

Degenerate regimes in Plato's Republic

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I. THE CRITIQUE OF INJUSTICE IN THE *REPUBLIC*

This essay concerns the negative end of the political argument of the *Republic*, that injustice – the rule of unreason – is both widespread and undesirable, and that whatever shadows of virtue or order might be found in its midst are corrupt and unstable. This claim is explained in detail in *Republic* 8 and 9. These passages explain recognizable faults in recognizable regimes in terms of the failure of the rule of reason and the corresponding success of the rule of non-rational forms of motivation. I will first look at degenerate regimes as they appear in a less systematic way in the Ship of State passage in *Republic* 6 and in the discussion with Thrasymachus in Book 1. I will then give a general overview of the system of degenerate regimes in Book 8 to examine what exactly goes wrong with them and why, and will explain how the process of degeneration ought to be understood as the progressive decay of the rule of reason. Finally, I will argue that a close look at this decay reveals something surprising: that degenerate regimes and characters feature weak versions of virtue, shadow-virtues that are based on appearances and held in place by force. Thus in the end the whole process of degeneration ought to be understood as an extended conflict between reason and appetite.

However, since the negative or critical political philosophy of the *Republic* is a relatively neglected topic, it will be useful to begin by sketching its place within its historical context and in the context of the broad political outlook of the *Republic*. Plato grew up in a world riven by violent conflict between supporters of democracy and supporters of oligarchy. Thucydides describes the civil wars instigated all over Greece by Athens and Sparta during the Peloponnesian War and the enormous toll they took both in lives and in civic health.¹ The conflict came home to Athens in the Spartan-sponsored oligarchic coup of 404, when Plato was 23.² The band of oligarchs, known as the “Thirty Tyrants,” included Plato’s relatives Critias and Charmides. The execution of Socrates in 399 after the restoration of democracy is widely thought to be a response to the excesses of the Thirty.³

The political turmoil of the late fifth and early fourth centuries clearly lies in the background of Plato's *Republic*, taking place as it does in a household destroyed by the Thirty, and featuring in its most famous image – the Cave – a philosopher executed by the majority.⁴ Toward the end of the *Republic*, as a lead-up to Socrates' final argument that the just life is superior to the unjust life, Socrates describes a degenerating series of characters and regimes parallel to those characters. The just city they have described makes an error in its marriage ritual, and begins a decline first into a Spartan-style timocracy,⁵ then an oligarchy, then a democracy, and finally a tyranny. These regimes are characterized by division, violent conflict, and instability. In light of the dramatic and historical background of the *Republic*, it is natural to think that in these passages Plato means to diagnose and explain the historical conditions of his youth.⁶

What kind of diagnosis of bad politics is the *Republic*? So far as philosophizing about politics goes, it is a very puzzling piece of work. It praises a certain form of political community as best, and describes its educational system in great detail, while saying little about its governing institutions.⁷ Furthermore, the just city is not defended against alternatives in the way we might expect. No democrat appears on the dramatic scene of the dialogue to object (as we might well want to object) that the rulers of Kallipolis are not bound by law, or that people ought not to be educated from a single perspective, but rather exposed to a variety of points of view. The great opponent of Socrates in the dialogue, Thrasymachus, is practically silent while the just city is under construction; he speaks up only once, to agree with the other interlocutors that the community of women and children needs more explanation (450a). The interlocutors are so agreeable that one can readily sympathize with the great Neoplatonic commentator Proclus, who reportedly removed the *Republic* from his Platonic curriculum in part since it was "not written in dialogue form."⁸

Likewise, the alternatives to Kallipolis – timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny – are presented as instances of evil (*kakia*; 445c) and as aberrations (*hēmartēmēna*; 544a) without protest. Their names are mostly conventional, but their general character and their putative overarching goals seem to have little or no basis in history.⁹ Aristotle, in his careful catalog of regime-changes in *Politics* 5, releases a battery of historical counterexamples to *Republic* 8: democracies that have changed into oligarchies, oligarchies that have changed into tyrannies, oligarchies with different laws and defining principles (1316a20–b14). He furthermore complains that while the causes of political change are numerous, Socrates has spoken as if there were only one per regime; and that indeed there are many forms

of democracy and oligarchy, not just one as presented in the *Republic* (1316b15–27).

Given these difficulties, it is understandable that the political theory of the *Republic* is often dismissed *tout court* by commentators.¹⁰ They point out – correctly – that the main argument of the *Republic* is about the choice of lives for individuals. The just regime and the bad regimes are explicitly constructed to clarify the argument that a just life for an individual is superior to an unjust one (368c–369a; 445a–d; 544a). Accordingly, it might well seem justified to focus, as the existing literature on *Republic* 8 and 9 has overwhelmingly done, on the individual character-types described in those sections rather than the regimes.¹¹

That said, to dismiss the political theory of the *Republic* – either the positive view of political justice shown in the construction of Kallipolis or the critical remarks on bad regimes in Books 8 and 9 – is a mistake. While the individual choice of lives is more fundamental to the argument of the dialogue, the discussions of politics are important in their own right.¹² What has caused confusion is a lack of recognition of the distinctive type of political theory that the *Republic* presents. Unlike the *Laws* or Aristotle's *Politics*, it is not a practical guide for legislators and politicians to make improvements in their cities in a variety of circumstances.¹³ The *Republic* is not concerned with practical politics, any more than it is concerned with practical morality. The choice of lives is a matter of the choice of a standard. So too the political theory of the *Republic* concerns *political standards*: the ultimate goals around which cities and governments are organized. Roughly speaking, these standards are two, corresponding to the ultimate standards guiding the choice of lives for individuals: the rule of reason and the rule of appetite.¹⁴

Why are political standards important? According to the political philosophy presented in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, one's political standard ultimately determines the practical choices one makes about political institutions and laws. The decisions about laws and institutions made while constructing Kallipolis are made with an eye to the production of justice. In the *Laws*, a primary concern for the rule of reason determines both institutional structure and specific laws in the hypothetical new colony.¹⁵ Likewise, in the degenerate regimes of the *Republic*, it is the misguided pursuit of a faulty ultimate standard that drives poor choices about political institutions and laws – as for instance when the pursuit of wealth in oligarchy leads the leadership to permit by law the selling all of one's possessions (552a, 555c). Furthermore, knowledge of the correct standard is valuable in its own right – as a means of evaluating existing institutions, as a way to see them

as they really are. Knowledge of the objective moral condition of one's political community is useful for making practical changes; but it is also worth having for its own sake.

The rule of appetite, from the perspective of the *Republic*, is by and large the operative standard in existing cities and communities. In this way, Plato's response in the *Republic* to the political turmoil of his surroundings is the wholesale rejection of the terms of conventional politics.¹⁶ Civic conflict, for Plato, is the result of appetitive rule: cities governed by rulers and made up of citizens who consider the objects of appetite to have ultimate value. Justice and civic health, by contrast, involve the rule of reason in rulers and in citizens. The rule of reason is rare – perhaps non-existent – while appetitive rule is widespread.¹⁷ So Socrates' famous slogan turns out to be the central thesis of the political theory of the *Republic*:

Until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now kings and rulers genuinely and adequately philosophize, until political power and philosophy coincide . . . there can be no rest from evils, dear Glaucon, in cities nor, I fancy, for the human race either. (473d; translations from Shorey 1930, with frequent modifications)

The background of the thesis is the presence of unrelenting evils in cities and in individuals. Socrates argues first of all that despite this background, the rule of reason and justice – for which philosopher-kings are necessary – is both attractive and possible, given human nature as it is.¹⁸ Second, he argues, the rule of unreason or injustice is both ubiquitous and undesirable – and without the rule of reason, inevitable. Whatever desirable order can be found in non-rational regimes is corrupt and ultimately unstable. This argument is made in terms of the central contrast between the rule of reason and the rule of non-rational forces. Accordingly, these two arguments – the bulk of which are found in Books 4, 8 and 9 – involve constant reference to the tripartite soul.

The possibility of Kallipolis ought not to be confused with the practicality of Kallipolis. Its possibility is explicit in the text (471c-473d): it is the whole premise for the central books of the *Republic*. Socrates and his interlocutors are also explicit that they consider the conditions for the possibility of Kallipolis as unlikely ever to hold (473c, 592a-b). This means that Kallipolis is meant to be possible, at least minimally so, even if it can never be put into practice. As Socrates insists, it ought rather to be understood as a paradigm or standard (472c-e, 544a, 592b). This suggests that Socrates and his interlocutors mean to construct a paradigm or standard for political action with an eye to the best condition human beings are capable of, given their nature.¹⁹

I turn now to the negative end of the political argument of the *Republic*, that injustice – the rule of unreason – is both widespread and undesirable. Before looking at the account of degenerate regimes in *Republic* 8, I want to show how the central contrast between the rule of reason and the rule of appetite is prefigured in earlier, more familiar, and less systematic parts of the *Republic*: the Ship of State image and the argument with Thrasymachus in Book 1.

II. APPETITIVE RULE: THRASYMACHUS AND THE SHIP OF STATE

The degenerate regimes of Book 8 are regimes marked by instability and violent struggle between factions (*stasis*). Their rulers or ruling classes are susceptible to their appetites, and their guiding ideals are wrong-headed and ultimately self-undermining. As such, the Book 8 discussion does not introduce the idea of a degenerate regime, but rather organizes and clarifies earlier discussions: namely, the Ship of State in Book 6, and Thrasymachus' critique of conventional justice in Book 1.

The Ship of State analogy is introduced to explain why philosophers are not held in honor, and so why philosophical rule seems ridiculous (487e7-489c7). In the analogy, sailors, analogous to citizens seeking power, strive for power over an incompetent shipmaster, the city itself.²⁰ They seek power for the sake of consuming the ship's cargo, with the "drinking and feasting" that that involves (488c4-7). And this striving for power involves conflict and violence: they "struggle (*stasiazontas*) with one another for control of the helm" (488b3-4); they "cut to pieces" anyone who says the art of steering can be taught (488b6-8); they execute and exile others who attain power over the city (such as oligarchs, demagogues, and potential tyrants, presumably; 488c3-4). The true navigator, in the meantime, languishes on the sidelines or is mocked as a buffoon (488c3-489a2).

The Ship of State, like the analogy between the demos and the ravaging beast that follows it (493a6-c8), is a figure directed at the Athenian democracy in which the interlocutors live, as a way of explaining why, in that context, philosophy is not considered an art of ruling, as something to which power naturally belongs. The image is accordingly of a piece with the image in the *Gorgias* (464d3-465a2) of the doctor and the rhetor competing for the hearts of a band of children: it serves to contrast starkly the democratic status quo, where appetites rule, with a hypothetical ideal of the rule of knowledge. The apparent political good in the Ship of State image is the cargo, represented as the objects of appetites of hunger and

thirst, but standing in for the objects of appetite generally including wealth and other appetitive pleasures. This good is zero-sum – more for one means less for others, hence the competition, the violence, and the ensuing instability.²¹ The struggles of fifth-century Athens have parallels throughout Greece in the *staseis* Thucydides describes.²² Accordingly, its central image of appetitive rule is generalized both in Book 8 and Book 1 to apply to any regime where reason does not rule.²³

It is a strange irony of the *Republic* that if we consider instability, violence, *stasis*, and deference to appetites as cardinal features of conventional regimes, and if we consider Thrasymachus as a critic of conventional justice,²⁴ we find considerable agreement between Thrasymachus and Plato on conventional politics – how politics is actually practiced – even if the disagreement between them on how politics ought to be practiced is stark. The unstable, *stasis*-riddled regimes seen in Books 6 and 8 are just those where the rulers rule for their own advantage, given Thrasymachus' initial implicit understanding of advantage as power and wealth.²⁵ While Thrasymachus is tripped up toward the end of the argument by pressure from Socrates as to whether advantage is virtue, wisdom, or the exercise of one's proper function, he clearly begins with a much more simple and concrete vision of the political good: it is power, and behind power, wealth. Hence his example of the shepherd who rules for wages (343b); his claim that the just man loses out in business dealings (343d–344a); and his comparison between the tyrant and other lesser, unjust wealth-seekers: temple-robbers, kidnappers, swindlers, and thieves (344b3–5).

I am not here prepared to make claims about the coherence in the details of Thrasymachus' view of politics, nor about the coherence or effectiveness of Socrates' arguments against him.²⁶ All the same, Thrasymachus has a certain general vision of politics that, taken as a description of the way things are, is not only not incoherent but closely matches the image of conventional politics Plato endorses. According to Thrasymachus, at least before he is pressured by Socrates into admitting other sorts of motivation and types of good, political regimes are characterized by appetitive rule, which is to say, the rule of appetitive people in the service of their own appetites and pleasures. Like the politics of the Ship of State, Thrasymachus' politics is zero-sum – one wins only because another loses;²⁷ and accordingly, politics should be expected to be competitive, violent, and unstable.

The degenerate regimes of Books 1 and 6 give us some help in explaining what makes a bad regime bad. A regime organized around the appetitive ends of wealth and power will be violent and unstable, since if one faction of the city has more of these things, another has less. This explains at least in

part why Plato describes degenerate regimes as susceptible to appetite, and why they are unstable and prone to conflict and violence. In Book 8, the connection between these defects and the non-rational motivations and ends of the rulers is developed in detail. Any political community not ruled by reason will be susceptible to the appetites and so susceptible to conflict, violence, and ultimate collapse.

The general contrast between appetitive rule and the rule of reason presented in the earlier parts of the *Republic* is developed in detail in Book 8. The degenerate regimes of Book 8 are characterized by violence and instability, and they are defined in terms of false conceptions of the good: honor, wealth, and liberty. I will argue that these more general features can be explained in terms of the progressing failure of the rule of reason. The account of degenerate regimes is in its way as idealized or hypothetical as the earlier sections describing the construction of a just city. Just as nothing external to human justice determines the construction of Kallipolis – the city of pigs is not suddenly attacked by a pack of bears, for instance – so nothing external to human injustice or vice determines the deterioration of regimes as described.²⁸ A city might be destroyed by fire, flood, or conquest; Plato's concern is what a human political community might do or suffer when the guidance of reason alone fails.²⁹ Thus the decline is organized *anthropologically*: it starts with a human being (and a city) in a natural condition and decomposes it piece by piece.³⁰

III. THE REGIMES OF REPUBLIC 8: AN OVERVIEW

What characterizes the degenerate regimes of *Republic* 8, and what distinguishes them from one another? The bad regimes share a number of features in common: division or *stasis*;³¹ the use of force and violence;³² and instability. Instability, however, is shared also with Kallipolis; it too inevitably falls apart, although for different sorts of reasons.³³ The just city falls when the rulers miss the mathematically expressed law of good births (546a4–b3), thanks to their use of a mix of reasoning and sense-perception (*logismos met' aisthēseōs*, 546b2).³⁴ Socrates appeals to a general principle that everything that comes to be must be destroyed (546a); it seems likely that the bad regimes fail for more specific reasons, from some feature internal to themselves.

Division and violence are shared among the bad regimes, then, and perhaps there are forms of instability special to them. How are the regimes different from one another, and what is it that defines a regime as one kind and not another? The name "timocracy" is Plato's novelty, but oligarchy,

democracy, and tyranny are conventional ways of categorizing regimes. However, earlier discussions of these regimes differentiate them by the number of rulers: the rule of one, the rule of many, the rule of a few.³⁵ This obvious distinction in types of institutional arrangement plays little to no role in *Republic 8*. The regime-types are differentiated in two ways: (i) the law defining office-holders, or the ruling class, and (ii) the *dominant end*, the goal around which the constitution is organized.³⁶

The timocracy is defined by its exclusion of wise people from office (547e-548a);³⁷ the oligarchy by its restriction of office to the wealthy (551b); and the democracy by its inclusion of every free man, according to the principle of equality or *isonomia* (557a). The defining characteristic of the ruling class is related to a regime's dominant end. The dominant end of timocracy is honor, rather than the good (548c) – accordingly it restricts (however informally) lovers of wisdom and the good from rule. The dominant end of oligarchy is wealth, and so rule is restricted to the wealthy. In democracy, the dominant end is liberty or *eleutheria*, understood as “doing what one wants” (557b); citizenship and a share in rule is granted to every freeman or *eleutheros*, as in Athens citizenship was granted to every free-born Athenian male.³⁸ Tyranny is defined by the disregard of law, not only written laws establishing criteria for office, but also unwritten customs forbidding harmful or licentious behavior. Correspondingly, no dominant end is attributed to the tyranny; this marks its place at the lowest extreme of psychic and political degeneration and disorganization.

Political degeneration, Socrates claims to the agreement of his interlocutors, begins from the top: each regime decays by the decay in character of its ruling class (cf. 545d). Socrates also appeals to the dominant ends of oligarchy and democracy to explain what is wrong with them and why they collapse. Socrates says that oligarchy turns into democracy “by the insatiate desire (*apléstia*) for that which it sets before itself as the good, the attainment of the greatest possible wealth” (555b). He repeats this claim about oligarchy at 562b and applies it also to the transition from democracy to tyranny: “Is it not the case that the insatiate desire (*apléstia*) for what the democracy defines as good also destroys it?” and confirms that this defined good is liberty (*eleutheria*; 562b, cf. 557b). Looking backward, it seems that timocracy, too, is assigned a dominant good, when its most conspicuous feature is said to be love of honor and victory (548c). One possibility is that honor, too, is such a self-undermining good, the pursuit of which both defines the regime and destroys it. I suspect, however, that honor is rather undermined by appetite, and that only the appetitive dominant ends undermine themselves. I will explain why this might be the case further on.

Republic 8 and 9 alternate discussion of degenerate regime-types with discussion of the degenerate types of individual that correspond to each regime. A complication that has obscured the importance of the dominant ends is the wide array of special types of motivation that arise in the individual characters. The dominant ends are emphasized in the discussions of regime-types; in the discussions of individual types, we find instead discussion of dominant types of desire. With the timocrat and just man, there is nothing either puzzling or interesting about the connection between dominant motive and dominant end: the dominant ends are the good and honor, respectively; and the dominant motives are desire for the good and desire for honor. But as the decline continues, new types of desire are unleashed in the soul. Certain types of desire are characteristically unleashed in the tyrant and the democrat that ought not to be confused with their dominant desires. Unnecessary desires – desires unconnected to one's own health and preservation – first appear in the oligarchic character, but he is nonetheless ruled by his necessary appetites, and these are the only appetites he indulges (554a). The unnecessary desires are first indulged by the democratic character (561a; I call them “characteristic” of him in the chart below). However, the democratic character is not ruled by these desires, but by a kind of compromise between them and his necessary desires (561b).³⁹ Likewise, we encounter lawless desires first in the tyrant, but the tyrant is not ruled by these desires, but by single dominating *erôs* (572e, 575a).⁴⁰ Thus the connection between the dominant end and the dominant type of motivation becomes looser the further we descend down the degenerative chain. The whole scheme can be summarized as follows:⁴¹

Individual character	Philosopher-king	Timocrat	Oligarch	Democrat	Tyrant
Constitution	Aristocracy	Timocracy	Oligarchy	Democracy	Tyranny
Characteristic motive	Reason	Spirit (<i>thymos</i>)	Necessary desires	Unnecessary desires	Lawless desires
Dominant motive	Reason	Spirit	Necessary desires	Necessary & unnecessary	Eros
Dominant end	the Good	Honor	Wealth	Liberty	–

One key pattern in the decline, seen from the perspective of the dominant ends and motivations, is that appetites play an increasing role. The democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny are all appetitive regimes, and their individual analogues are appetitive characters, in that their dominant ends are appetitive ends. The pursuit of wealth is clearly appetitive: wealth and

money are emphasized throughout the *Republic* as a characteristic object – sometimes *the* characteristic object – of appetite (581a). Likewise, the liberty of the democracy and the democrat, understood as “doing what one likes,” is an appetitive end: the standard for personal and political action is simply what one happens to desire (557b; 561b–d).⁴² The tyrant, while he has no dominant end, is characterized by the rapid and chaotic growth of appetite (571b, 572b, 573e, 574d), which drives him to ever-escalating acts of violence (574d, 566e–567c). The tyrant has, in fact, no internal constraint on his actions: the scope of harm he does depends only on external considerations, namely how numerous the other tyrannical characters are in his city (575b–576a). Thus the degeneration of regimes follows the progress of the appetites and their increase in power over the political leadership in cities.

Furthermore, the appetites play a role in the fall of every regime including Kallipolis. While the appetites are not likely to be the original cause of the fall of Kallipolis,⁴³ the mistake in sense-perception does cause a decay in the quality of the rulers, which leads those rulers to neglect education, which in turn allows mixing of the classes (546e). This mixing results in the introduction of appetitive characters into the ruling class, which results in a civil war among the rulers with one side seeking money and property (547b). The secret lust for wealth in the timocracy – marked by the political leadership’s keeping of secret private treasuries for themselves (548a) – gradually corrupts the leadership until their primary interest is in wealth rather than honor, so bringing about the decline in the regime (548a5–b2, 550e4–551a10). The oligarchy is said to fall because of its insatiate love of wealth (555b); and the democracy hands itself over to the tyrant, it is suggested, the better to confiscate the property of the rich (566a).

Thus human appetite seems to be the main culprit for the instability of political regimes. This reading has the advantage of a unified account of decline, however attenuated it is in the first instance. It has the further advantage of a concrete explanation for the inevitable decline of created human institutions: appetites belong to human beings as necessary conditions of their embodiment, as Socrates suggests in Book 10 (611a10–612a6). But it must be only a partial explanation, as a number of aspects of the text remain mysterious. Why do the appetites progress in the way that they do? Why is it, for instance, that the introduction of private property in the timocracy results in the ultimate corruption of the whole ruling class from the love of honor to the love of money? Why is it that the oligarchy’s repressive instruments in the pursuit of wealth are ineffective, and

ultimately lead to its dissolution? Why can’t democracy’s appetitive pursuits stay within the bounds of law? And why, if it is the appetites that drive dissolution and destruction, does Plato bother with categorizing regimes by dominant end, and why does Socrates claim that the dominant ends of oligarchy and democracy are self-destructive? These questions can be answered by seeing a different type of progress in the regimes, corresponding to the growth of appetites, and that is the decline of reason.

IV. THE DECLINE OF REASON

In the remainder of this essay I make two claims about the function of reason in the degenerate regimes and characters. The first (less speculative) claim is that the neglect of reason is the ultimate cause of the decline of regimes. It is the neglect of reason that allows for the growth and fragmentation of appetite – and so ultimately it is what drives the division, violence, and instability found in bad regimes. The second (more speculative) claim is that reason is in fact the source of what order there is in the bad regimes; that it allows them certain shadows of virtue and goodness; and that the continued function of reason is necessary to understand the role of dominant ends in bad regimes. Reason is not dispensed with in the degenerate regimes; rather, it pursues inadequate objects. Rather than seeking what is genuinely good, degenerate reason pursues certain shadowy appearances of the good: honor, constraint, and lawfulness.

First, the less speculative claim: it is the neglect of reason that allows for the growth of the appetites and so for the process of degeneration itself. Here Socrates is quite explicit. The first sign of decay in Kallipolis after the mistake in eugenic arrangements is the neglect of musical education and then education in gymnastics, with the result that the guardians become “less musical” (*amousoteroi*; 546d). The ordaining and regulation of music is the function of reason, or reason’s analogue, philosopher-kings. In Book 3, it is said that the education must be preserved by a “permanent overseer” (*epistatēs*; 412a). This is developed in Book 6, when Socrates indicates that the philosopher-kings will amount to the presence of the legislators (Socrates and his interlocutors) in the city (497c). So the neglect of education is a failing of the function of reason in the best city.⁴⁴

This neglect of education results in the growth of the appetites because of its impact on the *thumos* or spirited part of the rulers. The neglect of music *vis-à-vis* gymnastics, it is said in Book 3, results in the crippling of the part of the soul that loves learning: it becomes “feeble, deaf, and blind,” since it is

"not aroused or nurtured, nor are its perceptions purified" (411d). The result is that the man so educated becomes a misologist, a hater of reason, and "he no longer makes any use of persuasion by speech but achieves all his ends like a beast by violence and savagery" (411d–e).

The deterioration of the use of reason and the corresponding decay in education has precisely this effect on the timocracy. The timocratic ruling class "fears to admit wise men into office" (547d) and it rules by violence and force. The propensity to violence is shown internally, by its subjection of its own people as slaves (547b–c), and externally, by "waging war most of the time" (548a). Furthermore – and most importantly, for its own stability – it represses its love of wealth by force. The following passage is crucial:

Will they not be stingy about money, since they prize it and are not allowed to possess it openly, prodigal of others' wealth because of their appetites, enjoying their pleasures in secret, and running away from the law as boys from a father, since they have not been educated by persuasion but by force because of their neglect of the true Muse, the companion of discussion and philosophy, and because of their preference of gymnastics to music? (548b)

Their preference of gymnastics to music leads to the incapacity of reason; the incapacity of reason means that the power of persuasion over the appetites is lost; and the use of force over the appetites is manifestly ineffective.

Clearly, to unpack this dynamic in detail would require a detailed analysis of how, exactly, reason persuades appetite: is it by talking to it and so convincing it, for instance, not to love wealth? By satisfying it with its natural object? Or soothing it in a mysterious mechanical way by means of music? There is evidence in the *Republic* for all of these methods,⁴⁵ but there is nothing in the discussion of timocracy itself that points one way or the other. All the same, one difference between the rule of reason and the rule of force is suggested, however subtly, by the text: force can only maintain an external appearance of virtue.

The love of wealth in the timocracy is the engine of its decline; it eventually corrupts the ruling class and makes them into oligarchs. How and why does this take place? One thing to notice is that the love of wealth is secret. The timocrats hide their gold and silver in private treasuries and in their homes; they are not allowed to possess it openly; they are lavish in private but stingy in public (548b). This suggests that honor, decency, and virtue, for them, are a matter of appearance.⁴⁶ They must look good in public. The overarching value put on honor, and the disdain for wealth, is for them something imposed from outside, by force of law or convention.

They force this appearance on themselves and others contrary to their own inclinations.

A practice that Xenophon describes in his account of Sparta illustrates this feature nicely. Boys when they reached adolescence were put under the supervision of older adolescents who would supervise them and set for them various tasks and contests as a part of their training as soldiers. The boys were not fed enough to be satisfied, but it was expected and permitted that they steal food. Nonetheless, if they were caught, they were severely beaten.⁴⁷ Plutarch reports that one Spartan boy allowed a stolen fox to disembowel him with its teeth and claws rather than be caught.⁴⁸ Xenophon explains this practice as a way of teaching soldiers to survive in the field. But it illustrates in a particularly extreme way what it might mean to pursue virtue only as a matter of appearance. The boys are allowed – indeed encouraged – to be vicious out of sight.

One function of education, then, and one thing that it means for reason to "persuade" appetite, is to produce virtue, to the extent that it is possible, from within, because one wants or desires it. In Book 3, this control of reason over the love of wealth is described in two ways: first of all, the guardians are told a story about gold and silver, that it exists in their own souls and so they have no need of metals; and they are told that metallic gold and silver are connected to "many impious deeds" (416e–417a). Reason (understood as embodied in the legislator) furthermore gives a law (*themis*) forbidding the guardians from any contact with gold and silver (417a). This combination of (alleged) persuasion and restriction on reason's part allows the avoidance of wealth to be holistic, internal as well as external, and not a mere imposition from without.⁴⁹ This law is overturned when the timocracy establishes private property for the ruling class.

The neglect of reason, the rule of force, and the preoccupation with appearing virtuous in public also play a prominent role in the discussion of oligarchy. The oligarchic character esteems wealth above everything "because he has never turned his thoughts to education" (554b). Because of his "lack of education" (*apaidusia*) drone-like appetites spring up in him (554c), appetites which we later learn are the unnecessary appetites that can be trained by discipline or practice. The discipline in question seems to be the sort administered by reason in the soul or by legislative educators in the city. Likewise, in the oligarchic city, Socrates says that the presence of the class of impoverished and sometimes criminal drones is on account of "lack of education and bad upbringing" (*kekē trophē*; 552e). The oligarchic person's forcible restraint of his dronish appetites is mirrored by the oligarchy's forcible restraint of the impoverished drone-classes.

In oligarchy, however, there is a twist: the emergence of unruly appetites and their forcible restraint is all in the service of an appetitive end, the acquisition of wealth. The oligarchic rulers impoverish their subjects by allowing citizens to sell their entire net worth, reducing some to penury while increasing the wealth of others (552a). They then forcibly restrain the impoverished criminals (552e), rather than removing the root cause of their poverty. Here the criminal law is doing double duty: under the guise of restraining petty injustice such as thievery and temple-robbing (552d), the oligarchic rulers maintain a legal structure which enriches them.

The use of the appearance of virtue for appetitive purposes is yet clearer in the oligarchic individual. While he will privately abuse orphans, or commit other injustices (554c), he will maintain an outward appearance of decency in order to transact business: in his "contractual obligations (*sumbolaiotai*), where he enjoys the reputation of a seemingly just man (*eudokimeî dokôn dikaios*)" he forcibly suppresses his evil desires (554c-d). It is presumably his reputation for decency which allows him to make his profitable loans, and so he maintains it carefully and forcefully.⁵⁰ His appearance of virtue, in other words, is in the service of his pursuit of wealth through destructive loans, and his enforcement of the law is in the service of protecting his unjustly acquired wealth from theft. This is, I think, the sense in which his reason and *thumos* are at the service of his appetitive love of wealth. The supervisory capacities of the city and the individual are dedicated to the promotion of wealth and wealth alone.

What happens when we turn to the democrat and the democracy? The democracy not only neglects education, but considers it something inferior (558b), which suggests that it abandons to some extent even holding up the appearance of virtue as a standard. Force and violence are replaced, by and large, with tolerance, laxity, and the liberty to do what one likes, as seen most clearly when Socrates claims that there is no compulsion to hold office if one doesn't want to; one can hold office if forbidden by law; and convicted criminals wander freely (557e-558a).⁵¹ Here, however, the suggestion is not that force and violence have been replaced by persuasion in virtue, but rather that the standard of virtue has been at least partially abandoned. The appetites nurtured in the neglect of reason and held in forcible constraint by the previous two administrations have been set loose.

Nonetheless, on Socrates' portrayal, the democracy is still concerned with a certain kind of restraint and with the projection of a certain kind of appearance. This can be seen in part by looking backward from the tyrant. The tyrant alone unleashes his lawless appetites, the desires that drive violent injustices such as theft and murder. What has kept the democrat

and the democracy from this sort of indulgence? The democratic character settles a compromise between his necessary and unnecessary appetites, under something like a law of equality (572b10-d3). In doing so, the democratic character imagines he is being moderate. The rule of equality or compromise, in other words, a kind of lawfulness, is the source of order in the democratic character, a source of order he pretends is something lofty and virtuous. But since he refuses to evaluate his desires on their content, by his total commitment to his desires as a standard for action, the democrat has no real grounds to oppose the pursuit of lawless desires. As Nettleship puts it, he has made the absence of principle into a principle.⁵² In this way the democrat, like the oligarch and the timocrat, nurtures appetites hostile to his own values while pretending to himself – and perhaps to others – that he is in fact safe from them.

The self-deception of the democratic individual has a political analogue. When Socrates describes the degeneration of the democracy into tyranny, he emphasizes the deception of the farming demos by the drone-demagogues and ultimately by the tyrant. The demagogues seek to extract wealth from the rich – but the people will not support this program if it is described to them as a way to get more money. They must be deceived into believing that the rich are already attacking the existing order (565b-c). To that extent they consider themselves bound by law. On the other hand, they have pursued "liberty" to the point of denying the most basic kinds of authority – the authority of age, wisdom, and most memorably, species (562e-563c) – and so they themselves lay the ground for the eventual destruction of the laws which constrain tyrannical behavior. Furthermore, they are perfectly happy to exploit the rich, it is suggested, under other pretenses (565a).⁵³

I have shown, I hope, that the rise of appetite in degenerate regimes ought to be understood as caused by the neglect of reason and education. Without the rule of reason, the political and psychological elements that are hostile to order can only be constrained by force. In place of rulers who persuade and educate with an eye to the real good, we find rulers who constrain their subjects under the auspices of a false good, a good determined by how things look to oneself or to others. Sometimes the rulers endorse this good sincerely and sometimes with an eye to deception. Regardless, the false appearance of good functions as a sort of mask, under which the appetites or other elements dangerous to the regime are inadvertently nurtured.

However, something strange has emerged from a close look at the decline of reason in the bad regimes. We find forms of order in the bad regimes that are set against genuinely harmful elements: honor versus the pursuit of

wealth in timocracy; the orderly acquisition of wealth versus the pursuit of self-indulgent desire in the oligarchy; and lawfulness versus the pursuit of violent injustices in the democracy. These forms of order are incomplete – they are based on the presentation of appearances – and they are helpless against the forces arrayed against them and that they inadvertently nurture. I will argue in my final section that these forms of order are residual functions of reason, and that they are the key to understanding how the dominant ends define regimes.

V. REASON AS A SOURCE OF ORDER

It is to my knowledge an almost entirely neglected fact about the degenerate regimes and characters that they contain weak versions of virtue, versions of virtue that are based on appearances.⁵⁴ The failings of this type of appearance-based virtue by comparison with real virtue should not be underestimated. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that Socrates often speaks of these “shadow-virtues” as if they are real virtues. The shadow-virtues are the function of the corrupted and weakened rational elements in both degenerate individuals and degenerate regimes.

The clearest evidence of the presence of valuable, if limited, shadow-virtues is in the discussion of the oligarchic man. Consider the passage where Socrates describes the oligarchic character's restraint when making business deals: it says that he keeps down his bad desires “by something decent in himself” (*epitikei tini beautois*; 554c). In explaining the collapse of the oligarchy, Socrates says that the regime falls because the love of wealth is ultimately incompatible with the possession of *sôphrosunê*, moderation, which implies that the oligarchy had moderation to begin with (555c).⁵⁵ Finally – and I think most convincingly – the transition from the oligarchic to the democratic character unmistakably assumes that certain virtues are in place until the destructive influence of the democrat's drone-friends comes into play. The democratic character comes very near to the ultimate collapse of all constraint and pretense of virtue, and to the actual reversal of the dictates of reason. The democratic character when young is torn between the oligarchic constraint of his father and the freedom and license of his drone-friends. The outcome of the struggle can be oligarchy (at which point, Socrates says, “a certain reverence or shame (*aidôs*) is engendered in the soul of the young man and it is once again set in order” (*katekosmêthê*; 560a)). Or the drone-desires win out, “seizing the *akropolis* or citadel of the man's soul.” Since the citadel is empty of learning and study, the drone-desires fill it with demagogue-like speeches and rename the virtues, calling *aidôs* or shame foolishness and

sôphrosunê unmanliness, putting in their place *hubris* (renamed “good education”), *anarchia* or lawlessness (renamed “freedom (*eleutheria*)”), and lack of shame (renamed “manliness”) (560b–e).⁵⁶

This total overturning of any shadow of the rule of reason is only temporary; the tumult dies down, and the democratic character settles into a quasi-orderly compromise, admits back into his soul some of the “oligarchic” desires and puts all of his desires, oligarchic and drone-like, under the law of equality, *isonomia* (561b). All the same, the implication is unmistakable that the democratic child of the oligarchic father, before coming under the influence of the drones, has some version of *aidôs* and *sôphrosunê*, shame and moderation. If this were not the case, or if there were no value whatsoever in the oligarchic versions of the virtues, the whole drama of the decline into the democratic character would be meaningless.

It is important to see that these shadow-virtues do not meet Book 4's criteria for full virtue.⁵⁷ The oligarch's *sôphrosunê* does not amount to all parts of the soul agreeing that reason ought to rule – the oligarch is a deeply conflicted person. At best, he is like Aristotle's continent person: someone who is good only by constraint and strength of will. The timocrat's unruly and suppressed desire for wealth puts him in a similar position: he succeeds in moderation, to the extent that he does succeed, only by force. Accordingly, we find inconsistent behavior: the timocrat's wild parties (548a), the oligarch's abuse of orphans (554c). Such inconsistencies, whether caused by sincerely felt inner conflict or simply by social pressure, would be a constant danger for these characters. The oligarch, since his restraint is motivated by greed, ought to be considered in a yet worse position than the timocrat.

That the virtues attributed to the oligarch and oligarchy are *aidôs* and *sôphrosunê*, and not, say, courage or wisdom, is also significant. We can assume, I think, that wisdom is impossible in the degenerate regimes, from the moment that the timocracy excludes wise people from ruling (547e). Although no virtues in particular are explicitly ascribed to the timocracy or the timocrat, the *stasis* that brings down the timocracy is described as a struggle between the forces of virtue (*aretê*) and the love of wealth (550e–551a). Further, the focus of the regime and character on war and competition suggests that at least some sort of courage is retained. This point is bolstered by the emphatic loss of the warlike virtues in the oligarchy and the oligarchic character. The oligarchic state “will be unable to wage war,” because it fears the people (551d–e). Likewise, the oligarchic character is “a feeble competitor” on his own, and avoids any kind of civic contest (555a). So it seems that we can trace the decline in regimes as a progressive decay in virtue: first

wisdom is lost; then courage – whatever kind is possible without wisdom – and then moderation.

How then ought we to understand the situation of democracy and the democratic character? Socrates' narrative is vague on this point: after the destruction of virtue in the democratic character's soul, he allows that a real democratic character will emerge when he "receives back a part of the banished elements [*aidōs*, *sōphrosunē*, etc.]" and "establishes . . . all his pleasures on the footing of equality (*eis ison*)" (561b). Some of the quasi-virtuous elements such as shame or moderation return. In the later discussion of the decay from the democratic character into the tyrannical one, Socrates disparages the moderation in question as something that the democratic character "supposes" (572d); it is suggested that it consists simply in the avoidance of lawlessness, or violent injustice. On the other hand, when the dominant *erōs* is instilled in the tyrannical character, it is said that the *erōs* purges any remaining opinions or desires "capable of shame" and also expels "moderation" (*sōphrosunē*) (573b). This final purge of any remaining good motivations by the tyrant is the individual analogue of the political tyrant's purgation of any good or virtuous characters remaining in the city, removing the best and leaving the worst (567c).

The tyrant's final purgation of any trace of goodness, and his aggressive pursuit of violent injustice, theft, murder, and temple-robbing, mark him out as the furthest extreme of moral and rational degeneration. To understand the shadow-virtues of the democrat, then, I suggest we look to the source of order in the democratic soul and the democracy. Socrates implies that the democrat's "moderation" consists in lawfulness: his avoidance of behavior that is violent (such as theft or murder) or grotesque (such as lying with one's mother; 571d). This orderliness is the defining structure of the democratic character, and it is mimicked by the constraint of *nomos* or law in the political democracy. The democracy, whatever its faults, distributes political power according to law, the principle of equality or *isonomia*. The equal share in office is the defining law of democracy (557a), just as the wealth-qualification is for oligarchy. Just as the wealth-qualification is indiscriminate to the actual capacity for ruling (551c), so also the principle of *isonomia* assigns "a kind of equality to equals and unequals alike" (558c). All the same, it formally prevents the absorption of political power into one person as we find in the tyranny.

One considerable advantage of emphasizing the passages about the shadow-virtues is that it brings the degenerate regimes into closer contact with the historical regimes that they are meant at least partially to capture (see note 9). As I noted earlier, commentators often complain that neither

the democracy nor the oligarchy of *Republic* 8 seems grounded in historical reality. The importance of law as a key feature of democratic ideology has been widely attested.⁵⁸ By contrast, liberty understood as "doing what one wants" is only attested among critics of democracy, unless one counts the patriotic contrasts with austere Sparta in wartime speeches in Thucydides.⁵⁹ If we see that the definition of democracy in the *Republic* and its source of order is the shadow-virtue of *isonomia*, we can see that Plato meant to take real-life Athenian ideals into account.

The difficulty of historical correspondence would seem even more serious with the oligarchy, since while there is some evidence that liberty or *eleutheria* was some kind of democratic ideal, the historical proponents of oligarchy did not any of them seem to endorse the pursuit of wealth. Rather, they considered themselves and promoted themselves as proponents of virtue and traditional values.⁶⁰ If we take seriously, however, the attribution of some kind of moderation and decency to oligarchs and oligarchy, this complaint about Plato's account seems unjustified. Indeed, Plato takes pains, in describing the shadow-virtues, to explain just this fact: that the oligarchs call themselves virtuous. In part, this is a deceptive appearance used to issue loans that enrich themselves at the expense of others. And in part, it has some truth: the oligarchs do indeed constrain and moderate their desires, if only by force and if only for corrupt purposes.⁶¹

If this interpretation is correct, then attribution of the dominant ends of "wealth" and "liberty" to the regimes ought to be understood as involving a critical judgment, a sort of debunking of the ideals that the real-life regimes espouse. In this way, it might be compared to similar attributions in contemporary political rhetoric: that proponents of radical Islam, under the guise of promoting "virtue," in fact hate freedom; or that, under the guise of "freedom," American capitalists seek their own aggrandizement at the expense of the working peoples of the world. Such attributions criticize the ends or goals that the regimes criticized pursue in practice, by contrast to the loftier ideals they lay claim to in self-justifying rhetoric.

One might question this reading simply because the ugly, repressive greed of the oligarch and the silly, licentious liberty of the democrat are by far the most memorable passages of the whole sequence of characters and regimes. Their rhetorical importance is unquestionable, and one can't help but think that it is these images that do most of the persuasive work in determining the place of oligarchic and democratic characters in the final ranking in Book 9. However, we must also remember that we read this book twenty-five centuries from its original context. It is not far-fetched to think that the democratic ideal of *isonomia* and lawfulness, and the corresponding

oligarchic ideal of virtue and a return to old-fashioned values, would have been foremost in the minds both of the hypothetical interlocutors and the fourth-century audience of the *Republic*. The conventional ideals, then, which the *Republic* keeps in the background and treats as shadowy, are simply taken for granted in the discussion. It is only from this further distance that exegesis is needed to eke them out.

VI. CONCLUSIONS: DOMINANT ENDS, THE ROLE OF REASON, AND APPEARANCES

Two points of crucial interest thus emerge from tracing the loosening hold of reason over the degenerate regimes. As reason loses its grip, and the appetites gain, so do we also find a decrease of order and structure. One natural thought – borne out by evidence of shadowy and defective virtues – is that reason is the source of that structure. Consider the oligarchic character, which is (unfortunately) the only place where the role of reason is at all clear or explicit. Reason is subjugated to appetite; it calculates and considers “only” how to gain wealth. The single-minded pursuit of wealth is also the oligarchic character’s source of order: it is what justifies the forceful repression of unnecessary appetites. This is indeed just what it means to have wealth as a dominant end: it means to organize one’s life around that end. A dominant end is an organizing principle, a source of order set against some source of disorder. As such, it is a rational structure, a function of reason.

Politically speaking, the dominant end functions not only by its influence on the character of the rulers, but also by laws and institutions. The dominant end of wealth determines the qualifications for office (property) and laws governing the exchange of property. The dominant end of liberty also determines the qualifications for office (equality, or “being a free-born citizen”), and more broadly it promotes a culture of tolerant lawfulness.

If these speculations are correct, then we have available to us a much more attractive view of how the dominant ends attributed to the regimes work. They have a double structure. In one respect, they are the end (or an end) associated with a particular part of the soul, honor for *thumos* and the timocracy, wealth and the lower appetitive pleasures for oligarchy and democracy. Considered from this angle, the ends are not self-undermining. The pursuit of honor in timocracy is not undermined by the pursuit of honor itself, but by the conflicting pursuit of wealth. Likewise, the pursuit of wealth in oligarchy is not undermined, strictly speaking, by the pursuit of wealth: after all, both the democracy and the tyranny show considerable

wealth-seeking behavior. Rather, the oligarchy is undermined by the pursuit of liberty, and the democracy by the pursuit of lawlessness.

In another respect, however, the ends are also shadow-virtues. They are courage (without wisdom) in timocracy, moderation (understood as constraint) in oligarchy, and justice (reduced to lawfulness) in democracy. These shadow-virtues give the regimes definition and structure, and make a regime one type and not another. So it seems reasonable to conclude that it is the corrupt rational structures of the degenerate regimes that are destroyed by the advance of appetite. In the case of oligarchy and democracy, where these rational structures are set up for appetitive ends, the shadow-virtues are pursued by the deception of oneself and others, masking the inadvertent encouragement of elements that will undermine them. In this respect these two regimes are self-undermining.

What conclusions can we draw about why the regimes collapse? The first is that the conflicts that bring them down ought to be understood, not as conflicts among the multifarious appetites, all competing for first place, but as conflicts between weak rational or lawful structures and appetitive forces, personal or political.⁶² In this way the whole process of degeneration can be viewed as an extended conflict between reason and appetite.

The second conclusion is that part of the weakness of what I have called rational structures is their reliance on *appearance*. Without the rule of reason, one has no ability to weigh appearances critically and to make decisions based on those critical evaluations.⁶³ The timocrat seeks courage, the oligarch moderation, and the democrat lawful freedom by the criterion of how these things *look*. They are interested in projecting an image in public. This image may be self-deceptive – as I think it must be in the case of individuals – or it may be manipulative, as may be the case in the political contexts, or it may be both. However, authentic virtue must take concern for the internal, for shaping the real motivations of individuals in particular ways. Only then can virtue produce behavior that can endure changes in social circumstance – or even behavior that presents direct opposition to social pressure – as the virtue of Socrates did. This is why neglect of education is so emphasized in the discussion of regime collapse.

It is thus not surprising in the stories of degeneration in *Republic* 8 that Socrates emphasizes what the various characters *perceive*, especially in their social surroundings.⁶⁴ Every one of the degenerate characters degenerates because of social influence: the timocrat and oligarch because of their fathers’ low social status (549d–550a, 553a–b), and the democrat because of the influence of his drone-friends (559d–e). One’s values, in the *Republic*, come from the outside – unless, that is, one determines them by reason and

has the means to impose them. Once one has renounced or lost rational rule – the power to criticize appearances and to enforce those criticisms – one is carried along willy-nilly to whatever things present themselves as appealing in one’s social surroundings.

While an honor-governed regime may partially or temporarily succeed in putting vice out of sight, the appetitive regimes always have variety and division. This means that the social context does not determine any coherent value, and so a socially determined appetitive end will be particularly unstable. Hence the haplessness of the degenerate characters: none of them succeed in their aims, since their aims are shadow-virtues, appearances that are subject to being replaced by other appearances. Without the guidance of reason, human beings and human communities ultimately do not have the power to resist these appearances, no matter how evil or base they might have judged them initially.

Whether Plato is correct in his account of his own historical context – or whether he is more generally correct about the forces of evil and degeneration in regimes – is outside the scope of this essay. All the same, it ought to be clearer what exactly that account amounts to. And one can often find insights at a different level of generality, whatever the disagreements between Plato and ourselves. For example: what ought human beings to do, who find themselves in fragmented political cultures, characterized by conflict and violence, where virtues are sought via their appearances and so are susceptible to corruption or collapse? The *Republic* offers one alternative: to use reason to determine, as best as one can, what justice for human beings could look like; and to use the conclusions so gathered to look clearly at one’s surroundings, the better to distinguish the apparent from the real.⁶⁵

NOTES

1. See especially the discussion of civil war in Corcyra: Thucydides 2.81–85 and discussion in Balot, 2001, chs. 5 and 6.
2. See Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.3–43 and Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 35.
3. The orator Aeschines makes the claim that Socrates was executed for educating Critias (*Against Timarchus* 173); see discussion in Schofield 2006, pp. 22–23.
4. For more on the historical context of the *Republic*, see the vividly written and thorough introduction to the *Republic* in Ferrari and Griffith 2000, as well as Menn 2006; Balot 2001, esp. ch. 7; Schofield, 2006, chs. 1–3. I should add that if James Wilberding’s (2004) interpretation of the Cave is correct, it is the demagogues and political leaders who execute the philosopher, not the majority.
5. The timocracy is explicitly called Laconian or Spartan (545a). A constitution called “timocracy” is Plato’s invention. Sparta in the Peloponnesian War was

- considered an oligarchy. I discuss the difficulties in mapping the degenerate constitutions of Book 8 onto historical constitutions below.
6. Annas claims on the contrary that “Athenian politics of the fifth and fourth centuries do not actually shed any light on the *Republic*” (Annas 1999, p. 77; see discussion pp. 73–78). Her argument against the use of sketchy ancient biographies of Plato seems to me fair enough. But there is abundant evidence within the text of the *Republic* (and bolstered by the *Apology*, *Gorgias*, and *Protagoras*) of Plato’s critical response to Athenian politics. Her other charges – that Kallipolis is based on first principles rather than historical regimes, and that the degenerate regimes of Books 8 and 9 have no basis in real regimes – are addressed in this essay.
 7. It is true that *politeia* has a different and broader meaning in Plato’s time and place than “constitution” does for us, and referred to individual ways of life and political culture as well as to institutional arrangements (Schofield 2006, pp. 30–35). It is also true that the two *Politeiai* attributed to Xenophon praise or blame particular cities (Athens and Sparta), with special reference to their cultural life rather than their political institutions (on which see Menn 2006). All the same, I am not convinced that complaints about the lack of institutional detail in the *Republic* are thereby provincial or anachronistic. After all, constitutions are discussed in terms of institutional arrangements in authors as early as Herodotus 3.80–82, in Thucydides 8.97, and of course in later literature such as the *Laws* and Aristotle’s *Politics*. The broad meaning of *politeia* is not enough to explain the strangeness of the *Republic*.
 8. So cites the anonymous author of the sixth-century *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* 26.6–7. It is not clear what Proclus meant by saying that the *Republic* (and the *Laws*) were not written *dialogikōs*. Proclus would certainly not complain about a dialogue being dogmatic, but he may have thought that the *Republic* was ill-suited for pedagogical purposes because of its dogmatism combined with its political focus. It is not clear to which text of Proclus the anonymous commentator is referring, and neither the adverb *dialogikōs* nor the adjective *dialogikos* seem to have been standard ways for Neoplatonists to describe particular dialogues as opposed to others.
 9. See Annas 1999, pp. 77–78; Frede 1996, pp. 260–66; Schofield 2006, pp. 104–05.
 10. Annas 1999, ch. 4; Frede 1996, pp. 259–69; Blössner 2007, pp. 366–72. I agree with both Frede and Blössner that the emphasis in these passages is on ultimate values rather than on political systems or institutions; I disagree that the treatment of values does not count as serious reflection on history and politics, and so not as serious political theory.
 11. As for example does Irwin 1995, pp. 281–97.
 12. As Ferrari 2003, p. 59, points out, it is very hard to believe that the political structures are only introduced as an analogy.
 13. Both of those later books provide much more extensive catalogs of (a) existing or historical political constitutions and (b) many more recommendations for institutional arrangements. In the case of the *Laws*, it seems likely that these recommendations are meant to be adapted to different circumstances (see Laks

2000). In the case of the *Politics*, this is explicit. To take one example, Aristotle's catalog of types of regime-change in *Politics* 5 culminates in a series of recommendations as to how to maintain stability in regimes in different circumstances (*Politics* 5.8–12). Aristotle regularly addresses “the lawgiver” or *nomothētēs* and it seems reasonable to think he is addressing lawmakers and politicians in a variety of circumstances (on which see Bodéüs 1993). By contrast, there is only one point in *Republic* 8 and 9 that might count as a widely applicable generalization: the condemnation of the oligarchy's failure to ban by law the selling of all one's possessions (552a, 555c). The only “lawgivers” mentioned in the *Republic* are Socrates and his interlocutors, constructing the just regime (see n. 44 for references).

14. The failings of the rule of *thumos* in timocracy are closely tied to its failure to control appetite. I discuss this in detail below.
15. See for example *Laws* 713e on the rule of law and the rule of reason.
16. See Schofield 2006, p. 103, for a similar point.
17. So, at least, in the framework of the *Republic*. It is possible that the limited praise of law-governed regimes in the *Statesman* (291b–303c) indicates a change in view as to how rare the rule of reason is. However, the standard of the rule of reason is so far lowered in this passage in the *Statesman*, and the praise so mixed (as for instance when the rulers of such regimes are called *stasiastikoi*, leaders of faction (303c)), that it is not obvious that the law-governed regimes exclude, say, the oligarchy or democracy of *Republic* 8.
18. As Stephen Menn (2006, p. 34), puts it, Plato wants a just city that is “psychologically possible.”
19. Seeing Kallipolis as the minimally possible just regime compatible with human nature makes sense of some of the puzzling features of the text I mention above. The interlocutors interrupt the construction of the best city, not to raise objections with a view to alternative cities, but to indicate the distance between the city as constructed and their own desires. The response to these interruptions is either to adapt the city to those desires or to give further explanation so that the objectionable feature seems attractive. When Glaucon complains in Book 2 that the just city they have described is “a city of pigs,” Socrates responds by introducing classes of people and practices that will produce the luxury Glaucon requires (372c–e). When all of the interlocutors stumble on the community of wives and children, further explanation and defense is given (449c). When a question is raised at the end of Book 5 about whether the ideal city is practicable, Socrates introduces the notion of the philosopher-king, and to produce such rulers he devises a new program of education for the guardians of the previously described city (471c–473e). When the constructed city is adapted to their needs, this is a concession to human nature. When the constructed city is defended against their complaints, their subsequent persuasion (e.g. 445a–b, 471c–e) is evidence that such persuasion is possible, and so that the distance between desire and ideal can be met.
20. My interpretation of the details of this passage (for which I am indebted to Alexander Nehamas) is controversial, and the points of controversy are not

- important for the general gist: the contrast between appetitive rule and rational rule is clear either way. The traditional interpretation, as given by Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1406b25), followed by the anonymous author of *Prologomena to Platonic Philosophy* (221.29), is that the shipmaster is the demos. But this does not make sense of the sailors' praise of “bad pilots” as the ones who are most successful in persuading or compelling the shipmaster to let them rule. Rather, it seems that the bad pilots are demagogues or politicians, and that the sailors are the demos. Furthermore, the sailors' hostility to those who say that the art of steering can be taught seems to parallel democratic hostility to the sophists, as depicted in Anytus in *Meno* 91a–94e and described by Socrates in *Protagoras* 319a–320b. This interpretation also alleviates the tension between the image of the demos as a helpless, half-deaf idiot here and the image almost immediately following of the demos as a greedy, immensely powerful beast (493a6–c8, cf. 492a1–c8; Benardete 1989, p. 147 points out the tension). The greedy, violent sailors, by contrast, fit quite well with what follows. My interpretation does face difficulties of its own: if the shipmaster is the city itself, what is the ship? For a very useful discussion of the passage (although it follows the traditional interpretation of the shipmaster), see Keyt 2006.
21. That appetitive goods are zero-sum and so cannot be shared is also pointed out by Blossner 2007, pp. 364–65. He claims that honor also cannot be shared, since a superior person requires an inferior. While this would explain some things, for instance, why the timocracy is a slave-state, it also creates difficulties. For one thing, honor can certainly be shared among soldiers and citizens: while a victory may require someone else's loss, that loss need not be sustained *within* the city. Moreover, competition over honor in the timocracy is not portrayed as destructive, unlike the portrayal of competition over appetitive goods in the other bad regimes. Accordingly I am not sure that honor ought to be counted as a zero-sum good in the *Republic*.
 22. See n. 1. This may be why Socrates suggests that the struggles of Athens can be imagined as taking place “on many ships, or on one” (488a).
 23. Timocracy, while violent and divided, is not organized around appetitive goods and so is an exception to this general principle. See discussion below (and n. 21).
 24. Cf. the illuminating discussion of Thrasymachus in Barney 2004, pp. 4–8.
 25. Cf. Menn 2006, p. 14; Barney 2004, p. 6.
 26. On which see Barney 2006 in addition to Barney 2004.
 27. Cf. Barney 2004, p. 6.
 28. Taylor 1939, p. 27 puts a similar point somewhat differently.
 29. That the regimes track the failure of reason is suggested by Frede 1996, p. 261.
 30. For another moral decline with an anthropological structure, see Paul, *Romans* 1.18–22.
 31. Division or *stasis* in timocracy: 547a–b; in oligarchy, 551d; in democracy, 564c–565a; in tyranny, 566a, 567b–c, 569a. Contrast the just city, whose unity is constituted by agreement as to who should rule (431d–432a).
 32. Timocracy, 547b–c; oligarchy, 551b–c; democracy, 557a; tyranny 565d–566a, 566e–567c.

33. Accordingly Frede 1996, p. 261, cannot be quite right in saying that Plato's point is to show the inherent instability of the bad regimes without the rule of reason. The rule of reason is also unstable.
34. What exactly have they gotten wrong, and why? The end result of their failure is the decline of the ruling class and the ultimate mixing of the social classes (546c6–547a5), which suggests the possibility that the ruling class misapplies the rule on account of its being misled by its own sexual appetites. (For a related view, see Roochnik 2003, who argues that the just city falls because the regulation of *erōs* is impossible (cf. especially p. 46, ch. 2).) This possibility, however tempting, is very unlikely. For one thing, there is no suggestion of wayward appetite in the text; *aisthēsis* alone is suggested as the human failing involved. For another, the eugenic discussions generally speak as if the rulers are organizing marriages for others, not themselves (e.g. 458e–461e). Lastly, since the rulers cannot even contemplate Forms until the age of 50, and rule only after some such contemplation (540a–c), they have been for the most part educated past the ordained age of child-begetting. Women rulers, forbidden to beget past 40, are certainly ruled out; men rulers have until 55, which gives them a very short window at best in which they could both rule and beget (459a–461a). The remaining scenario – that the rulers are led astray by their own appetites while arranging marriages on behalf of others – seems far-fetched.
35. Number of rulers seems to distinguish monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy in Herodotus 3.80–82, although the oligarchy is also clearly meant to be an aristocracy or rule of the best. A similar distinction with a similar assumption is found in Pindar, *Pythian* 2.86. The number of rulers also plays a role in the taxonomies of constitutions in Plato's *Statesman* 302b–303b as well as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.10 and *Politics* 3.5, although it is not the sole distinguishing criterion in these passages.
36. As Frede notes, using the term “characteristic value” (Frede 1996, pp. 266–67); see also Blössner 2007.
37. Unlike the democracy or oligarchy, there is no suggestion that this is a legal exclusion.
38. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1317a40–1317b17.
39. Reeve 1988, pp. 47–48, claims wrongly that the democratic character is ruled by unnecessary desires. Furthermore, the distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires is clearly meant to be a division only within the appetites, and not, as Reeve claims, one that cuts across desires of reason and spirit (pp. 44–47; *Republic* 558d–559d).
40. Reeve claims on the contrary that the tyrant is ruled by lawless desires (Reeve 1988, p. 47).
41. My schema differs from that found in Reeve not only on some interpretive points (see previous two notes) but also because of differences in emphasis and interest: (1) it is meant to summarize only Books 8 and 9, and not the whole *Republic*, and (2) I emphasize the dominant end over the type of motivation, and treat the finer-grained distinction in dominant ends found in *Republic* 8 as

- more significant than the broader division in Book 9 between lovers of wisdom, honor, and money (Reeve 1988, p. 43).
42. The question of whether the democrat and the democracy are ruled by appetite is a different question from the question of whether all of the democratic character's motivations are appetites. Cooper 1984 argues that they are all appetites; Scott 2000 claims that the democratic character features rather a mixture of motivations. The passage at 572c where the democratic character is said to draw equally from his necessary and unnecessary appetites supports Cooper; the famous description of the democrat pursuing everything that strikes his fancy, including soldiering and philosophy (561c–d), supports Scott. I think that the passages can be reconciled by simply assuming that the democrat's primary focus is the appetites (as described at 572); that not all of the democrat's motives are appetites (as seen at 561c–d); and that he is to be considered “appetitive” or “ruled by appetite,” since his ultimate standard is his desires or what he happens to want. This ultimate standard vitiates any good motivation and renders its goodness powerless. The same is true in the political analogy; although democracy contains a variety of characters (557b–d), a wise and good man such as Socrates is powerless in the Athenian democracy. According to the account at *Apology* 32b–c, Socrates is ordered to act unjustly both by the democracy and by the Thirty, and so faces either the compromise of his goodness or prosecution resulting in execution or expulsion. So, I suggest, we ought to think of the function of better characters in democracies and the better motivations in the democrat; the democrat's interest in philosophy cannot attain knowledge, and his flirtation with soldiering cannot produce courage.
43. See n. 34.
44. Socrates describes what he and the interlocutors are doing as *nomothetein*, legislating, at various points in the text (398b3, 403b4, 409e5, 417b8, 456b12, 459e5, 463c9, 525b11, 534b8, 534e1); he also three times calls Glaucon *nomothētēs*, the lawgiver (429c2, 458c6, 497d1).
45. Talking to it: 416e–417a; satisfying it with its natural object: 586a–587a; soothing it in a mysterious way by music: 390a–b. Moss agrees that the education in music is meant to educate both appetite and spirit (Moss 2008, pp. 43–44).
46. I am indebted to Caroline Wexselbaum (2006) for pointing out the importance of public appearance in degenerate regimes.
47. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaimonians* 11.5–9; cf. Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 17.1–4.
48. Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 18.1.
49. The combination of persuasion and compulsion in the law described here seems to me a clear anticipation of the doctrine of preludes in the *Laws*.
50. See Wexselbaum (2006, p. 28) for the point.
51. Frede 1996, p. 263, complains that this is without historical basis; Schofield 2006, pp. 118–19, finds otherwise, citing Adam's example of Crito's assumption that Socrates can walk away even though he has been sentenced to death.

52. Nettleship 1897, p. 310, cited by Adam 1902, p. 244.
53. Shorey 1930, p. 316, notes parallel accounts of the exploitation of the rich in Athens.
54. A 1915 paper by F. V. Merriman is the exception: Merriman makes the claim that one can trace the decline through the progressive loss of the virtues (cf. especially p. 13).
55. See the parallel account of the shifting balance between *aretē* and greed in the timocracy (550e–551a).
56. This passage has an obvious parallel in Thucydides' account of the shifting virtues during the plague at Athens (3.82).
57. It is possible that timocratic courage is an exception, especially given the qualifications put on Book 4 courage as "civic courage" (430c).
58. See Ober 1989, pp. 291–304; Vlastos 1981a.
59. Aristotle, *Politics* 1317a40–1317b17; Thucydides 2.37, 7.69. I discuss this in my 2005 review of Kurt Raaflaub's *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece*.
60. See Schofield 2006, pp. 104–05, with references.
61. This is not to say, of course, that Plato's analysis of historical democracy and oligarchy is correct. It is only to say that it is more sophisticated than it looks at first appearance, and so evaluating its correctness is more complex than it might have seemed.
62. This is supported by recent work by Hendrik Lorenz 2006 on the division of the tripartite soul. Lorenz argues – to my mind, entirely convincingly – that rational functioning can never be attributed to the lower parts, appetite or *thumos*, and that appetites do not directly conflict with one another (Lorenz 2006, part I). Accordingly, mental conflict is always between soul-parts. On his reading of the oligarchic character, for instance, the conflict in his soul is not between different types of appetite, but between weak and corrupt rational desires and strong appetitive ones (pp. 41–52).
63. I have been much influenced by the arguments of Moss 2008. She argues that Plato's division of the soul ought to be understood as a division between (i) reason as an active calculator and evaluator of appearances and (ii) non-rational parts passively affected by appearances and closely associated with sense-perception.
64. The timocrat arises from hearing (*akouētēn*) his mother's complaints about his father's status (549c), and "sees and hears" the same things (repeated twice), while also "seeing and hearing the words of his father" (550a). The timocratic leadership "observe" (*horōn*) and emulate one another and decay accordingly (550e). The timocrat turns into an oligarch after seeing his father ruined, and after "seeing and suffering these things" (*idōn taūta kai pathōn*), he turns to the pursuit of wealth (553b). The oligarchy falls when the rich and poor "observing" (*theomenoi*) one another at a public event see that the one class is weaker than the other (556c–d). The democratic man arises from the oligarch by being exposed to certain pleasures (559d). The misleading speeches of the demagogue-drones are the means to overturning democracy (564d–566b).

65. I thank the audience at the 2008 Arizona Colloquium and my commentator Nils Raahut for a very helpful discussion; thanks also to Cristina Ionescu, Liz Irwin, Patrick Miller, and Rachel Singpurwalla for valuable comments on a previous version. I have learned a great deal from many conversations with many people about *Republic* 8 over the past several years, and I gratefully dedicate this essay to them: my fellow-students, teachers, colleagues, and friends.