

Pleasure, Pain, and “Anticipation” in Plato’s *Laws*, Book I¹

Susan Sauvé Meyer

The Divine Puppets

In a memorable passage in book I of Plato’s *Laws*, the Athenian expounds upon the psychological sources of human action:

ATHENIAN: Do we assume that each of us is one person?

KLEINIAS: Yes.

ATH: But we have inside ourselves two opposite and mindless advisors, which we call pleasure and pain.

KL: That’s the case.

ATH: In addition to these, we have opinions about the future, whose general name is anticipation (ἔλπις) and whose specific names are “fear” in anticipation of pain, and “confidence” (θάραρος) in anticipation of its opposite. And on top of all these we have judgment (λογισμός) as to which of them is better or worse.

When this becomes the common view of a city, it is called “law.” (644c4–d3)²

In the face of his interlocutor’s puzzlement (d4–6), the Athenian follows up with a concrete illustration of this theory by means of what he calls a “fable” (μῦθος) (645b2):

ATH: Let us suppose each of us living beings is a divine puppet (θαῦμα).

Whether we are constituted as the gods’ playthings or for a serious purpose is not our present concern, but we do know that these forces in us are like cords or strings tugging against each other and pulling us toward opposing actions, across the boundary dividing virtue from vice. One of these pulls, on this story, is the one to which each of us must cleave without fail and resist the pull of all the other strings. This is the sacred and golden pull of judgment, also called the city’s common law. Being golden, it is soft (μακαλήν), while the others are hard

¹ I am pleased to dedicate this essay to Charles Kahn, my colleague for the past fifteen years, in appreciation of the encouragement he has given to my own forays into the field of Platonic scholarship.

² All translations from Plato’s *Laws* and *Timaeus* are my own.

(σκληράς) and iron (σιδηράς), akin to many different kinds of stuff. Each of us must pitch in with the noblest pull, that of law, which is noble owing to its source in reason but gentle, rather than violent, so its influence requires assistance (ὑπηρετών) if the golden element within us is to win the struggle against the others. (644d7–645b1)

The psychological theory and its concrete illustration in the fable of the puppets are offered to illuminate the nature of “self-mastery” which has functioned as a paradigm for virtue since the beginning of the work (626e2–6, 633d5–e6). Victory over oneself, however paradoxical such a notion might appear at first, is to be construed as victory of the better part over the worse in a complex whole (626e7–627d4). So far in Book I, the distinction between “better” and “worse” elements has been explored only in the context of political or familial strife, with no attempt made to identify the corresponding parts within a single person. It is in our present passage that the Athenian turns to this analysis. The better part of a person (the golden cord) is reason or judgment (λογισμός), and self-mastery consists in its victory over the “iron strings”—the sway of pleasure, pain, and their “anticipations.”

A problem for those who would cultivate such self-mastery, the puppets passage tells us, is that reason, being soft (μακαλή) and gentle (πρᾶος) in keeping with its “golden” nature, requires “assistance” in order to win the struggle against the iron chords, whose pull is, by contrast, hard (σκληρός) and violent (βιαίος). The kind and source of the “assistance” that the Athenian has in mind is not evident in our passage. We might recall that on the tripartite psychology of the *Republic*, it is θυμός (“spirit”, the middle part of the soul) that, when properly cultivated, plays the role of reason’s assistant in resisting the pull of the appetites (*Republic* 441e–442b). But the puppets fable here in the *Laws*, in distinguishing between golden and iron strings, makes what is on the surface at any rate, a bipartite rather than a tripartite division.³

³ Thus W. W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1975), 24: “what had seemed a threefold distinction is to be construed primarily as a dichotomy.” K. Schöpsdau, *Nomoi, Buch I–3: Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 229–230, argues that the division is fundamentally bipartite, with the “anticipations” (θάρρος and φόβος) not easily distinguished from pleasures and pains. Earlier endorsements of the “bipartite” diagnosis of the psychology of *Laws* I

To be sure, the psychological division that precedes the fable identifies further complexity within the “iron strings”—between pleasure and pain on the one hand, and their “anticipations” (ἐλπίδες) on the other—and we might wonder whether something analogous to the *Republic*’s distinction between spirit and appetite is to be found here.⁴ However, on a very natural reading of the psychology outlined at 644c6–d3, this is not at all what we find. The “iron strings”, whose multiplicity and variety are emphasized in the puppets metaphor (645a4), are here distinguished into two subsets. In the first are pleasure and pain, whose characterization as “opposite advisors” (644c6) would seem to point to the fact that pleasures attract us and pains repels us.⁵ Thus one set of iron strings would amount to the attraction we naturally feel toward pleasant experiences and the aversion we feel to painful ones. The other set are “expectations” or “anticipations” (ἐλπίδες) of pleasure and pain. It is easy to suppose that we are meant to understand the latter quite simply as temporal extensions (in creatures capable of anticipating the future)

include G. Müller, *Studien zu den platonischen Nomoi* (Munich: Beck, 1951), *Zetemata* 3, 22; D. A. Rees, “Bipartition of the Soul in the Early Academy,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957), 112–116; H. Görgemanns, *Beiträge zur Interpretation von Platons Nomoi* (Munich: Beck, 1960), *Zetemata* 25, 122, 137, 142; A. Graeser, *Probleme der platonischen Seelenteilungslehre* (Munich: Beck 1969), *Zetemata* 47, 102–105; T. Robinson, *Plato’s Psychology* (Toronto: 1970), 124–125, 145. A tripartite analysis of the *Laws*’s psychology was endorsed by O. Apelt, *Platon-Index* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1923) s.v. Seelenlehre, and by C. Ritter, *Platon: sein Leben, seine Schriften, seine Lehre*, Vol. 2 (Munich: Beck, 1923), 451, but has since fallen out of favor, an exception is T. Saunders, “The Structure of the Soul and State in Plato’s *Laws*,” *Eranos* 60 (1962), 37–55.

⁴ The question of “partition” at issue here concerns whether the impulses classified as “iron” in the *Laws* can be further sorted into two fundamentally different types of motivation, along the lines of the functional differences between the impulses issuing from the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul in the *Republic*. Such a conception of “partition” must be distinguished from a much stronger one recently advanced by Christopher Bobonich, according to which “parts” of the soul must be “agent-like” subjects of beliefs and desires in their own right (“Akrasia and Agency in Plato’s *Laws* and *Republic*,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994), 3–36; and *Plato’s Utopia Recast: His later Ethics and Politics* (Oxford: 2002), 260–267. On the basis of this stronger conception of “partition” (criticized by Lloyd Gerson, “Akrasia and the Divided Soul in Plato’s *Laws*,” *Plato’s Laws: From Theory into Practice*, eds. Luc Brisson and Samuel Scolnicov (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2003), 150–153), Bobonich denies that there is *any* partition of the soul in the *Laws*; however, he does not deny that the psychology of the *Laws* allows for conflicting occurrent impulses within a unitary subject. The question of concern to us in the present essay is whether these impulses may be classified as appetitive and “spirited” in the weaker sense. Dorothea Frede, in the most sustained recent discussion of the puppets passage (“Puppets on Strings: Moral Psychology in *Laws* Books 1 and 2,” in *A Guidebook to Plato’s Laws*, ed. Christopher Bobonich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 108–126), finds no functional distinction within the iron strings (p. 18), but she neglects the distinction explicitly marked by the Athenian between the motive force of pleasure and pain on the one hand (644c6–7), and that of their “anticipations” on the other (644c9–d1). This is the distinction, I shall argue, that recapitulates the functional distinction between appetitive and “spirited” impulses.

⁵ A claim made explicitly in a parallel passage at *Timaeus* 69d1–2.

of the basic hedonistic responses invoked in the former. We are attracted to pleasures we anticipate in the future, and repelled by the pains we anticipate.⁶

On this interpretation of the iron strings, the non-rational aspect of human motivation amounts quite simply to a basic psychological hedonism. The non-rational impulses of the human soul would all be what the *Republic* classifies as “appetitive” impulses, inasmuch as they are directed toward what is perceived as or expected to be pleasant (*Republic* 436a, 439d, 559d). Such a reading would imply that, in contrast to the tripartite division of the soul in *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Phaedrus*, we have a much simpler bipartite psychology in the *Laws*.⁷ Part of my project in this essay is to argue against the interpretation of the “iron strings” that would license this bipartite diagnosis of the psychology of the *Laws*—with particular emphasis on how we are to understand the “anticipations.” Although one of my conclusions will be that something very like *Republic*’s tripartition is not very far from the surface here in *Laws*, my main goal is not to defend a unitarian interpretation of Plato’s psychological theory, but to explore a development, in later dialogues such as *Philebus* and *Laws*, in Plato’s understanding of the ways in which pleasure and pain figure in the psychology of human action. Very roughly: pleasures and pains play a role in our psychology not simply as objects of pursuit and avoidance, but also as ways in which we respond to our options and alternatives.⁸

⁶ Such a “hedonistic” interpretation of the iron strings is, for example, endorsed by R. F. Stalley, *Introduction to Plato’s Laws* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 60–61. See also F. Bravo, “Le Platon des *Lois* est-il hédoniste?” In S. Scolnicov and L. Brisson (eds.), *op. cit.*, 103-115.

⁷ Not all adherents of the “bipartite” analysis of the psychology of *Laws* I endorse (or take an explicit stand on) this “appetitive” interpretation of the iron strings. For example, Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, insists that the iron strings are exclusively the seat of “emotional response” (24–26). Frede’s assessment (“Puppets,” p. 116-120) is effectively in accord with Fortenbaugh on this question, at least insofar as she takes the emotions to figure prominently among the iron strings. But to defend such a position, it is necessary to rule out the simple hedonist reading of the iron strings, which is my project.

⁸ I will thus be defending a version of Fortenbaugh’s core claim (*Aristotle on Emotion*, 9–11, 23–25, 29, 32–34) that in the *Laws* and *Philebus* Plato develops an account of what he calls “emotional response,” as distinct from the impulses attributed to the appetitive part of the soul in the *Republic*. I do not, however, follow Fortenbaugh’s extremely narrow conception of “appetitive” impulses as blind bodily “thrusts” devoid of cognitive content. An “appetitive” impulse, on the conception I will be using, is directed toward an object *qua* pleasant, or away from an object *qua* painful, and may very well involve a representation of the object. What distinguishes an emotional response from the pleasures and pains that are the objects of appetitive impulses, I will argue, is that the former is a pleasure or pain directed at an intentional object (e.g. distress at the prospect of losing one’s job), rather than a pleasure or pain that is the intentional object of a desire (e.g. the pleasures that are the object of sexual appetite).

Hedonism and the Iron Strings

If the iron strings, as elucidated in 644c–d, are intended to capture nothing more than our natural propensity to pursue pleasures and to flee from pains, one might wonder why the Athenian goes to the trouble of distinguishing four distinct “strings”: the two “witless” ones (pleasure and pain), and the two “anticipations” involving beliefs about the future. What point would there be to distinguishing the pull of “witless” pleasures (at 644c6–7) from that of the “anticipated” ones (at 644c9–d1)? Insofar as we are attracted to pursue pleasures (or to avoid pains), they must be in prospect, and hence anticipated.⁹ While the experience of pain presumably engages a set of mechanisms for recoil (this is the basic human response identified by the ancient Epicureans), it is unclear what movement is prompted by the bare experience of pleasure. One might suppose that it is a condition in which we are naturally inclined to remain, but to the extent that it moves us to take steps to remain in that condition (or to seek it out on another occasion), it would seem to involve expectation or anticipation (ἐλπίζ). So instead of the four iron strings identified by the Athenian, the hedonistic interpretation would lead us to expect only three: “witless” pain on the one hand, and the anticipations of pleasure and pain on the other.

One might defend the hedonistic interpretation of the iron strings against this criticism by supposing that the distinction between the pull of “witless” pleasure and pain on the one hand and their “anticipations” on the other is intended to distinguish the motivational pull of short-term as opposed to longer-term prospects for pleasure and pain. In that case, we would have four distinct iron “strings” (an advantage over the previous proposal)—but we would still need some positive reason to suppose, in the first place, that the “anticipations” are properly understood as impulses to pursue expected pleasures or flee expected pains.

Recall that the two “anticipations” are identified as fear (φόβος) and “confidence” (θάραχος) (644c10–d1). While fear might seem well suited to serve as an impulse to flee expected pains, confidence is a decidedly odd candidate for an impulse to

⁹ Thus Frede, “Puppets,” p. 117 notes that “only the future provides incentives to *act* in one way or another.”

pursue expected pleasures. One would rather expect desire (ἐπιθυμία or something like it) to play this role. Indeed the quartet—pleasure, pain, fear, and desire (ἐπιθυμία)—occurs frequently in other Platonic contexts to capture this sort of motivational apparatus—e.g., *Phaedo* 83b6–7, *Republic* 430a7–b1 (cf. 413b–e), *Theaetetus* 156b4–5—and later functions as the four Stoic genera of the passions.¹⁰ Confidence, however, conceived of as the expectation of future pleasure, does not necessarily imply an impulse to bring about that pleasure. Why take the trouble to bring about something that one is already confident will occur? If I am confident that you will pay me back at the end of the month, I will not pester you with reminders. (Of course confidence that X will occur does not preclude trying to bring about X; my point is simply that confidence does not require it.) So if the “anticipation” (ἐλπίς) of future pleasure is understood by the Athenian as an impulse to pursue that pleasure, it is decidedly odd that he identifies it as “confidence.”

In fact, however, “confidence” is not a particularly good translation of “θάραρος” in all the contexts in which it is deployed in *Laws* I. The term—cognate with θρασύς (bold), and which henceforth I will transliterate rather than translate—is often better translated “daring” or “boldness” (Latin *audacia*).¹¹ We can see this by attending to the subsequent development in Book I where the Athenian explores the roles played in the virtues of temperance and courage by the two “anticipations” fear and *tharros* (646e–647c). The latter, it is clear in this context, is the drive that impels the warrior to face and endure the dangers, fears, and pains of battle, and the proper cultivation of “*tharros* in the face of the enemy” (647b6–7; cf. 649b9–c1) is essential to the development of courage. *Tharros* so conceived is clearly an impulse (in keeping with its status as a “string” that pulls us), but it is one that resists, rather than abets, our aversion to pains. Indeed, it is cultivated by the educational institutions of militaristic societies such as Sparta, whose educational goal is summed up as cultivating “endurance of pain” (633b6). Thus, contrary to the hypothesis we are considering, which would construe it as an impulse to

¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 7.110–11. It is interesting to note that the “good feeling” (εὐπάθεια) coordinate with fear on the Stoic account, although it is usually reported to be “caution” (εὐλάβεια, Diogenes Laertius 7.116) is in some contexts identified as θάραρος (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.66; cf. Stobaeus, *Eclogues* 2.7.5b, 5g). For discussion, see Margaret Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 213–220.

¹¹ Thus Schöpsdau (*Nomoi*, 231) glosses θάραρος at 647a10 as “Dreistigkeit” (brazenness), even though he translates it consistently as “Zuversicht” (confidence).

pursue prospective pleasures, *tharros* turns out to be an impulse that opposes the basic hedonistic urge to flee present or expected pains. It is a force of resistance to our hedonistic impulses, allowing us to push past pains and resist the pull of fears.

Are we on any firmer ground in taking fear to be an impulse that serves a basic hedonistic orientation? While many fears will be impulses to avoid expected pains, the sort of fear that is to be cultivated in the citizens, according to the Athenian, is clearly not. To see why not, let us return for a moment to *tharros*, which turns out, on the Athenian's account, to be of limited value in citizens, with its proper application being restricted to military contexts. When deployed in social contexts, it is "shamelessness (ἀναίδεια) . . . the greatest evil in private or public life" (647a10–b1; cf. 649a5). This is the brazenness (θρασύτης—649c8–d1) that flies in the face of social conventions, especially the norms of justice that require self-restraint in the pursuit of pleasures. What a citizen needs in these contexts instead of *tharros*, the Athenian insists, is a kind of fear—not, to be sure, the fear of pain and injury that the warrior needs to resist on the battlefield, but rather an "opposite kind":

ATH: . . . Now tell me: are we able to distinguish two roughly opposite kinds of fear.

KL: What kinds do you mean?

ATH: These ones: on the one hand, we fear evils when we expect them to befall us.

KL: Yes.

ATH: On the other hand, on many occasions we fear for our reputation, believing that people will think ill of us if we do or say something unbecoming—a kind of fear that we, and I dare say everyone else, call shame (ἄισχύνη).

KL: Certainly.

ATH: These are the two fears I was talking about. The latter opposes not only pains and other fears but the most prevalent and strongest pleasures as well.

KL: You are right.

ATH: So doesn't the legislator, and anyone else worth his salt, hold this fear in great esteem, calling it "shame" and calling "shamelessness" the *tharros* that is

opposed to it—the latter being, in his view, the greatest evil in private or public life? (*Laws* I 646e4–647b1)

Not only does the requisite fear play a role in “resisting” the attraction of pleasures that would play havoc with social peace and stability (thus functioning as the counterpart of *tharros* in its role of resisting pains), it also enables one to resist the “pains and other fears” (647a5) of battle—thus doing the job of *tharros*. Indeed, the Athenian claims, shame actually plays a more significant role than *tharros* in military courage:

ATH: Not only does this fear safeguard us in many other important respects, nothing is more effective, man for man, at securing victory and safety in war itself. For there are two things that secure victory—confidence in the face of the enemy and fear of being disgraced for bad behavior in front of one’s friends. (647b3–7)

We have here two very different kinds of fear:

- (1) the fear of pain, death, and injury in the battlefield that is opposed by properly deployed *tharros*; and
- (2) the fear (shame) that opposes the pull of pleasures and pains—including the fears in (1).

Even if the fear in the first set of oppositions (which both *tharros* and shame are supposed to resist) may be construed as a hedonistic aversion to pain, the appropriately cultivated fear in the second set is not. Like the *tharros* to be inculcated in the citizens, the fear that they must acquire is an impulse that opposes our hedonistic attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain. We can capture this point by labeling the requisite fear and *tharros* as “oppositional impulses.”¹²

In noting the oppositional nature of fear and *tharros*, we are in the realm of what Thomas Aquinas called the “irascible” passions.¹³ Aquinas divided the passions into

¹² The sense in which fear and *tharros* are “oppositional” (i.e., fighting against resistance) is not the same as that in which they are opposites to each other. The latter opposition reflects the fact that fear and *tharros* have opposing vectors: fear is a restraining force while *tharros* is assertive.

¹³ *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae 23.1. On the sources of this notion, see S. S. Meyer and A. M. Martin, “Emotion and the Emotions” in R. Crisp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook to the History of Ethics* (forthcoming).

those belonging to the appetitive and those belonging to the “spirited” part of the soul. In his vocabulary, the latter is the “irascible” part, “*ira*” being his translation of the Greek θυμός). Notable among the five “irascible” passions he identifies are fear (*timor*) and daring (*audacia*—a good translation of *tharros*); the other three irascible passions are hope (*spes*) and despair (*desperatio*) (an opposed pair like fear and daring) and anger (*ira*) which has no opposite. The common feature of these passions, according to Aquinas, is that they are for objectives perceived as difficult to achieve or difficult to avoid. That is to say, achieving those objectives involves overcoming resistance or difficulty. This is clearly the case for the variety of fear and confidence that we are supposed to cultivate, according to the Athenian. As we have seen, these are directed either against external opposition (as in the case of the *tharros* that is to be deployed against the enemy in battle), or against wayward internal impulses (in the case of the shame that resists the pains and fears that would dissuade you from the right course of action or the desires and pleasures that would lead you astray).

Aquinas, in identifying such opposition as the salient feature of the middle—or in his terminology “irascible” (θυμοειδής)—part of the soul, has captured a central feature of Plato’s characterization of that part of the soul in the *Republic*. To see this, let us trace the Doppelgängers of *tharros* and fear in the context of the *Republic*’s tripartite psychology. A version of *tharros* first appears in the *Republic*, although not under that name, with the introduction of the military class in Book II (374aff.). The primary natural qualification for this occupation is to be “spirited” (θυμοειδής), understood as involving ferocity and aggression (375a–b), a desideratum that makes sense in the light of the soldiers’ function of guarding the city against enemies. The requisite ferocity and aggression is, in everything but name, the kind of *tharros* attributed to the courageous warrior in *Laws* I, and to which, we have seen, the Athenian accords a limited role in the properly cultivated soul. It also carries with it the danger, made much of by Socrates in *Republic* and by the Athenian in the *Laws*, of nasty anti-social implications. If misdirected or carried beyond its proper military context, it yields the aggressive self-seeking at the expense of fellow citizens that a sense of shame is supposed to curb (*Republic* 375b–c; cf. 410d–e, 411c–e). This is why the Athenian’s interlocutors are

wrong, he thinks, to suppose that cultivating toughness and ferocity exhausts the moral education of the citizens (*Laws* 666e–667a).

Another characteristic manifestation of the “spirited” part in the *Republic*, made much of in the argument in Book IV for the distinction between the spirited and the appetitive parts of the soul, is in shame and disgust. The example illustrating the conflict between these parts of the soul is that of Leontius, who has the prurient desire to gaze at corpses, and marshals against it the shame and disgust that issues from his “spirit” (θυμός—439e–440e). The sense of shame that the Athenian, in the *Laws*, identifies as the fear to be cultivated in the citizens is of a kind with Leontius’ disgust. (If you are inclined to be more impressed by Leontius’ disgust than by a concern with the opinion of others—in the way that guilt may appear more morally impressive than shame—it is useful to note that the shame touted by the Athenian in the *Laws* is not essentially concerned with reputation; it is alternatively described as fear of “daring to say, undergo, or do anything disgraceful” (ἀΐσχροτόν—649d1–2).¹⁵

Let us return now to the bigger picture, and to our concern with whether the fear and *tharros* invoked as “anticipations” of pleasure and pain at *Laws* 644c4–d3 are to be construed as impulses to flee expected pains and to pursue expected pleasures, and thus whether the only non-rational impulses we find among the iron strings are those classified as appetitive in the *Republic*. It is now abundantly clear not only that these anticipations are not appetitive impulses, but that the roles they play in the internal dynamics of motivation and action recapitulate very closely the functions attributed to the “spirited” part of the soul in the *Republic*. Tripartition is not far below the surface here. Indeed, it is clear that the “assistants” required by the gentle pull of reason’s golden cord in order to win in its struggle against the iron strings (645a6) are precisely the fear and *tharros* to be cultivated by the legislator; thus these play the role accorded to spirit in the *Republic* as being reason’s ally against the appetites (441e–442b).¹⁶

¹⁵ In this regard, one might note that the verb used to describe Leontius’ disgust (δυσχεραίνειν—439e9) is used by Aristotle at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1179b31 to describe the virtuous person’s distaste for what is shameful (αἰσχροτόν), the flip side of his love for the fine (στέργειν τὸ καλόν).

¹⁶ Thus even though Bobonich is right to claim that nowhere in *Laws* is θυμός (“spirit”) said to play the role of assisting reason in its struggle against appetites (“Akrasia and Agency,” 19n36, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 264), the iron strings of fear and *tharros* play the same functional role. That they should “assist” the golden cord of reason in this way is consistent with the proposal of Schöpsdau, *Nomoi*, 232 that the

Anticipations Reconsidered

If fear and *tharros* are not, after all, impulses to flee anticipated pain and pursue anticipated pleasures (or at least not in the cases most interesting to the Athenian), then how are we to understand their characterization as “ἐλπίδες” of pleasure and pain at 644c9–d1? We might get some illumination by considering other passages where Plato discusses ἐλπίδες (anticipations), pleasures and pains, and fear and *tharros*.

One parallel passage is in the *Timaeus*, where we are given an enumeration of the sorts of “affections” (παθήματα) that arise in the soul as a necessary consequence of its embodiment:

first of all pleasure, the greatest enticement to evil, next pains that drive us away from the good, and further those witless advocates, *tharros* and fear, as well as anger, hard to assuage, and anticipation (ἐλπίδα) easily led astray . . . (*Timaeus* 69d1–4)

In many respects this passage is a doublet of *Laws* 644c4–d3, with the grouping together of pleasure, pain, daring and fear, and the repetition of the dual expression, “witless advocates” (ἄφρονε συνβούλω 69d3) from *Laws* 644c6–7, although here it characterizes fear and daring rather than pleasure and pain. In contrast with our passage in *Laws*, however, fear and daring are not classified here as types of “anticipation” (ἐλπίς). Although branded with the foolishness characteristic of these impulses (it is “easily misled”), “anticipation” gets a separate entry on the list. Thus we have no answer here to our question about why fear and confidence/daring are classified as ἐλπίδες in *Laws* I.

The *Philebus* is considerably more helpful to our inquiry. In this dialogue, the notion of “anticipation”—while most famously deployed in the (notorious) doctrine of

assistance referred to at *Laws* 645a6 comes from education (παιδεία); presumably it is education that cultivates the requisite fear and *tharros*.

false pleasures at 36c–40e—is initially invoked when “pleasures of the soul” are distinguished from those of the body:¹⁷

Now accept also the anticipation (προσδόκημα) by the soul itself of these two kinds of experiences: that (τὸ . . . ἐλπιζόμενον) before (πρό + gen.) the actual pleasure will be pleasant and comforting (θαρραλέον), while that before (πρό + gen.) the pain will be frightening (φοβερόν) and painful. (*Philebus* 32b9–c2; trans. D. Frede, slightly altered)¹⁸

This passage combines all the salient elements of our text in *Laws* 644c4–d3. We find the notion of “anticipation” here used in its verbal form (ἐλπίζειν), and also (as in the *Laws* passage) used generically to encompass both positive and negative prospects. We also find fear (φόβος) and *tharros*—in their adjectival forms—used to characterize the two sub-species of “anticipation”; and finally, we have the use of πρό + genitive (“before”) for the object of anticipation. What is especially significant in this passage is that the activity of anticipation (ἐλπίζειν) is itself presented as pleasant or painful (32c1–2). It is not merely the anticipation of a pleasant or painful experience, but it is itself pleasant or painful (cf. 36b4–6; 47c7).

That the “anticipations” are themselves pleasant and painful is a point reiterated when the notion of ἐλπίζειν is again deployed for the point about false pleasures:

SOC: Did we not say before, about the pleasures and pains that belong to the soul alone, that they might precede those that go through the body? It would therefore be possible that we have anticipatory pleasure and pains (προχαίρειν τε καὶ πολυπέϊσθαι) about the future. (*Philebus* 39d1–5)

One example of an anticipatory pleasure would be savoring in one’s mind, when thirsty, the prospect of a cold drink. This is not an affectless belief about the future (a mere expectation that one will have the pleasure in the future), but a pleasure taken in the

¹⁷ The pleasures of the soul are distinguished from those of the body at *Philebus* 31e–32c; 33c, 34c, 36a, 39d, 41b–c.

¹⁸ All translations from the *Philebus* will be from Dorothea Frede, *Plato: Philebus* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993).

prospect of what one anticipates will happen. Such pleasures (and the corresponding variety of pains) are cases of “anticipation,” as Socrates allows explicitly (36a7–c1; 39d1–5). Similarly, in the putative example of a false pleasure, a person delights in the prospect of becoming very wealthy and enjoying the pleasures that accrue from that (40a–c). He is mistaken in thinking that he will get the wealth, or that he will enjoy it (40b), and this is the reason why his anticipatory pleasure is false.

We may set aside the thorny question of how to understand the putative falsity of his pleasure¹⁹ and focus simply on the fact that this “anticipatory” pleasure is directed at a mental picture (40a9–12).²⁰ In other words, this (anticipatory pleasure) is a pleasure *at* an intentional object, and its negative counterpart (anticipatory pain) is to be understood as pain directed *at* an intentional object. Thus the anticipatory pleasures and pains invoked in the *Philebus* share a common feature with the other class of “pleasures and pains of the soul” identified in that dialogue. These are the feelings of fear and anger “and all such things” (40e2–3), which are explicitly said to be *about* or *at* (ἐπί + dative) objects that can be true or false (40d7–e4). The members of the set are further enumerated at 47e1–3 to encompass: fear, anger, longing, lamentation, love, jealousy, envy “and the like” (e2). These are, one might note, the sorts of “pleasures and pains” that the legislator is supposed to cultivate in the citizens (*Laws* I 631e4–632a1), and that the Athenian evidently takes to be included among the “iron strings” at 645d7–8. The pains in question include those one might experience *at* the occurrence of apparent misfortune (illness or poverty), and the pleasures include those one experiences *at* their opposites (cf. *Republic* 387d–388e, 398d–399c, 605c–606b). For convenience, I will refer to these pleasures and pains of the soul as “emotional responses.”

Unlike narrowly anticipatory pleasures and pains, however, emotional responses need not be directed *at* objects that are themselves respectively, pleasant or painful. For

¹⁹ The precise sense in which the pleasures in Socrates’ example are supposed to be false is a matter of considerable scholarly dispute, which need not concern us here. For a classic statement of the interpretive difficulties, including a sustained discussion of anticipatory pleasures, see Dorothea Frede, “Rumpelstiltskin’s Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato’s *Philebus*,” *Phronesis*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1985), 151–180. For a survey of and response to recent developments in the dispute, see Matthew Evans, “Plato on the Possibility of Hedonic Mistakes,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2008), 89–124.

²⁰ On the significance of mental pictures in non-rational motivation, see Hendrik Lorenz, *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), ch. 7.

example, envy (on the list at *Philebus* 47e1–3) is pain at the apparent good fortune of another—hardly a painful experience, however much it pains the envious person to contemplate it. Nor need the objects of the emotional responses be actually expected to occur, as opposed to “entertained” (which is nicely captured by the model of an internal picture at *Philebus* 40a). This is easiest to see in the case of shame, when it functions as a deterrent to inappropriate action. It is the thought of doing the unjust act (not the positive expectation that one will do it) that is painful to the person with a properly cultivated sense of shame (“I would be ashamed to do that . . .”). Nonetheless, it is a feature of both the emotional responses listed at 40e and 47e and the “anticipatory” pleasures and pains described at 32b9–c2, 36a7–c1, 39d3–5 and 47c7, that they are pleasures or pains *at* intentional objects, and it is presumably this shared feature that underwrites their classification as pleasures or pains “of the soul.”

The upshot of these observations about “anticipations” and emotions in *Philebus* is that it is perfectly intelligible why the Athenian in *Laws* should classify fear (especially its specific manifestation as shame) as an “anticipation”—the salient feature being not that its intentional object (what is entertained) is an expected painful experience (unlikely in the case of shameful pleasures), but that entertaining that prospect is painful: that it is pain of the soul directed *at* an intentional object.²¹ The Athenian would be using ἔλπις in a generic sense, prepared for but not articulated in the *Philebus*, that encompasses all pleasures or pains with intentional objects (whether anticipatory pleasures/pains or emotions). Thus the distinction invoked at *Laws* 644c4–d3 between pleasure and pain as our “witless advisors” and our “anticipations” of pleasure and pain is (however inchoately) a distinction between the motive force supplied, on the one hand, by our attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain and, on the other, by our ability to have pleasures and pains with intentional objects. The “witless advisors” are pleasures and pains that function as the intentional objects of desire, e.g., the allure of a cold drink on a

²¹ While in many instances of fear the intentional object is a future pain, the crucial feature that makes them fears, on this account, is that they are distress *at* something anticipated, not that the thing anticipated is painful. The bad reputation that is the object of shame, for example, is not intrinsically painful (just as winning the lottery or the Nobel prize is not intrinsically pleasant).

hot day, while the “anticipations” are pleasures and pains that themselves have intentional objects (e.g. pain at the thought of drinking more than one’s fair share).²²

Thus unpacked, the psychology of the “iron strings” in Plato’s *Laws*, gestured at by the very economical description invoking pleasure, pain, and “anticipation” at 644c4–d3, involves considerable complexity. While accommodating all the potential for opposition between spirited and appetitive impulses that is dramatized in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, it also marks out two very different ways in which pleasure and pain figure into our motivational apparatus. On the simplest level (marked out by the identification of pleasure and pain as our “witless advisors”) we have a set of hedonistic motivations—a tendency to pursue pleasures and to flee from pains. Quite distinct from this, and involving our capacity for opinion (*doxa*), we have pleasures and pains that are directed at intentional objects. When properly cultivated, the latter can direct us toward goals other than securing pleasure or avoiding pain—for example, achieving the admirable (*καλόν*). One of the morals of the puppets fable is that the latter set of motivations can be deployed to resist the pull of the former.²³

In such cases, shame and *tharros* will oppose, from within the iron ranks, the hedonistic pull of pleasure and pain. This is not a deliberative opposition between alternatives (e.g. weighing how much pleasure I will get from indulging in a pleasant opportunity against how pained I will be if I indulge). Rather, my being pained *now* at the prospect of indulging is the source of an impulse that can oppose a hedonistic impulse to indulge—in just the way that, in the *Republic*, Leontius’ shame opposes his prurient appetitive desire. In declining to attribute such opposition to a third part of the soul (e.g.

²² This is not to deny that bodily pleasures and pains might also be “about” things (in the way one might think the pain in my arm is “about” the broken bone in my wrist, or the pleasure from a cold drink on a hot day is “about” replenishing depleted bodily fluids). Such a “representationalist” theory of pleasure and pain is defended for example, by Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), ch. 4, and attributed to Plato in the *Philebus* by Matthew Evans, “Plato and the Meaning of Pain,” *Apeiron* 40 (2007), 71–93. If the representationalist is right, then all pleasures and pains are “about” or “at” something, but it can still be distinctive of the anticipatory and emotional pleasures that Plato classifies as belonging to the soul, that they are about intentional objects, involving belief or imagination. In any case, the distinction of concern to my interpretive argument is not between pleasures/pains that are about (intentional) objects and those that are not, but between pleasures/pains that are the intentional objects of desires, and impulses (as in cases of hedonistic attraction and aversion) that have pleasures or pains as their intentional objects.

²³ Thus Fortenbaugh is right, against some version of the “bipartite” interpretations, that we have emotions here, but wrong if he means (as it seems to me he does) that attraction to pleasures is not included among the iron strings).

by positing a set of “silver strings” to assist the golden strings against the iron cords) the Athenian here indicates that he finds the apparatus of tripartition less helpful for understanding the nature of these all-important impulses than a stress on the fact that these impulses are kinds of pleasures and pains.

Thus we may conclude that the absence of explicit tripartition in the *Laws* does not indicate that the psychology there invoked by the Athenian involves a more simplistic analysis of human motivation than the tripartite psychology invoked by Socrates in the *Republic*. Rather, it would appear that Plato has come to have a deeper appreciation of the complexity and variety of the roles that pleasure and pain play in human motivation.²⁴

²⁴ I am grateful to the participants at the Delphi conference for their generous discussion of a preliminary draft of this paper, and to Flora Lee (herself a former student of Professor Kahn) for incisive written comments on a later version. Spirited discussion with audiences at Cornell and Fordham Universities forced me to clarify my thinking on the distinction between “bodily” and “psychic” pleasures in *Philebus*, and particular thanks in this regard are due to Stephen Mahaffey and Richard Boyd. Richard Patterson helped me to clarify the upshot of my argument and for helpful discussion of Fortenbaugh’s views I am indebted to Krisanna Scheiter.