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## Anarchic Souls: Plato's Depiction of the 'Democratic Man'\*

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### Abstract

In books 8 and 9 of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates provides a detailed account of the nature and origins of four main kinds of vice found in political constitutions and in the kinds of people that correspond to them. The third of the four corrupt kinds of person he describes is the 'democratic man'. In this paper, I ask what 'rules' in the democratic man's soul. It is commonly thought that his soul is ruled in some way by its appetitive part, or by a particular class of appetitive desires. I reject this view, and argue instead that his soul is ruled by a succession of desires of a full range of different kinds. I show how this view helps us better understand Plato's depiction of corrupt souls in the *Republic* more generally, and with it his views on the rule of the soul, appetitive desire, and the nature of vice.

### Keywords

Plato, *Republic*, democratic man, soul, appetite, desire

### I

In books 8 and 9 of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates provides a long and detailed account of the nature and origins of four main kinds of 'wickedness' (*ponèrias*, 449a5) that are found in political constitutions and in the kinds

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of people that correspond to them.<sup>1</sup> The third of the four corrupt kinds of person he describes is the ‘democratic man’, so called because his soul ‘resembles’ (544a5, 558c6) Socrates’ ‘democratic city’.<sup>2</sup> Socrates’ depiction of this democratic man is memorable and entertaining; but it also raises serious questions about Plato’s rank ordering of corrupt souls in the *Republic* and about his views on the rule of the soul, appetitive desire and the nature of vice. What is supposed to ‘rule’ within the democratic man’s soul? How does this relate to the discrepancy in the *Republic* as a whole between the number of parts of the soul Socrates identifies and the number of main kinds of person he describes? Should we understand the democratic man as acting exclusively on appetitive desires? And what, after all, is supposed to be *wrong* with this man, on Socrates’ account? In this paper, I argue that Plato intended us to understand the democratic man as having an ‘anarchic’ soul – that is, one that is not ruled in a stable and enduring way by *any* of its elements or parts.<sup>3</sup> Rather, I claim, his soul is

<sup>1</sup> In what follows I read Slings’ 2003 OCT text of the *Republic*, unless otherwise noted. All line references are to this edition of the text. Translations generally follow Grube 1992, although these are sometimes slightly modified.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to be clear from the outset that Socrates calls this person ‘democratic’ because of a kind of structural correspondence between his soul and the democratic city Socrates has already described. The basic nature of this structural parallel is clear enough in the text: in the democratic city all citizens are treated as equals and regarded as equally worthy of temporarily holding power, with rulers selected by the random process of drawing lots, while in the democratic person all pleasures and desires are treated as equal and regarded as equally deserving of temporarily ‘holding power’, with ‘rule’ over the soul handed indiscriminately to whatever desire comes along ‘as if it were chosen by lot’ (I examine these claims about the soul below). I see no reason to suppose that Plato intended, in addition to establishing this structural parallel, actually to populate his democratic city with ‘democratic men’ in the sense at issue. Thus there is no need to accuse Plato of confusedly identifying the democratic city with a city dominated by people with souls like Socrates’ ‘democratic man’ (as do e.g. Williams 1973, Annas 1981, 301). (For criticism of the view that Plato populated each of his corrupt cities with individuals of the corresponding type, see Ferrari 2005.) Nor is it right to say that Plato’s characterization of the democratic man is ‘markedly incorrect’ (Santas 2001, 57) on the basis that he has failed to describe accurately the psychological makeup of a supporter of democratic political principles and institutions, since doing this was never his goal.

<sup>3</sup> The democratic soul is never explicitly called ‘anarchic’ (*anarchos*) in the *Republic*. However, Socrates does apply this term to the democratic city at 558c2-3, and again 562e2-4. His idea is clearly not that the democratic city literally lacks rulers at any given time, but rather that its rulers are constantly changing and also essentially ineffective, given that they impose no restraint on the populace. My suggestion will be that the democratic soul is

temporarily ruled by a succession of desires, which are of a full range of different kinds. As I shall show, this interpretation is clearly preferable to the widely held view that the democratic man's soul is ruled by its appetitive part, or by a particular class of appetitive desires, while it also helps us better understand Plato's procedure in writing his depiction of corrupt souls in *Republic* 8-9.<sup>4</sup>

## II

As Socrates presents things in the *Republic*, the embodied human soul contains three different 'elements' or 'parts' –<sup>5</sup> to *epithumêtikon* ('appetite' or 'the appetitive part'), to *thumoeides* ('spirit' or 'the spirited part') and to *logistikôn* ('reason' or 'the rational part') – each of which serves as a distinct source of human motivation and each of which is capable of 'ruling'

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'anarchic' in this same way: its rulers are constantly changing, resulting in an inner government that is both unstable and ineffective at imposing any kind of internal restraint on his desires.

<sup>4</sup> The kinds of view I wish to oppose are those on which the democratic man's soul is thought to be ruled by its appetitive part, by a sub-part of its appetitive part, or by a class of specifically appetitive desires. Such views have been advanced for example by Moline 1978, 24 with n. 47, describing the democratic man as someone who 'loves possessions' because **is** soul is ruled by 'sensual appetites'; Cooper 1999, 127 n. 13, asserting that 'the 'oligarch', the 'democrat' and the 'tyrant' are all ruled in different ways by appetite'; Reeve 1988, 257, describing the democratic soul as 'ruled by non-lawless unnecessary appetites'; Klosko 1988, 349, claiming that the soul of the democratic man is ruled by appetites, although these 'ruling appetites' also occasionally indulge the desires of reason and spirit; Lear 1992, 200-1, describing the oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical individuals as all 'appetitive types' (200), and claiming that an appetitive type 'organizes his life, values and thoughts around production and acquisition' (201); Price 1995, 62, describing the democratic man as a 'creature of appetite'; Burnyeat 2006, 16, describing the democratic man as someone 'whose reason is enslaved to appetites'; Blössner 2007, 352, claiming that in *Republic* 8 the appetitive part of the soul is split into three and that the democratic man is ruled by precisely one of these appetitive soul-parts; Rowe 2007, 269-70, writing that the democratic individual is 'complex' because of 'the domination in him of the **"complex"** beast of appetite'; and Brown 2011, claiming that 'democratically constituted persons' are 'ruled by unnecessary appetitive attitudes'.

<sup>5</sup> I set aside for present purposes the disputed question of whether Plato thought the human soul is tripartite when separated from the body.

over the soul as a whole.<sup>6</sup> This last idea, that the soul as a whole can be ‘ruled’ in an enduring way by any one of its three parts, plays a pivotal role throughout the work. For example, in Book 4, Socrates famously characterizes justice (and virtue in general) in terms of having and maintaining proper relations of ruling and being ruled among the soul’s three parts: reason rules, with the assistance of spirit, while appetite refrains from seeking to arise above its proper (subservient) station (e.g. 441e3-442b9). By contrast, injustice (and vice in general) is described there as a condition in which the soul’s parts stand to one another in relations of ruling and being ruled that are ‘contrary to nature’ (*para phusin*, 444d9). Later in the *Republic*, in Books 8 and 9, Socrates completes his description of the good city and soul – the one that is ruled by reason in the appropriate way – and immediately turns to the four main kinds of corrupt city and soul, which he identifies with four kinds of internal arrangement in which reason fails to rule over the whole.<sup>7</sup> In fact, it is perhaps no great exaggeration to say that a contrast between cities and souls that are ruled by reason and those that are not (and the related claim that human affairs *should* be ruled by reason) lies at the very heart of the *Republic* as a whole.

What rules in the souls of each of the four main kinds of vicious person Socrates describes, if not reason? In the cases of the first two kinds of

<sup>6</sup> There has been some dispute over the appropriateness, in discussions of Plato, of using the term ‘part’ (as in ‘part of the soul’), as opposed to a more neutral term such as ‘element’. Nothing important hangs on this terminological question for present purposes, and in what follows, I use the terms ‘part’ and ‘element’ more or less interchangeably – although I do prefer the more general word ‘element’ in contexts where not only the three soul ‘parts’ (reason, spirit and appetite) are at issue, but also other mental items such as individual desires (which, as I discuss below, are also sometimes said to become ‘rulers’ of a soul).

<sup>7</sup> Socrates makes it clear that there are in his view ‘innumerable many’ different forms of vice, four of which are ‘worth mentioning’ (445c4-7). It is tempting to suppose that Plato selected these four based on the main kinds of political constitution recognized in his time, and then squeezed and shaped his depictions of the individual souls to make the city-soul analogy fit. However, it seems to me more likely that the political passages were meant to describe not actual historical regimes, but rather idealized types, the depiction of which was based at least in part on the *Republic*’s theory of human motivation. (For arguments in support of the claim that Plato set out in the *Republic* to depict not actual historical regimes, but rather idealized types, see Frede 1996 and 1997.) If this is right, we should expect the organization of *Republic* 8 and 9 to reflect the dialogue’s underlying psychological theory, not (say) empirical observations of actual political regimes or deterministic theories concerning their historical development. The present paper offers support for understanding Plato’s procedure in writing *Republic* 8 and 9 in this general way.

corrupt person – the ‘timocratic’ and ‘oligarchic’ men – the answer is clear and explicit in the text. First, after a struggle for power between his soul’s rational and appetitive parts, the young future timocratic person is said to ‘hand over’ control of his soul to its ‘middle part’ – the ‘victory-loving and spirited’ part – and hence to become an ‘honor-loving man’ (550b1-7). Later, the young future oligarchic man (himself a son of the timocratic man) is said to install his ‘appetitive’ and ‘money-loving’ part on the ‘throne’ in his soul, making it a ‘great king’ within himself (553b7-c7), while spirit and reason are made to sit at its feet as its slaves (553d1-7).<sup>8</sup> These descriptions leave no doubt that the timocratic man’s soul is ruled by spirit and the oligarchic man’s soul is ruled by appetite, much as the philosopher’s soul is ruled by reason.

However, the situation becomes more complicated when we turn to the ‘democratic’ and ‘tyrannical’ men, the final two kinds of person Socrates discusses. This is because Socrates distinguishes only three parts of the soul in the *Republic*, but describes five main kinds of person. How are we to explain this discrepancy between the number of parts of the soul Socrates distinguishes and the number of main kinds of person he describes? The first thing to note in this connection is that in books 8 and 9 of the *Republic*, immediately before introducing each of the final two kinds of person he describes, Socrates adds new complexity to his account by drawing new distinctions within the class of appetitive desires. First, at 558d8 ff., Socrates distinguishes ‘necessary’ (*anankaïos*) from ‘unnecessary’ (*mê anankaïos*) desires. ‘Necessary’ desires, he claims, are those we cannot turn away from (*apotrepsai*) as well as those whose satisfaction benefits us (558d11-e3),<sup>9</sup> while ‘unnecessary’ desires are those we can eliminate if we practice ‘from youth on’, and that aim at objects that are harmful, or at least benefit us in no way (559a3-6).<sup>10</sup> Later, immediately before beginning his discussion of

<sup>8</sup>) For discussion of these transitions to new forms of inner rule, see Johnstone 2011.

<sup>9</sup>) Both ineliminable and beneficial desires count as ‘necessary’, Socrates claims, because we are compelled ‘by nature’ (τῆ φύσει) to satisfy both kinds (558e2). Plato may well be assuming that any desire we cannot eliminate on account of our nature must be beneficial, an idea perhaps connected to his teleology. If this is right, then the basic distinction here is between desires that are beneficial and those that are not beneficial, with all ineliminable desires (but only some eliminable ones) falling into the former class.

<sup>10</sup>) As examples of ‘necessary’ desires Socrates cites desires to eat to the point of health and well-being (559a11-b1). As examples of ‘unnecessary’ desires he cites a desire that ‘goes beyond these and seeks other sorts of food’, that ‘most people can get rid of, if it’s restrained

the tyrannical man, Socrates distinguishes a further subclass within the class of unnecessary desires, which he calls 'lawless' (*paranomos*), in contrast to those that are merely 'useless'. This new subclass of unnecessary desires includes deeply depraved sexual and other appetitive desires that exist, Socrates claims, in every soul but typically reveal themselves only in our dreams (571a5-572b7).<sup>11</sup>

Do these distinctions between different kinds of appetitive desire represent a division of the appetitive part of the soul into three sub-parts? Although some interpreters have supposed so,<sup>12</sup> there is good reason to doubt that this is what Plato intended. To begin with, Socrates never claims to have subdivided the appetitive part of the soul. In fact, he continues to treat the soul as tripartite later in Book 9, well after introducing his new distinctions between different kinds of appetitive desire, notably in a kind of summary discussion of the tripartite soul (580c10 *ff.*), and in the famous image of the human being, lion and many-headed beast contained within a person (588b1 *ff.*).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in his original argument for the division of the soul in Book 4, Socrates takes great care to argue that not just any conflict of desires warrants subdivision, but only those that involve a direct and simultaneous opposition between desire and aversion in relation to the same object.<sup>14</sup> Had Plato intended a further

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and educated while they're young', and that 'is harmful both to the body and to the reason and moderation of the soul' (559b8-c1), together with the desire for sex and other such desires (559c6).

<sup>11</sup> As examples of 'lawless' desires Socrates cites completely indiscriminate and unrestrained sexual desires, including desires to commit incest and bestiality and even to have sex with gods; desires to commit murder; and desires to eat any food whatsoever (571c3-d5). Some have found in this last remark a veiled reference to cannibalism; so e.g. Adam 1963, 320.

<sup>12</sup> For example Moline 1978, 24: 'There is evidence that he [Plato] recognized conflicts within part C [appetite], and hence that he was committed to regarding at least that part as having sub-parts;' Kahn 1987, 83: 'The third or appetitive part (*to epithumêtikon*) will be elaborately subdivided in books 8-9;' Blössner 2007, 352: 'In Books 8 and 9 the appetitive part is split into three.'

<sup>13</sup> Socrates' depiction of the beast as many-headed neatly captures and reflects the number and variety (not to mention the characteristic insatiability) of appetitive desires; but it does not support the claim that the appetitive part of the soul has been subdivided (for one thing, appetite is still represented as a single beast).

<sup>14</sup> For detailed discussion of this argument and of the kinds of motivational conflict it appeals to, see Lorenz 2006. Note that Socrates' argument in *Republic* 10 for dividing the

subdivision of the appetitive part of the soul in Books 8 and 9, we should surely expect to find explicit arguments from mental conflict of this general kind; yet no such arguments are offered. Finally, other dialogues usually thought to postdate the *Republic*, notably the *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*, clearly depict the soul as tripartite, strongly suggesting that Plato did not wish to abandon this view in the *Republic* and replace it with one on which the soul is further subdivided into more than three (say, five) parts.

Still, even though Socrates may not strictly divide the appetitive part of the soul into sub-parts, he clearly does divide appetitive desires into three different kinds. Perhaps Plato meant us to conclude that each of the final three corrupt kinds of person Socrates describes has a soul ruled by one of these three kinds of appetitive desire? On this view, the oligarchic man's soul is to be understood as ruled by necessary appetitive desires, the democratic man's soul by unnecessary (but not lawless) appetitive desires, and the tyrannical man's soul by lawless desires. This interpretation has considerable intuitive appeal. Nevertheless, I shall argue, it fails to fit the way the democratic man, at least, is actually described.<sup>15</sup> The problem with it is not that it requires us to draw a distinction between souls that are ruled by one of their parts and souls that are ruled by individual desires. Indeed, in what follows I argue that the democratic man's soul *is* ruled by (a succession of) individual desires, rather than by one of the three parts of the soul distinguished in *Republic* 4.<sup>16</sup> However, I also argue, the text gives us no reason to think – and good reason to doubt – that these ruling desires are exclusively or primarily unnecessary appetites. Rather, I claim, the democratic man's soul is temporarily ruled by whatever desire arises in him, where these can be of a full range of different kinds.

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soul into rational and non-rational parts also appeals to the existence of opposites in relation to the same thing at the same time (at 604b1-2).

<sup>15</sup> It also fails to fit the way the tyrannical man is ~~actually~~ described: for although this man alone *has* 'lawless' desires while awake, his soul is not said to be ruled by them, but rather by a single all-consuming 'lust' (*erôs*). Indeed, the analogy with the tyrannical city *requires* that his soul have a single ruler, rather than being ruled by a whole class of desires. On this point, see also note 35 below.

<sup>16</sup> I shall take it that 'handing control over one's soul' to an individual desire involves (perhaps temporarily) adopting the satisfaction of that desire as one's overriding goal. The democratic man's soul is depicted as ruled by a succession of fleeting desires, leaving it with a succession of temporary rulers and him with a succession of temporary goals.

### III

Socrates describes the life of the ‘democratic man’ as follows:<sup>17</sup>

He lives... yielding day by day to the desire at hand. Sometimes he drinks heavily while listening to the flute; at other times, he drinks only water and is on a diet; sometimes he goes in for physical training; at other times, he’s idle and neglects everything; and sometimes he even occupies himself with what he takes to be philosophy. He often engages in politics, leaping up from his seat and saying and doing whatever comes into his mind. If he happens to admire soldiers, he’s carried in that direction, if money makers, in that one. There’s neither order nor necessity in his life, but he calls it pleasant, free, and blessedly happy, and he follows it for as long as he lives.

In this memorable passage, Socrates presents the democratic man as impulsive and mercurial, someone who lives by dabbling in whatever activity currently takes his fancy. Many readers have appreciated Plato’s colorful and humorous depiction of a perhaps familiar (if surely exaggerated) character type. Yet this description does not support the view that the democratic man’s soul is to be understood as ruled by (a sub-part of) its appetitive part, or by specifically unnecessary appetitive desires. The problem is not simply that he is attracted to, and engages in, an extremely diverse range of activities, many of which are not obviously associated with the satisfaction of unnecessary appetitive desires. It is also that this man’s life appears to lack *any* overall direction or goal.

Allow me to explain what I mean. The preceding three character types described by Socrates all organize their lives around the pursuit of some object closely associated in the *Republic* with the part of their soul that rules over the whole.<sup>18</sup> Thus the philosopher, whose soul is ruled by its

<sup>17</sup> *Republic* 561c6-d8: διαζῆ τὸ καθ’ ἡμέραν οὕτω χαριζόμενος τῇ προσπιπτούσῃ ἐπιθυμίᾳ, τότε μὲν μεθύων καὶ καταλούμενος, αὐθις δὲ ὑδροποτῶν καὶ κατισχναινόμενος, τότε δ’ αὖ γυμναζόμενος, ἔστιν δ’ ὅτε ἀργῶν καὶ πάντων ἀμελῶν, τότε δ’ ὡς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίβων. πολλάκις δὲ πολιτεύεται, καὶ ἀναπηδῶν ὅτι ἂν τύχη λέγει τε καὶ πράττει· κἄν ποτέ τις πολεμικοῦς ζηλώσῃ, ταύτη φέρεται, ἢ χρηματιστικούς, ἐπὶ τοῦτ’ αὖ. καὶ οὔτε τις τάξις οὔτε ἀνάγκη ἔπεισιν αὐτοῦ τῷ βίῳ, ἀλλ’ ἡδὺν τε δὴ καὶ ἐλευθέριον καὶ μακάριον καλῶν τὸν βίον τοῦτον χρῆται αὐτῷ διὰ παντός.

<sup>18</sup> As many other commentators have observed, having one’s soul as a whole ‘ruled’ by one of its parts is correlated in the *Republic* with having a set of overall life goals or values, goals or values that are associated with the characteristic desires of the soul’s ruling part. For this idea, see for example Kraut 1973 and Klosko 1988, both of whom label the salient kind of rule (the sense in which the philosopher’s soul is ruled by reason, the timocratic man’s by

rational part, organizes his or her life around the pursuit of wisdom and truth;<sup>19</sup> the timocratic man, whose soul is ruled by its spirited part, organizes his life around the pursuit of victory and honor; and the oligarchic man, whose soul is ruled by its appetitive part, subordinates everything else in his life to the goal of accumulating as much wealth as possible. Extending this same pattern, we might expect an individual whose soul is ruled by unnecessary appetites to organize his life around the pursuit of extravagant and luxurious bodily pleasures. However, the man Socrates calls 'democratic' fails to meet this expectation. In fact, he sometimes enthusiastically diets and drinks only water, or willingly subjects himself to military training. Furthermore, he does not seem to adopt such pursuits for the sake of some further goal, as someone might diet to save money, say, or train to achieve victory. Rather, he appears to engage in them merely because they capture his fancy, at least for a while. The resulting impression is of a care-free and impulsive individual whose life entirely lacks any central organizing goal.<sup>20</sup>

I would like to suggest that this description of the democratic man is best explained, not by holding that his soul is ruled by its appetitive part

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spirit and the oligarchic man's by appetite) 'normative rule'. This same basic idea – that the ruling part of a person's soul determines his or her overall life goals – is also endorsed for example by Blössner 1997, Bobonich 2003, 46 and Lorenz 2006, 33. Irwin appears to accept it in outline (see e.g. Irwin 1995, 285), while Ferrari speaks more vaguely of the desires of a ruling part of the soul 'shaping' a person's entire life (2007b, 195). My interpretation has the advantage of making Plato's depiction of the democratic man fit neatly with this more general account of his views on psychic rule.

<sup>19</sup>) It might be objected that philosophers also desire the good. However, in the *Republic* it seems that *every* kind of person desires what is good as they understand it. The philosopher is not unique in this respect, but rather in that he or she alone possesses an accurate view about what truly *is* good. On Plato's view, as I understand it, philosophers pursue truth and wisdom *as* good, since these really are good things for them to pursue (far better than e.g. wealth, political power or bodily pleasure), and they recognize this fact.

<sup>20</sup>) One might object that the democratic man *does* have an overall guiding goal for his life as a whole, namely freedom (*eleutheria*) (e.g. Blössner 2007, 352, 361 and 364). However, it is important to be clear that freedom does not play a role in the democratic man's life analogous to that played by wisdom, honor, and money in the lives of his three predecessors. In particular, it does not serve as an object that the democratic man strives for and pursues above all else. Rather, freedom as he understands it (the complete lack of inner restraint or compulsion) appears to play a kind of regulating or limiting role, preventing him from restraining any of his own desires but not providing him with a single goal that he organizes his life around.

or by his unnecessary appetitive desires, but rather by supposing that *no* element or part of his soul rules over the whole in an enduring way. To begin with, this view is strongly supported by Socrates' analogy with the democratic city. This city, which the democratic man is repeatedly said to 'be like', assigns people to positions of rule by the random process of drawing lots (557a4-5).<sup>21</sup> The result is a 'pleasant constitution' that 'lacks rulers but not variety' (it is 'anarchic and multicolored', *anarchos kai poikilê*, 558c2-3).<sup>22</sup> Socrates' claim is clearly not that the democratic city literally lacks rulers at any given time.<sup>23</sup> Rather, it is that the democratic city is constantly *changing* its rulers, with the result that no individual or group remains in power for an extended period of time, in such a way as to provide a stable direction for the city as a whole. Socrates seeks to adhere to the analogy between the city and soul as closely as possible throughout his descriptions of the democratic city and person. Indeed, in a clear echo of the parallel political passage, the democratic man is said to be forever surrendering rule over himself to whatever desire comes along, 'as if it were chosen by lot'.<sup>24</sup> If this analogy with the democratic city is taken seriously, it implies that no single element or class of desires rules in the democratic man's soul for an extended period of time, in such a way as to provide stable direction for his life as a whole.

The view that the democratic man's soul is not ruled in an enduring way by any of its elements or parts also gains support from Socrates' claim that this man treats all of his desires as equally deserving of satisfaction. According to Socrates, the democratic man 'puts all his pleasures on an equal footing' and lives 'always surrendering rule over himself to whichever

<sup>21</sup> Plato's Socrates is clearly alluding here to the practice, current in Athens at the time, of selecting various holders of public office by lot. It is not difficult to see why Plato's Socrates (and presumably Plato himself) would be opposed to this practice, given his strong advocacy in the *Republic* of the idea that only those with the appropriate expertise (due to the right combination of nature and training) should rule in an ideal *polis*. For evidence that the historical Socrates opposed the practice of selecting leaders by a random process (rather than on merit) see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1393b4-7; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.9.

<sup>22</sup> The democratic city is also said to be 'anarchic' at 562e2-4, where the unfettered freedom characteristic of such a city is said to breed anarchy (*ἀναρχία*) even among animals.

<sup>23</sup> Socrates explicitly speaks of the democratic city as having 'leaders' (*προστατούντων*) and 'rulers' (*τοὺς ἄρχοντας*) at 562d1-2.

<sup>24</sup> *Republic* 561b4-5: τῇ παραλιπούση ἀεὶ ὡσπερ λαχούση τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀρχὴν παραδιδούς.

desire comes along, as if it were chosen by lot,<sup>25</sup> while when that is satisfied he ‘surrenders the rule to another, not disdaining any but satisfying them all equally’.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the democratic man treats all of his desires and pleasures as equals and hands rule over himself to any desire that happens to arise, without restraining any of them. This suggests that the democratic man sometimes surrenders ‘rule’ over himself to desires originating in all three parts of his soul, and to both necessary and unnecessary appetites. In order to deny this, one would have to deny that the democratic man *has* any desires that are not (unnecessary?) appetites. However, this claim would be extremely difficult to sustain. To begin with, the *Republic* strongly suggests that every human soul has all three ‘parts’: reason, spirit and appetite. Given that each part of the soul is associated with its own particular kind of desire,<sup>27</sup> this implies that every person has all three kinds of desire. If this is right, a ‘democratic’ man will

<sup>25</sup> In the immediately preceding passage, Socrates refers to necessary and unnecessary *pleasures* rather than speaking in terms of desires. In fact, he seems to speak of desires and pleasures more or less indiscriminately throughout the surrounding discussion. Nevertheless, I take it that Socrates’ talk here of ‘being satisfied’ (πληρωθῆ, 561b5) justifies the supposition that the democratic person is best thought of as surrendering rule over himself to desires, not pleasures; the translation included here reflects this choice.

<sup>26</sup> *Republic* 561b3-6: εἰς ἴσον δὴ τι καταστήσας τὰς ἡδονὰς διάγει, τῇ παραπιπτούσῃ ἀεὶ ὡσπερ λαχούσῃ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀρχὴν παραδιδούς ἕως ἂν πληρωθῆ, καὶ αὐθις ἄλλῃ, οὐδεμίαν ἀτιμάζων ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἴσου τρέφων. Socrates talks here of the democratic man ‘surrendering rule over himself’ to different desires. This phrase is strongly reminiscent of one used earlier in Book 8, when the young future timocratic man is said to ‘surrender rule over himself’ to the spirited part of his soul (550b5-7) (the same verb, *paradidōmi*, is used in both passages). However, there is an important difference between the two cases: the timocratic man is said to ‘surrender rule over himself’ to a part of his soul, while democratic man is said to ‘surrender rule over himself’ to a succession of individual desires. How are we to understand this difference? Presumably, we are not to think of *everyone* as being ‘ruled’ in the salient sense by whatever desire they are acting on at any given time. For example, I take it that on Socrates’ view a timocratic person does not cease to be ruled by the spirited part of her soul when she acts on one of her appetitive desires. Rather, as noted, it seems that in the *Republic* being ruled by a part of the soul is a relatively stable condition, which involves adopting a certain set of overall life goals. On the present interpretation, no one part of the democratic man’s soul exerts control over the whole for an extended period of time, in such a way as to impose such an organizing life goal. As a result, there is no ‘higher authority’ in his soul, as it were, than the desire on which he currently acts.

<sup>27</sup> *Republic* 580d6-7: τριῶν ὄντων τριττὰ καὶ ἡδοναὶ μοι φαίνονται, ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μία ἰδίᾳ ἐπιθυμία τε ὡσαύτως καὶ ἀρχαί. Note that in this passage each part of the soul is associated not only with its own desires, but also with its own pleasures and kind of rule.

sometimes have spirited and rational desires; and if *this* is accepted, then, given his aversion to favoring one desire over another, it is hard to see why he would not ‘surrender rule over himself’ to them too when they arise.

Moreover, the way the democratic man’s life is actually described supports the view that he has – and acts on – a full range of different kinds of desires. The list of activities in which this man is said to engage is strikingly varied, and clearly not selected at random. It begins with two pairs of carefully chosen opposites, contrasting luxurious living with austerity and physical training with idleness. Socrates then remarks that he ‘sometimes occupies himself with what he takes to be philosophy’ (561d3), and that he ‘often engages in politics’ (561d3-4).<sup>28</sup> Attraction to these activities is not normally associated in Plato with the appetitive part of the soul. Socrates then offers a (surely deliberate) reference to the lives of timocratic and oligarchic men: ‘if he happens to admire soldiers, he’s carried in that direction; if moneymakers, in that one’ (561d5-6). Again, this would be a surprising choice if Plato had intended to depict the democratic man’s soul as ruled exclusively by (unnecessary?) appetites, especially when we bear in mind that appetitive desires are overwhelmingly associated elsewhere in Plato with the pursuit of specifically bodily pleasure and gratification.<sup>29</sup> To be clear, my claim is not that Socrates’ description of the democratic man,

<sup>28</sup> It is clear that the democratic man does not engage in either philosophy or politics in the proper or appropriate way. This man is said to occupy himself ‘as if in philosophy’ (*hōs en philosophiai diatribōn*), while his involvement in politics consists of him ‘leaping up from his seat and saying and doing whatever comes into his mind’ (561d); in these ways, his participation in both of these activities is clearly marked as deficient. However, it is one thing to say that this man’s attachment to such activities is superficial, or that it differs from that characteristic of the true philosopher or statesman, and quite another to claim that it is specifically *appetitive* in kind. On this latter claim, see note 30 below.

<sup>29</sup> Plato consistently distinguishes appetitive desires as a class on the basis of their origin in the body and its pleasures and needs. In the *Republic*, see for example 389e1-2 (where Socrates clearly already has appetitive desires in mind), 436a10-b2, 439d1-8, 442a7-8, 485d12, all of the choices of examples used to distinguish ‘necessary,’ ‘unnecessary’ and ‘lawless’ appetitive desires in books 8 and 9, 580e2-5, 584c3-5, 585a8-b1, and the depiction of ordinary people as gluttonous at 586a1-b4 (this list of examples is by no means comprehensive). The same close connections between appetitive desires and bodily pleasures and needs can also be observed in other, related Platonic dialogues: e.g. in the *Phaedrus* the unruly black horse is overwhelmingly associated with sexual desire, or in the *Timaeus*, where appetite is explicitly characterized as the element of the soul that desires ‘food, drink, and whatever else it has a need for due to the nature of the body’ (70d7-8).

taken on its own, *requires* us to understand him as ‘handing rule over himself’ to desires that are not appetites. However, while it may be possible to construe this man’s desires to exercise, diet, make money, be a soldier, attend political meetings or dabble in ‘philosophy’ as exclusively appetitive, the question quickly arises of *why* we should feel determined to do so, given that this is a far from straightforward reading of the text and in light of the ready availability of an alternative.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> My claim is that we have no good reason to search for a way of understanding the democratic man as acting only on appetitive desires, since he is in any case best understood as having a soul that is temporarily ruled by a succession of desires of a full range of different kinds. Nevertheless, some commentators have sought to trace all of the democratic man’s motivations to engage in these highly varied pursuits to specifically appetitive desires. For example, Burnyeat (2006, 16-17) claims that we should understand all of the democratic man’s desires as deriving ultimately from his bodily desires, in much way that (according to Socrates) a desire for money is derived from desires for bodily pleasure. However, money seems to be a special case, since, as Socrates points out (580e5-581a1), spending money is especially closely associated with satisfying bodily desires for food, drink, sex and the like. It would be strange to suppose that the same kinds of close, regular connections hold between such diverse activities as exercising, dieting, attending political meetings or ‘philosophizing’ and satisfying desires for bodily gratification.

A different possible strategy involves arguing that the democratic man desires to do all of these things in the same *way* that most people desire food, drink or sex. Thus e.g. Scott (2000) claims that the democratic man’s desires ‘all *resemble* appetites... his desires for victory or discovery feel just as they would if they were desires for a drink’ (26, emphasis added). Although Scott actually denies that the democratic man’s desires are all appetites, he still claims that the democratic man should be understood as ‘quasi-appetitive’ (26), since his desires are all ‘like’ appetites (28). However, besides the fact that this interpretation leaves us wondering what the difference is between ‘appetitive’ and ‘quasi-appetitive’ types of person, I see no support whatsoever in the text for understanding the democratic man’s desires to do all of the various things he does in this rather peculiar way.

A third possible strategy involves simply denying that there is any necessary connection for Plato between appetitive desires and specifically bodily pleasures or needs. For example, one might suppose that a desire counts as appetitive, for Plato, just in case it aims at what is immediately appealing or pleasant in *any* way, so long as this is pursued without regard for the long-term good. Thus e.g. Price (1995) emphasizes the fact that this man does everything he does ‘just for fun’ (63); a similar view is advanced by Cooper (1999). However, even if we suppose that the democratic man is motivated to do everything he does only by pleasure, it does not follow that he acts only on appetites, since all three parts of the soul have their own distinctive pleasures (580d6). Furthermore, the view that appetitive desires derive from specifically bodily pleasures and needs has extremely strong textual support (see previous note). It should not, I claim, be discarded lightly, and certainly not on the basis of this single passage that so readily admits of an alternative interpretation.

The final reason for understanding Plato's democratic man in the way I recommend is that this makes Socrates' description of him fit perfectly with a pattern already established by the preceding three character types. As noted, each of the three kinds of person described up to this point in the *Republic* lives a life organized around the pursuit of a single overarching goal: obtaining a kind of object characteristically desired by their soul's ruling part. On the assumption that the democratic man's soul is ruled by appetite, or by a certain class of appetitive desires, he represents a break from this pattern, since his life as Socrates describes it is *not* organized around the pursuit of a characteristically appetitive goal (such as wealth or bodily pleasure). However, on the present interpretation the democratic man is depicted exactly as the pattern established by the preceding three character types should lead us to expect: for a life lacking any overall organizing goal is exactly what we should expect of a person whose soul has no stable ruling part. In this way, the democratic soul is 'anarchic', just as (according to Socrates) the democratic city is 'anarchic': no single individual or party rules over it in a stable and enduring way. Far from presenting a troubling apparent exception to a pattern established by the preceding character types, the democratic man, when so understood, in fact provides confirmation of the close connection, on Socrates' account, between one's inner government and the overall goals of one's life as a whole.

#### IV

Given the strength of the case for understanding Socrates' depiction of the democratic man in the way I recommend, why have so many commentators nevertheless wished to maintain that his soul is ruled by its appetitive part, or exclusively by his unnecessary appetitive desires? I take it there are two main reasons for the prevalence of these views. The first has to do with terminology. Throughout his discussion of the democratic man in *Republic* 8, Socrates uses the term *epithumia* to refer to this person's desires. It is sometimes thought that Socrates' use of the word *epithumia* in these passages supports the view that all of this man's desires are 'appetites', that is, desires attributable specifically to the appetitive part of the soul.<sup>31</sup> However,

<sup>31</sup>) For example, Burnyeat (2006, 16) comments on 'the democratic man's appetite (yes, ἐπιθυμία) for philosophy or politics', clearly inferring from Socrates' use of the word *epithumia* in this passage that the desires in question are specifically appetitive.

it is important to be clear that Plato (unlike Aristotle) does not use *epithumia* as a technical term denoting appetitive (as opposed to spirited or rational) desires.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the word *epithumia* demonstrably does not mean ‘appetitive desire’ in the *Republic*, since it is frequently used in this work as a generic term for ‘desire’ of any kind.<sup>33</sup> Socrates’ choice of the label *to epithumêtikon* should not mislead us here for, as he explains, this soul-part is given this name *not* because it alone has *epithumiai*, but rather because its desires for food, drink, sex and the like are especially intense.<sup>34</sup> Thus Socrates’ use of the term *epithumia* in this context does not on its own provide any reason to think that the democratic man ‘hands rule over himself’ only to appetitive desires.

The more important reason, I take it, why many interpreters have felt motivated to understand the democratic man’s soul as ruled by its appetitive part, or by his unnecessary appetitive desires, is his low position in Socrates’ rank ordering of corrupt souls. The democratic man is preceded in Socrates’ hierarchy by the oligarchic man, whose soul is undoubtedly ruled by appetite, and is followed only by the tyrannical man, whose soul is presumably dominated by appetite in a way.<sup>35</sup> If his predecessor and

<sup>32</sup> As is well known, Aristotle follows Plato in distinguishing three kinds of desire, which he calls *epithumia* (appetitive desire), *thumos* (spirited desire) and *boulêsis* (rational desire). He generally uses the term *orexis* to denote ‘desire’ in general.

<sup>33</sup> This is perhaps most explicit at 580d7, where Socrates speaks of each of the three parts of the soul as having its own peculiar *epithumiai*. However, there are also a number of other passages in the *Republic* in which Socrates uses the word ‘*epithumia*’ in contexts where it would be extremely difficult to conclude that specifically appetitive desires are at issue. Lorenz (2006, 45-6) provides a series of examples of this, including: Cephalus’ *epithumiai* for ‘conversation’ (*tous logous*) and its pleasures, which grow stronger as he ages and his desires for bodily pleasures recede (328d3-5); Thrasymachus’ *epithumia* to earn people’s esteem by giving a fine answer (338a5-7); and the passage from *Republic* 5 (475b4 ff.) in which Socrates asks whether someone desiring something (*epithumêtikon tinos*) desires (*epithumein*) the whole of that thing or only a part of it, and considers the desire for wisdom alongside the desire for food as an example.

<sup>34</sup> In Book 9, Socrates explains his practice of referring to the lowest part of the soul as *to epithumêtikon* by appealing to the ‘intensity’ (*sphodrotês*) of its desires (*epithumiai*) for ‘food, drink, sex, and all the things associated with them’ (580e2-5).

<sup>35</sup> As Socrates presents things, the tyrannical man’s soul is ruled by a single overriding ‘lust’ (*erôs*), which drives him to do everything he can to secure the money and power that will allow him to satisfy his clamoring horde of unnecessary appetitive desires (which now include, but are not limited to, ‘lawless’ desires). Since the tyrannical man aims above all else at the satisfaction of his unnecessary appetites, he can be said to be dominated by these

successor both have souls dominated by appetite, it might seem that this must be true of the democratic man as well. Furthermore, Socrates appears to provide a *ranking* of corrupt souls, from least bad to most wretched. This implies that the democratic man is worse off than his oligarchic predecessor. If the oligarchic man's soul is ruled by its appetitive part, and if appetite is the lowest of the three parts of the soul, then surely the democratic man's soul must also be ruled by appetite in some way? This argument can also be put as a challenge: if the democratic man's soul were *not* ruled by its appetitive part, then, given that appetite is the lowest part of the soul, how could he possibly be worse off than the appetitive oligarch?

This appeal to the democratic man's position in Socrates' rank ordering of corrupt souls might initially appear to carry considerable weight. However, it is perfectly possible to explain the democratic man's low position without supposing that his soul is ruled by appetite. To begin with, there is no doubt that the democratic man first emerges as the result of a process that *begins* with the triumph of unnecessary appetitive desires in a young man's soul. Thus Socrates vividly describes a process in which the 'citadel' in the soul of an oligarch man's son is 'overrun' by 'useless' and 'unnecessary' desires and pleasures, which have been bolstered and strengthened by his interaction with the worthless and idle 'dronish' elements in his city and which eventually expel and shut out the 'necessary' desires instilled in him by his father (559d5-561a4). However, the immediate product of this process is not the man Socrates calls 'democratic', who resembles the democratic city. Rather, the young future democrat (as I shall call him) is characterized as a crass hedonist and lover of luxuries, a person who lives 'in a frenzy' (*ekbakcheuthêi*, 561b1) and whose soul is full of 'insolence' (*hubris*) 'anarchy' (*anarchia*) 'profligacy' (*asôtia*) and 'shamelessness' (*anaidia*) (560e4-561a1). It is only when he grows older and the great 'tumult' within him has spent itself, that sometimes, 'if he's lucky', he allows some of the 'exiles' from his soul to return and places all of his desires on an equal footing, so becoming a 'democratic' man (561a8-b4). Thus Socrates actually describes two distinct kinds of person in these passages, one of whom sometimes develops out of the other. The first, the

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desires in a way. Nevertheless, according to Socrates it is clearly the 'lust' (which I take to be a single, persistent desire) that rules in his soul, not his soul's appetitive part or the whole class of his 'lawless' appetites, as is sometimes supposed. For further discussion of Plato's 'tyrannical man', see Parry 2007, Scott 2007.

young future democrat, is described by Socrates in exactly the way we would expect of a person dominated by unnecessary appetitive desires. However, the mature democratic man represents something different altogether. As a result, neither the account of his first emergence nor his position in Socrates' catalogue of corrupt souls forces us to understand his soul as ruled by its appetitive part, or exclusively by his appetitive desires.

What, then, is so *wrong* with the democratic man, as Socrates depicts him? Why, if his soul is not ruled in some way by its appetitive part, does he occupy a lower position in Socrates' catalogue of corrupt people than the oligarchic man, whose soul undoubtedly *is* ruled by appetite? The first point to make here is that it is only in the just soul of the philosopher that reason truly does its own proper work.<sup>36</sup> The rational part of the democratic man's soul is presumably no more capable of governing his soul as a whole in accordance with knowledge of what is truly good than those of his oligarchic and timocratic predecessors.<sup>37</sup> As a result, the democratic man is no better off than his oligarchic predecessor with respect to the rational governance of his life as a whole. He is also clearly worse off in others. To begin with, this man's policy of indiscriminately pursuing the satisfaction of every desire that arises in him leaves him lacking even the limited form of moderation exhibited by the oligarchic man, who was generally able to restrain himself from acting on his wasteful or unnecessary desires.<sup>38</sup> In addition, since his soul is not ruled in an enduring way by

<sup>36</sup> I take it that this work involves ruling the soul as a whole in light of knowledge of the good. By contrast, the rational parts of all corrupt souls play only a subservient role, which apparently involves working only to pursue goals set by the part or element that *does* rule in the soul, whatever that may be in each case. Furthermore, in no corrupt soul will the rational part receive a proper education, such as would allow it to develop to its fullest potential, becoming 'strong' (cf. the description of the effects of the father's influence on the *logistikon* of the young future timocratic man at 550b1-2) and working towards eventually acquiring knowledge of the forms, as is proper to its nature (490a8-b4; cf. *Tim.* 90a2-d7). In this way, the development of reason in *every* corrupt soul, including that of the democratic man, will be severely stunted.

<sup>37</sup> We should not be misled here by Socrates' reference to the democratic man dabbling in 'what he takes to be philosophy' (561d3), since I take it to be clear that Socrates does not consider this person capable of engaging in any activity truly deserving of that name. On this point, see also note 28 above.

<sup>38</sup> According to Socrates, the 'dronish' desires in the soul of the oligarchic man are forcibly held in check by his 'carefulness' (*epimeleia*, 554c2). The democratic man will display no such restraint.

any of its elements or parts, his life as a whole (unlike that of the oligarchic man) lacks all order (*taxis*, 561d6), which Socrates clearly regards as a fault. Furthermore, while the oligarchic man was able to distinguish between his better and worse desires, and generally pursued the former in preference to the latter (554e1-2), the democratic man is unable even to make these distinctions. Thus Socrates emphasizes the fact that he is unwilling to listen to anyone who tries to tell him that some pleasures and desires are fine and good and others are bad, falsely insisting that all are equal and should be valued equally (561b8-c4). Finally, on account of his tolerance, this man is even less able than his oligarchic predecessor to check the growth in his soul of the basest forms of appetitive desire.<sup>39</sup> It is this failing, finally, that leads to the emergence of the tyrannical man, the worst kind of person Socrates describes,<sup>40</sup> who is eventually enslaved to the very basest of his desires.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> As I understand the *Republic*, Socrates presents a view on which appetitive desires have a tendency to grow stronger with time if left unchecked, especially in the young, and hence represent a constant threat to the development of human virtue. Every human soul therefore requires 'guards' to keep them in their proper place and to prevent them from growing strong and taking over the soul. No corrupt soul has the best possible guards against the growth of appetitive desires, which Socrates claims are reason and a good education (549a9-b7). However, the democratic man has *no* such guards; in this respect he is worse off than even his oligarchic predecessor, who restrained his unnecessary appetites 'by force' and kept them in check by means of a 'decent part of himself' (554c12-d1: the reference is either to his necessary appetites, or, more probably, to his enslaved rational part, which has adopted the accumulation of wealth as its goal). Interestingly, Plato's depiction of the mature democratic man's later development suggests that even without anything to check them appetitive desires can sometimes mellow with age (on this idea, compare also the remarks of Cephalus on the waning of his bodily desires in Book 1, 329a4-8).

<sup>40</sup> Why is the tyrannical man worse than the democratic? Socrates distinguishes (and ranks from best to worst) three kinds of appetitive desires: necessary, unnecessary and lawless. The oligarchic man acts mostly on his necessary desires, while his unnecessary desires are held in check by force (and hence lives a frugal and outwardly moderate life). The democratic man fails to distinguish better from worse among his appetitive desires, and so treats necessary and unnecessary desires as equal (and hence lives a mercurial, directionless life). The tyrannical man, finally, actually *favours* his unnecessary desires – which now prominently include lawless desires – while actively *destroying* all vestiges of moderation and restraint in his soul. As a result, he lives an utterly depraved life. I take it that this is what finally explains Socrates' rank ordering of the three most corrupt kinds of soul.

<sup>41</sup> Era Gavrielides (2010) has recently argued that the basic problem with all degenerate souls on Socrates' account is not simply that they lack unity (as is supposed for example by Annas 1981, Wilberding 2009), but rather that they are unified only by force. She is in my

## V

I conclude that the soul of the ‘democratic man’, as this person is depicted in the *Republic*, is not ruled in an enduring way by any one of its elements or parts, or by any single kind of desire. Rather, the soul of the mature democratic man is ruled by a succession of desires, of a full range of different kinds. This interpretation is strongly supported by Socrates’ analogy with the democratic city, which is not ruled in an enduring way by any particular individual or party and which chooses a succession of temporary rulers by drawing lots. It also gains support from Socrates’ description of the democratic man as treating all of his desires as equals, at least on the assumption (which would be difficult to deny) that the democratic man sometimes *has* rational and spirited desires, and both necessary and unnecessary appetites. This interpretation also provides the most plausible explanation for the sheer variety and range of activities this man is said to be attracted to and to pursue. Furthermore, once we have distinguished the young future democrat from the mature ‘democratic man’ – the man who resembles the democratic city – the position of the latter in Socrates’ hierarchy does not force us to understand his soul as ruled by its appetitive part, or exclusively by his (unnecessary?) appetitive desires. The claim that this man is worse off than his oligarchic predecessor is also easily explained, without assuming that his soul is ruled by appetite. Finally, the present interpretation allows us to understand Socrates’ depiction of the democratic man as continuing a pattern established in his descriptions of the preceding three character types: for a disordered and directionless life is exactly what we should expect from a person whose soul has no stable ruling part.

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view right to insist that Socrates’ ranking of corrupt souls is not based solely on declining degrees of inner unity. However, I am inclined to think that her account is incomplete; for while Plato surely held that no corrupt soul has the kind of harmonious unity found in a good soul ruled by reason, there is more wrong with each of them than that they are unified only by force (see previous note). The limitations of Gavrielides’ view are exposed in her treatment of the democratic man, when she claims that his most fundamental flaw is that he controls his lawless unnecessary appetites by force (215-6). While it is true (and interesting) that the democratic man still experiences lawless desires only in his dreams, suggesting that some kind of (presumably unconscious) restraint still exists in his soul, it seems a stretch to claim that the reader is supposed to understand the forceful restraint of lawless desires as the most fundamental problem with his inner government, especially since lawless desires are not even mentioned in the *Republic* until after Socrates’ description of the democratic man is complete.

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