

CHANGING RULERS IN THE SOUL:
PSYCHOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS
IN *REPUBLIC* 8–9

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At the beginning of book 8 of the *Republic* Glaucon urges Socrates to resume the line of argument interrupted at the beginning of book 5 by speaking, as he had previously promised he would, about the four main kinds of ‘flawed’ (*ἡμαρτημέναις*, 544 A 1) cities and the four kinds of men that correspond to them. Socrates proceeds to describe the progressive decline of the ideal political regime through the ‘diseased’ (*νόσημα*, 544 C 7) governmental forms of timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny, depicting at each stage the man who ‘is like’ or ‘resembles’ the city. In the process, he discusses not only what each form of city and person is like, but also how each stage of the decline occurs: how each kind of city and character first comes to be. Special problems arise in the individual case, however, since at key points in his discussion Socrates appears to invoke the person as an entity over and above the three parts of his soul—an entity, moreover, capable of deciding between these parts when they conflict. These remarks create the impression that each person is able to determine, by a kind of choice, the eventual government of their soul as a whole. However, I argue, this impression is mistaken. Upon careful examination, the text of books 8 and 9 overwhelmingly supports an alternative interpretation. According to this view, the eventual government of each person’s soul is decided by a struggle for power occurring within the person, among the soul’s parts, the outcome of which is determined by the relative

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strength and alignment of the competing parties. If this interpretation is correct, Plato adheres more closely to the city–soul analogy in these passages than has sometimes been thought. In addition, on this view, Plato locates the ultimate origins of vice in the soul squarely in a person’s upbringing and education, and not in a mistaken choice of life on their part.

I

The first of the *Republic*’s four ‘psychological transition’ passages begins at 549 C 1, when Socrates takes up the question of how the ‘timocratic’ man—that is, the man corresponding to the ‘timocratic’ city¹—initially comes to be. This occurs, he tells Adeimantus, when the son of a good father is raised in a city that is not well governed (οὐκ εὖ πολιτευομένη). In such a city, the good man² will be content to mind his own business: he will be a person who ‘avoids honours, office, lawsuits, and all such meddling in other people’s affairs, and who is even willing to be put at a disadvantage in order to avoid trouble’ (549 C 3–5).³ Yet although this man will heavily influence his son, at the same time the son will constantly be exposed to others’ negative assessments of his father’s life. Thus, on Socrates’ account, the young man hears his mother complaining about her husband’s lack of political power and ambition and the low social status she is forced to endure as a result; about his lack of interest in money and in defending himself when he is insulted; and about

¹ The timocratic man is said to ‘correspond to’ the timocratic city at 548 D 6, where he is first introduced as ὁ κατὰ ταύτην τὴν πολιτείαν ἀνὴρ, and again at 549 A 8, while he is said to ‘be like’ (εἰκώς) this city at 549 B 10. Socrates suggests his own name for the kind of city in question at 545 B 7–8, where he expresses indifference between ‘timocracy’ (τιμοκρατία) and ‘timarchy’ (τιμαρχία). Neither of these names is traditional. Up to this point, Socrates had refrained from using a name at all, initially referring to the regime in question simply as ‘honour-loving’ (φιλότιμον) or ‘victory-loving’ (φιλόνηκον) (545 A 2–3). He takes this kind of city to correspond to the Spartan constitution at 544 C 1–2, and again at 545 A 3.

² The description of the father is of some interest. As described, he strikingly resembles members of that small group of people who currently ‘consort with philosophy in a way that is worthy of her’, described by Socrates in book 6, 496 A–D (cf. Calicles’ characterization of the ἀνανδρος adult philosopher at *Gorg.* 485 C–D). This, Socrates suggests again, is the appropriate way for a good person to behave in a poorly governed city.

³ Unless otherwise noted, translations from the *Republic* are by G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in J. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 1997), sometimes slightly modified.

his tendency to concentrate on his own thoughts rather than on honouring or dishonouring her—angered by all these things, she tells her son that his father is ‘unmanly’ (*ἀνανδρος*, 549 D 6). The same messages are repeated by servants in the young man’s house and by people on the street when he goes out: that his father is a coward, that those who live quietly and mind their own business are fools, that those who meddle in other people’s affairs are honoured and praised (549 E–550 A). As a result of these conflicting influences, the young man becomes torn: his father ‘nourishes the rational part of his soul and makes it grow’ (*τὸ λογιστικὸν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἄρδοντός τε καὶ αὐξοντός*), while at the same time the others ‘nourish’ the spirited and appetitive parts (550 B 1–2).⁴ Being ‘pulled’ in these two ways, he ‘settles in the middle’, ‘surrenders the rule over himself to the middle part’—the ‘victory-loving and spirited part’—and ‘becomes a proud and honour-loving man’ (550 B 4–7).⁵

There is something deeply puzzling about Socrates’ reference in this passage to a subject who ‘hands over’ or ‘surrenders’ (*παρέδωκε*, 550 B 6) control of his soul as a whole to its spirited part. The problem is that this remark seems to suggest that the young man in question is able to adjudicate between the competing parts of his own soul, and that he somehow intervenes on behalf of one of them in order to set it up as ruler within himself. In *Plato’s Ethics*, Terence Irwin usefully distinguishes three basic options for understanding what Plato might have had in mind in this passage:⁶ (1) Socrates’ reference to the person is not to be taken seriously—Plato means only that the domination of one part of the soul is replaced by the domination of another; (2) Plato is invoking a conception of the person as an entity distinct from the three parts of the soul; or (3) the reference to the person is to be understood as a reference to the

⁴ In what follows, I adhere to convention in referring to *τὸ λογιστικόν*, *τὸ θυμοειδές*, and *τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν* as the ‘rational’, ‘spirited’, and ‘appetitive’ parts of the soul, respectively. The language of ‘parts’ is also conventional, although somewhat more controversial. For an extended recent discussion of the issue, and defence of the view that Plato divides the soul into parts—rather than merely distinguishing different kinds or classes of desire—see H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within* (Oxford, 2006), chs. 2 and 3.

⁵ *εἰς τὸ μέσον ἐλκόμενος ὑπ’ ἀμφοτέρων τούτων ἦλθε, καὶ τὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἀρχὴν παρέδωκε τῷ μέσῳ τε καὶ φιλονίκῳ καὶ θυμοειδεῖ, καὶ ἐγένετο ὑψηλόφρων τε καὶ φιλότιμος ἀνὴρ*. We should note that the son’s eventual fate is ascribed neither to his father’s failings as an educator nor to the son’s own nature (he is ‘not a bad man by nature but keeps bad company’, 550 B 3–4), but rather to the powerful and seemingly inescapable influence of the wider society in which he is raised.

⁶ T. Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics [Ethics]* (Oxford, 1995), 285.

special role of one (or more) of the soul's parts. Irwin rejects option (2), on the basis that the tripartite psychology of the *Republic* would become explanatorily redundant if Plato were forced to invoke some otherwise unexplained notion of the 'person' to account for the young man's decision. He also rejects option (1), the view that the apparent reference to the person is not to be taken seriously. The problem with this view, Irwin argues, is that Plato's phrasing implies that the handover of power to spirit is the result of a definite, deliberate choice by the young man, while the process is described in enough detail to make it extremely unlikely that the reference to a 'handover' or 'surrender' of control represents nothing but an instance of loose or careless writing on Plato's part.⁷

Irwin's own solution to this problem is to adopt a version of (3), the view that the reference to the person should be understood as a reference to the special role of one (or more) of the parts of the soul. Specifically, he argues that Plato must have had in mind a special role for the soul's rational part.⁸ First, he observes that the future timocrat's decision to hand power to the spirited part is portrayed as a deliberate choice, which presumably involves the rational part of the soul. Furthermore, Irwin argues, Plato provides us with reasons for the young man's decision: although the good man realizes that he should tolerate the way that other people in the corrupt society dishonour him, the son, observing his father's life, 'could make a reasonable case to show that his father's way of life does not really do justice to all the parts of his soul'.⁹ On the basis of this example, Irwin formulates the following general principle, which he believes is applicable at each of the four stages of psychic decline:

People turn from Life 1 to Life 2 when it seems to them that Life 1 fails to achieve its own ends and that Life 2 offers a better prospect of setting reasonable ends that they can hope to achieve.¹⁰

Plato is not expressing himself loosely, Irwin concludes, when he suggests that the transition from one character type to the next is a rational process: at each stage the person makes a rational decision to hand over control. This decision, Irwin claims, does not require us to invoke a notion of the person in addition to the parts of the

⁷ Ibid. 286–7

⁸ Ibid. The basic view in question is already present in Irwin's *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford, 1977), esp. 226–33.

⁹ Irwin, *Ethics*, 286.

¹⁰ Ibid.

soul, since it can be attributed to the rational part alone. We should not be misled by the fact that the interests of the whole soul, rather than those of the rational part alone, form the basis of each decision, since the rational part considers not only its own good, narrowly conceived, but also the good of the soul as a whole.¹¹ Thus, for Irwin, each stage of the psychological decline is driven by a rational choice, attributable to the person in virtue of being attributable to the rational part of that person's soul, to cede control over the soul as a whole to a non-rational part. In what follows, I shall refer to this as the 'rational choice' view.

Irwin's view represents an ingenious attempt to resolve the problems raised by Socrates' apparent reference to the person in the psychological transition passages. The challenge, as Irwin sees it, is to preserve the idea that each psychological transition is driven by a deliberate, personal choice to adopt a new way of life, while avoiding the problems associated with attributing the decision in question to some entity apart from the three parts of the soul.¹² Irwin meets this challenge by effectively *identifying* the person who chooses with the rational part of his soul.¹³ This position has clear appeal, and has continued to find support in the recent literature on Plato's psychology.¹⁴ At the same time, several other interpreters

¹¹ In support of this claim, Irwin invokes passages from *Republic* 4, in which Socrates claims that the rational part of the soul 'is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul' (441 E 3-4), and that it alone 'has within it knowledge of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul' (442 C 5-7) (*Ethics*, 287).

¹² As Irwin notes, if the person who decides were an entity altogether distinct from the three parts of his soul, Plato's tripartite psychology would be rendered explanatorily redundant—a serious failing given the prominence of the tripartite soul throughout the discussion of corrupt people in books 8 and 9. In addition, we might also wonder how on this view the rational part of the soul could be related to the person; presumably, for example, it is to be understood as involved in *some* way in the young man's deliberations over which life to choose. Because it avoids these problems, I take the rational choice view to represent the most plausible version of a 'personal choice' interpretation.

¹³ Cf. A Price, *Mental Conflict* (London, 1995): 'Reason is what each of us most fundamentally *is* . . . what my reason decides is what *I* decide' (96).

¹⁴ See e.g. C. Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* (Oxford, 2002): 'Despite occasional loose language suggesting that the person is something over and above the three parts of the soul . . . we can explain the claims that Plato makes without invoking it [cites Irwin, *Ethics*, 285-8 in support]. A distinct person over and above the three parts would be hard to distinguish from the Reasoning part to the extent that a person is a rational actor and has the capacities of the Reasoning part. It would also undermine the role of the parts of the soul in explaining the person's choices and threatens to lead to a pointless regress' (531 n. 27); M. Anagnostopoulos, 'The Divided Soul and the Desire for the Good in Plato's *Re-*

have endorsed some form of ‘personal choice’ account, without specifying any particular version.¹⁵ Such people will tend to be drawn to Irwin’s interpretation, not only because it is the most detailed and well-developed statement of a ‘personal choice’ view in the existing literature, but also because it is arguably the most plausible. Irwin’s statement of the problem in question is especially clear, his own solution to it is prominent, influential, and superficially attractive, and the idiosyncrasies in his view, such as they are, are the result of recognizing and attempting to respond to problems that will plague any version of a much larger and more widely advocated family of interpretations. For these reasons, in what follows I use Irwin’s view as a foil for developing my own account. However, it must be emphasized that the interpretation I present is intended to represent an alternative not only to Irwin’s rational choice view, but also to any account that traces the first emergence of each new inner regime to a personal choice on the person’s part to adopt a new way of life.

public’ [‘Divided Soul’], in G. Santas (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic* (Malden, Mass., 2006), 166–88, insists that responsibility for the shifts in power in books 8 and 9 ‘lies in the *person*, not the parts of the person’ (178), and concludes that ‘the problem is . . . *reason*’s failure to “stand guard” or, in other words, to choose correctly a plan of life’ (179, emphasis added).

¹⁵ An excellent example is provided by J. Annas, *Platonic Ethics Old and New* (Ithaca, NY, 1999): ‘[T]he changed types of people are not presented as merely the result of power struggles between the parts of the soul. Rather, it is the person himself, under various kinds of pressure, who is said to produce the changes. The “timocratic” man, for example, “hands over the power within himself” to his spirited part . . . No adequate account of the progress from virtue to vice can be produced just by citing dominance of one or another part of the soul; the progress looks more like a person making a series of increasingly catastrophic decisions as to what kinds of motivation to prefer’ (129). Cf. her ‘Weakness as Psychological Break-down’, in T. Roche (ed.), *Ancient Ethics and Political Philosophy* (*Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 43, suppl.; Memphis, 2005), 1–19). Annas does not explicitly endorse Irwin’s rational choice view. However, his position represents a natural development of her claim, as is well illustrated by Anagnostopoulos, ‘Divided Soul’, who moves seamlessly from approvingly quoting this very passage from Annas (178) to adopting Irwin’s rational choice view (see previous note). G. R. F. Ferrari, ‘The Three-Part Soul’, in Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic* (Cambridge, 2007), 165–20, also endorses some version of the personal choice interpretation: ‘the choice of a less than perfect way of life, however unwise a choice it may be, is still a choice of life’ (195). Ferrari goes on to claim that the future timocratic man ‘makes the decision to allow the desires of a particular element within his soul to shape his entire life’ (ibid.).

II

Despite its initial appeal, the rational choice view faces serious problems. To begin with, the textual evidence on which the view is based is, in fact, very thin. The argument for it stems not so much from a close analysis of all the relevant passages as from a felt need to resolve an interpretative problem raised by one of them in particular: the passage in which the emergence of the timocratic character is described, with its reference to the young man's 'surrendering the rule over himself to the middle part'. However, if it can be shown that another way of understanding this (and related passages) is available, any sense of necessity motivating the rational choice view dissolves. In the absence of such support, a defender of this view would need to go to the remaining texts and show why each of the four passages describing the emergence of a new character type in *Republic* 8 and 9 none the less supports this interpretation. However, I argue, the remaining texts provide little or no support for the rational choice view. In fact, as I shall demonstrate, they provide considerable evidence in favour of my alternative interpretation. If this alternative can be shown to be preferable for other reasons as well, the rational choice view will be effectively undermined.

Second, on the rational choice view each transition to a new kind of inner regime is driven by a choice, properly attributable to the rational part of the person's soul. This implies that the rational part of every soul possesses, and retains throughout life, the power to depose the existing government of the soul at any time, and to replace it with a new one of its choosing. Irwin is explicit on the point: according to his interpretation, reason not only initially endorses each new regime, but also retains the power to replace the ruling part of the soul whenever it develops an inclination to do so.¹⁶ Thus, on this view the rational part of the soul exerts a special kind of executive control over the government of the soul in every kind of person, including even the most corrupt. Yet this might seem implausible, and is altogether unsupported by the text. For example, the rational part of the soul is not even mentioned in Socrates' descriptions of

¹⁶ For example, Irwin claims that in the case of the oligarchic person 'the rational part chooses to assign itself a subordinate position in the government of the soul, even though it retains the capacity to change this government and replace it with another' (*Ethics*, 287).

the final two transitions, while in the others it appears to operate at the same level, as it were, as spirit and appetite: it must 'struggle' with them for control of the soul, or is sometimes even 'enslaved' by them.¹⁷

The third major problem with the rational choice view—and indeed with *any* personal choice interpretation—is that its proponents are committed to denying the cogency of the city–soul parallel. According to personal choice interpretations, a single entity, the person, assents to every transition in the individual psyche, thereby initiating and driving each change of inner 'regime'. In the city, by contrast, one government is turned out and another is installed without any single source of authority consenting to all of the changes. This forces any proponent of a personal choice view to abandon all hope of finding a coherent parallel between city and soul in books 8 and 9 of the *Republic*. At this point, a defender of such a view might be tempted to say: so much the worse for the city–soul analogy.¹⁸ This appears to have been Irwin's response;¹⁹ indeed, he is far from alone in thinking that Plato's psychological theory can be rendered more perspicuous by freeing it from the distracting analogy with the city.²⁰ However, we should note that

¹⁷ I return to many of these points below. In response, Irwin might claim that the rational part of the soul in corrupt people continues to make bad decisions because its judgement becomes progressively more 'warped'. But this response would be beside the point. The question at issue is not whether the perspective of the rational part becomes warped in corrupt souls—I agree with Irwin that it does. Rather, the question is whether this warping *precedes* and *explains* each transition, or is rather *caused by* reason's resulting subservience to a non-rational part of the soul. I shall maintain the latter view; Irwin holds the former.

¹⁸ See e.g. N. Blössner, 'The City–Soul Analogy', in Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, 345–85 at 359: 'the behaviour of the city, if we can put it that way, is identical with the behaviour of its members; but the behaviour of an individual is not identical with that of his soul parts. For alongside the soul parts, the individual himself stands as a distinct figure' (359). Blössner goes on to cite the reference to the timocratic man 'handing over rule of his soul to the spirited part' in support of his own view that the *Republic's* city–soul analogy breaks down, and that Plato was well aware of this fact.

¹⁹ 'In the sequence of political changes, one government is turned out and another is installed, and there is no single source of authority that consents to all the changes in government. In the individual however, Plato seems to intend the person to remain the permanent source of authority' (Irwin, *Ethics*, 287). This attitude is apparent in Irwin's choice to omit almost all mention of the political passages in the course of his explication of Plato's psychology in *Republic* 8–9. In the following discussion I seek to show that Plato adhered more closely to the city–soul analogy in these passages than Irwin and others have supposed, and that the political passages can actually shed considerable light on the corresponding psychological ones.

²⁰ For example, Julia Annas, in *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* [*Introduction*]

the breakdown of the city–soul analogy that would follow on any personal choice view is total: there is no part of the city even remotely corresponding to the role played by the person as such views would have us conceive of it.²¹ Yet even a cursory reading of these passages shows that Plato took great care to develop the city–soul parallel as closely as possible throughout the long catalogue of corrupt cities and souls in *Republic* 8–9. This gives us good reason to consider suspect any interpretation that diverges from the analogy so strikingly and to prefer one, if available, that leaves at least the most basic features of the parallel between city and soul intact.

III

The above considerations provide good reason to revisit the psychological transition passages and to examine whether a more satisfying interpretation of them is available. I begin with Socrates' description of the emergence of the timocratic city, which immediately precedes his discussion of the timocratic man. The timocratic city first comes into being, Socrates tells Glaucon, when failures in the programme of eugenics in a good city lead to 'bronze'- and 'iron'-souled people finding their way into the city's ruling class. A civil conflict (*στάσις*, 547 A 6) results as the city as a whole is pulled in two ways: the iron and bronze types 'drag' or 'pull' (*εἰλκέτην*, 547 B 2) it towards moneymaking and the acquisition of property, while

(Oxford, 1981), writes that in all the sketches 'the parallel with the state is less convincing than the claim that can be independently made about the individual in terms of the soul's parts' (298), and that 'the valuable points in books 8–9 come out with their proper force only when the hampering city–soul parallel is dropped' (305). So too, for example, Nicholas Pappas: 'Plato could have shown one kind of soul to be much worse than another much more directly than by constructing such a complex analogy' (*Plato and the Republic*, 2nd edn. (London, 2003), 171); and Anagnostopoulos, 'Divided Soul': 'Plato's presentation of the demise of the soul is interspersed with his account of the demise of the city; the resulting picture is vivid and forceful. It is, however, also exaggerated. As in earlier comparisons of the city and soul, Plato's use of language of agreement, discord, or power struggles between the parts of the soul is an extension of the way he specifies the possible relationships between parts of the city. He overdoes the parallel, in a way that obscures his own convictions about psychic turmoil and harmony' (180).

²¹ Irwin greatly understates the problem when he writes that it is a consequence of his view that 'one aspect of the political analogy has to be modified when it is applied to the individual soul' (*Ethics*, 287).

the gold and silver types ‘lead’ (ἡγήτην, 547 B 7) it towards virtue and the old order. These groups strive and struggle with each other (βιαζομένων τε καὶ ἀντιπεινόντων ἀλλήλοις, 547 B 7–8), until they eventually agree on a middle way (εἰς μέσον ὁμολόγησαν, 547 B 8): a city that resembles both an aristocracy and an oligarchy in some ways, but that is characterized, above all, by a focus on physical training and warfare, a respect for authority, and the rule of spirited people.

The first thing to note about this passage is the striking similarity between Socrates’ description of the emergence of the timocratic city and his account of the emergence of the timocratic man, summarized above. In the city, a change of regime occurs when a civil conflict arises between an old, predominantly rational order (represented by the remaining ‘golden’ rulers) and a new set of competing influences (represented by iron- and bronze-souled people who have infiltrated the city’s ruling class). Similarly, a change of ‘regime’ occurs in the soul of the young man when a conflict arises within him between the rational part of his soul, which has been nurtured and nourished by his good father, and a new set of competing desires fostered in him by his mother and other members of his society. The result is that the young man, like the city, is ‘pulled in two ways’ (the same verb, ἔλκω, is used in both cases). And eventually the man, just like the city, resolves this inner conflict by means of a compromise: he ‘settles in the middle’ and grants control to the spirited part.²²

Further features of the political passage should now be noted. In particular, we might wonder why the remaining gold-souled members of the ruling class ‘agree’ (547 B 8) to the establishment of spirited rule in the city. One possibility is that their perspective has already become warped, such that they have come to believe that spirited people are best suited by nature to rule in the city. However, the text suggests a different answer: that the remaining good rulers consent to this only as the best available option under difficult circumstances. In other words, I suggest, they agree to the

²² These similarities between the two descriptions were already recognized by J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato [Republic]* (1902; repr. Cambridge, 1963), who remarks, commenting on the passage at 550 B, that ‘a compromise is effected, reminding us of the compromise which converted the aristocratical State into *τιμαρχία*’ (218). So also N. White, *A Companion to Plato’s Republic [Companion]* (Indianapolis, 1979): ‘in 550 A–B, Plato attributes the development of the timocratic man directly to a conflict within his character arising from two contrary influences. This explanation is to be compared with the earlier explanation of the way in which dissension among rulers leads to political change’ (210).

military rule of the spirited class, not because they have come to believe this is best for the city *simpliciter*, but rather because they regard it as the least bad outcome still attainable: the ruling class in the city is split and conflicted; the situation in which the city is ruled by 'golden' leaders alone has become unrecoverable; and it is better, they conclude, to accept a compromise than to have a city that is permanently divided against itself²³ or ruled by its lowest class. The agreement of the ruling class's 'bronze'- and 'iron'-souled members to spirited rule can readily be understood in a similar way, since this represents the greatest transfer of power away from the old order and towards them that the remaining gold-souled rulers will be willing to accept.²⁴

Moving from consideration of the city to consideration of the man, I suggest that the passage in which Socrates describes the emergence of the timocratic character can be understood along similar lines. On this interpretation, the young future timocrat finds himself hopelessly torn between two competing sets of motivations and desires: one set inculcated in him by his father and the other strengthened through his interactions with his mother and other members of his society. The desires inculcated in him by his father pull him towards the quiet life characteristic of a good man in a poorly governed city. However, due to the desires fostered in him by the other, corrupting influences, the son has strong spirited and appetitive desires that his father's life could never satisfy; as a result, he is unable to follow in his father's footsteps. At the same time, due to the continuing positive influence of his father, the young man finds himself unable to adopt the kind of life characteristic of the worst (i.e. criminal) elements of his society, or even that of the moneymakers. In short, the son finds himself pulled towards different ways of living, yet unable to adopt either extreme without continuing inner conflict. He therefore settles on

²³ I am assuming here that the remaining good rulers retain a concern for the good of the city as a whole, and (correctly) believe that deep-seated civil conflict and division are among the greatest evils for any *polis*.

²⁴ We might wonder, in general, under what circumstances a struggle for control between parties A and B will be settled by handing control to party C. My suggestion is that in the case described here neither A nor B is able to prevail, and that, given a desire to end the conflict, the rule of compromise candidate C represents the greatest concession that A (the incumbent) is willing to make and that C (the challenger) is able to secure. The case of the soul will be similar, but will also differ in certain respects, as I discuss below. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* for urging clarification on this point.

the life of the honour-lover as a compromise, the best available to him under his circumstances.

In both city and soul, therefore, spirit emerges with power as the result of a kind of compromise: the inner conflict in question must be resolved, yet no party is strong enough to prevail on its own. But how is this idea of a compromise to be understood in the specific case of the soul? The first thing to note here is that the parallel between political and psychological cases, while strikingly close, is not perfect: in one important respect it does break down. In the city, I have observed, the parties in question ‘agree’ (ὡμολόγησαν) to the compromise because each is able to recognize that this outcome is the best they can secure under the circumstances. In the case of the soul, by contrast, Plato refrains from using the language of agreement, preferring to speak of the young man ‘coming to be’ or ‘settling’ in the middle (550 B 5).²⁵ The change of verb here is striking, and surely deliberate. By making it, Plato avoids attributing complicated cognitive abilities to each of the individual parts of the soul, such as those used by the rulers of the city to negotiate their agreement. Rather, I suggest, we are invited to view this struggle as a kind of ‘tug-of-war’ between the competing parties, neither of which is strong enough to prevail. We can then envisage this process as manifesting itself, at the level of the young man’s conscious awareness, in a conflict between different views about what one should value and how one should live.²⁶ The young man is unable to adopt either extreme, and eventually settles on the honour-lover’s life to bring his deep-seated motivational conflict to an end—a compromise of exactly the kind described above.

I submit that this way of understanding the young man’s inner conflict and its resolution not only better fits the text, but is

²⁵ The Greek verb is ἤλθε, aorist singular of ἐρχομαι. Grube (rev. Reeve) translates ‘settles’. There is a question about how to construe the aorists here and in 550 B 6–7. Adam may well be correct in suggesting that they should really be translated as past (Adam, *Republic*, 218; see also his note on 548 D on page 214).

²⁶ In the context of the *Republic*, it appears that being ‘ruled’ by a given part of one’s soul leads one to adopt overall life goals that correspond in some way to the characteristic desires of the soul’s ruling part. If this is right, it is natural to think that the struggle for control within the soul of the young future timocrat would express itself in a deep motivational conflict among beliefs about how it is best to live: an aspiration to live as his father does, corresponding to the temporary ascendancy in the soul of the rational part, followed by an inclination to live as others in society prize, corresponding to the temporary ascendancy of the spirited and appetitive parts. Neither reason nor appetite is able to prevail, so spirit emerges as ruler, causing him to adopt the life of the proud and honour-loving man.

also more psychologically plausible than the alternative. On Irwin's view, we are asked to envisage the young man reflectively considering the different kinds of life available to him, comparing them on the basis of which offers the best prospect of satisfying the greatest number of his desires over the course of his lifetime, deciding on the honour-lover's life on this basis, and promptly beginning to live that way. This account of what happens is unsupported by the text,²⁷ and seems radically to over-intellectualize the ordinary case. By contrast, on the view I propose we need not suppose that the young man in question deliberates over how best to live, consciously chooses an overall policy or plan for his life as a whole, and immediately puts this plan into effect. Rather, he simply adopts the way of life that alone brings his deep-seated motivational conflict to an end. Nor need we suppose that on this view he becomes a passive spectator of events occurring within his own soul; indeed, we need not suppose that he has any sophisticated theoretical view about psychology, including any awareness that his soul even contains distinct elements or parts.²⁸ For these reasons, I take this interpretation to provide a more psychologically plausible account of what the young man in question is supposed to experience and undergo.

²⁷ Two features of this passage might be thought to support the rational choice interpretation. First, in Grube's translation, the young man is said to 'compare' his father's ways of living with those of the others. However, this represents an over-translation of the Greek: all the text actually says is that the young man sees (*ὁρῶν*) his father's ways of living 'alongside' or perhaps 'in addition to' those of the others (*παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων*, 550 A 6–7), a phrase that lacks the same connotations of deliberation on his part conveyed by the English word 'compare'. Second, as already noted, the young man is said to 'hand over' or 'surrender' rule over himself to the middle part (550 B 6), a phrase that alone may lead the reader to envisage a life-transforming choice. However, Socrates' terminology is perfectly compatible with the alternative interpretation: the 'handing over' in question could involve a gradual transition as easily as an instantaneous transformation. Moreover, the use of the verb *παράδωμι* may indicate only that the process is voluntary, which it is on both accounts—on the present interpretation the young man does what he believes to be best at all times, even in the absence of the kind of deliberate, conscious comparison of lives that the rational choice view requires.

²⁸ This suggests another problem for the rational choice view. In the *Republic*, the rational part of the soul is frequently depicted as fully aware of the existence of the other soul-parts. For example, it is said to possess knowledge of what is good for the whole soul and each of its parts (442 c 5–7). Yet according to the rational choice view, the person who chooses is to be identified with the rational part of his soul. This implies, implausibly, that each person who chooses is consciously aware of the existence of spirited and appetitive parts or elements in his or her soul. I take it that this is unlikely to have been Plato's view about ordinary cases.

Before proceeding, we should note that there is one further, serious problem here for the rational choice view. On Irwin's account, the young man chooses an overall life policy or plan because the rational part of his soul does so. However, in this first case the rational part of the soul is itself one of the parties to the conflict Socrates describes, which is portrayed as a kind of inner 'tug-of-war'. Thus, on the rational choice view, the rational part of the soul serves *both* as one of the parties to the young man's inner struggle *and*, simultaneously, as the party that alone determines the struggle's eventual outcome. The problems for the rational choice view only multiply when we note that the rational part of the soul is depicted as ultimately unable to prevail in this struggle, apparently because it is insufficiently strong relative to the appetitive part. This would be difficult to explain, to say the least, if the rational part of the soul had the power to determine the soul's government at any time at will, as the rational choice view requires.

This discussion serves to bring out a fundamental difference between the 'personal choice' interpretation and my alternative, which I call the 'power struggle' view. On my view, each new inner regime first emerges only after a struggle for power occurring at the subpersonal level, among the soul's parts, has been resolved. The outcome of this struggle, in turn, is settled by the relative strength and alignment of the competing parties. In this way, events occurring at the subpersonal level determine the kind of person the young man eventually becomes. On any personal choice interpretation, by contrast, the person's decision itself causes the parts of his soul to line up in a particular way: the outcome of a conflict described at the subpersonal level is determined by a decision at the personal.²⁹ Such views threaten to undermine the explanatory relevance of all interactions among the soul's parts.

²⁹ This crucial distinction is masked in much of the literature on the notion of the 'rule' of the soul in Plato. Consider, for example, the following formulations of what psychic rule amounts to in the *Republic*, offered in two of the best-known discussions of the issue: R. Kraut, 'Reason and Justice in the *Republic*', in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and R. M. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument* (Assen, 1973), 207–24: 'One part of the soul rules both the others if the individual prefers a value associated with the part to any value associated with some other part' (211); G. Klosko, 'The "Rule" of Reason in Plato's Psychology', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 5 (1988), 341–56: 'if a soul (regularly) gives precedence to values associated with element X, rather than those associated with element Y, then X rules over Y' (344). Although not wrong, these formulations fail to make it clear whether having one's soul ruled by a given part *causes* one to hold a certain set of values, perhaps by affecting the orientation of one's reason in some way, or whether saying that one's soul is 'ruled'

This in turn pushes us towards purely metaphorical readings of Socrates' references to parts of the soul 'ruling', 'struggling for power', being 'enslaved' to one another, and the like. Irwin recognizes and wishes to avoid this threat. However, he attempts to have things both ways, attributing causal power to a personal choice while also identifying the chooser with one of the parts of his soul. The resulting view clashes with many details of the text and also faces other problems. Many of these stem from the fact that the parts or elements of the soul—including the soul's rational part—are regularly depicted interacting with each other at the same 'level', as it were. This creates severe difficulties for any attempt to identify the person who chooses with a single part of his or her soul.³⁰

The differences between these two interpretations may appear subtle, and are easily blurred in the case of this first transition, in which the rational part of the soul continues to play a prominent role. However, they become increasingly clear in the three remaining transitions, in which the rational part has already been excluded from the governance of the soul. In these passages, if the power struggle view is correct, we should expect the transfer of 'rule' within the individual soul to be driven entirely by a conflict or struggle for power among the non-rational parts of the soul, with no decisive intervention by the soul's rational part at any stage. In order to test this possibility, I turn now to the second of the four psychological transition passages, in which the emergence of the oligarchic man is described.

IV

At 553 A Socrates takes up the question of how the man who 'is like' the 'oligarchic' city—a city in which the qualification to rule is based on an assessment of property—first comes to be. The olig-

by part A is simply a colourful way of describing the fact that one *has* that set of values. I take the former view.

³⁰ My claim is that a basic problem will confront *any* account that identifies the person with one of the parts of his soul, while also seeking to preserve the explanatory relevance of conflict and interaction among the soul's parts. On the power struggle view, by contrast, there is a clear distinction between what happens to the young man at the level of his conscious experience and the interactions among the parts of his soul: events at the lower level serve to explain certain events at the higher.

archic man, he tells Adeimantus, emerges when the son of a person of timocratic character sees his father, formerly a man of high social standing, run foul of the city in which he lives, losing all his citizenship rights and possessions, and possibly even his life, as a result of false charges being upheld against him in court (553 A–B). Until this point, the son had emulated his father in every way. However, after he has witnessed his father’s fate, everything changes:

The son sees all this, suffers from it, loses all his property, and, fearing for his life, immediately drives from the throne in his own soul [ὠθεῖ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ ἐν τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῇ] the honour-loving and spirited part that ruled there. Humbled by poverty, he turns greedily to making money, and, little by little, saving and working, he amasses property. Don’t you think that this man would establish [ἐγκαθίστημι] his appetitive and money-loving part on the throne, setting it up as a great king within himself [μέγαν βασιλέα ποιῆν ἐν ἑαυτῷ], adorning it with golden tiaras and collars and girding it with Persian swords? (553 B 7–C 7)

This striking passage might initially seem to support the rational choice interpretation. After all, it is difficult at first to see how the son could drive the spirited part from the throne in his own soul and establish the appetitive part there, making it ‘a great king within himself’, unless he decided to do these things in virtue of the fact that the rational part of his soul, the only part not mentioned in the passage, decided to do them. Furthermore, the father’s tragic fate might well be thought to represent exactly the kind of event that would prompt a rational reassessment of the ends of one’s life as a whole.

However, this reading becomes considerably more problematic when we consider the remainder of the passage in question. Socrates continues:

He makes the rational and spirited parts sit on the ground beneath appetite, one on either side, reducing them to slaves. He won’t allow [ἐὰν] the first to reason about or examine [λογίζεσθαι οὐδέ σκοπεῖν] anything except how a little money can be made into great wealth. And he won’t allow the second to value or admire [θαυμάζειν καὶ τιμᾶν] anything but wealth and wealthy people or to have any ambition [φιλοτιμείσθαι] other than the acquisition of wealth or whatever might contribute to getting it. (553 D 1–7)

In this passage Socrates explicitly distinguishes the man from the rational part of his soul. If anything, the person now seems to be identified most closely with the *appetitive* part, which holds reason

down by force. Furthermore, while it might be plausible to say of the rational part that it ‘chooses to assign itself a subordinate position in the government of the soul’, as Irwin puts it,³¹ the language chosen by Plato is considerably stronger than this summary of the passage would imply: the rational part is reduced to the status of a slave (*καταδουλωσάμενος*, 553 D 2) and is allowed to reason about nothing but how best to acquire more money. It would be peculiar indeed to say that the rational part chose, out of concern for the soul as a whole, to do *this* to itself.

How, then, are we to interpret this passage? I suggest that the key to understanding it lies in recognizing the essential inadequacy of the kind of control used to restrain appetitive desires in the soul of the timocratic person. This fragility is evident in Socrates’ description of the fall of the timocratic city and the rise of the oligarchy.³² The rulers in the timocracy, we should recall, are highly appetitive men.³³ The only things that prevent them from openly pursuing wealth are the law—which forbids them from owning private property—and the sense of shame attached to breaking it. As a result, they continue to enjoy their pleasures in secret, while ‘running away from the law like boys from their father’ (548 B 6–7). Yet this form of control must eventually fail, Socrates claims, because timocratic individuals lack reason (*λόγος*) and the good education in music and poetry (*μουσική*) that constitute the best ‘guard’ (*φύλαξ*) against the growth of appetitive desires (549 B 3–7). As a result, the appetitive part of the soul of each ruler in the timocratic city becomes gradually stronger over time. In the case of the city, this process is likened to the swing of a set of scales: as the appetitive part

³¹ Irwin, *Ethics*, 287.

³² In what follows, I accept that the rulers of the timocratic city are ‘spirited’ men, men whose souls are dominated by *τὸ θυμοειδές*. This seems clear in the text and I take it to be uncontroversial. I do not, however, assume that they are instances of the ‘timocratic’ individual whom Adeimantus and Socrates compare to Glaucon at 548 D. For detailed criticism of the common assumption that the rulers of each city in books 8 and 9 of the *Republic* are examples of the character type that corresponds to that city, see G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato’s Republic* (Sankt Augustin, 2003), esp. ch. 3.

³³ Socrates tells us that the rulers in the timocratic city ‘will desire money just as those in oligarchies do, passionately adoring gold and silver in secret . . . they’ll be mean with their own money, since they value it and are not allowed to acquire it openly, but they’ll love to spend other people’s because of their appetites’ (548 A 5–B 5). Similarly, the timocratic man ‘despises money when he is young but loves it more and more as he grows older, because he shares in the money-loving nature and isn’t pure in his attitude to virtue’ (549 A 9–B 3).

becomes stronger in the city's rulers, wealth comes to be 'valued' or 'honoured' more and virtue comes to be 'valued' or 'honoured' less by the same proportion (550 E 5–6).³⁴ In this way, the rule of spirit over appetite is essentially *unstable*. Eventually, the rulers in the timocratic city stretch and then break the laws, hesitantly at first and then en masse when they witness others doing the same (550 D). At this point, they establish an oligarchy by introducing a property qualification into the criteria for political power (551 A–B).

Advocates of the rational choice view could clearly accept all this and yet continue to insist that the actual transfer of power—in the *individual* if not in the city—occurs as the result of a rational choice. In support of this view, they might point out that there is a clear disanalogy between the two cases: the transfer of power in the city is presented as the culmination of a gradual transition in the souls of the rulers, while in the case of the individual it is represented as the result of a sudden event. However, a close examination of the relevant passages shows that the text does not support the rational choice interpretation. First, the text strongly suggests that the change in the young man's soul is not the result of a rational choice to pursue a different kind of life, but is motivated rather by *fear*, the fear of living a much worse one.³⁵ It is because of fear (*δέσας*, 553 B 8) that the young man drives the honour-loving and spirited part from the throne in his soul.³⁶ Socrates is in fact consistent in describing the oligarch, an appetitive character, as motivated by fear of losing what he has. For example, the oligarchic man holds his 'unnecessary' appetites in check, 'not by persuading them that it's better not to act on them or taming them by reason [*λόγῳ*],³⁷ but by compulsion and fear [*ἀνάγκη καὶ φόβῳ*], trembling [*τρέμων*] for his other possessions' (554 D 1–3). The son of the timocrat, like the mature oligarchic person he will become, is driven by fear, indeed fear of the very same kind: the fear of losing what he has and being reduced to poverty, of amounting to nothing in the city. I submit

³⁴ ὅσα ἂν τοῦτο τιμώτερον ἡγῶνται, τοσοῦτον ἀρετὴν ἀτιμωτέραν.

³⁵ As was recognized already by White, *Companion*: 'the idea appears to be that this greed for money arises because of fear brought on by his father's financial ruin, which in turn was brought on by unsuccessful efforts to live life in the pursuit of honour' (212).

³⁶ Grube (rev. Reeve) translates 'fearing for his life', but in the Greek the participle stands alone, and the object of the young man's fear is left unspecified.

³⁷ Grube (rev. Reeve) has 'arguments' here, but this would seem to over-translate the singular dative.

that it is this fear, and not rational reflection on how best to live, that causes spirit to be driven from the throne in his soul.³⁸

Socrates' repeated references to *honour*, and to the kinds of hierarchical structures associated with the spirited part of the soul, also count against the rational choice interpretation. As already noted, the rulers of the timocratic city gradually shift from valuing (or 'esteeming', *τιμώντες*) virtue to valuing money. The spirited parts of their souls are not represented as diminishing in strength, but rather as shifting allegiance from virtue (if not intellectual virtue, then at least prowess in battle) to wealth.³⁹ Importantly, a close reading of the text strongly suggests that the son of the timocrat becomes an oligarchic man after a similar shift in the allegiance of the spirited part of his soul. Thus the young man is said first to set about making money because he is 'humbled by poverty' (*ταπεινωθεὶς ὑπὸ πενίας*, 553 C 1), a phrase that suggests that he is primarily sensitive to the loss of *status* that his new condition brings. Next, the appetitive part is 'set up as a great king' within his soul, while the soul's remaining two parts sit on the ground beneath it (553 C 4–6); this language is strongly reminiscent of the kind of respect for superiors and harsh treatment of inferiors, especially slaves, that Socrates tells us is characteristic of the timocratic man.⁴⁰ Moreover, the spirited part of the soul is forbidden to 'admire' or 'value' (*θαυμάζειν καὶ τιμᾶν*) anything but wealth or wealthy people, or to 'aspire to' (*φιλοτιμείσθαι*) anything other than the acquisition of money (553 D 2–7)—language that again suggests a spirited attachment to wealth. Finally, Socrates indicates that the mature oligarchic person remains highly susceptible to 'spirited' motivations, even after the transition to the rule of appetite is complete.⁴¹ This all suggests

³⁸ Elsewhere in Plato's writings fear is associated with non-rational parts of the soul. This is perhaps most explicit at *Tim.* 69 D 2, where fear is located in the lower, 'mortal' part of the embodied soul. Note also *Tim.* 42 A 7, where fear is listed alongside 'spiritedness' as something we need to master in order to become just, whereas we become unjust if we fail to master it; *Rep.* 430 B, where Socrates implies that animals too experience fear; and *Theaet.* 156 B, where fear is closely associated with sense-perception and the experience of pleasure and pain.

³⁹ 550 E 4–551 A 5. Note also that the rulers in the oligarchy are said to become 'more honoured' (*ἐντιμώτεροι*) as they become richer (555 C 5).

⁴⁰ The timocratic man is described as being 'harsh to his slaves rather than merely looking down on them as an educated person does' and as being 'gentle to free people and very obedient to rulers, being himself a lover of ruling and a lover of honour' (549 A 1–4).

⁴¹ Shame, an emotion characteristically associated with the spirited part of the soul, plays a prominent role in the passage where Socrates describes what happens

that the transfer of power in the young man's soul is driven neither by a rational choice nor by a simple shift in the relative strengths of the three parts of the soul, but rather by a change in the allegiance of his spirited motivations, which become aligned with the desires of his soul's appetitive part.⁴²

On close examination, then, Socrates' description of the emergence of the oligarchic man does not support the rational choice view. If this view were correct, we should expect the transfer of power to the appetitive part of the young man's soul to be driven by a rational choice, attributable to the rational part of his soul and made with the good of the whole soul in mind. But in fact, as I have argued, the change is presented as driven primarily by non-rational motivations: by fear, along with a shift in the young man's sense of what is to be honoured and admired. In particular, it seems, the change in his overall life goal is driven by a deep aversion to his sudden poverty and low social standing, each of which he closely associates with the life favoured by his father. The social status attached to such a life, the young man realizes, is tenuous: from being the son of a man of some importance in the city he is suddenly reduced to nothing. Motivated as he is by spirit, he fears the prospect of being a nobody in the city, and he greedily turns to accumulating money as a secure way of avoiding this fate. This interpretation easily accounts for the suddenness of the transition.⁴³ It also explains

when a 'revolution' in the soul of the son of the oligarch fails: 'some of the young man's appetites are overcome, others are expelled, a kind of shame [*aidōs*] arises in the soul, and order is restored' (560 A 5–7). Note also that the oligarchic man is 'the sort the majority admires [*ἐπαινέει*]' (554 A 11–B 1) and that money is 'valued above everything [*μάλιστα ἐντιμὰ*]' by both the city and the man (554 B 2–3); these passages suggest that the oligarch's wealth also satisfies his desire for esteem.

⁴² My claim implies that spirit is malleable. This accords well with the view, defended, for example, by Myles Burnyeat in 'The Truth of Tripartition' ['Truth'], *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006), 1–23, that the spirited part of the soul in the *Republic* represents the essentially *social* nature of human beings, especially our basic desire for status and the esteem of our peers. This would tend to make spirit more malleable, since one will tend to regard different objects as honourable or shameful, depending on one's upbringing and the dominant values of one's society. Nevertheless, this need not imply that spirit has no natural object for Plato: there is still room for the view that certain objects or actions are *inherently* honourable or disgraceful. As such, they would become the objects of spirited motivations when spirit is playing its proper role as ally of reason, something it is not doing in the case of the oligarchic man.

⁴³ The idea of a switch of allegiance explains the sudden nature of the transition without requiring a sudden shift in the relative strengths of spirit and appetite. This view also accords well with the way Plato appears to think of the non-rational parts

why the oligarchic man remains so responsive to shame, praise, and the esteem of others: it is not that he is suddenly not motivated by spirit at all, but rather that the natural objects of spirit (political honours and the like) have been displaced by wealth. Thus the impetus behind the change of 'ruler' in the young man's soul comes not from reason, but rather entirely from the two non-rational parts of the soul.

V

To this point, I have examined the passages from book 8 of the *Republic* in which Socrates describes the emergence of the timocratic and oligarchic men. These passages provided the primary textual evidence for the rational choice view. I have argued that they do not, on closer examination, support this view. In fact, they provide significant textual evidence in favour of an alternative account. This alternative involves explaining each transition to a new form of 'government' in the soul in terms of a chain of events that undermine its pre-existing ruling configuration, whatever that may be in each case. Specifically, each change results from a struggle for power within a young man whose personality is still developing, with the eventual 'government' of his soul not yet settled. On one side of the struggle, there are desires inculcated by the father, while on the other there is a set of desires already present in the young man's soul but bolstered and shaped by societal influences that lie beyond the father's control. Crucially, the outcome of this struggle is determined by the strength and alignment of the competing parties.⁴⁴ Reason *may* be one of these parties, as in the case of the young future timocrat, but it need not be; nor does it play the special role of arbiter required by the rational choice view.

of the soul, here and elsewhere: their strength—both in absolute terms and relative to one another—depends primarily on the person's upbringing and environment, and changes only very slowly over long periods of time.

⁴⁴ In this I am in agreement with J. Cooper, 'Plato's Theory of Human Motivation' ['Motivation'], in id., *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton 1999), 118–37 (originally published in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1 (1984), 3–21): 'the four bad kinds of person Socrates describes are conceived by him as people in whom another part of the soul has grown strong, displacing reason and establishing its own control over them and their lives' (132). Cooper emphasizes that this does not mean that reason ceases to function altogether, only that it becomes subservient in various ways, especially with respect to the goals it begins to pursue.

On this ‘power struggle’ interpretation, explanations of the psychological transitions will not be as uniform as they are on the rational choice view. The details in each case will depend on the specific kind of rule pre-existing in the soul, after being inculcated by the father, and the particular kinds of desires and motivations that come to challenge it. Nevertheless, a pattern does begin to emerge. In the two transitions examined so far, each successive generation exhibits a progressive breakdown of the existing kind of control, as represented by the legacy of the father, over steadily baser desires. In the young future timocrat, the control of reason breaks down when competing desires and values, nourished in the still impressionable youth through his contact with wider society, become so strong that reason is unable to subdue them. The result is an impasse, broken only by the adoption of spirited rule. The control of spirit, however, is inherently unstable: once education has been neglected, it provides no effective way of checking the growth of appetitive desires. Eventually, the appetitive part gains control of the soul, at which point wealth comes to be honoured more than traditional virtue.

Further support will be gained for the power struggle view if the same general pattern can be shown to recur in the remaining two transitions. If this basic line of interpretation is correct, we should expect each of these transitions to be explicable in terms of a struggle within the soul of a young man in which each fledgling ‘regime’, represented by the teachings of the father, is eventually overcome by progressively baser appetitive desires.⁴⁵ Crucially, these transitions should be explicable without any reference to a rational choice to hand over control, or, indeed, to the rational part of the soul at all. This is exactly what we find, I suggest, in Socrates’ descriptions of the emergence of the democratic and tyrannical men.

VI

The democratic and tyrannical men arise in roughly the following way. As Socrates describes things, the son of the oligarch is brought

⁴⁵ Strictly speaking, the transition from democrat to tyrant represents an exception to this generalization, since in the soul of the son of the democratic man there is no resistance whatsoever to the rise of the *erōs* that eventually comes to dominate there. For more on this point, see below.

up in his father's ways: he has the same strong attachment to money as his father and is motivated in the same way to restrain his more luxurious and 'unnecessary' pleasures and desires,⁴⁶ which he holds down by force (558 C–D). However, this young man comes into contact with useless 'drones' in the city, who expose him to all manner of pleasures. As a result, the unnecessary desires already present within him are bolstered (559 D–E). At this point, his father and other members of his household intervene on behalf of his 'necessary' desires and a civil conflict (*στάσις*) ensues between the different parties in his soul (559 E 4–560 A 2).⁴⁷ Sometimes the baser appetites prevail, at which point the 'citadel' (*ἀκρόπολις*) in his soul is 'occupied' by unnecessary desires (560 B 6–9). Eventually, as he grows older and if he is lucky, the moderate desires that had been exiled in his youth return. He then comes to live yielding day by day to every desire that arises, regarding all of them as equally worthy and surrendering rule of his soul to each of them in turn. This, according to Socrates, is the 'democratic' man, the man who is 'just like' the democratic city (562 A 1–2).⁴⁸

The extreme tolerance characteristic of the democratic father creates the conditions required for the emergence of the tyrannical man. As Socrates describes things, the son of the democratic man is tempted to associate with the useless elements in his society, who appeal to the love of liberty instilled in him by his father calling

⁴⁶ Socrates clarifies the distinction between 'necessary' and 'unnecessary' desires at 558 D 8–559 D 3. Roughly, the former class includes those we cannot eliminate due to our nature, together with those whose satisfaction benefits us, while the latter class includes those that do us no good, or even harm us, and that we can eliminate with training. Plato may well be assuming here that all ineliminable desires are in fact beneficial.

⁴⁷ This is represented as involving a 'civil conflict', 'counter-revolution', and 'battle' within the young man fought against himself: *στάσις δὴ καὶ ἀντίστασις καὶ μάχη ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸς αὐτὸν τότε γίγνεται* (560 A 1–2). Note that the parties to this 'battle' are two different classes of appetitive desires.

⁴⁸ It is easy to overlook the fact that there is a further step between the triumph of the unnecessary desires and the establishment of the democratic character: it is only as he gets older and only 'if he is lucky' that the young man readmits the exiled desires into his soul and begins to treat them all indiscriminately (561 A 6–B 5). It is debatable whether the resulting 'democratic' man is ruled by appetite at all, rather than indiscriminately pursuing the satisfaction of desires arising from all three parts of his soul. In support of the former view see e.g. Cooper, 'Motivation', and Burnyeat, 'Truth', 16–17; in support of the latter view see D. Scott, 'Plato's Critique of the Democratic Character', *Phronesis*, 45 (2000), 19–37. Regardless, Socrates' description of the original psychological transition supports my account, since it is clearly described as resulting from the triumph, by force, of 'unnecessary' appetitive desires, rather than from an act of the rational part of the soul.

lawlessness ‘freedom’ (572 E 1–2).⁴⁹ These ‘enchanters’ and ‘tyrant-makers’ plant in him a ‘lust’ (*erōs*), which is ‘nurtured’ by his idle desires until it is sufficiently large and strong to ‘destroy’⁵⁰ and forcibly expel any beliefs or desires that are thought to be good or that still have some shame (572 E–573 B). The kind of man that results initially goes in for ‘feasts, revelries, luxuries, girlfriends, and all that sort of thing’ (573 D 2–4). However, satisfying these desires—and other ‘terrible’ ones that grow up beside them—soon exhausts his financial reserves (573 D–E). He then ‘becomes frenzied’ (*οἰστροῦν*, 573 E 7) and pursues wealth from every source, in order to avoid living in great pain and suffering (573 E–574 A). He turns on his parents (574 A–C), then resorts to stealing from others, breaking into houses and looting temples (574 D). In the process, the last vestiges of the old, traditional opinions (*δόξαι*, 574 D 5) that he had held from childhood about what is fine or shameful are overcome by opinions, newly released from slavery, which are now the ‘bodyguard’ of the *erōs* and hold sway along with it (574 D). Finally, this man becomes while awake what he used to be only occasionally while asleep, with the result that ‘he won’t hold back from any terrible murder or from any kind of food or act’ (574 E 3–4) in order to provide sustenance for his *erōs* and the ‘clamouring crowd’ (*θόρυβος*) of desires that surrounds it (575 A 4).

These lengthy and detailed narrative passages raise numerous difficult interpretative issues, most of which can be set aside here. For the purposes of the present discussion, the following points

⁴⁹ The young future tyrant is said to have similar early experiences to the young future democrat, including coming into contact with the same corrupting influences in his society (572 D). However, one difference between the two men, as Socrates describes things, is that the ‘dronish’ desires in the soul of the oligarchic man (and, presumably, his son) are forcibly held in check by his carefulness (*ἐπιμέλεια*, 554 C 2)—the democratic man and his son will display no such restraint. Thus the young future democrat is said to have ‘a better nature than his corruptors’ and is ‘pulled in both directions’, before he eventually ‘settles down in the middle’ between his father’s life and theirs (572 C 9–D 1). The upbringing of the young future tyrant, by contrast, leaves him particularly vulnerable to the blandishments of the corruptors who (as noted) equate freedom with being in every way ‘lawless’ (*παράνομος*); the result is that there is no effective resistance in his soul to the growth of his unnecessary appetitive desires (572 D 8–573 C 9). Eventually, an *erōs* is set up in his soul that destroys (573 B 1–3) all remaining good beliefs and desires. At this point, there is no possibility of these good beliefs and desires being readmitted into the ‘citadel’ in his soul, as they are in the case of the mature democratic man.

⁵⁰ Literally, it ‘kills’ (*ἀποκτείνω*) these remaining good beliefs or desires in the young man’s soul (573 B 2), much as the ruler of a tyrannical city has any members of his inner circle who are good or talented killed (567 B 3–C 8).

should be noted. First, none of these passages contains any reference whatsoever to the rational part of the soul, nor to a rational choice effecting a change of regime. As a result, they provide no direct textual support for the rational choice interpretation. In fact, given the complete absence of any references to the rational part of the soul, they present a serious *prima facie* challenge for any proponent of that view. Second, each transition is described as the result of a struggle between appetitive desires, a struggle settled eventually by the exercise of superior force. This is exactly as one would expect if the ‘power struggle’ view were correct, since by this point in the decline reason and spirit have already been excluded from the governance of the soul. Finally, these passages fit the pattern identified above, according to which each stage in Socrates’ catalogue of corrupt souls represents a further step in the breakdown of all effective means of controlling baser appetitive desires. In each case, there is a son who starts out resembling his father, has the baser desires already present in him⁵¹ bolstered as a result of his contact with wider society, lacks the appropriate means of resisting this development, becomes internally divided and battles and struggles against himself, and finally transforms. By contrast, these passages shed no light whatsoever on how the alternative overarching narrative is supposed to work, according to which the decline is propelled by a progressive restricting and warping of the perspective of the rational part of the soul. For all of these reasons, the case for preferring the ‘power struggle’ interpretation to the rational choice view, a case argued for in detail for the first two transition passages, grows significantly stronger when we take into account Socrates’ descriptions of the origins of the democratic and tyrannical men.

VII

As an interpretation of the psychological transition passages in the *Republic*, the power struggle view is manifestly superior to the rational choice alternative, and indeed to any kind of personal choice

⁵¹ Socrates stresses that the desires in question are already present in the soul of the young man: they are not originally instilled through his contact with wider society, but merely strengthened and reinforced. This is most evident for the future democrat at 559 E 4–7, and is implied also for the future tyrant at 571 B 3–C 1 and 572 B 2–7.

account; it is far better supported by the text, while numerous other considerations count in its favour. Before closing, I would like briefly to highlight one interesting feature of Plato's view, as I argue it should be understood. On the picture Plato presents us with in the *Republic*, the ultimate origins of vice in each soul lie in the person's upbringing and education, and in the various corrupting influences a person is exposed to while still young. Thus, in each case Socrates describes, the young man's spirited and (especially) appetitive desires are bolstered and made to grow strong as a result of his exposure to corrupting influences in his society; this strength of the lower parts of his soul then determines the kind of person he eventually becomes. Although there are various ways of curtailing the growth of progressively baser appetitive desires in the soul, some of which are exhibited by the timocratic and oligarchic men, Plato suggests that over the long term the only effective way of exerting this control is by establishing the proper kind of 'guard' in the soul: reason, bolstered by a good education. By contrast, little emphasis is placed in these passages on the idea that these people make mistaken personal choices about how best to live, an idea that many interpreters have sought to place front and centre in their interpretations of books 8–9 of the *Republic*.⁵² Thus, on my account, Plato is not—or at least not simply⁵³—warning

⁵² This may be in part due to the influence of the Myth of Er in *Republic* 10 (614 B–621 B). However, regardless of whether this description of the journeys and fates of disembodied souls is understood literally (as depicting what actually happens in the afterlife) or as purely allegorical, we should be mindful of the sharp differences between the choice of lives portrayed there and the description of corrupt souls and their origins in *Republic* 8–9. For example, the disembodied souls choose their new lives from a detached position; by contrast, on any interpretation, the character types described in books 8–9 are deeply embedded in a life in progress, and already subject to all the competing influences Socrates describes. In addition, the disembodied souls choose reflectively, with full knowledge available to them of what each life will contain; there is no evidence in the text that we are to think of the young men described in books 8–9 as stepping back from their lives and reflecting on them in the detached way this implies. For these and related reasons, we should not allow the Myth of Er to govern and guide our understanding of the origins of corrupt character types in *Republic* 8–9.

⁵³ I do not by any means wish to deny that Plato is seeking to challenge and invert a certain commonly held evaluative view, according to which the life of the tyrant, which exceeds all other lives in wealth, power, and access to luxuries and bodily pleasures, represents the ideal. Indeed, Plato clearly wishes to invert this ideal by revealing how the actual tyrant, once we get past his veneer, is not at all to be admired, due to the wretched condition of his soul. However, I claim, when it comes to the *origins* of vice in the soul, his most basic point is very much the one I emphasize here.

us to reflect wisely when we choose what kind of life to live and what kind of person to become. He is also offering us a *diagnosis* of where people go wrong as things currently stand. So long as societies remain corrupt, Plato seems to suggest, the prospects for individuals within those societies turning out well remain grim.⁵⁴ Social influence far outweighs individual choice when it comes to the origins of vice in the soul.⁵⁵

VIII

Certain passages in *Republic* 8–9 seem to suggest that the best account of the emergence of each new character type Socrates describes is as the direct result of a deliberate choice to adopt a new way of life. Irwin's 'rational choice' interpretation, which attributes the person's choice to the rational part of his soul, represents the most plausible version of this kind of account. However, this interpretation is severely lacking in textual support, and faces other serious problems. By contrast, the text as a whole strongly supports an alternative way of understanding how each corrupt kind of person described in *Republic* 8–9 first comes to be. On this 'power struggle' interpretation, the emergence of each new character type is the direct result of a struggle for control within a young man's soul, the outcome of which is decided by the strength and alignment of the competing parties. It is crucial to this view that each struggle occurs within a distinct person, the leadership of whose soul is not yet settled, yet who represents, through the influence of his father, the preceding form of inner control. Thus this interpretation readily explains why Plato presents us with a series of developmental nar-

⁵⁴ It is a consequence of Plato's view, on my account, that people typically have less direct control over the kinds of people they become than they—or for that matter we—typically suppose. We might speculate that this emphasis on Plato's part on environment and upbringing in the shaping of personality reflects his own increasing focus, evident throughout the *Republic* and culminating in the *Laws*, on questions concerning fundamental social and political reform, in contrast to the highly individualistic approach to the promotion of goodness in the soul apparently practised by the historical Socrates.

⁵⁵ We might wonder about the prospects, on Plato's view, of reform and improvement later in one's life. Is it possible, on his account, to become a good person even after a degenerate regime has been established in one's soul? Although Plato's position on this question is not clear, I suggest that his view seems pessimistic, especially if the analogy with the decline of the city is taken into account.

ratives, in the way that he does.⁵⁶ It also easily preserves a central explanatory role for Plato's tripartite psychology. It avoids attributing to the rational part of the soul a special executive authority to change the government of the soul at any time at will, as the rational choice view requires. And it captures and preserves, in broad outline, the parallels between city and soul that Plato clearly strove to develop and sustain throughout these sections of the *Republic*. I conclude that the power struggle view, as I have developed it here, provides the most plausible account of how, according to Socrates in the *Republic*, each part of the soul first becomes established as 'ruler' over the whole.

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⁵⁶ Thus Plato's problem in *Republic* 8–9 was *not*, *pace* A. E. Taylor, 'The Decline and Fall of the State in *Republic* VIII', *Mind*, 48 (1939), 23–38, 'how may a society, or an individual man, which (or who) begins by being in the highest conditions of spiritual health, sink, by sheer moral carelessness, to a state of mortal moral disease' (38, emphasis added). Plato depicts the decline of a single city over the course of all four transitions, but not the decline of a single soul. I take it to be an advantage of my view that it readily explains this feature of his account.

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