



## Psychology and Violence in Plato's *Phaedrus, Republic and Timaeus*

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# Psychology and Violence in Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Republic* and *Timaeus*

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*In the Phaedrus, Plato describes the control of the epithumia by the reason as being extremely violent. The epithumia-black horse is brutalized and it becomes obedient by this brutality. The aim of this paper is to prove that this violence is not an image, but a psychological reality. Plato defends this point of view in the Timaeus, where he describes the psychophysiological process which occurs when the logos attacks the epithumia. But the Timaeus also shows that the thumos plays an important role in the realization of the rational violence.*

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## **Introduction**

In the *Republic*, Plato writes: “While physical exertion undertaken by force has no adverse effect on the body, any exercise forced [βίαιον] on the soul has no lasting value.”<sup>1</sup> Violence is useless in the case of the soul. Only the education composed of *gymnastikê* and *mousikê* can help the soul to become harmonious.<sup>2</sup> A similar idea seems to appear in the *Timaeus*: the intellect (*noûs*) takes the control of the entire soul by the study of the skies and of the regular movements of the planets.<sup>3</sup> In both texts, the domination of the rational is a soft and peaceful process. Whereas the *thumos* and the *epithumia* are described as being potentially violent, “reason is gentle and does not use force to get its way.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. J. Emlyn-Jones & William Preddy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), VII, 536e1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II, 376e2-3; 5-6; III, 403c8; 404e3-5; 410a7-9; 410b10-c3; 411e4-412a2; 441e7-442a2.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 47b5-c4.

<sup>4</sup> A. Domanski, “Role of Reason in Plato’s Philosophy,” *Akroterion* 55/46 (2001): 24. For the violence of *thumos*, see *Republic*, IV, 440b1; IX, 586c7-d2; *Laws*, IX, 863b2-4; 869e4-5. For *epithumia*, see *Republic*, IX, 588e4-589a4; *Laws*, V, 734a2-5; VI, 782e1-783a4; IX, 870a1-2; *Timaeus*, 70e3-4; 91b4-7. In this paper, I use very often the Greek words *thumos* and *epithumia*. I sometimes translate *epithumia* by appetite, but I never translate *thumos*, because it is a complex notion. About the meanings of *thumos*, see Jean Frère, *Ardeur et colère: Le thumos platonicien* (Paris: Kimé, 2004), 109-112; Olivier Renaut, *Platon: la médiation des émotions: l’éducation du θυμός dans les dialogues* (Paris: Vrin, 2014).

But this picture is different from what we find in the *Phaedrus*. In the famous chariot allegory (246a3-256e2), the control of appetite by reason appears to be extremely violent. The *logos*-charioteer must mistreat the *epithumia*-black horse if he wants to dominate it. At first sight, the psychological operation described in the *Phaedrus* is unique in the Platonic dialogues, for two reasons. First, because *logos* is not supposed to be violent. Second, because of the discreet role of *thumos* in controlling *epithumia*. In the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, *thumos* is described as the natural ally of *logos* against the appetites.<sup>5</sup> It causes anger in us and it corresponds to the military power in the city.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it would be logical that violence in the soul came from it. But in the *Phaedrus*, we can see that this is not the case. Reason uses strength whereas the *thumos*-white horse is passive and does not confront the *epithumia*-black horse. So, it is unclear whether *thumos* plays a role in the rational violence, which is quite intriguing.

In this paper, I want to prove that the violence of reason in the *Phaedrus* is not an exception. On the contrary, violence is one of the most efficient ways to control *epithumia*. The chariot allegory is confirmed by the *Timaeus*. Reason controls appetite by making it suffer. It is a real psychological process and not only an image. But I will also show that the *Timaeus* makes *thumos* active when *logos* tries to control *epithumia*. In this case, this is the *Republic* which is confirmed by the *Timaeus*. By consequence, the psychological violence implies both *logos* and *thumos*, and it appears in three major dialogues: the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. In order to demonstrate this theory, I will first comment on the brutality which appears in the *Phaedrus*. Then, through a reading of the *Timaeus*, I will show how reason can concretely act on *epithumia*. Finally, through a comparative reading of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, I will clarify the role of *thumos* in that violent but rational process.

## I. Brutality in the *Phaedrus*

### A. The Violence of Epithumia

The chariot allegory is well-known. The point here is not to comment on it in its entirety, but to underline what happens when the *logos*-charioteer tries to take the control of the two horses and, most of all, of the *epithumia*-black horse. The *thumos*-white horse appears to be passive and to follow obediently the charioteer's commands. The cause of this behavior is easy to find: the white horse is able to listen to the charioteer. It "is guided only by the word of command and by reason [λόγῳ]."<sup>7</sup> That is why the charioteer does not need to whip it. It is a clear reference to *thumos* as a natural ally of reason against *epithumia*.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Republic*, IV, 439e6-440b7; *Timaeus*, 70a2-7.

<sup>6</sup> We can deduce that the *thumos* corresponds to the military power in the city because both are intermediaries between a superior principle (the *logos*/the philosopher king) and an inferior principle (the *epithumia*/the people). Both are supposed to convey the main principle's commands to the inferior reality (*Republic*, IV, 441a2-3; 458c9-d4). That is why the guardians' soul is full of *thumos* (see *Republic* II, 375b5).

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. H.N. Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 253e7-254a1.

<sup>8</sup> E.S Belfiort thinks that the charioteer and the two horses do not really correspond to the three faculties of the *Republic*. As she says: "The charioteer represents a guiding principle in the soul, with desires of its own. The black horse represents an impulse to move in bold and disorderly fashion toward erotic objects, while the white horse represents the impulse to stand still and to resist these objects." See E. S. Belfiore, "Dancing with the Gods: The Myth of the Chariot in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *American Journal of Philology* 127/2 (2006): 190. According to me, this is not an objection to the fact that the three parts of the chariot are the three faculties of the *Republic*. On the contrary, as E.S Belfiort herself underlines (190), the white horse is τιμῆς ἐραστής, lover of honor (*Phaedrus*, 253e6). In the *Republic*, *thumos* is described as having φιλοτιμία (*Republic*, VIII, 548c7; 553c1; 586e9). The white horse is also friend of

black horse is literally deaf to the charioteer.<sup>9</sup> This deafness explains why the charioteer must mistreat it, because it is completely disobedient. Plato says that it is even “hardly obedient to whip [κέντρων] and spurs.”<sup>10</sup> But whip and spurs are the only communication possible between the charioteer and the black horse. If we translate this into psychological terms, it means that *epithumia* is not able to listen to reason. We find this idea in other texts.<sup>11</sup> Reason must act violently because appetite cannot understand its reasoning and arguments. In the *Phaedrus*, it seems that violence is even the only language understood by *epithumia*.

In any case, it is the only language which appears when reason tries to control it. To prove it, I will focus on the text from 253e5 to 255a1, which shows the role of violence in the interactions between reason and appetite. The whole process begins when the soul sees the beautiful young boy:

Now when the charioteer beholds the love-inspiring vision, and his whole soul is warmed by the sight, and is full of the tickling and pricking [κέντρων] of yearning [πόθου], the horse that is obedient to the charioteer, constrained [βιαζόμενος] then as always by modesty [αἰδοῖ], controls himself and does not leap upon the beloved; but the other no longer heeds the pricks [κέντρων] or the whip of the charioteer, but springs wildly forward [βιαιφέρεται], causing all possible trouble to his mate and to the charioteer.<sup>12</sup>

We see here that violence appears in the totality of the soul and not only between reason and appetite. The charioteer is the first to see the young boy and to react to his beauty. It is important to underline that Plato uses the word κέντρον, translated by “prick.” He uses the same word when he writes about the violence against the black horse; the charioteer uses the pricks to be obeyed. Why does Plato use this term for the charioteer himself? We find the phrase “πόθουκέντρον” in the *Republic* (IX, 573a7), when Plato describes the set of physical desires and pleasures which drive reason mad.<sup>13</sup> The idea is the same here. The *logos*-charioteer is disoriented by the violence of his desire caused by the beautiful young man.<sup>14</sup> This violence is also found in the *Timaeus* when the immortal soul comes into the body. The immortal soul’s contact with the sensations disorganizes its rational movements and “it becomes at the first irrational [ἄνοος].”<sup>15</sup> So, this violence pertaining to reason, which is nothing else than craziness, is not unusual in Plato’s dialogues. The irrationality of the charioteer causes two different reactions depending on the horses. In the case of the *thumos*-white horse, the violence is against the horse itself. It forces itself to restrain thanks to the αἰδώς. It means that

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modesty (αἰδοῖς, *Phaedrus*, 253d6). As O. Renaut has shown, *thumos* is responsible for the αἰδώς, because it deals with the link between the individual and the city. The αἰδώς is the emotional reaction to the observance of social values (Renaut, 104-105, 209).

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253e3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 253e4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Republic*, IV, 439d7-8; 440a9-b4; VIII, 554d1-3; *Timaeus*, 71a3-7; 91b5-7.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253e5-254a6. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>13</sup> Πόθος is used in order to express the emotional aspect of the desire. Whereas *epithumia* can be neutral because it is utilized to name the necessary appetites, πόθος has a bad signification because it designates what is passionate and seducing in the desire (see *Symposium*, 197d7; *Phaedrus*, 250c7; 252a7; *Laws*, IX, 870a2). That is why it can also be translated by “regret” (see *Cratylus*, 420a4-8; *Philebus*, 36a6; 47e1; 48a1; 50b7).

<sup>14</sup> As G.R.F Ferrari underlines, the prick of the charioteer is not the prick of the black horse. It is a reference to 251d5-e4, when the feathers grow and provoke pain in the soul (Giovanni Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus*, Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 186).

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard university press, 1981), 44a8.

it does not listen to reason, which is disoriented, but to its own nature, which implies the respect of social and personal values<sup>16</sup>—forth seduction of a young man is very criticized by the city.<sup>17</sup> The *thumos*-white horse does not fight the *epithumia*-black horse. It does not even seem to care about its irrational companion. It only respects a social imperative. On the opposite, the *epithumia*-black horse does not feel concerned by citizens' opinions. It is focused on its own aim: having an affair with the loved one. The *epithumia*-horse is the only one which is clearly linked to violence, as the word “βία” shows. It is the first to be violent against the soul's other faculties. The brutality against it, represented by the pricks and the whip, is useless. In this first part of the discourse, *epithumia* is clearly victorious: “And they at first pull back indignantly and will not be forced to do terrible and unlawful deeds; but finally, as the trouble has no end, they go forward with him, yielding and agreeing to do his bidding.”<sup>18</sup> The violence against *epithumia* is useless and the other faculties are reduced to protest. They end up following the movement imposed by appetite.

Then comes the second round. The soul is now close to the beloved:

When he [the charioteer] sees this [the Idea of Beauty] he is afraid and falls backward in reverence, and in falling he is forced to pull the reins so violently backward as to bring both horses upon their haunches, the one quite willing, since he does not oppose him, but the unruly [ὄβριστην] beast very unwilling. And as they go away, one horse in his shame and terror wets all the soul with sweat, but the other, as soon as he is recovered from the pain of the bit and the fall, before he has fairly taken breath, breaks forth into angry [ὄργῆ] reproaches, bitterly reviling [καλιζων] his mate and the charioteer for their cowardice and lack of manhood in deserting their post and breaking their agreement.<sup>19</sup>

When the charioteer sees the beautiful boy, he has the reminiscence of the Idea of Beauty. This reminiscence creates in him a violent movement by which he falls back and stops the team of horses. This movement was really used in ancient Greece when a charioteer tried to control his horses.<sup>20</sup> In this case, he stops the carriage because, when he remembers the Idea

<sup>16</sup> The *thumos* is sensible to honor. It is the value by which it evaluates the desire of *epithumia*: “Where his appetitive soul looks around and sees the possibilities of pleasure and pain, and his rational soul, to whatever extent it is functioning, assesses future options for their goodness and badness, seeks the true and avoids the false, his spirit will be sensitive to the honor and dishonor bound up in actions he might take or events that might befall him.” See T. Brennan, “The Nature of the Spirited Part of the Soul and Its Object,” in *Plato and the Divided Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 122. But, as the author outlines, this sense of honor is not always linked to the presence of other persons. Self-esteem is also due to *thumos*: “Spirit should still come to the assistance of reason in suppressing appetites that surpass the bounds of reason, even if there are no other persons in the picture” (ibid., 132).

<sup>17</sup> The judgement of the city about pederasty seems to be severe, particularly if the relation becomes sexual. See for example Nicolas Cartelet, *Aux origines de la pédérastie: petites et grandes histoires homosexuelles de l'antiquité grecque* (Paris: La Musardine, 2016), Part One, chapter 3 “Les Grecs face à la question homosexuelle.”

<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254a7-b1.

<sup>19</sup> Plato, 254b3-d1.

<sup>20</sup> About this historical practice, see Xenophon, *On Horsemanship*, 3.14; 8.7-8; Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, 189. As G. Ferrari shows, “the charioteer jerks back on the reins – thus closing off the option the bad horse would have him allow – as a not fully voluntary consequence or side-effect of his fear and reverence at the memory of the Forms; that is, the gesture is a part of his natural reaction to that memory simply by virtue of his being to one to hold the reins – of his being that in the psyche which is concerned for the good of the whole” (Ferrari, 197).

of Beauty, he understands that he must not physically seduce his beloved.<sup>21</sup> In other words, it is not the intensity of the memory which reverses the charioteer, but the awareness of its real origin and of its nature.

This awareness prevents the satisfaction of the sexual appetite searched by *epithumia*. If the fall is brutal for the charioteer, it is also the case for his horses. Again, their reactions are different. The white horse does not resist to the charioteer's traction, but it reacts emotionally and physically with intensity. The feelings of the white horse seem to be particularly violent. What is the cause of that violence? Is it the reminiscence or the proximity of the young man? Probably both. The white horse feels shameful because it has followed the black horse, and the terror the former feels may be the consequence of the reminiscence. The white horse cannot have the memory of the Idea of Beauty because it is the charioteer who contemplates the intelligible.<sup>22</sup> But it is also true that *thumos* is able to understand reason. In this case, the reminiscence known by the charioteer strengthens the values defended by the white horse. It is indecent to have sexual relations with a young man. The physical reaction of sweating shows the conflict suffered by the *thumos*-white horse, which is divided between reason and the *epithumia*.<sup>23</sup> But the white horse is still able to control itself.

On the contrary, the black horse's violence explodes and turns against the charioteer and the white horse. The violence of *epithumia* is never against itself. It does not have any self-control. This violence is not physical, but verbal. The features that one would spontaneously attribute to reason and *epithumia* are inverted here. Reason is not able to think or to act thanks to reflection and deliberation; it acts spontaneously and by reflex. It is *epithumia* that talks and argues.<sup>24</sup> We can even see that the talking and arguing refers to values like keeping a promise or demonstrating courage. Moreover, the ὄργη is a feeling of *thumos*, and not of *epithumia*.<sup>25</sup> However, the nature of *epithumia* is the same as in the other dialogues, as we can see with the word ὕβρις. In the other dialogues, ὕβρις is linked to physical desire and pleasure.<sup>26</sup> It is opposed to αἰδώς.<sup>27</sup> In the *Phaedrus*, ὕβρις is defined as the domination of *epithumia* in the soul: "when desire [ἐπιθυμία] irrationally drags us toward pleasures and rules within us, its rule is called excess [ὑβρις]."<sup>28</sup> So, how can we explain the strange behavior of *logos* and *epithumia* in the chariot allegory?

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<sup>21</sup> The charioteer learns with the reminiscence "what he will not do than of what he will" (Ferrari, 195).

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c7-d1; 248a1-3.

<sup>23</sup> *Thumos* is difficult to define because it has an intermediary status between the *logos* and the *epithumia*. By consequence, it can have the characteristics of both. It is able to listen to reason, but it can have irrational and violent reactions, particularly when it searches its natural object, the honor: "Spirit may be the natural ally of reason, but spirit's object, honor, is the natural ally of appetite" (T. Brennan, « The Nature of the Spirited Part of the Soul and Its Object », 127). According to O. Renaut, we find three meanings for the *thumos* as an intermediary: first, the *thumos* is an interval between beast and man, child and adult, rationality and irrationality, soul and body. Second, it has a middle position between reason and *epithumia*. Third, it acts like both an energy and a complex reasoning (Renaut, *Platon*, 118).

<sup>24</sup> I follow here the analysis of G. Ferrari: "But the special contribution of the account here in the *Phaedrus* is the curious feature of the give-and-take between two of the figures, the charioteer and black horse [...]: namely, that although the charioteer seems to stand for the control of reason and the bad horse for brutish, uninhibited lust, in the struggle between the two it is the bad horse who adopts persuasive language and the methods of reason, while the charioteer maintains control by sheer strength and wordless violence" (Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, 186).

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 440a6.

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Philebus*, 45e2; *Phaedo*, 81e5.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, 26e8.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 238a1-3.

### B. Madness as Cause of the Victory of Logos

The answer lies in the context of the myth, which is the demonstration of the superiority of philosophic madness. Love is madness for the philosopher, because of the reminiscence and of the birth of the wings, which symbolizes the rational return to the intelligible. Consequently, reason is not able to act discursively when it makes the reminiscence. As G. Ferrari shows, the rationality of *epithumia* is illusory.<sup>29</sup> It uses only one type of reasoning, the “prudential calculation of the means to a predetermined goal.”<sup>30</sup> It is unable to look further than the satisfaction of its individual desire, whereas *logos* aims the good of the soul in its entirety. The violent discourse of *epithumia* shows that *epithumia* does not understand anything about what is happening in the other faculties when reminiscence occurs. *Epithumia* is excluded from the awareness of the intelligible. In the instance of frustration, violence is *epithumia*’s unique means of communication. For that reason, the charioteer only uses violence when he tries to control the black horse. But when reminiscence occurs to *logos*, the violence against *epithumia* is useless and it keeps searching the young man. Under what conditions can violence be efficient? The answer can be found at the end of our text:

The effect [of the reminiscence] upon the charioteer is the same as before, but more pronounced; he falls back like a racer from the starting-rope, pulls the bit backward even more violently [βίῳ] than before from the teeth of the unruly horse [ὑβριστοῦ ἵππου], covers his scurrilous tongue and jaws with blood, and forces his legs and haunches to the ground, causing him much pain. Now when the bad horse has gone through the same experience many times and has ceased from his unruliness [ὑβρωεως], he is humbled and follows henceforth the wisdom of the charioteer, and when he sees the beautiful one, he is overwhelmed with fear [φόβῳ]; and so from that time on the soul of the lover follows the beloved in reverence [αἰδομένην] and awe.<sup>31</sup>

The description of violence is particularly realistic here. A classical psychological speech would not have the same impact on the imagination and on the representation of the conflict between *epithumia* and *logos*. In this passage of the chariot allegory, the verbal violence of the black horse becomes physical. The more the horse is frustrated the more it becomes unable to verbalize this frustration. *Epithumia* finally shows its true nature. Solely based on the body and its needs, *epithumia* is purely irrational. *Epithumia* is completely obsessed by its aim. We can now see why *epithumia* is depicted as an untamed beast.<sup>32</sup> *Epithumia* is unable to control itself and to follow rules by itself. But this time, violence is going to be useless. The charioteer is stricken by the reminiscence again and the strength of this vision creates a different reaction than before. In the second text that we have studied, reminiscence makes the black horse fall, but the charioteer is still unable to control it. He manages to get rid of it by begging it to wait until the next time to seduce the beloved one.<sup>33</sup> But the conclusion is different here. The reminiscence becomes so strong that the violence of *logos* against *epithumia* explodes. There is a causal link between the reminiscence and the violence of reason. When *logos* reminds the

<sup>29</sup> Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, 190-192.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254d2-255a1.

<sup>32</sup> In the *Republic*, the *epithumia* is described as a “compound beast” (παντοδαπὸν θηρίον, *Republic*, IX, 588e6). The *thumos* is also compared to a wild animal, a lion, but the word θηρίον is stronger when we talk about wildness. The θηρίον represents the sinister and frightening animal, which lives outside any kind of pack.

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254d2.

Idea of Beauty, it understands that the physical beauty that it sees is only an image of true Beauty. The sexual satisfaction will only be an obstacle between the *logos* and the intelligible. This awareness instantly silences physical appetite. It is still not the argumentative aspect of reason which takes control, but a madness which leads to the return to the contemplation of the Ideas. This madness is more powerful than the irrationality of *epithumia*. It is the repetition of the reminiscence which finally tames the appetite. So, the violence of reason is efficient when the reminiscence is profound and repeated. The consequences on appetite are twofold; the violence of reason creates pain and terror. *Epithumia* must suffer to become tamed. It is the only way to educate it, for its own good.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the use of violence to tame *epithumia* is not a surprise. Violence is omnipresent in the dialogue between appetite and *logos*. It is the only language understood by *epithumia*. But the chariot allegory is not plainly satisfactory when it comes to really understanding the psychological process which is at stake here. How can reason concretely use violence? The madness which appears in the *Phaedrus* cannot be generalized to all of Plato's dialogues and, above all, madness, of course, cannot be a philosophical and ethical prerequisite. We cannot expect every man to have a reminiscence of the Idea of Beauty to expect a moderate behavior from citizens.<sup>35</sup> So, can we find a psychological explanation of the violence of *logos* which is more general than what we find in the *Phaedrus*? The answer lies in the *Timaeus*.

## II. Pain and Fear in the *Timaeus*

*Timaeus*' monologue aims to explain the constitution of the world, of the soul and of the body. It is not a mythical discourse, even if the language used is not always appropriate to the realities which are described.<sup>36</sup> The body is built according to the structure of the soul and particularly, according to the interaction between the immortal soul, which corresponds to reason, and the mortal soul, which incorporates the *thumos* and the *epithumia*.<sup>37</sup> Again, Plato looks into the process of communication between reason and *epithumia*. The problem is the same as in the *Phaedrus*. Appetite is unable to understand what comes from the immortal soul. It only knows "by images [εἰδῶλων] and phantasms [φαντασμάτων]."<sup>38</sup> Here Plato defines more precisely the possible type of *epithumia*'s cognitive means. Of course, there is nothing rational in them. Even if appetite were able to receive reasonings, they would be incomprehensible for it. It only understands images and phantasms. Image (εἶδωλον) is opposed to what comes from intellect and reason.<sup>39</sup> With phantasms (φάντασμα), they are linked to lie and falsity. They are not real, and they have no being.<sup>40</sup> This kind of cognition

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<sup>34</sup> The soft education only concerns the *logos*. Repression is for the *epithumia* (Mary Margaret Mackenzie, *Platon on Punishment*, University of California Press (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1981), 194). Punishment and pain are the only ways to cure the soul when it is afflicted by the psychological disease which is the domination of the *epithumia* on the two other faculties: "According to the body/soul analogy, punishment is the medicine of wickedness – painful, but useful to effect a cure; when it succeeds, it makes us more temperate and just. We should not, therefore, avoid punishment, as is commonly advised" (Mackenzie, 183).

<sup>35</sup> It is particularly true when we know that the contemplation of the Idea of Beauty is different between the souls (*Phaedrus*, 248a1-c5). There are only few people who can make the reminiscence.

<sup>36</sup> The main limit of *Timaeus*'s discourse is the temporal vocabulary used for eternal realities, like the soul (*Phaedrus*, 245d7-246a2).

<sup>37</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 41c6; d1; 42e7; 43a4; 65a5, 69c6; 8; d5; e1; 73d3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 71a6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150c2.

<sup>40</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150e6; 151c3; *Sophist*, 237b7; 240d1; 260c8; 264c12; 266b6; *Symposium*, 212a4; *Laws*, X, 889d2; *Republic*, II, 382c1; X, 598b5; 8; 600e5.

fits very well with *epithumia* and explains why it is unable to act moderately by itself. It cannot access to *logos* and it only understands things which are very liable to be unreal and false. But there is a problem: how does *epithumia* understand images and phantasms? Can it use faculties like imagination or opinion?

#### A. The Question of the Cognitive Capacities of Epithumia

The *Timaeus* is unambiguous on this point: *epithumia* does not have access to opinion.<sup>41</sup> However, in the *Theaetetus*, there is an identification between imagination and sensation.<sup>42</sup> In the *Sophist*, imagination is described as an opinion which manifests itself by sensation and not reason.<sup>43</sup> In the *Timaeus*, Plato addresses the topic of rational opinion, but it is possible for *epithumia* to access a kind of opinion that only comes from sensation. He says that *epithumia* “shares [...] in sensation, pleasant and painful, together with desires [ἐπιθυμιῶν].”<sup>44</sup> The pleasant and the painful are particularly important for the rest of the argumentation, as we shall see. It seems that *epithumia* possesses a sensitive kind of knowledge. This point is supported by the description of the liver:

He [a god] fashioned it dense and smooth and bright and sweet, yet containing bitterness, that the power of thoughts which proceed from the intellect [ἡ ἐκ τοῦ νοῦ φερομένη δύναμις], moving in the liver as in a mirror which receives impressions [τύπους] and provides visible images [εἶδωλα], should frighten [φοβοῦ] this part of the soul; for when the mental power bears down upon it with stern threats [ἄπειλῆ], it uses a kindred portion of the liver’s bitterness and makes it swiftly suffuse the whole liver, so that it exhibits bilious colors, and by contraction makes it all wrinkled and rough; [...] and thus it produces pains [λύπας] and nausea [ἄσας].<sup>45</sup>

This quote draws a parallel between what happens in the soul and what happens in the body. We can clearly see the mutual influence which exists between them. The liver reacts to the intellect.<sup>46</sup> It is compared to a mirror, hence the vocabulary of impression and image. We find again the word εἶδωλον, with τύπος.<sup>47</sup> But it does not mean that *epithumia* looks at a visible image on the liver to understand what reason is saying. The *datum* which comes from the intellect creates a physical reaction at the level of the liver. It is that physical reaction which interacts with *epithumia*. The way by which this reaction occurs is the real problem.

<sup>41</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 77b4-5. Opinion is used by the immortal soul when it receives *data* from sensation (37b6-8).

<sup>42</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152c1.

<sup>43</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 264a1-6.

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 77b5-6.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 71a7-c3. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>46</sup> In this case, there is no clear difference between the intellect (νοῦς) and reason (λόγος). It seems that the intellect corresponds to reason when it contemplates the intelligible, by opposition to opinion (*Timaeus*, 39e7; 47b7; 51d3-5; 92c2). *Epithumia* is hermetic to pure reason and to the intelligible, as we have seen in the *Phaedrus* and in *Timaeus* 77b5.

<sup>47</sup> Τύπος in Plato’s dialogues does not have the psychological sense that appears, for example, in Stoic philosophy (except in the case of memory, *Theaetetus*, 192a4). In the case of the mirror, it can mean that it receives images from the outside (*Phaedrus*, 275a4). It cannot produce anything by itself.

Regarding this question, I shall consider two interpretations. The first is given by Emily Fletcher.<sup>48</sup> To her, *epithumia* is not aware of the image.<sup>49</sup> It reacts to the states of the liver by what she calls the “mean-state *aisthēsis*,” that is to say the pleasure or the pain which indicate the state of the body. This mean-state *aisthēsis* “arises when an ensouled body moves relative to its natural condition.”<sup>50</sup> By the mean-state *aisthēsis*, *epithumia* feels the pain and the nausea caused by the deformation of the liver and tries to restore a normal situation.<sup>51</sup> I quote here Fletcher’s conclusion, which summarizes very well the physical process involved in the *Timaeus*: “Since appetite resides around the liver, reason communicates by altering the liver relative to its mean-state or natural condition in order to produce mean-state *aisthēsis*.”<sup>52</sup>

The second interpretation comes from H. Lorenz. According to him, the movements of *logos* use the internal fire to create an image on the liver, in the same way that the internal fire in the eyes creates an image on a mirror when it encounters the fire from an object.<sup>53</sup> The corporal affections, with the help of the internal fire, produce a visible image on the liver’s smooth surface.<sup>54</sup> This image is a sensory representation, understandable by *epithumia*.<sup>55</sup> For this reason, appetite would have cognitive capacities which are more developed than in Fletcher’s interpretation. Appetite would be able to form determinate desires and to initiate movement and motivation by itself.<sup>56</sup> If appetite cannot produce means-end reasoning, like reason does, it can nonetheless have a representation of the object: “From appetite’s point of view, the representation in response to which it gives rise to the relevant motivating condition need not be articulated in terms of means-end relations. [...] The desire I act on in going to the shop, Plato might say, is simply my appetitive desire to smoke.”<sup>57</sup>

According to me, Fletcher and Lorenz are both right and wrong. On the one hand, Fletcher is right to say that *epithumia* understands commands of reason thanks to the physical modification of the liver, but this theory does not really use image and representation. On the other hand, Lorenz underlines the contribution of image and representation to appetite’s action, but the physical reaction of the liver is absent. I shall now try to resolve that tension by studying the role of pain in the control of *epithumia* by *logos*.

### *B. The Process of Pain and its Representative Counterpart*

In the *Phaedrus*, the black horse finally respects the beloved one because it is terrorized when it sees him.<sup>58</sup> Again, *epithumia* must be scared to be dominated. But it does not mean, in the case of the *Timaeus*, that the appetite faculty really feels emotion. It feels pleasure and pain, but the feelings of fear or anger concern *thumos*, and not *epithumia*.<sup>59</sup> That is why pain plays

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<sup>48</sup> A lot of debate occurs about the *epithumia*’s real cognitive capacities. About these discussions and their arguments, see J. Wilberding, “Curbing one’s appetites in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. by R. Barney, T. Brennan and C. Brittain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 147, note 16.

<sup>49</sup> Emily Fletcher, “Aisthēsis, Reason and Appetite in the *Timaeus*,” *Phronesis* 61/ 4 (2016): 423.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>53</sup> H. Lorenz, “The cognition of appetite in Plato’s *Timaeus*,” 270.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 261, 269.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>56</sup> H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Introduction to Part Two, §1.

<sup>57</sup> Lorenz, Part One, chapter 4, §26.

<sup>58</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254e8.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 42a7; *Republic*, IV, 430b2.

such an important role. Reason does not act directly on appetite, like in the *Phaedrus*. It attacks what is its greatest power: the body. The body is what gives to *epithumia* its capacity to threaten reason and potentially overthrow it. We see it clearly when the immortal soul is incorporated in the body for the first time. The regular circular movements which compose it are completely broken and become chaotic when they are hit by the sensation and the contact between the body and the exterior objects.<sup>60</sup> The immortal soul must learn to rebalance its movements if it wants to return to the intelligible and to find a proper functioning again. If not, it stays in a state of madness.<sup>61</sup> So, the body can easily disorient the immortal soul. But if *epithumia* seems to be a powerful threat because it does not understand reason, it nonetheless understands very well what happens in the body. It is important to remember that the first function of *epithumia* is not desire, but the survival of the body.<sup>62</sup> Desire only exists because the body has needs and appetite must pull it to the object which can satisfy these needs. Reason, which is able to think of the person in its totality — soul and body — knows that it has to act on the body if it wants to obtain something from appetite. As we can see, it chooses pain. Pain is generally defined as alienation (*ἄλλοτριούμενον*) of the body, which has lost its natural functioning.<sup>63</sup> It is felt by *epithumia* which plays its natural role of restoring the normal state of the body. We cannot say that appetite is really scared, because it does not know that emotion, but it feels the pain and the threat posed to the survival of the body. According to Plato, the bile, which stems from the decomposition of the flesh, is responsible for diseases, because its movements in the blood are completely disorganized and they destroy the bodily substances — muscles, bones, tendons, marrow — which are still intact.<sup>64</sup> Plato also says that the bile can interact with the movements of the immortal soul in the head.<sup>65</sup> So we can think that the opposite is possible, the movements of the immortal soul are able to act on the bile and to attack the liver with it.

So far, my reading is inspired by Fletcher's interpretation. But, if we stop here, we do not understand why the liver is more important than the other organs. The reason could use the bile to attack any organs if it wanted to cause pain to the *epithumia*. Why does the liver play a distinct role? The answer lies in the liver's capacity to receive images, to be shiny and smooth. We must remember that for *epithumia* sensation is imagination. In my opinion, Lorenz is right when he contends that the liver receives sensory representations. As he shows very well, the opinions formed by *logos* can be accompanied by sensory representation.<sup>66</sup> *Epithumia* cannot obey reason if it does not have a minimal idea of why it is in pain and what the problem at stake is. *Epithumia* can also learn to anticipate pain or pleasure. It is the only way to explain how *epithumia* can be educated and controlled. If *epithumia* does not retain anything when it is brutalized by reason, it would mean that we should watch it all the time. *Epithumia* must be

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<sup>60</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 43a6-44b1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 44b1-c4.

<sup>62</sup> The first *epithumiai* are hunger and thirst (*Republic*, IV, 437d1-5; *Timaeus*, 70d7-8).

<sup>63</sup> It is the unique occurrence of *ἄλλοτριῶ* in the dialogues.

<sup>64</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 82e7-83a5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 85a5-b2.

<sup>66</sup> For example, the *Philebus* describes the presence of a writer and of a painter in the soul in order to explain the functioning of memory (*Philebus*, 39a1-39c1). The writer causes the opinion in us and the painter the sensitive representation which is linked to it. According to H. Lorenz, this process explains how *epithumia* can anticipate pleasure and pain and, by consequence, how it can develop its cognitive resources: "Thus reason can, for instance by forming suitable beliefs, bring about sensory experiences in which appetite shares and by means of which it can be informed about, say, the imminent availability of some source of pleasure or the imminent threat of some intensely painful experience." Lorenz, "The cognition of appetite in Plato's *Timaeus*," 267.

able to understand why it is punished and how to avoid that punishment. The liver is not only physically modified to hurt *epithumia* and to provoke an adapted answer from it, but it also plays a cognitive role. It is not certain that appetite really looks at images on the liver like we can do with a mirror. Plato may mean that, thanks to the liver's shiny surface, the information which comes from reason is transformed into a sensitive representation accessible to the appetite faculty. Either way, both cognitive and physical aspects play a part. But does it mean that violence is the favorite means of communication between *logos* and *epithumia*, like in the *Phaedrus*?

### C. Violence as Reason's Favorite Choice

We may have some doubts about the predominance of violence when we read the following text:

On the other hand, when a breath of mildness from the thinking [διανοίας] paints on the liver appearances [φαντάσματα] of the opposite kind, and calms down its bitterness by refusing to move or touch the nature opposite to itself, and using upon the liver the sweetness inherent therein rectifies all its parts so as to make them straight and smooth and free, it causes the part of the soul planted [κατωρισμένην] round the liver to be cheerful [ἕλεών] and serene.<sup>67</sup>

The physical manifestation gives an important indication about the real utility of mildness. Reason uses it to *restore* the liver's physical state. In other words, kindness and sweetness are never used in the first line. It appears only after pain. This idea is confirmed by a passage of the *Laws*, where Plato explains that there is no contradiction between cheerfulness and pain. On the contrary, cheerfulness is reached when the soul has known pain and is able to be in middle state between suffering and disturbed pleasure.<sup>68</sup> Protecting a child against every kind of pain is counterproductive. Mildness is the reward for *epithumia*'s capacity to calm itself and to obey reason by stopping the physical suffering. It is not reason's first choice.

Hence, like in the *Phaedrus*, violence is the best way to obtain something from *epithumia*. *Logos* uses appetite's greatest strength — the body — against itself. The psychological process appears to be complex, not to say obscure. But the essential point remains: *epithumia* learns how to act only with pain. However, there is a difference between the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. In the first dialogue, *thumos* was present, but passive. In the second, it is absent at first sight. But we know that *thumos* is normally the natural ally of reason. Why does it seem to be absent when Plato talks about rational violence? Is *thumos* really passive?

### III. *Thumos*'s role in Rational Violence

When we read the texts about reason using violence against *epithumia*, *thumos* is absent. But it does not mean that *thumos* does not appear in other texts pertaining to the control of appetite. We have already seen this point in the *Phaedrus*. There is no direct fight or violence between the *thumos* and the *epithumia*. But does it mean that *thumos* does not play any role in that violent process?

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<sup>67</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 71c3-d4. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>68</sup> Plato, *Laws*, VII, 792b4-e7.

#### A. *Thumos as the Executor of Logos' commands*

The idea of *thumos* as the executor of *Logos'* commands is warranted by the *Timaetus*. Again, it is reason which attacks the body to cause pain to *epithumia*. But there is a text which is intriguing about the role of *thumos* against appetite, where Plato argues that *thumos* “might hearken to the reason, and, in conjunction [χοινῆ] therewith, might forcibly [βίῳ] subdue the tribe of the desires [ἐπιθυμιῶν] whensoever they should utterly refuse to yield willing obedience to the word of command from the citadel of reason.”<sup>69</sup> The text is clear: *thumos* itself uses violence against *epithumia*. This time, *thumos* appears to be particularly active. The cause of *thumos'* intervention is similar to the one indicated in the *Phaedrus*: appetite refuses to obey to *logos*. But, unlike the white horse, *thumos* directly helps reason against the appetite part. How can *thumos* act on *epithumia*? Is it a different process from the one that we have seen before? Or is it the same, *thumos* being the missing link between the head and the liver? The question is legit because, in the excerpt from the *Timaetus* that we studied, nothing indicates that pain is used in a conflictual situation. The liver only exists because *epithumia* is not able to understand reason. There is not an attempt from appetite to take control over the the soul and to overwhelm *logos* like in the *Phaedrus*. But in this text about *thumos*, it is exactly this situation which is described. Fortunately, Plato gives us the psychological and physical process which occurs when *thumos* intervenes:

When the heat of the passion boils up, as soon as reason passes the word round that some unjust action is being done which affects them, either from without or possibly even from the interior desires [ἐπιθυμιῶν], everything that is sensitive [πᾶν ὄσον αἰσθητικὸν] in the body might quickly perceive [αἰσθανόμενον] through all the channels both the injunctions and the threats [ἄπειλῶν] and in all ways obey and follow them, thus allowing their best part to be the leader of them all.<sup>70</sup>

This quotation reminds us not only of the *Phaedrus*, but also of the famous story of Leontius who is mad at himself because he has yielded to *epithumia*.<sup>71</sup> We see here the psychophysics process which occurs in that situation. I will not focus on the reaction to an external injustice, but to an inner injustice. Injustice for Plato is first a psychological disorder where reason cannot act as a leader and is overwhelmed by the other faculties.<sup>72</sup> It is what happens here: *epithumia* tries to resist against reason, or it has already managed to act as it pleases. What Plato describes in this passage is the first step of the process that we have studied in the second part of this paper. Following H. Lorenz, we have underlined that the sensitive images on the liver were caused by the internal fire, which intervenes for example in sight. In my opinion, we have here the explanation of the way by which this fire is mobilized by *logos*. First, the immortal soul finds out an abnormal activity at the level of *epithumia* which represents a threat for its hegemony. Then, the immortal soul acts on the *thumos*, which has the capacity to listen to it. *Thumos* reacts by anger. This psychological activity provokes a physical reaction, which amounts to the augmentation of blood temperature. Blood is intimately linked to fire. Like the flesh, the marrow and the bones, blood is composed of the four elements—fire, water, earth and air.<sup>73</sup> But it appears that the internal fire flows in the

<sup>69</sup> Plato, *Timaetus*, 70a2a-7.

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Timaetus*, 70a7-c1. Translation modified.

<sup>71</sup> Plato, *Republic*, IV, 439e5-440a4.

<sup>72</sup> Plato, *Republic*, IV, 434b8-435c.

<sup>73</sup> Plato, *Timaetus*, 82c2-4.

body thanks to blood. That is why the parts which are closer to the flow of blood are hotter.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the veins and blood make the link between the heart and the liver. So, we have here the path which is followed by the information coming from reason. The augmentation of blood temperature coincides with the augmentation of the activity of internal fire. This overactivity is carried to the liver and causes the sensitive image on it.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the last lines of our present text: “everything that is sensitive [πᾶν ὄσον αἰσθητικὸν] in the body might quickly perceive [αἰσθανόμενον] through all the channels both the injunctions and the threats [ἄπειλῶν] and in all ways obey and follow them.” This is a description of the *epithumia*. First, the word ἀπειλή already appears in *Timaeus* 71a7-c3, it. It is the threat which provokes the deformation of the liver. Second, there are of course the characteristics that are those of *epithumia* in the *Timaeus*. We have already noticed the link between *epithumia* and sensation. *Epithumia*'s knowledge rests on the irrationality of sensations.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, there is an interesting passage which clearly shows the relation between sensation and the liver: “In general, then, let us lay it down that sound is a stroke transmitted through the ears, by the action of the air upon the brain and the blood, and reaching to the soul; and that the motion caused thereby, which begins in the head and ends about the seat of the liver, is hearing.”<sup>76</sup> Here we see a distinction between the sensitive *stimulus*—sound—and the sensation of this stimulus, that is to say the awareness of it—hearing. It appears that the true sensation is caused by an association between the head and the liver. If this motion does not attain the liver, it is not a sensation. As mentioned previously, there is irrational sensation, which does not imply the immortal soul and which is the sensation of animals and plants. But there cannot be rational sensation with only the head. Every type of sensation implies *epithumia*.

By consequence, if in the *Phaedrus* the white horse is passive and does not confront the black horse, the *Timaeus* gives an opposite description. Rational violence is possible because it is physically caused by *thumos*. Both attack *epithumia* in order to make it obedient. What can we deduce from this difference between the texts? What is the true doctrine defended by Plato?

### B. The argument of the Republic

The *Timaeus* is more pertinent when we want to understand the role played by *thumos* because the same idea appears in the *Republic*. The *Timaeus* explains what is told in the *Republic*. The *Republic* insists that the harmonization of both reason *thumos* is the only way by which justice can exist in the soul.<sup>77</sup> *Epithumia* is standing alone against the two other faculties, which share a capacity of self-control when they are educated. Again, *thumos* is described as the executor of rational violence, which aims to tame *epithumia*: “Then would these two be best [...] to guard against external enemies on behalf of the whole soul and body, one by its counsel, the other by its defensive measures, following its ruler and carrying out the ruler's intentions courageously [ἀνδρείῳ]?”<sup>78</sup> The idea is clear: reason thinks of the problem and finds the solution, *thumos* applies this solution. It is exactly what happens in the *Timaeus*: reason identifies the injustice and *thumos* puts an end to it. However, the reference to courage may also be linked to the *Phaedrus*. Courage is defined by Plato as upholding “the belief that has

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 79d1. The blood is red because it collects the aliments which are fragmented by the fire and which are marked by its imprint (80e4).

<sup>75</sup> “Ἄλογος αἰσθησις” (Plato, *Timaeus*, 69d3).

<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 67b2-5.

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Republic*, IV, 442a4-b3.

<sup>78</sup> Plato, *Republic*, IV, 442b5-8.

come into use by law through education concerning dangers, both what and what sorts of things they are.”<sup>79</sup> He also gives the following precision: “by ‘through everything’ I meant the preserving of it in pain as also in pleasure, in passion and in fear, and not expelling it.”<sup>80</sup> Courage is the virtue of *thumos*. What is interesting here is the idea of preservation. It is exactly what happens in the *Phaedrus*. The white horse can be described as courageous because it defends its ethical values against the temptation of *epithumia*. In the chariot allegory, it is this resistance which prevents the soul to fall into injustice. But it seems that it is not something which is only found in the *Phaedrus*, where reason is unable to control appetite. As it is said in *Republic* 442b5-8, courage explains why the soul is able to defend itself against any threat. *Logos* alone cannot do anything. If it gives a command and if *thumos* is unable to defend the value behind this command, all the processes of control will fail. *Thumos* will not launch the physical reaction which will attack *epithumia*, and *logos* will probably be submerged by the appetite.

Hence, what Plato describes in the *Timaeus* already appears in the *Republic*. But the *Phaedrus* is not completely different either, particularly when we think about courage. We have already explained this point: *logos* is disrupted by the reminiscence and it is *thumos*’ resistance which stops *epithumia*’s movement. Rational violence may be direct in the *Phaedrus* because it is not *thumos* which attacks its companion. But the white horse resists temptation. This resistance protects reason and the soul’s equilibrium until the end of the reminiscence. Reason becomes able to use this reminiscence and its strength because *thumos* is courageous. In a sense, *thumos* in the *Phaedrus* participates to rational violence because it immobilizes *epithumia*. It inhibits the satisfaction of the appetites and, by consequence, its capacity to become more powerful. Then, *logos* can control it. *Thumos* weakens *epithumia*. The specificity of the *Phaedrus* comes from the fact that reason is not able to reflect and deliberate, like in the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. *Thumos* appears to be more passive because it does not obey a direct order. It only does what it can by nature: preserving an opinion. Rational violence, which appears in the *Phaedrus*, is direct because it is caused by the reminiscence and *logos*’ madness. But *thumos* does not obey this violent feeling, it only follows the rational commands. Thus, it cannot attack *epithumia* and it is finally surpassed by reason, which is in a particular state. Consequently, the *Phaedrus* is not an objection to what we said before about the role of *thumos*. *Thumos* makes the link between reason and the body. It carries out, as Plato says, violence ordered by reason. The *Phaedrus* only illustrates a situation where *logos* does not use its normal capacities. Both the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* are in agreement regarding *thumos*’ role in the process of violence.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the *Timaeus* has shown that the violence of reason in the chariot allegory is not an exception in the dialogues. On the contrary, Plato has chosen to explain the psychophysical process behind the myth. *Logos* is justified to use violence because *epithumia* is unable to understand another language. Most of all, its irrationality is a terrible threat against reason, because it becomes more and more powerful when it is satisfied. There is no other way to control appetite than to brutalize it. Like in the *Phaedrus*, pain plays a determinant role. By making the body suffering, *logos* prevents *epithumia* from acting badly. But this violence is not only caused by reason. It is the cause of the violent process, but the active realization resulted from *thumos*’ action. It is *thumos* which puts the body in a situation of pain. In this case, the *Timaeus* supports the *Republic*. Hence, Plato really defends the violence of reason in several dialogues. If the role of *thumos* changes, being between the active aggressiveness and the passive resistance, *logos* is always the cause of the attack against *epithumia*.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 429c7-8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 429c8-d1.

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