.

*Socrates:* But, Alcibiades, whether it is easy or not, here is the fact for us all the same: if we have that knowledge, we are like to know what pains to take over ourselves; but if we have it not, we never can...

*Socrates:* So man is different from his own body?

*Alcibiades:* It seems so.

*Socrates:* Then whatever is man?

*Alcibiades:* I cannot say.

*Socrates:* Oh, but you can—that he is the user of the body.

*Alcibiades:* Yes. [130a]

*Socrates:* And the user of it must be the soul? [Psyche]

*Alcibiades:* It must.

*Socrates:* And ruler? [*arkhousa*, or *arkhōn*]

Alcibiades I is a relatively short read, and well worth the time, but I have a much simpler way to cover much of the same ground. When I first meet with a patient, the focus is on evaluation and treatment planning. Most sessions are just a 50-minute hour, which doesn't leave much if any time for 'treatment' per se. I try to end with my nutshell version of Alcibiades I if time allows, otherwise it is how I start the next session. I simply ask something along the line of, "Do you try to take care of yourself?" I've never had someone answer that they do not.

I then ask something like, "What are the things you do to take care of yourself?" Inevitably their response is focused on taking care of their bodies or belongings. Sometimes they may also mention parts of their true self, such as processing their emotions or bettering their intellect through education, but that is rare in my experience. In either case, their focus is generally on the physical.

I then go on to point out that I am not talking about their bodies, at least not primarily, and certainly not their belongings (such as job, finances, or family). I point out that they are not the same as these things. That, while that would be very unfortunate if they lose their job or house or even their right arm, they would still be themselves. Sometimes they get this, sometimes not. If not, then I use an example of someone they love, like their spouse or parent or (most powerfully) their child. I ask that if their child lost an arm, would they love that child any less? Would that child be any less of a person? The answer is inevitably no. Then what does it mean to take care of the Self? This is then the segue into introducing them to the Tetradic Psyche.

### **Auto Nomos = Self Rule = Autonomy**

Rather than describing the Psyche using the language of Plato, or the combined Plato / Freud version (which I use when communicating with fellow psychotherapists), I use less technical language.

I label and walk them through the parts of the Psyche by drawing each part on a white board, along with the corresponding part of the brain:

### Know Your SELF (*Gnothi Seauton*)

S - Soma (Body) / Survival (Fight/Flight) part

E - Emotional part (Love: Joy, Sad, Anger, Guilt; wave that will peak and pass)

L - Logical part (Intelligence, Time, Planning)

F - Fundamental Rules: relationship between parts (Healthy = Attentive, Unhealthy = Neglectful / Abusive)

Once I have gone through this, I then go back through and talk about how to use this knowledge to take care of the Self, whether dealing with life's problems or striving for excellence. This becomes their homework to practice, and is a structure for all future sessions.



Figure 11

### Take Care of Your SELF (*Epimeleia Seauton*)

R - Relationship with SELF, Golden Rule = Attend to SELF

U - Unmanaged Anxiety (Fight/Flight) should be Attended to (Relax and Breathe)

L - Label and Attend to Emotions (feel wave and impulse for action)

E - Examine, Decide what Logical / Constructive Action to take

I give them a 'cheat sheet' that has the above information on the back of a card to carry with them, and follow it up (often via email) with most of the detail for each part which I would have spoken in session:

SELF Consists of four parts:

1. **SOMA/SURVIVAL:** Soma is the Greek word for body. The physical automatic functions that manage our bodily functions necessary for safety and survival, i.e. digestion, body temperature, hunger, thirst, reproduction, shelter, physical boundaries, etc. While very complex, lacks intelligence. Has only one response to any perceived danger: the fight-or-flight (sometimes freeze) response, also known as anxiety. Anxiety can be experienced as either irritability (fight) or fear (flight), and in humans can be triggered by any perceived danger. It's healthy to respond to a real danger

with anxiety, but modern civilization often confuses wants with needs, and problems that simply need to be addressed with real safety/survival issues. Often our internal set of Fundamental Rules dictate that emotions are not allowed, or a sign of weakness, or loss of control, etc., so that when natural and healthy emotion starts to come, we respond to it as if it is dangerous and thus we have anxiety, and can use the anxiety to suppress the emotion (tension). Anxiety is a healthy response to real danger, and can be healthy in response to real problems, as long as it is used to fight/fix the problem, or flight/remove yourself from the problem or come to acceptance if there is no way to fix the problem. But anxiety is only effective for a fast response, to become quickly aware of a threat and then act on your own behalf. Chronic anxiety is very dysfunctional and physically unhealthy. Symptoms of anxiety can include: muscle tension, fidgety/restlessness, dry/sweaty, rapid heartbeat, nausea, dizziness, mental rumination or “worrying”, losing track of thoughts, etc. The only part of the autonomic system that can be directly and consciously controlled is breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing and muscle relaxation are the keys to anxiety management.

2. EMOTION: A true emotion has three components: 1) the cognitive awareness of the emotion; 2) the accompanying physiological changes or physical experience of the emotion; and 3) the impulse toward, or motivation for, action as a result of the emotion (an e-motion). If you suppress any one of the three components, then you are not fully experiencing your feeling, which results in anxiety. There are only four core emotions which are universal across cultures, and each have a physiology (components 2 and 3) to them that is either experienced (good) or suppressed (bad): joy, anger, sadness, and guilt. All true emotions are triggered by love; they are a reaction to a situation involving something or someone we care about. If we don't love/care, we don't have an emotional reaction. Emotions are healthy and normal human responses that need to be experienced for psychological health. Emotions that are not suppressed are experienced like a wave that reaches a peak and then passes. Emotions that are suppressed result in a battle within the Self through anxiety and neglect or abuse.

3. LOGIC: intellect, reason, knowledge, abstract thinking, beliefs/opinions about right and wrong, etc. Intellect should be used to attend to your rights and responsibilities, your wants and needs, to address problems, to learn from the past and plan for the future, and to decide what constructive actions to take in the face of any given situation.

4. FUNDAMENTAL RULES: the relationship or attitude you have toward your Self, the other 3 parts of your mind. This is generally an internalization of the rules and attitudes from the people and environment we were raised in. Can be either caring/attentive, ignoring/neglectful, abusive/self-destructive, or some combination thereof. Developing a caring and attentive relationship with your Self is necessary for psychological health, and a happy and effectual life. This can be compared to the U. S. Constitution, the document outlining the structure and laws our country is founded on. Eventually our forefathers realized that they were living under a Tyrant that was both neglectful and abusive to their rights, needs, and wants. What did they do? They chose to reject that way of being treated, wrote the Declaration of Independence which declared all men to be equal and endowed with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They then fought and won their independence, and established a new and healthier government, a new nation, embodied in the Constitution. People often find that they have been living out of habit by rules that they did not choose for themselves, rules that are neglectful and/or abusive to their Self. With this realization one can choose to declare independence from those old rules, and establish a “more perfect union” that attends to each of the other parts: SELF RULE



I will end this article with yet one final quote, from Epictetus the Stoic. It is an excellent motivator for us all to strive to live the philosophical life, once we have begun to know ourselves:

How long are you going to wait before you demand the best for yourself and in no instance bypass the discriminations of reason? You have been given the principles that you ought to endorse, and you have endorsed them. What kind of teacher, then, are you still waiting for in order to refer your self-improvement to him? You are no longer a boy, but a full-grown man. If you are careless and lazy now and keep putting things off and always deferring the day after which you will attend to yourself, you will not notice that you are making no progress, but you will live and die as someone quite ordinary.

From now on, then, resolve to live as a grown-up who is making progress, and make whatever you think best a law that you never set aside. And whenever you encounter anything that is difficult or pleasurable, or highly or lowly regarded, remember that the contest is now: you are at the Olympic Games, you cannot wait any longer, and that your progress is wrecked or preserved by a single day and a single event. That is how Socrates fulfilled himself by attending to nothing except reason in everything he encountered. And you, although you are not yet a Socrates, should live as someone who at least wants to be a Socrates. (Enchiridion, Chapter 51)

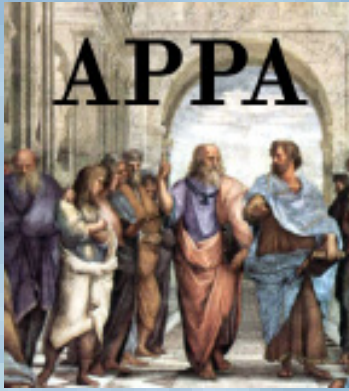
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# PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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