

## **Plato on Hunger and Thirst**

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[Abstract] Throughout the dialogues, Plato seems committed to the claim that desire is for the good. Repeatedly, Plato discusses hunger and thirst as examples of desires. Accordingly, it would seem that hunger and thirst must be for the good. And yet, in a famous passage in Book IV of the *Republic*—right at the beginning of the discussion of tripartition—Socrates seems to say that hunger (πείνα) and thirst (δίψα) aim at food and drink, not at good food or good drink (438a; 437d-439a). Are hunger and thirst exceptions to the general premise that desire is for the good? On the reading I propose, this way of framing the question moves too quickly. Moreover, it is an ill fit with Plato's suggestion that hunger/thirst are paradigmatic desires. As I argue, Plato offers an account of hunger and thirst that is inherently interesting and that uncovers a general feature of desire: desire has an unqualified and a qualified dimension. There are *kinds* of desires: hunger, thirst, the desire for appreciation by others, desire for knowledge, etc., are kinds of desires. A kind of desire is what it is by having its object; say, thirst is for drink, sans qualification. In qualified hunger/thirst, both unqualified and qualified hunger/thirst are psychologically real: a person who is, say, thirsty for hot drink is also unqualifiedly thirsty. This proposal, which I call Two Dimensions, captures motivational phenomena that are highly recognizable: being hungry and aiming to determine what one is hungry for, or analogously and in the domain of reason, wanting to study and still figuring out what field it is that one wants to study. Two Dimensions is compatible with the premise that desire is for the good because the objects of paradigmatic desires are inherently valuable. Whether or not a given drink is a good drink, qua drink it is of value. Similarly, whatever knowledge someone pursues, qua knowledge it is valuable.