

7-5-2012

# The Freedom of the Good: A Study of Plato's Ethical Conception of Freedom

Siobhán McLoughlin

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**THE FREEDOM OF THE GOOD:  
A STUDY OF PLATO'S ETHICAL  
CONCEPTION OF FREEDOM**

by

**SIOBHÁN MCLOUGHLIN**

B.A. (Hons.), Philosophy, University of Toronto, 2000  
M.A., Philosophy, University of Ottawa, 2003

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Philosophy**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2012**

**DEDICATION**

To my father, Stephen, for support from above.  
To my mother, Ingrid, for her support here below.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of many years of work that would not have been possible without the help of many people.

Thank you to my Committee Chair, John Bussanich, for seeing my project through to completion. All of your time spent reading and commenting on drafts of this manuscript is much appreciated and helped to make this a markedly better dissertation. I wish to thank my other committee members, Andrew Burgess, Russell Goodman, Paul Livingston, Warren Smith, and Lorenzo Garcia. Your various perspectives, insights and suggestions have enriched my thinking on this topic. Any errors or omissions that may remain are my own.

I am grateful for the comments that I received from the audiences who heard portions of my work at the Society for Ancient Philosophy and International Society of Neoplatonic Study meetings. The remarks of the anonymous reviewer of my paper published in *Conversations Platonic and Neoplatonic* helped to guide parts of this project, as well. Thank you to my good friend Kathleen McIntyre for editing assistance, advice, and encouragement.

I was first introduced to Plato and his myths by Asli Gocer as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto. Thank you for setting me on this path of discovery.

Thank you to my father for being the first one to embrace my idea of getting a philosophy Ph.D. enthusiastically, as you did with all of my endeavours. My mother, Ingrid, and my sister, Sinéad, have been my constant champions over the years. Thank you for your love and support.

A special thank you to my husband, Ahmad, for weathering the ups and downs of the dissertation-writing process with me. I could not have done this without you.

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**ABSTRACT**

My dissertation argues that Plato has a concept of individual metaphysical freedom, making him a key figure in the emergence of the free will debate in the history of Western philosophy. A philosophy of freedom can be seen throughout his works, particularly in the *Republic*, the *Laws*, and the *Phaedrus*. I show that underlying Platonic moral psychology is the notion that an individual is free if her reasoning element rules her soul in line with the Good. This makes Platonic freedom a thoroughly ethical concept.

In my first chapter, I examine Plato's critique of three competing notions of freedom drawn from conventional notions of virtue, democracy, and tyranny. Plato's own notion of freedom emerges from his criticisms of these alternative definitions of freedom. He redefines freedom from a conception of unconstrained choice towards a notion of reasoned choice in line with virtue. Thus, Platonic freedom is a normative concept.

My next chapter provides a detailed analysis of Platonic freedom by examining its metaphysical foundation as described in the *Republic*. This work reveals the philosopher as the authentically free person. The myth of Er engages notions of freedom, responsibility and choice. In this myth, Plato emphasizes individual responsibility even in cases of diminished psychological freedom. The myth of the Cave underscores the idea

that philosophical freedom is not liberty to pursue desires uninhibited. Rather, freedom is the ability to pursue reason's desires as informed by the Good.

My final chapter examines the concept of freedom within the tripartite psychology. The *Phaedrus* myth provides further detail about the interaction between the parts of the soul and the struggle for freedom. It emphasizes the natural position of reason as ruler of the soul. The image of the golden cord in the *Laws* outlines the soul's ideal relationship to reason. The freedom of the philosopher is moderate, self-controlled, and predictable.

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## 1. Introduction

The question of whether and how human beings have free will is an enduring philosophical question. It is often argued that the problem was first articulated after Plato, in the Hellenistic period.<sup>1</sup> I wish to challenge this view by showing that Plato is a pivotal figure in the emergence of the philosophical debate about free will. I shall argue that Plato's dialogues make strong assertions about human agency and moral responsibility within a teleological cosmology.

The special contribution of this dissertation lies in its focus upon the problem of free will in the mythical sections of Plato's text. This approach has several advantages. The mythical backdrop allows Plato to explore the problem freely through the thought experiments and extrapolations that myth allows. The perspective of the afterlife, in particular, enables Plato to represent a human course of life as a single unit of accumulated choices of actions, while at the same time focusing on the importance of present choices. In doing so, he develops a concept of freedom by connecting key aspects of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Since Plato is such a seminal figure in the history of philosophy it is important to try to get him right so that his works may better understood, along with the philosophical developments that follow him. This study uncovers nuances that can be brought to bear even in the contemporary debate. Thus, a historically sensitive discussion of freedom and determinism in Plato's works is warranted and desirable.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Huby 1967 and Bobzien 1998. Huby argues that Epicurus was the first philosopher to discover the free will problem, while Bobzien pinpoints its articulation in the second century A.D.

### a. The Historical Freedom and Determinism Debate

Plato builds upon a nascent concept of metaphysical freedom present in some early Greek poets and tragedians, who approach the topic of freedom and fatalism through their particular genres. These authors begin to draw out a more individualized concept of personal freedom in tension with the religio-poetic concepts of fate. Fate (*moira*) is broached in the works of Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles; however, it is difficult to extract a rigorous philosophical position from these non-philosophical sources.<sup>2</sup>

A crude form of determinism seems to have emerged with the Atomists, Leucippus and Democritus, who were contemporaries, and apparently nemeses, of Plato.<sup>3</sup> The Atomists theorized that processes in the universe are a result of the interactions between different types of atoms.<sup>4</sup> The atomists seem to allow some room for freedom, as they recommended mastering pleasure<sup>5</sup> and suggested that teaching reshapes the character of a person.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, around the time of Plato's birth a debate was emerging in the public arena regarding *nomos* (custom, law, convention) and *physis* (nature, natural order).<sup>7</sup> Within this debate the rudimentary concepts of necessity and freedom to resist nature

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<sup>2</sup> Greene 1963 provides a good survey of the Greek concept of fate. For a discussion of freedom and fate in tragedy see Patterson 1991, 109-132; 165-173.

<sup>3</sup> Plato never mentions Democritus by name, though his opposition to materialism in the *Theaetetus* is often thought to be aimed at the Atomists. Surprisingly, however, Plato may have used some of Democritus' cosmogony as inspiration for his *Timaeus*.

<sup>4</sup> The atomists do seem to allow some room for freedom. They recommended mastering pleasure (Democritus, DK 68B214) and suggested that teaching reshapes the nature of a person (Democritus, DK 68B33). In fact, this causal determinism may be part of a compatibilist scheme overall.

<sup>5</sup> Democritus, DK 68B214.

<sup>6</sup> Democritus, DK 68B33.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the historical background of this debate see McKirahan 1994, 390-413.

come to the fore. Plato enters this debate with his theory of the *nomos* of ideal society in the *Republic* and his *Laws*. *Physis* is also championed by Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and Callicles in the *Gorgias*. A theme of the dialogues is the naturalness of the order of reason in the cosmos and the individual.

The *nomos-physis* debate emerges when a concept of political freedom appears in classical Athenian society. The advent of democracy coincided with the invention of a concept of political freedom, which entailed liberty from tyranny as well as the ability to engage in political decisions. Plato is the first philosopher to engage extensively with these new ideas of political and metaphysical freedom. He attacks democratic and tyrannical concepts of freedom. At the same time he confronts traditional beliefs about fatalism through his eschatological myths.

After Plato the debate starts to take on more explicit shape starting with Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> It takes a decisively new turn when the Epicureans<sup>9</sup> and Stoics<sup>10</sup> introduce a version of hard determinism. With the work of Chrysippus, in particular, the debate enters a phase that sounds surprisingly modern. The debate is further expanded by the Middle Platonists through to early Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, I argue Plato provides the first serious attempt to introduce and resolve the debate about individual metaphysical freedom in the Western philosophical tradition.

In contemporary philosophy, there are three main positions on the free will

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle argues for a category of *prohairesis* distinct from the Platonic categories of *epithumia*, *thumos*, *boulēsis* and *doxa*. See Pakaluk 2005, 130. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1, he finds voluntariness to be key in attributing praise or blame. Aristotle also broaches the subject of determinism in his famous Sea Battle Example where he raises the problem of the necessity and truth values of present statements regarding future events, *De Interpretatione IX*.

<sup>9</sup> Huby 1967.

<sup>10</sup> See Bobzien 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas gives an elaborate account of types of willings in his development of Aristotelian compatibilism, particularly in *Summa Theologica*, Part One.

question: determinism, libertarianism and the synthesis of the two, compatibilism, also called soft determinism. The first two positions are versions of incompatibilism, meaning that they find determinism and freedom of the will to be incompatible with each other. Most versions of the above positions posit claims about whether rational agents can will actions freely, that is without constraint.<sup>12</sup> *Willing* is thus distinguished from *acting* on one's will because factors external to one's will may impede the full completion of the desired action. Plato is likewise focused on choice (*prohairesis*), rather than on action.

Philosophers who hold the position that humans have free will come in many varieties. A version of this doctrine pertinent to Plato is the libertarian agent-causation theory, which distinguishes agent causation from the event causation of causal determinism.<sup>13</sup> In this version agents cause events, as unmoved movers, and desires may incline agents towards certain actions, but do not necessitate them. An important concern of many free will proponents is the 'could have done otherwise' clause, which states that a person is free if she could have acted otherwise than she did. For instance, just now I continued working. However, I just as well could have gotten a drink of water, checked my email, or done a variety of other actions. According to the libertarian, I could have done otherwise than working, the action I chose. If I turned back the clock to that exact same point in time with the same conditions, I was free to choose another action. Nothing in the past or in my mind determined that I must continue working.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In contrast, some philosophers define freedom as *action*, not *choice* of action or *willing* action, without constraint. Descartes most notably holds this, in *Meditation IV*.

<sup>13</sup> This version is championed by Chisholm 1997, 143-155.

<sup>14</sup> Libertarianism works best, in my opinion, when accompanied by a theory of the soul, which can account for the non-materialistic basis of actions. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to make libertarianism compatible with scientific evidence that human choices produce physical events in the brain and that physical events in the rest of the body appear to be governed by physical, deterministic laws. However, libertarianism and

The determinist claims that persons are not free in willing any actions due to causal, biological, psychological, or theological necessity. Each of these types of determinism is relevant to Plato's analysis. Causal determinism holds that a complete description of the way things are at one time uniquely determines all subsequent states of affairs, according to natural laws. Biological determinism is the view that biology fully determines destiny. A strand of this view can be seen in Plato's breeding program for the ruling class (*Republic* 459d-e). According to psychological determinism, purposes, needs, and desires of individuals can explain human behavior.<sup>15</sup> For Plato, as I will show, overcoming one's base desires and empowering reason to rule one's actions is the only true freedom. Theological determinism is the thesis that if God knows the future, then all future events are predetermined and thus we are not free.<sup>16</sup> This final form of determinism is applicable particularly to Plato's *Laws*, where it is stated "you exist for the sake of the universe" (903c).<sup>17</sup> Here it is implied that each soul has a cosmic purpose, which may be a form of theological determinism. The *Timaeus* also contains elements of this type of determinism. For instance, the production of human souls is said to complete the universe (41b-c).

It is important to note that if determinism is true, nothing would change phenomenologically. Individuals may not feel compelled to act in a certain way; rather they would deliberate and feel as if they were free, according to their customs and beliefs.

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dualism do not always go hand in hand with philosophers. For instance, Peter Van Inwagen is a libertarian materialist. However, his strong theism and his commitment to continuation of life after death work to mitigate the tensions in this pairing by still allowing for a transcendent aspect in his framework.

<sup>15</sup> B. F. Skinner's behavioral determinism is an example of this view.

<sup>16</sup> Another version of this theological determinism is divine preordination: the doctrine that if God is the ultimate cause of everything, God has preordained everything that will occur, and therefore everything is determined. This ends up being a form of causal determinism.

<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Plato quotations are from Plato 1997 (varying translators).

Determinism broadly construed is simply a metaphysical explanation of the world, with no phenomenological evidence on which to base its truth. Likewise, determinism should be distinguished from fatalism, the doctrine that certain events are fated to occur, no matter which preconditions exist. The classic Greek example of fatalism is the story of Oedipus, who was fated to kill his father and marry his mother no matter what precautions he or his parents took to prevent the predicted events.

There are deterministic elements in Plato's works. However, in his eschatology Plato emphasizes that the choice of one's next life is the soul's responsibility, not the god's. Thus, because of Plato's focus on free choice here he appears anti-deterministic. In tension with this Plato insists that the soul's experiences both in life and in the afterlife, particularly of punishment and reward, do seem to impact the souls' choices in a deterministic way. It remains to be seen whether the choices that caused certain afterlife results are free or not. A solution may be found in placing Plato with the compatibilists.

Compatibilists claim to solve the free will problem by arguing that determinism and free will—and often moral responsibility—are compatible. Traditional or classical compatibilism holds that one is free when able to act without constraint according to one's desires. Free actions are still caused actions, making freedom and determinism compatible. This position, more or less, was held by many modern philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, David Hume and John Stuart Mill.

## **b. Freedom and Platonic Myth**

Why examine the topic of freedom and determinism in Platonic myth? It is in the eschatological myths that Plato addresses moral responsibility and punishment, two key aspects of the freedom and determinism debate, more acutely and compactly than elsewhere in his dialogues. The main issues of how the past is connected to the future and the impact of this relationship upon our decision-making come to a head in Plato's afterlife scheme of punishment, reward and subsequent transmigration of souls into different bodies. The question of whether determinism is compatible with moral responsibility, and thus punishment, often plays a large factor in philosophers' acceptance of determinism.<sup>18</sup> As with many afterlife schemes, the consequences of one's actions throughout life are experienced more intensely in Plato's Hades. It is here that Plato shows the reader the full brunt of philosophical and non-philosophical ways of life. In these myths Plato is best able to underscore the importance of the philosophical life. Further, because of Plato's inclusion of transmigration in his system, we see these positive effects of philosophy being carried over into other lives and influencing the choice of the next life. Will is shown to play a heightened role in Plato's afterlife, making the myths a good place to frame a study of freedom and determinism in Plato. Finally, mythical sections are always conjoined with passages of non-mythical reasoning.<sup>19</sup> Hence, I will be able to bring in non-mythical portions of text to compare and add to what is being said in the myths.

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<sup>18</sup> Frankfurt 1997, 155-166 argues that free will is not a necessary precondition for moral responsibility, and has tried to pry apart these two notions.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholson 1999, 33.

Quite a detailed eschatology can be pieced together by comparing all of Plato's myths of the afterlife and using the elements in one myth to fill in elements that are missing or glossed over in others. Of course each of Plato's works has a somewhat different emphasis, which then carries over into the corresponding myth in that particular work. However, overall this method gives a consistent eschatology. A fairly complete eschatology can be pieced together based upon the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Laws*, and *Timaeus*. In approaching the myths this way, I am taking an interpretive stance with regard to the question of the continuity of the dialogues in suggesting that one eschatology can be found throughout Plato's works.<sup>20</sup>

When these myths and their eschatological themes are considered synoptically, one finds a curious mixture of elements of freedom, necessity, order, chance and fate experienced by the souls in the afterlife. My dissertation will aim to determine what Plato is trying to do by including all of these, sometimes seemingly contradictory, elements in his eschatology.

### **c. Previous Scholarship on Plato and Free Will**

Most frequently, the topic of freedom in Plato has been broached peripherally, as an aside to a different set of concerns or interpretive studies on a single Platonic work.<sup>21</sup> One reason for this may be that the topic of freedom, like many special topics in Plato, touches multiple areas of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Another reason for this is the assumption, mentioned above that freedom is a topic that arose later in the history

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<sup>20</sup> I am following Long 1948 and Döring 1893 on this point. However, I do allow that Plato may have changed his mind, or perhaps simply his emphasis, on a number of philosophical issues throughout his writing career. In addition, I also maintain that each dialogue can be read independently of the others with fruitful results.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Bobonich 2002, 521n133.

of philosophy. Further, when freedom is discussed, the focus has been largely on political freedom.<sup>22</sup> Such study has its place, but it is my contention that Plato's treatment of political freedom is related to a doctrine of individual metaphysical freedom.<sup>23</sup>

Kenneth Dorter calls the myth of Er "the first formulation of the problem of free will,"<sup>24</sup> a milestone in the history of Western philosophy, if true. Dorter's article introduces a problem with Plato's eschatological schema: "Our choice of life entails the choice of a particular character . . . but any choice we make is already determined by our present character, so if we choose our character we must do so on the basis of the character we already have, and there seems to be an infinite regress."<sup>25</sup> In such a system, individual souls are never truly free to deviate from inclinations accumulated in past lives. How can there be any hope for change if one's path is predetermined by choices made in the afterlife and previous lives? Further, to be able to impute moral responsibility, we must be responsible for our character if our character compels our actions. A closer examination of the myths indicates that there are some exceptions to this *prima facie* "depressing"<sup>26</sup> eschatological scheme.

Two ways out of the cosmic machinery are either to break bad habits through afterlife punishment and suffering or to maintain habits so strong that they withstand any superficial desires that come from undergoing afterlife suffering or rewards.<sup>27</sup> A third option is to determine one's choices using wisdom, not habit or reaction to reward or

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<sup>22</sup> The most famous critic of Plato as an enemy to the freedom of the 'open society' is of course Popper 1966.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the primary focus of the political sections of the *Republic* might best be taken as metaphor in relation to the individual soul, following Annas 1999, 82-83, Waterfield 1993, xiv, xvi, and Williams 1993, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Dorter 2003, 132.

<sup>25</sup> Dorter 2003, 131.

<sup>26</sup> Annas 1982, 132.

<sup>27</sup> Dorter 2003, 136.

punishment.<sup>28</sup> The third option allows philosophers true freedom. Dorter concludes that Plato is a compatibilist because he believes in rational choice and causal determinism: “Our empirical selves are not free from the law of cause and effect, but our truest self, reason, is free from the domination of the irrational, and from the unconscious domination of habit and manipulation.”<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, Dorter highlights places in the myth that show intertwinement of individual destinies and the destiny of the cosmos as a whole. He suggests that Plato is hinting that the necessity in individual lives plays “a necessary part in the harmonious fabric of the whole.”<sup>30</sup> Dorter relates this to the Pythagorean idea of the harmony of the spheres. Unfortunately, after a cursory comparison to the *Timaeus*, Dorter does not return to this theme or incorporate it into his conclusion. Further work on this idea could yield interesting results for the discussion of freedom and determinism in Plato. On the whole, Dorter makes some promising entrées in his paper. However, I see this article as prefatory to more in-depth study of the topic.

In contrast to Dorter, Julia Annas seems to fall prey to anachronism and lack of charity when interpreting Plato’s eschatology. Famously, she refers to the myth of Er as a “lame and messy ending” to the *Republic* and a “painful shock.”<sup>31</sup> Further, she calls the reincarnation scheme in it “implausible, and even grotesque.”<sup>32</sup> Annas is troubled by the impersonal cosmic machinery that “contains no optimistic promise of final reward to induce us to be just.”<sup>33</sup> However, here she seems to miss two important points brought

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<sup>28</sup> Dorter 2003, 136-137.

<sup>29</sup> Dorter 2003, 138.

<sup>30</sup> Dorter 2003, 135.

<sup>31</sup> Annas 1981, 353, 349.

<sup>32</sup> Annas 1982, 138.

<sup>33</sup> Annas 1982, 139.

out by Dorter. Firstly, the myth of Er is referring to “most” people or souls.<sup>34</sup> As mentioned above, philosophers can escape the deterministic scheme. A second counterpoint to Annas’ interpretation is that justice does not guarantee absolute happiness or reward, only relative happiness as compared to the unjust.<sup>35</sup>

Because of her unwillingness to accept that Plato may have believed in reincarnation<sup>36</sup> she proceeds, as she puts it, to ‘demythologize’ the myth. She is bothered by the ‘fatalism’ that the cosmic system suggests and instead seizes upon the points where personal responsibility and present choices are highlighted to produce what may be called an allegorical interpretation of the myth whereby the afterlife details are taken as metaphors for making choices in life and their consequences. While I agree that this is one plausible meaning to be taken from the myth of Er, I think that Annas is too eager to discount the possibility that Plato did believe some of the “apparatus of reincarnation.” The fact that the same apparatus continues to appear in Plato’s other eschatological myths, each time with details complementing the other myths and the constant presence of Orphic-Pythagorean imagery in his works indicates that Plato did study and find more than simple dramatic value in the eschatological scheme that he presents. The accounts of Plato’s meetings with the Pythagoreans in Sicily also bear this out.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, Annas claims that if the myth of Er is taken seriously, “it seems to offer us an entirely consequentialist reason for being just, thus undermining Plato’s sustained effort to show that justice is worth having for the agent in a non-

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<sup>34</sup> Dorter 2003, 136.

<sup>35</sup> Dorter 2003, 138-140.

<sup>36</sup> “Plato is not seriously suggesting that we have lived other lives and been through their consequences in heaven and hell” (Annas 1981, 351).

<sup>37</sup> Plato writes about going to Sicily in his *Seventh Letter*.

consequentialist way.”<sup>38</sup> With respect to Annas’ objection it is important to remember that in Book 2 of the *Republic* (357d-358a) Socrates places justice in the highest class of goods, things both valuable in themselves *and* because of their consequences. More important, however, is the fact that although Plato is presenting the afterlife consequences of various ways of living he is steering his readers *away* from this focus by suggesting that those who have steeled themselves *against* valuing pleasure and absence of pain, focusing on philosophy instead, will weather the inevitable ups and downs of various lives. Thus, the thrust of the myth is that by valuing philosophy for itself one will not be swayed into choosing lives based on pleasures and rewards to be received. A true philosopher is not focused on avoiding suffering and being rewarded; rather, he comes into a state where he is beyond pleasure and pain because these things are not his focus. For the non-philosophical person, the myth can be seen as a consequentialist depiction of justice, but the true philosopher sees the non-consequentialist underpinning of what is said and left unsaid by Plato in the form of Er. My study aims to refute Annas’ objection about the myth of Er by expanding upon the argument just stated.

R. F. Stalley takes a similar view to Dorter’s, in arguing that a main message of the *Republic* is that the just man—that is, the philosopher—is truly free and that injustice is a kind of inner slavery.<sup>39</sup> Stalley claims that the philosopher “is free, not because he has some faculty of free choice, but because his decisions are a response to a true vision of the good.”<sup>40</sup> Stalley also notes that Plato does not see freedom as a necessary

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<sup>38</sup> Annas 1981, 349. This objection could also be leveled against the *Phaedo* and the *Gorgias*.

<sup>39</sup> Stalley 1998, 145, 147.

<sup>40</sup> Stalley 1998, 151.

condition for responsibility in the sense of inflicting punishment for wrongdoing.<sup>41</sup> In addition, punishment may serve as a cure to the offender.<sup>42</sup> Stalley makes some important remarks about citizens' freedom in the *Laws* and *Republic* as being defined by governance by persuasion rather than force.<sup>43</sup> This discussion can be applied to Plato's use of myth as a form of persuading the citizenry in the *Republic*. As I also indicated, in the *Timaeus* persuasion seems to be able to dismantle determinism on the cosmic scale and now perhaps on the human scale too. This idea makes for a unique approach to the freedom and determinism debate.

Stalley asserts that freedom is not an all-or-nothing matter for Plato; instead, "The more we willingly allow our lives to be governed by reason the more free we are."<sup>44</sup> Thus, one's freedom can be placed on a continuum. Further, Stalley remarks that freedom is a matter of knowledge, not of choice. These conclusions suggest that more straightforward compatibilism may not accurately describe Plato's position. Stalley's investigation into Plato's doctrine of freedom does not examine the eschatological myths at all, even though he is dealing exclusively with texts that contain these myths.

#### **d. Outline of my Study**

In chapter two, I examine Plato's criticisms of three competing notions of freedom. The first conception of freedom is that of conventional virtue, whereby one is thought to be free if one follows social mores. However, conventional virtue provides an ethical framework without understanding. The second notion of freedom is democratic

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<sup>41</sup> Stalley 1998, 153. This is in line with Frankfurt.

<sup>42</sup> Stalley 1998, 153.

<sup>43</sup> Stalley 1998, 156-7.

<sup>44</sup> Stalley 1998, 157.

freedom, which is the ability to pursue desires without constraint. For Plato, this definition of freedom lacks the ethical direction of the Good. Finally, tyranny—the absolute ability to do as one pleases—encourages the overdevelopment of the lower parts of the soul at the expense of reason. Plato’s own notion of freedom emerges from his criticisms of these alternative definitions of freedom. He redefines freedom, rejecting the conception of unconstrained choice and embracing the reasoned choice in accordance with virtue. Hence, Plato transforms freedom into a thoroughly ethical concept. In this revised concept of freedom one is free when pursuing the desires of the highest part of the soul, so that the reasoning part’s natural desires drive the soul’s actions. Plato sees these as the true desires of the soul, but also as the appropriate desires one should have. Thus, Platonic freedom is a normative concept.

The ethical aspect of Platonic freedom is discussed in chapter three on the myth of Er in the *Republic*. The myth explores notions of freedom, responsibility and choice. Here Plato emphasizes individual responsibility even in cases of diminished psychological capacity. We see this in the poor choices that most souls make in the afterlife. Only Odysseus makes a wise choice by relying on reason and past experience instead of lower desires. The outlines of lives are chosen before birth. However, Plato still makes the case that souls’ reactions to prenatally-chosen events are free and open to revision. In this chapter, I suggest that the lower parts of the soul survive physical death, but that philosophers ultimately achieve permanent liberation from the lower soul after an unspecified number of incarnations.

Chapter four examines the role of freedom within Plato’s tripartite psychology. Freedom is shown consistently to involve the rule of reason in the soul. The first section

of this chapter provides a detailed analysis of Platonic freedom by examining its metaphysical foundation as described in the *Republic*. Plato's metaphysical system presents the philosopher as the authentically free person. He highlights the Form of the Good, and emphasizes knowledge of the Forms more generally, as the ideals which should inform free actions. The allegory compares knowing the Forms to freedom from the enslavement of imagination and belief. At the same time, this freedom entails an absolute allegiance to the Forms and necessitates action to instantiate them in the physical world. The myth of the Cave underscores the idea that philosophical freedom is not liberty to pursue desires uninhibited. Rather, freedom is the ability to pursue reason's desires as informed by the Good.

The second section of chapter four looks at two other myths in the Platonic corpus that pertain to freedom. The *Phaedrus* myth provides further detail about the interaction between the parts of the soul. It emphasizes the natural position of reason as ruler of the soul. The image of the golden cord in the *Laws* outlines the soul's ideal relationship to reason. Action in line with reason puts an individual in the most control over her life, allowing her to be free. The divinity of reason links the philosopher to the gods, so that she is working to instantiate the Good. The alternative is enslavement to desires and pathological emotions, which will lead to erratic and unpredictable action.

## 2. Varieties of False Freedom

### a. Freedom Understood Through Conventional Notions of Virtue

Is the just life worth living? This is the main question that Plato asks in the *Republic*. The early books of the *Republic* frame the question in these terms: does justice impede individual freedom to pursue the desires that many think lead to happiness? I will show that the definitions of justice put forward by the interlocutors contain concomitant conceptions of freedom.<sup>45</sup> Plato demonstrates that misguided notions of justice are associated with equally deficient conceptions of freedom. He juxtaposes several political and ethical versions of justice within the *Republic*. In this chapter, I will focus on three main ideas of justice: the justice of traditional morality, the justice of democratic equality, and the tyrant's justice.<sup>46</sup> Each of these three concepts of justice corresponds to a distinct conception of freedom. And Plato challenges all three. Plato's assessments of each concept of freedom reveal aspects of his own as well as the challenges it must face.

#### i. The Freedom of Conventional Virtue

The first conception of freedom is represented by Cephalus,<sup>47</sup> where freedom is the ability to pursue one's desires within the limits of traditional morality. I will call this conventional freedom. Although Cephalus is only present in the first book of the

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<sup>45</sup> By my account, the definitions of justice contribute to distinct theories of happiness, since freedom leads to happiness.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor 1956, 266 distinguishes these general views of justice. He labels them the justice of "the unphilosophical decent representative of current convention" and that of the "new morality." Annas 1981, 21 calls the former "the ordinary person's view of justice."

<sup>47</sup> Polemarchus takes up Cephalus' argument in turn and transforms it somewhat. However, I will focus on Cephalus' description of justice.

*Republic*, he introduces three considerations into the discussion of justice that are important for Socrates' own theories of justice and freedom. First, Cephalus maintains that the restraint of appetites produces psychological freedom. Second, he exhibits concern for others' well-being. Finally, he highlights the importance of knowledge.

## ii. Restraint of Appetite

Cephalus suggests that the pursuit of all of one's desires may lead to enslavement rather than freedom. Sophocles' answer to the question of whether he was still able to enjoy sex in his old age, strikes Cephalus as apt: "I am very glad to have escaped from all that, like a slave who has escaped from a savage and tyrannical master" (329c2-3). Thus, Cephalus describes the appetite for sex as a tyrannical force opposing freedom.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Cephalus is the first to mention freedom by name in the *Republic* when he adds,

old age brings peace and freedom [ἐλευθερία] from all such things. When the appetites [αἱ ἐπιθυμίας] relax and cease to importune us, everything Sophocles said comes to pass, and we escape from [ἀπηλλάχθαι] many mad masters. If [people] are moderate [κόσμιοι] and contented [εὐκόλοι], old age, too, is only moderately onerous; if they aren't, both old age and youth are hard to bear.  
(329c4-d1)

Here Cephalus distinguishes between appetitive desires and the self through the image of the appetites as 'mad masters' seeking to control an individual's actions. Thus, we find a concept of freedom as a state in which appetitive desires do not drive the person's actions. His brief comments suggest that the cessation of the appetites leads to autonomy

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<sup>48</sup> Section 2c, below, makes the case that the tyrant is the antithesis of the philosophically free.

and conversely, that giving in to appetites may hinder freedom.

Cephalus' remarks hint at a more sophisticated division of desires with his distinction between appetitive desires and the true desires of the person, as seen in the above quote. In all of his works Plato associates freedom with the ability to fulfill desires, and he, too, distinguishes worthy and unworthy desires of the soul parts. This association of freedom with the pursuit of desires demonstrates the ethical egoism underlying Platonic thought. Following Bernard Williams, I take ethical egoism to be the view that "each man has good reason to act morally, and that the good reason has to appeal to him in terms of something about himself, how and what he will be if he is a man of that sort of character."<sup>49</sup> The reason behind action is ultimately the fulfillment of the desire to live well.<sup>50</sup> This does not preclude recognition of the value of virtuous action in itself, nor does it necessarily exclude caring for the well-being of others, for care of others may prove valuable for its own sake, not simply instrumentally.<sup>51</sup>

### **iii. Concern for Others**

The ethical dimension of Cephalus' view of justice provides further insight into how Plato regards popular Greek conceptions of freedom. Socrates summarizes Cephalus' notion of justice as "speaking the truth and paying whatever debts one has incurred" (331c1-2). This normative definition of justice betrays a concern for others that makes his corresponding definition of freedom ethical in nature. Thus, we have a

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<sup>49</sup> Williams 2006, 40. Williams notes that Plato's ethical egoism precludes comparison to Kantian moral theory, for which "there can be no reason for moral conduct at all, except that it is one's duty—that the very nature of morality requires it to consist in a completely autonomous demand which cannot be rationalized or explained by anything else" (39).

<sup>50</sup> Taylor 1998, 40.

<sup>51</sup> Taylor 1998, 50.

conception of freedom as following the rules of society, namely, honoring commitments without harming others.

Although Socrates' version of freedom will include an ethical orientation similar to Cephalus', Cephalus goes astray in mistaking the source of this freedom. He believes that the freedom to be just in this fashion comes from wealth. Cephalus' love of money, a trait of the appetitive soul,<sup>52</sup> misleads him into thinking that having and spending money, particularly in sacrifices to the gods, gives him the power to do what he wants without trouble: "Wealth can do a lot to save us from having to cheat or deceive someone against our will and from having to depart for that other place in fear because we owe sacrifice to a god or money to a person" (331b1-3).<sup>53</sup> Socrates' poverty is a glaring challenge to this view<sup>54</sup> and it points to a non-material source for Platonic freedom.

#### **iv. Lack of Knowledge**

Cephalus' psychological and ethical focus foreshadows important features of Plato's theory of freedom. However, Plato also uses Cephalus to exemplify the pitfalls of relying on beliefs rather than knowledge. Cephalus simply accepts the ethical conventions of his society without questioning them.<sup>55</sup> As a result, he does not fully understand the rules and he may end up breaking them out of ignorance. He indicates uncertainty in his beliefs about justice. Childhood stories of punishments of the unjust in

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<sup>52</sup> 580e1-4.

<sup>53</sup> Presumably, Cephalus considers only honestly-earned money as giving one freedom, as dishonest practices would conflict with his definition of justice. However, the discussion of the tyrant will show that having wealth does not guarantee justice. In fact, the Platonic theory of freedom will argue that focus on wealth can endanger the soul.

<sup>54</sup> See Annas 1981, 19.

<sup>55</sup> See Annas 1981, 20: "what matters is whether or not you perform certain actions, like sacrificing to the gods, and not the spirit in which this is done."

Hades have begun to weigh on him more as he approaches death:

when someone thinks his end is near, he becomes frightened and concerned about things he didn't fear before. It's then that the stories we're told about Hades, about how people who've been unjust here must pay the penalty there—stories he used to make fun of—twist his soul this way and that for fear they're true.

(330d)<sup>56</sup>

Cephalus' anxiety about his fate in the afterlife can be attributed to lack of knowledge about justice. Uncertain about the gods' views on justice, Cephalus is frantically trying to ensure himself a good afterlife. Thus, he bows out of the discussion in order to make sacrifices that he thinks will improve his chances in the afterlife, rather than remaining with Socrates to philosophize (331d). Cephalus represents the 'slavish virtue' discussed in the *Phaedo*: "...without wisdom such virtue is only an illusory appearance of virtue; it is in fact fit for slaves, without soundness or truth" (69b5-7). Because slavish virtue derives from diminished appetites and fear of the afterlife, his is a false freedom.

#### v. The Analogy of Political Freedom

After Book 1's treatment of conventional justice, the focus of the *Republic* shifts towards evaluating conceptions of political justice. The five constitutions that Plato examines each maintain a theory of freedom inherent in each concept of justice. Political freedom can be defined roughly as individuals being able to pursue desired actions without externally imposed constraints. Plato recounts a progression of systematic

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<sup>56</sup> In Book 10, Plato argues that such stories bolster the irrational parts of the soul, thereby weakening the rational part's rule, 602d9-606d5. This, in turn, threatens the soul's freedom.

political and psychological decay from one form of government to another, finally ending in tyranny. Each system is epitomized by psychological states of each type of ruler or rulers.<sup>57</sup> Within both the cities and the rulers' souls, Plato considers the power struggle between three main elements: the rational, the spirited and the appetitive. In the city these parts of the soul translate to the rulers, the auxiliaries and the producers, respectively. In the city, the three groups are vying for political power, just as there is a psychological battle occurring between the three corresponding soul parts. Throughout the *Republic*, Plato focuses attention continually inwards towards the state of the soul. Even the political analysis of the rise and fall of each city constitution centers upon a psychological group profile of each political faction. Indeed, if we take seriously Bernard Williams' claim that "Plato was not in the first instance concerned with political freedom,"<sup>58</sup> then Plato's extensive discussions of political systems in the *Republic* can and should be taken as part of his discussion of individual freedom.

The *Republic* establishes five varieties of political freedom. All forms of government, except the justly run city, place value on the wrong things. This faulty grounding leads to a false conception of freedom. Following the city-soul analogy, five types of individual soul arrangements correspond to each political constitution. The best city constitution is the republic ruled by the philosopher-king, wherein the military and merchant classes are subordinate to the philosophers. The state of this city resembles the individual soul of the philosopher-king, whereby the philosophical part of the soul rules the lower parts. Although two factions are subordinate in this arrangement, the state is

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<sup>57</sup> The formal problems of the city-soul analogy are taken up by Sachs 1963, 141-158; Williams 1973, 196-206; Annas 1978, 437-451, among many others.

<sup>58</sup> Williams 1993, 154.

said to be harmonious because the reasoning element is naturally suited to rule the other elements.<sup>59</sup>

The subsequent four states discussed in Books 8 and 9 are ruled by the naturally inferior factions, causing instability within the leadership. The second best state is the timocracy, which is the result of honor-loving individuals ruling by military aristocracy. Correspondingly, the timocratic ruler is led by the spirited part of the soul. Plato judges oligarchy, rule of the rich, to be the third best city government. Oligarchs have souls that are governed by the necessary appetites.<sup>60</sup> The fourth best form of government is democracy, citizen rule, in which the governing have souls dominated by unnecessary appetites. Finally, tyranny is deemed the worst constitution because its ruler acts on his lawless and unnecessary appetitive desires.

The concept of political freedom enters the descriptions of the various forms of rule implicitly in the elucidation of power structures in each society. In all governments except democracy, one ruling class restricts the political freedom of the other classes according to its perceived good. The democratic city, unlike the other constitutions discussed, makes rule open to every citizen. Democracy is founded on the principle of “an equal share [ἐξ ἴσου] in ruling, under the constitution, . . . for the most part assigning people to rule by lot [ἀπό κλήρων]” (557a3-5).

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<sup>59</sup> 441e3-5.

<sup>60</sup> For the remaining three city types, Socrates divides the lowest part of the soul into necessary and unnecessary appetites in the analogy, 558c11-559d1.

## **b. ‘The Unmixed Wine of Freedom’: Plato’s Critique of Democratic Freedom in the Republic**

In Socrates’ analysis of democracy, he points to freedom [τὴν ἐλευθερίαν] itself as the ultimate value in a democracy: “Surely you’d hear a democratic city say that this is the finest thing it has, so that as a result it is the only city worth living in for someone who is by nature free [φύσει ἐλεύθερος]” (562b12-c2). The democratic city is described as being “full of freedom [ἐλευθερίας] and freedom of speech [παρρησίας]” (557b3-4). Everyone in the city is said to “have the license [ἐξουσία] to do what he wants” (557b4-5). Socrates calls the democratic person, himself, free as well (557b3). Hence, Plato associates the political freedom of democracy with liberty to pursue whatever one desires without government interference in more private settings. Thus, a study of Plato’s conception of freedom must pay particular attention to democracy, given that Plato observes the importance of a concept of freedom as a main democratic value. Since democracy is given the status of runner-up for least desirable system of government, behind tyranny, democratic freedom must be deficient as well. In this section, I will examine Plato’s assessment of democratic freedom. For behind Plato’s criticisms of democratic freedom, we see a Platonic conception of freedom taking shape.

### **i. The Democratic Soul**

As with the other forms of government, Plato provides a psychological biography of how a generic democrat emerges in society, again paralleling city and psychological

types.<sup>61</sup> He depicts a battle between the parts of the soul for rule of the whole soul. The archetypal democratic man is the oligarch's son who rebels against his father, driven by the unnecessary desires of the appetitive part of the soul. Unnecessary desires go beyond what is beneficial for well-being and survival. Instead, these desires are "harmful both to the body and to the reason and moderation of the soul" (559b11-c1). These desires can be suppressed by most people through restraint and education while they are young (559b10-11). However, by indulging these unnecessary desires, the appetitive part of the soul is emboldened. Eventually, "seeing the citadel of the young man's soul empty of knowledge, fine ways of living, and words of truth," the unnecessary desires overtake the soul (560b6-9).

However, there is some hope for the older democrat:

if he is lucky, and his frenzy doesn't go too far . . . he welcomes back some of the exiles, ceases to surrender himself completely to the newcomers, and puts his pleasures on an equal footing. And so he lives, always surrendering rule over himself to whichever desire comes along, as if it were chosen by lot. And when that is satisfied, he surrenders the rule to another, not disdaining any but satisfying them all equally. (561a5-b5)

The older democrat's psychic health is somewhat better than the younger's because instead of only bowing to necessary and unnecessary desires, he embodies some virtues as well, such as reverence and moderation. Thus, the older democrat has some capacity to respond to reason. However, Plato deems the chance of recovery from

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<sup>61</sup> Plato further explores the inadequacies of the democratic man by concentrating democratic characteristics in the character of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. For a good summary see Ralkowski 2009, 167-172.

democracy slight, even for the older democrat:

he doesn't admit any word of truth into the guardhouse, for if someone tells him that some pleasures belong to fine and good desires and others to base<sup>62</sup> ones and that he must pursue and value the former and restrain and enslave the latter, he denies all this and declares that all pleasures are equal and must be valued equally. (561b7-c3)<sup>63</sup>

Hence, the democrat exhibits the same lack of knowledge of the Good that Cephalus does at the beginning of the *Republic*.

## ii. Freedom in the Democratic City

Plato emphasizes that democratic freedom involves citizens having an equal share in the rule and direction of the city.<sup>64</sup> Democracy is introduced into the dissolving oligarchy under a new principle of equal opportunity of all citizens to rule, put into practice by assigning rule by lot (557a3-5). The introduction of a lot signifies the equal qualification of all citizens to serve in leadership roles.<sup>65</sup> Thus, democratic freedom entails the opportunity, but also the obligation, to rule when your number comes up. The equality of opportunity is not based upon merit, but rather on the chance of the lot in choosing one's name to be part of the governing body. The only criteria for eligibility are being a male citizen.

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<sup>62</sup> Shorey's translation of πονηρῶν. This term and its precedents evoke a political connotation. See Liddell and Scott 1940, "πονηρός."

<sup>63</sup> Callicles, the representative of Athenian democracy in the *Gorgias*, finally accepts the distinction between good and bad pleasures, forcing him to capitulate to Socrates, 499b7-9; see Voegelin 1957, 36-39.

<sup>64</sup> This aspect of democratic freedom corresponds to Berlin's notion of positive freedom, which "derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master" (1958, 16).

<sup>65</sup> Whibley 1896, 35.

Plato suggests that this equality in government carries over into private life. One characteristic of democratic freedom seems to be that each citizen retains the authority to arrange his life however he pleases.<sup>66</sup> Further, democracy provides many examples of lifestyles, as well as the liberty to pursue whichever lifestyle is appealing. The democratic city “contains the most models of constitutions and ways of living” (561e4-5), creating a veritable “supermarket of constitutions” (557d5-6). Hence, the right to live any way one pleases assumes a certain equality of all, or most, possible ways of living. The political equality of democratic freedom results in the liberty to live one’s life unimpeded by government and the assumption of equality of all ways of life. Thus, democratic freedom includes both individual freedom and political freedom in that both one’s private activities<sup>67</sup> and one’s right to political participation are protected.

Socrates comments on the captivating variety of ways of life in a democracy:

it looks as though this is the finest or most beautiful of the constitutions, For like a coat embroidered with every kind of ornament, this city, embroidered with every kind of character type, would seem to be the most beautiful. And many people would probably judge it to be so. (557c3-6)

The description of democracy as inspiring awe in its variety is reminiscent of the discussion of lovers of sights and sounds in Book 5, where Socrates says: “The lovers of sights and sounds like beautiful sounds, colors, shapes and everything fashioned out of

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<sup>66</sup> This aspect of democratic freedom corresponds to Berlin’s concept of negative freedom, whereby I am said to be free “to the degree to which no human being interferes with my activity” (1958, 7).

<sup>67</sup> Inasmuch as we can say that any activities in ancient Athens are private. For the view that the *oikos* can be seen as a political unit, challenging the public/private distinction as a more modern construction, see Jameson 1990, 171-195. Hansen 1996, 98-99 maintains the more traditional view that there is a public/private split.

them” (476b3-4). However, lovers of sights and sounds are said to be “living in a dream” because they mistake likenesses of beauty for the form of the beautiful itself. Socrates pronounces that “their thought is unable to see and embrace the nature of the beautiful itself” (476b4-5). Similarly, Plato indicates that the democrat mistakes the freedom to satisfy all of his desires for the true freedom that is achieved by the philosopher.

### iii. The Dangers of Democratic Equality

All of Plato’s criticisms stem from his dissatisfaction with all citizens participating in ruling, regardless of individual capabilities, experience or personal qualities.<sup>68</sup> Democracy, he says, gives “no thought to what someone was doing before he entered public life” (558b6-7). Plato’s concern here is that some individuals are not fit to rule, but democracy allows and encourages the rule of such persons in the interest of equality and fairness. Hence, democracy “distributes a sort of equality to both equals and unequals alike” (558c5-6), even though all individuals are not equally worthy of or capable of handling the power that democracy offers. However, Plato does not abandon the notion of equality entirely. In the *Laws*, Plato employs what he suggests is a fairer conception of equality in his modified version of the ideal city. Like democracy, the city in the *Laws* makes use of a lot system of governance while at the same time accounting for individuals’ past histories and merit in serving in office:

. . . some people will arrive with relatively large fortunes, others with relatively little. So for a number of reasons, and especially because the state offers equality

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<sup>68</sup>Freedom, rather than equality, was considered the main value in classical democratic Athens for as far back as the sources go, even though equality was still deemed an important but secondary democratic value. See Hansen 1996, 92-93.

of opportunity [καίρων ἰσότητος], there must be graded property-classes, to ensure that the offices and taxes and grants may be arranged on the basis of what a man is worth. It's not only his personal virtues or his ancestors' that should be considered, or his physical strength or good looks: what he's made of his wealth or poverty should also be taken into account. In short, citizens must be esteemed and given office, so far as possible, on exactly equal terms of "proportional inequality" [τῷ ἀνίσῳ συμμέτρῳ], so as to avoid ill-feeling. (*Laws* 744b4-c4)

Likewise, the *Gorgias* mentions a similar notion of "proportionate equality" [ἡ ἰσότης ἡ γεωμετρικὴ] (508a6). Plato recognizes that no new society should disregard its citizens' previous activities and abilities. Nor does he think that all individuals should have an equal say in governmental matters, for some individuals are better suited to governance and have more relevant experience than others. In democracy, value is placed upon all voices being heard and weighted equally, thereby decreasing the influence of the opinions of true leaders and experts. Of course, it is the philosophers whom Plato deems most capable to rule. Philosophers "are fitted by nature both to engage in philosophy and to rule in a city, while the rest are naturally fitted to leave philosophy alone and follow their leader" (474b6-8). Hence, democracy disregards the natural aptitudes of philosophers to rule and the naturalness of others to follow good leaders. Plato is concerned that ignoring the true nature of individuals in this way leads to instability and jeopardizes the government's reign.

Not only does democracy ignore the natural distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers, but Plato suggests that democratic freedom eventually destroys all

social hierarchies: “The utmost freedom for the majority is reached in such a city when bought slaves, both male and female, are no less free than those who bought them” (563b3-5).<sup>69</sup> Democracy supplants natural social hierarchies such as ruler-subject, father-son, teacher-student, master-slave and even man-animal. Socrates presents a slippery slope argument that democratic freedom blurs all social distinctions. However, there is some irony in these disapproving statements about democracy’s equality. For Plato proposes some radical egalitarian ideas of his own, such as the possibility of philosopher-queens (456a6) and the potential for ‘lower-born’ but talented individuals to rise to higher ranking positions in his ideal city (415c2-4). There is a certain equality of opportunity in the ideal city. However, in the *kallipolis* one gains authority through merit and natural talent, not simply by being born a citizen.

#### iv. Wine as a Symbol of Freedom

The parameters of democratic governance are strictly limited, so that the chosen rulers must act on the desires of the majority, not simply of their own accord. Thus, the political officials are perhaps least free because their actions are limited severely by their constituents’ wishes. If some rulers actually attempt to rule using their own ideas, rather than the majority’s, and if others willingly follow them as subjects, Plato says that these rulers will be “accused of being accursed oligarchs” and punished by the city (562c8-d3). The rulers in this scenario are said to be getting drunk by drinking more of the “unmixed wine” [ἀκράτου] of freedom [τὴν ἐλευθερίαν] than they should (562c8-d2). Even though Plato employs the negative connotation of drunkenness for those who attempt to

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<sup>69</sup> See also Samaras 2002, 67.

rule, he shows sympathy for this group of would-be rulers and their willing ‘slaves’. Freedom is presented as a potent wine that can easily overcome those in leadership positions by pushing them to use their own ideas to shape the city. Here Plato presents those overcome by freedom in a more positive light. However, in Book 9’s description of the tyrant, we see the consequences of a more inept individual getting “drunk” on freedom’s power.

There is a similarity between the depiction of freedom as unmixed wine and Plato’s simile of the Good as being like the intense light of the sun in Books 6 and 7 of the *Republic*. Both analogies refer to an object that is intoxicating and disorienting when experienced directly. The subject, infused with the Good or with freedom, appears ridiculous or drunk to spectators who are unfamiliar with these experiences. However, both the examples of the tyrant in Book 9 and the ridiculous philosopher coming back into the darkness of the cave in Book 7 suggest that the philosopher must learn to modulate his response to the experience of both wine and cognitive illumination. Plato confirms this in the *Laws* by advocating drinking parties to test out potential rulers (645d1-649b7). He describes the response of the ideal ruler to wine:

While inevitably roused by the wine, he would show himself strong enough to escape its other effects: his virtue would prevent him from committing even one serious improper act, and from becoming a different kind of person. Before getting to the last round he would leave off, fearing the way in which drink invariably gets the better of a man. (*Laws* 648e1-5)

This section of the *Laws* shows Plato’s continued concern with the moderation of city

rulers when faced with the temptation to abuse their power. Further, wine continues to be an apt analogy for the dangerous freedom that comes with ruling.

The portrayal of freedom as unmixed wine shows the inherent instability of democratic freedom. For those chosen to rule are in a position of power that can be intoxicating. Expecting everyone to be able to handle such a position moderately, without proper education in moderation is naïve, as Socrates explains: “And what about the uneducated who have no experience of truth? Isn’t it likely . . . that they will never adequately govern a city? . . . [They] would fail because they don’t have a single goal at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim” (519b6-c2). This statement suggests that the adequate ruler has experience of the truth and directs all of his actions towards a single goal, the Good. For Plato this is the proper response to the freedom concomitant with rule.

#### **v. Anarchy and Amorality**

Democracy does not value one way of life over another. This includes the philosophical life devoted to the Good. Instead, the freedom to live however one pleases is esteemed over any one particular way of life, in effect demoting the importance of the philosophical life. Without public endorsement or guidance towards the philosophical life, the soul becomes easily distracted by the immediacy of satisfying lower pleasures. As a result, the philosophical life is marginalized in favor of gratifying the increasingly dominant appetitive part of the soul. For the desires of the lower soul are more immediate

and stronger<sup>70</sup> than those of the reasoning element, which must be trained and developed. The embrace of equality in governance and the acceptance of many lifestyles encourages the view that all pleasures are of equal value. Plato argues that the equality of all pursuits in democracy fosters the confusion of virtues with vices. The democrat confuses insolence with good breeding, extravagance with magnificence and shamelessness with courage (560e4-5). If all actions and ways of life are considered equally valuable it becomes difficult to distinguish and praise those virtues that Plato deems more worthy of praise. Thus, a main problem with democracy is its mistaken assessment of equality and freedom as the good, at the expense of the true Good. In this way, the democratic society is not governed by the Good of Platonic metaphysics. For action towards development of one's philosophical life is considered equal to all other potential actions, such as attending a play or participating in sports. For Plato, all activities and desires are not equal. Philosophical activities are definitively better than all other activities. However, democracy cannot embrace any such moral scheme without jeopardizing its constitutional equality.

A further criticism of democracy is that it leads to anarchy since it lacks rational moral principles. In fact, Socrates accuses democratic supporters of mistaking anarchy [*ἀναρχίαν*] for freedom (560e4). Here, anarchy means a lack of any leadership or organizing principle in the direction of one's life other than spontaneous hedonism; it is lawlessness. Socrates depicts the democrat's life as giving in to a constant succession of competing desires:

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<sup>70</sup> In Book 9, Socrates compares this part of the soul to a multi-headed beast that should be cared for "as a farmer does his animals, feeding and domesticating the gentle heads and preventing the savage ones from growing" (589b1-3). See 588b1-590d1 for the full discussion of the image.

And so he lives on, 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 [οὔτε τις τάξις οὔτε ἀνάγκη] in his life, but he calls it pleasant, free [ἐλευθέριον], and blessedly happy, and he follows it for as long as he lives. (561a4-b5)

This passage indicates the importance of order and necessity in the city.<sup>71</sup> In the ideal city, all activity is directed towards instantiating the Good by employing both order and necessity. Education is carried out in an orderly manner, progressing in difficulty and subject matter. Further, the aim of working towards the Good necessitates that certain actions be carried out in certain ways. Nothing is left to chance in the ideal city. Even the philosophically-minded must play the correct games and follow a fine way of life from early childhood to ensure that they become good (558b1-c1).

Democracy, on the other hand, ignores such minutiae, ultimately at its own peril, in Plato's view. For the budding anarchy in democracy leaves it ripe for tyranny.

However, the democrat's life is not entirely lawless, since he enjoys the oligarchic and the more hedonistic life each in moderation (572c9-10). Neither can the democrat's life

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<sup>71</sup> Compare also *Gorgias* 491e1-494a6.

be described as slavish, for he does not devote himself to any one idea or activity fully. Thus, the democrat is moderate in his indulgences, at the expense of indulging in the search for truth fully. Plato paints this as a natural consequence of living in a democracy that values equality. Just as all citizen-rulers are of equal status, so are the various interests and desires within each individual. Yet, Plato aims to show that if no one principle rules city or citizen, there is anarchy. Although the democrat says that equality and freedom rule democracy, in fact, these values on their own merely foster the rule of the lower soul's unnecessary desires if they are not grounded in an ethical system. These desires tend to take over if left unchecked without any moral guidance.<sup>72</sup>

Hence, the worst danger of the democratic system is that it ends up being directed by the lowest desires of the majority. It is these desires that are dominant within democratic citizens (559c9-10; 564d7-8). The majority of citizens will be dominated by the lowest, appetitive soul-part, as is natural for the largest proportion of the population.<sup>73</sup> As such, the decisions of the city council will reflect those values, neglecting the values of the spirited and reasoning elements of the soul, which make up increasingly smaller proportions of society, respectively. Thus, government decisions will not be based on reason and the ultimate Good but on the majority of base viewpoints. Plato describes the impact of the mob psychology that he judges to be present in democracy on an educated person, as follows:

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<sup>72</sup> See 606d1-5.

<sup>73</sup> “The people—those who work with their own hands—are the third class. They take no part in politics and have few possessions, but, when they are assembled, they are the largest and most powerful class in a democracy” (564e14-565a3).

When many of them are sitting together in assemblies, courts, theaters, army camps, or in some other public gathering of the crowd, they object very loudly and excessively to some of the things that are said or done and approve others in the same way, shouting and clapping, so that the very rocks and surroundings echo the din of their praise or blame and double it. In circumstances like that, what is the effect, as they say, on a young person's heart? What private training can hold out and not be swept away by that kind of praise or blame and be carried by the flood wherever it goes, so that he'll say that the same things are beautiful or ugly as the crowd does, follow the same way of life as they do, and be the same sort of person as they are? (492b4-c7)

More worrisome for Plato is his belief that a person with a philosophical nature growing up in the unsuitable environment of mob rule fares worse than the ordinary person (491d6-7). In such an environment the philosophically inclined "will develop in quite the opposite way,<sup>74</sup> unless some god happens to come to its rescue" (492a3-4).<sup>75</sup>

All of Plato's criticisms of democratic freedom are directed towards its principle of equality. This principle of equality of citizens in shared governance trickles down to all facets of life, from the way individuals live their lives to their internal psychologies. Presumed equality in the right of all citizens to govern entails the tolerance of other ways of life. Plato sees this tolerance as anathema to moral education. For the privileging of

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<sup>74</sup> i.e. tyranny.

<sup>75</sup> We can assume that Socrates was a recipient of such divine intervention.

one way of life undermines the value of other ways of life. Thus, the ultimate criticism of democratic freedom is that it is amoral. In opposition to this, Plato, seeks to infuse his own concept of freedom with the ethical content of the form of the Good, which is grounded in knowledge.

### **c. The Tyrant's Freedom**

One threat that democracy poses, in Plato's view, is that it easily lapses into tyranny. Thus, in a sense, his discussion of tyranny can be viewed as a continuation of the criticisms of democracy, aimed at swaying democrats more than would-be tyrants. Democracy's proximity to tyranny in Plato's political devolutionary scheme is meant as a final blow to the democratic principles of equality, tolerance, and the resulting lawlessness of democratic society. By showing democracy as one step away from tyranny, perhaps Plato hopes to shock democrats into recognizing that their system of governance allows the lowest desires to rule, undisciplined. However, Plato's stinging critiques of democracy and tyranny leave the door open to freedom conceived of in a new way. Plato's treatment of tyranny in the *Republic* solidifies the case that he is putting forward a new, ethical concept of freedom and that his hostility is directed towards what he considers false and inadequate conceptions of freedom, not freedom in toto.

### **i. Callicles' Tyranny in the *Gorgias***

With the character of Callicles in the *Gorgias*, Plato introduces the immoralist<sup>76</sup> view of freedom which appears again in the *Republic*. This view of freedom is the

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<sup>76</sup> Kahn 1998, 39 terms it anti-moralist. See also Taylor 1956, 266.

ultimate foil to Plato's philosophical freedom.<sup>77</sup> Callicles uses the *nomos-physis* distinction<sup>78</sup> to argue that the weak have defined justice in their favor so that all may have a fair share, while in nature justice is "for the better man and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and less capable man" (*Gorgias* 483d1-3). Hence, these "better", intelligent men should rule the city (*Gorgias* 491d1-3). In order to counter these claims, Socrates introduces an introspective definition of freedom: "being self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself" (*Gorgias* 491d11-e2).<sup>79</sup> However, Callicles calls men who act in such a way stupid. Instead, Callicles argues,

the man who'll live correctly ought to allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them. And when they are as large as possible, he ought to be competent to devote himself to them by virtue of his bravery and intelligence, and to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite for at the time. (491e9-492a4)

Callicles' summary of his own argument confirms that he is putting forward an assessment of freedom: "wantonness, lack of discipline, and freedom [ἐλευθερία], if available in good supply, are excellence and happiness" (*Gorgias* 492c4-5). Socrates counters Callicles' praise of insatiable appetite with the image of the soul as a sieve and the appetitive part as a leaky jar (*Gorgias* 493a1-c3). He extends the analogy to include the maintenance and filling of one's jars only as much as required to keep them satiated. In contrast, Socrates describes Callicles' undisciplined man: "his containers are leaky

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<sup>77</sup> Voegelin 1957, 31 notes that Callicles inverts and vulgarizes Socrates' arguments in the *Gorgias*.

<sup>78</sup> For more on the origins of this debate see Heinemann 1945, Guthrie 1969, and Kerferd 1981.

<sup>79</sup> This notion corresponds to Berlin's notion of positive freedom (1958, 16).

and rotten. He's forced to keep on filling them, day and night, or else he suffers extreme pain" (*Gorgias* 493e7-494a2). Callicles eventually accepts Socrates' distinction between good and bad pleasures, thus surrendering to Socrates. However, Callicles' view remains a challenge both to conventional morality exemplified by Cephalus, and to the moral freedom that Plato wishes to argue for. It is only in the *Republic*, when he enlists the tripartite psychology that Plato more fully develops a response to the immoralist views of Callicles.<sup>80</sup>

## ii. Tyranny in the *Republic*

The specter of the tyrant is present from the start of the *Republic*. Witness Polemarchus jokingly threatening Socrates: "you must either prove stronger [κρείττους]<sup>81</sup> than we are, or you will have to stay here" (327c9-10). When Socrates suggests the alternative of him persuading the group to release him, Polemarchus rejects this option: "But could you persuade [πειῶσαι], if we won't listen?" (327c12) In this first scene, Polemarchus is modeling what we might call the tyrant's conception of justice as someone who disregards the sway of reason in favor of whichever desire arises in him at that moment. Polemarchus' exhibits the urge to dominate, a tendency that can in an unjust state into tyrannical pathology. This tyrant's conception of freedom is the absolute power to fulfill all of his desires at any time. Thrasymachus and Glaucon each champion the tyrant's freedom in Books 1 and 2.

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<sup>80</sup> However, the champion of the immoralist view in the *Republic*, Thrasymachus, offers a lesser version of Callicles' argument. See Williams 2006, 36n18.

<sup>81</sup> κρείττους may also mean 'better', as Shorey 1969 translates it.

### iii. Thrasymachus

Thrasymachus shifts the discussion towards a definition of freedom based upon power and wealth gained dishonestly. He defines justice by focussing solely on the desires of the agent, which he describes as “the advantage of the stronger” (338c1-2). By way of explanation Thrasymachus brings up various government constitutions to show that justice is simply “the advantage of the established rule” (338e5). Thus, the established ruling powers label activities that benefit themselves as just irrespective of the consequences for their subjects. This position may be termed narrow egoism, in that the care of others is entirely instrumental towards achieving one’s own benefit.<sup>82</sup> Socrates attacks this narrow egoism by suggesting that concern for others motivates rulers’ actions, not their own concerns. He argues that those in positions of rule seek what is advantageous for their subjects, not themselves (342e).

Reversing conventional attributions of justice and injustice, Thrasymachus argues that the unjust life is the best life to live. In his view, tyranny is the complete expression of injustice and the happiest possible life (344a5-6). Further, he associates tyrannical rule with freedom explicitly: “injustice, if it is on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer [ἐλευθεριώτερον], and more masterly than justice” (344c3-4). Thrasymachus represents the viewpoint that the ultimate freedom is tyranny, the unhampered ability to pursue whatever one desires. Thrasymachan freedom involves subordinating all other individuals and their desires to the tyrant’s whims. Because it lacks any other-regarding

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<sup>82</sup> Following Taylor’s usage of the term (1998, 49-40). Irwin 1977, 255 calls this moral solipsism and contrasts it with moral egocentrism. See also Williams 2006, 39-40.

features this philosophy may be termed immoral.<sup>83</sup> Socrates presents an opposing view of freedom as the ethically-motivated action of a harmonious soul.

However, Socrates does not reject Thrasymachus' conception of freedom as the pursuit of one's desires in general. Rather, he appeals to it. He retorts to Thrasymachus that one cannot accomplish one's goals by being indiscriminately unjust to everyone because the resultant hatred and civil war will prevent the achievement of one's purpose (351d-e). Hence, one would be unfree if one were prevented from pursuing one's desires. Thus, one must benefit some people in order to continue to accomplish one's goals without one's rule being overthrown. In this way, Socrates reintroduces an ethical tone into the conversation by including the treatment of others as important.<sup>84</sup> He thereby introduces virtue into the discussion of injustice (348c2-3). Socrates then applies his political analysis to the individual: "And even in a single individual, [injustice] has the very same effect. First, it makes him incapable of achieving anything, because he is in a state of civil war and not of one mind [οὐχ ὁμονοοῦντα]; second, it makes him his own enemy, as well as the enemy of just people" (352a5-8). Again, Socrates returns to the idea planted by Cephalus, that one may have conflicting desires and that only some desires are authentic to the person and worthy of pursuit.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Following Taylor 1956, 267; Annas 1981, 44 calls it an 'immoralist view'.

<sup>84</sup> As such, he is revisiting Cephalus' definition of justice as giving others their due.

<sup>85</sup> Plato will further elucidate this idea with his introduction of the tripartite psychology in Book 4.

#### iv. Glaucon and Gyges

In Book 2, Glaucon continues Thrasymachus' argument that justice is the advantage of the stronger<sup>86</sup> by proposing his thought experiment about Gyges' ring.<sup>87</sup> The tyrant's concept of freedom is again central to this thought experiment. While introducing his tale, Glaucon refers to freedom: "The freedom [ἐξουσία]<sup>88</sup> I mentioned would be most easily realized if both people had the power [δύναμιν]<sup>89</sup> they say the ancestor of Gyges of Lydia possessed" (359c9-10). Glaucon relates the story of a shepherd who discovers a magic ring that allows him to become invisible to others. Gyges' ring gives people the freedom to pursue their hidden desires because there is no fear of punishment for actions normally deemed unacceptable by society. Taking advantage of the power to act with impunity, Gyges seduces the king's wife, murders the king, and usurps his rule.

Glaucon asks, why be just if it makes one less free? He states that "those who practice justice do it unwillingly [ἄκοντες] and because they lack the power to do injustice" (359b6-c1). Glaucon argues that actions labeled as just are practiced as a means to selfish ends rather than because of the intrinsic worth of justice. Like Thrasymachus, he argues that the life of injustice is better than the life of justice (358b7-c5). He defines freedom as the ability to pursue desires that are conventionally labeled unjust. When

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<sup>86</sup> Glaucon notes that he does not believe this definition of justice, unlike Thrasymachus. Rather, he is acting as the devil's advocate, 358c6-7; 361e1-2.

<sup>87</sup> Shields 2006, 73 suggests that the story can be framed as a proof, arguing for a conclusion using a thought experiment. He speculates that this may be the first thought experiment in the history of philosophy.

<sup>88</sup> ἐξουσία here is a synonym for freedom, also meaning power, authority and license. See Liddell and Scott 1940.

<sup>89</sup> I see δύναμιν as another synonym for freedom used throughout the discussions of Books 1 and 2. Freedom can be seen as the state of having power over one's actions.

allowed to pursue one's desires unhindered, everyone would follow his base desires, according to the thought experiment. In this case, justice hampers one's ability to pursue one's desires. Hence, for him freedom is the ability to do injustice without being harmed oneself.

Glaucon asks whether a just person and an unjust person would both behave in the same way if each was granted the power of invisibility. He maintains that both sorts of people would behave the same way—unjustly. Given the opportunity to do injustice without being held responsible for one's actions by society, even the so-called just would succumb. Justice is only skin deep. People are just simply because they are required to be just by society to avoid punishment and gain rewards. Thus, Gyges, like the tyrant, is truly free because his actions are not constrained by laws or customs. Gyges is able to pursue his desires unhindered. Glaucon argues that anyone in the same situation would pursue his base and unjust desires. The story claims that humans' deepest desires do not accord with their outwardly just behavior so that, given the chance to do whatever they want without consequence, all people would behave unjustly.

The Gyges thought experiment<sup>90</sup> ends with the juxtaposition of two possible lives, the life of the unjust who is thought just and the life of the just man who is presumed unjust. The clandestinely just man “will be whipped, stretched on a rack, chained, blinded with fire, and, at the end, when he has suffered every kind of evil, he'll be impaled” (361e2-5). On the other hand, the secretly unjust man reaps the benefits of justice because of his reputation. By laying out the two possible lives plainly, Glaucon presents Socrates

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<sup>90</sup> Voegelin 1957, 73 labels this a *doxa* about justice as opposed to Platonic *episteme* about justice.

with the difficult task of showing why the life of justice is best in all cases, even when one endures great suffering to be just. Socrates must show that the truly just are better off than the superficially just and that justice is to be valued for its intrinsic worth, rather than its external benefits. For the interlocutors imply that the life of injustice, especially when concealed, is freer, and thereby happier.

#### v. Political Tyranny

In Book 9 of the *Republic*, Plato examines the tyrant again after presenting his metaphysics of the Good in the middle books. As noted above, Plato views tyranny as the inevitable result of democracy's excessive focus on freedom. Democracy's demise comes from its citizens' eventual lawlessness in the face of having no unifying principle. In the end, the citizens "take no notice of the laws, whether written or unwritten, in order to avoid having any master at all" (563d7-8). With a lack of order, the worst elements of society are better able to wrest control of the city. Plato explains this degeneration into tyranny by arguing that "excessive action in one direction usually sets up a reaction in the opposite direction", as evidenced "in seasons, in plants, in bodies, and, last but not least, in constitutions" (563e9-11). Therefore, he says that "extreme freedom [ἄγαν ἐλευθερία] can't be expected to lead to anything but a change to extreme slavery [ἄγαν δουλείαν], whether for a private individual or for a city"<sup>91</sup> (564a3-4). Superficially, the contrast between democracy and tyranny appears to be large. However, Plato also indicates that democracy's decline into tyranny is a natural culmination of democratic

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<sup>91</sup> ". . . the most severe and cruel slavery [δουλεία πλείστη τε καὶ ἀγριωτάτη] from the utmost freedom [τῆς ἀκροτάτης ἐλευθερίας]" (564a7-8).

principles taken to their extreme. In tyranny, the freedom of democracy is concentrated in one person. Hence, tyranny shares many of the same potential towards lawlessness present in democracy.

Plato's analogy of city and soul converges in book 9 as the leadership of the city comes under one man again, as with the philosopher-king. However, the ruler who emerges as a solution to the civil war of the degenerating democracy is shown to be the polar opposite of the benevolent philosopher-ruler. Socrates determines that there is a naturalness to the democratic city supporting a single ruler. For he says that the people are "always in the habit of setting up one man as their special champion, nurturing him and making him great" (565c9-10). Plato warns that it only takes one major act of iniquity to push this man into becoming a tyrant, such as trying another person on false charges and then murdering him.<sup>92</sup>

However, the tyrant begins his reign under the guise of peacemaker by freeing people from debt and redistributing land. Thus, the tyrant aims to maintain a state of civil war against the rich "so that the people will continue to feel the need of a leader" (566e6-7). Further, the wars require war taxes, thereby draining any newly redistributed wealth so that the people become impoverished and focused on their daily needs rather than on plotting against the tyrant. If some "free spirits"<sup>93</sup> [ἐλεύθερα φρονήματα] do not favor his rule, the tyrant will find a way to punish them (567a4-6). Thus, the tyrant is portrayed as the enemy of freedom and Plato identifies tyranny as the removal of the people's freedom.

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<sup>92</sup> 565e5-7. This is an obvious dig at Socrates' trial and conviction.

<sup>93</sup> Shorey 1969 translation.

The tyrant is also taking advantage of disharmony already percolating in the democracy and he is simply deepening the discord. He uses certain factions to gain power. However, given that “the bravest of those who helped to establish his tyranny and who hold positions of power within it speak freely [παρρησιάζεσθαι] with each other and to him, criticizing what’s happening” (567b3-5), the tyrant must eventually purge such men who are “brave, large-minded, knowledgeable, or rich” (567b10-11). Thus, instead of expelling the worst elements, as a healer would, the tyrant must expel the best people and leave the worst in order to preserve his authority. Therefore he frees foreign drones and slaves, his only possible allies, to become his bodyguards. Socrates compares the tyrant’s situation to that of a wealthy slave-owner, who is deposited with his family and slaves in a deserted place, “where no free person could come to his assistance” (578e3-4). The result is that he would “be compelled to fawn on some of his own slaves, promise them lots of things, and free them, even though he didn’t want to . . . And wouldn’t he himself have become a panderer to slaves?” (578e7-579a2). Thus, although the tyrant would seem to have the most power to fulfill his desires, in fact, he must make many concessions in order to placate his allies and to keep his position.

The tyrant is finally recognized as the tyrant that he is when he uses up the city’s resources and is forced to rely upon the people of the city for sustenance, enslaving them completely (568d6-8). Plato compares this to parricide. For the people who had helped to nurture the tyrant into a leader, initially hoping to be freed from the rich, are now “enslaved to their own slave” (569a1). The supposed champion of the people’s freedom has become the people’s slave master. Plato compares the change from democracy to

tyranny by using the terms of freedom and enslavement consistently: “by trying to avoid the [smoke]<sup>94</sup> of enslavement to free men [δουλείας ἐλευθέρων], the people have fallen into the fire of having slaves as their masters, and . . . in the place of that great but inappropriate freedom [ἀκαίρου ἐλευθερίας] they enjoyed under democracy, they have put upon themselves the harshest and most bitter slavery to slaves” (569b7-c3). The term “great but inappropriate freedom” indicates that the freedom experienced in democracy is not the optimum state of freedom.

#### vi. The Psychology of a Tyrant

From his description of the creation of the tyrannical state, Plato turns to the psychology of the tyrant himself. By definition, everyone except the tyrant is a slave to the tyrant in the tyrannical state. However, Plato aims to show that the tyrant, himself, does not experience genuine freedom either. With the discussion of tyranny Plato returns to the main question of the *Republic*: is justice good in itself or merely for its consequences?<sup>95</sup> This question was first broached in Book 2, with the example of Gyges’ ring. The tyrant, although visible in his actions, also acts with impunity because of his complete power over his city.

The tyrant is the paradigm of injustice, so by showing the tyrant to be unhappy Plato confirms the deficiency of injustice. However, what is important for my discussion is that Plato substantiates his argument by using a concept of freedom. In his analysis of democratic psychology, Plato hints at a psychological concept of freedom. Now, with the

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<sup>94</sup> καπνόν, following the literal Shorey translation.

<sup>95</sup> See 358b4-6: “I want to know what justice and injustice are and what power each itself has when it’s by itself in the soul. I want to leave out of account their rewards and what comes from each of them.”

tyrant, concepts of psychological freedom and slavery play a large role in trying to show that the life of the tyrant is unpleasant in reality. In order to analyze the tyrant's individual psychology, Socrates determines that a discussion of desire [ἐπιθυμία] is necessary. Freedom takes on an even more important role in this study of desire.

Socrates recognizes lawlessness in some unnecessary desires and pleasures that are found in the appetitive part of the soul (571b4-5). These desires exist in most people (571b5). However, such desires usually only manifest themselves in sleep, even in the case of the democratic man, the penultimate worst man. A few people are said to have eliminated unnecessary desires entirely, or to have only a few weak desires (571b6-8). However, the tyrant's supporters encourage him to act on his lawless, unnecessary desires calling this 'total freedom' [ἐλευθερία ἅπασαν].<sup>96</sup> Thus, the tyrant begins to grow a "powerful erotic love, like a great winged drone, to be the leader of those idle desires" (572e5-6). As tyranny sets in, the tyrant expels any beliefs or desires that are thought to be good [χρηστάς] or that still have some shame [ἐπαισχυνομένας] so that the lawless desires take over his soul (573b1-3). As a result, the tyrant goes mad because these lawless desires are devoid of rationality.

Plato uses language of slavery when describing the awakening of the lawless desires in the tyrant:

erotic love lives like a tyrant within him, in complete anarchy and lawlessness as his sole ruler, and drives him, as if he were a city, to dare anything and provide sustenance for itself and the unruly mob around it (some of whose members have

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<sup>96</sup> 572d8-9, translation mine.

come in from outside as a result of his keeping bad company, while others have come from within, freed [ἐλευθερωθέντα ] and let loose by his own bad habits).

(574e6-575a5)

Thus, this erotic love becomes the tyrant within the tyrant, taking over his soul so that it drives his actions.<sup>97</sup>

In contrast to democracy's blind equality, tyranny creates an artificial inequality based solely upon the tyrant's power to enslave the population. The tyrant is morally unworthy of his position of power. Because the tyrant is an illegitimate ruler who rules only by force, without the good will of his subjects, the tyrant's freedom is unstable. In fact, Plato claims that the tyrant has the least freedom in the tyrannical city. After his description of the tyrannical state in the *Republic*, Socrates asks Glaucon if such a city is free or enslaved. Glaucon replies, "It is as enslaved as it is possible to be [μάλιστα δούλην]." "Yet," Socrates continues, "you see in it people who are masters and free [ἐν αὐτῇ δεσπότης καὶ ἐλευθέρους]." "I do see a few like that," says Glaucon, "but the whole city, so to speak, and the most decent part of it are wretched, dishonored slaves [δοῦλον]" (577c5-10). Socrates presses the analogy to show his interlocutors that even though it appears as though the tyrant has the most freedom of all, he is psychologically enslaved because the most decent parts of his soul are enslaved, while the small but maddest and most vicious part is his master.<sup>98</sup> The entire soul is said to be enslaved and least likely to pursue its desires, instead being "forcibly driven by the stings of a dronish

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<sup>97</sup> Plato expands upon a more positive channeling of erotic love in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, as I will consider further on.

<sup>98</sup> 577d1-4.

gadfly” (577d11-12). The tyrant is said to be “full of disorder and regret” (577e1). Thus, Plato paints a picture of a tortured tyrant unable to pursue his desires to the fullest because he is experiencing lawlessness and discord within his soul.

Plato determines that a proper assessment of the tyrant’s freedom takes into account his whole soul. An assessment of freedom pertains not simply in whether some aspect of the agent is acting to fulfill his desires, but rather whether the reasoning part of the soul is directing the actions of the soul. Ultimately, we shall see that only the soul ruled by the highest element, reason, is free in this new sense. With these clarifications, Plato is shifting from a more crude form of freedom towards a nuanced, psycho-ethical approach to assessing freedom.

Thus, Plato recognizes that the tyrant is free in the crude sense of having the power to satisfy his base desires. However, these desires are irrational and even contradictory, thereby limiting his freedom to be a rational agent, ultimately. The tyrant’s condition is compared to a kind of prison “filled with fears and erotic loves of all kinds” (579b4-5), “just like an exhausted body without any self-control” (579c7-8). Plato summarizes the tyrant’s lack of freedom as follows:

In truth, then, and whatever some people may think, a real tyrant is really a slave, compelled to engage in the worst kind of fawning, slavery, and pandering to the worst kind of people. He’s so far from satisfying his desires in any way that it is clear—if one happens to know that one must study his whole soul—that he’s in the greatest need of most things and truly poor. And . . . he’s full of fear, convulsions, and pains throughout his life” (579d8-e5).

Thus, Plato also denies the notion that the tyrant has complete political freedom by appealing to his tripartite psychology to show that freedom requires rationality.<sup>99</sup> The irrationality of the lower desires leads to lawless action and instability, which is antithetical to the peace and security that should accompany freedom.

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<sup>99</sup> An element first introduced through Cephalus. See section 2a.

### 3. “Virtue Knows no Master”: Ethical Freedom in the Myth of Er

The Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* presents an intricate interplay between the roles of freedom, responsibility, necessity and chance in its treatment of transmigration of souls, choice of new lives, and posthumous reward and punishment. However, the myth has not always been recognized for its groundbreaking treatment of the problem of freedom.<sup>100</sup> Annas famously calls the myth childish, vulgar and ultimately depressing in what she sees as its indifference to the individual’s fate.<sup>101</sup> Halliwell calls the myth “philosophically incomplete” and concludes that it defies interpretation as truth, fiction or allegory, entirely.<sup>102</sup> I argue that the myth of Er is a key to understanding Plato’s doctrine of freedom. In what is said and what is conspicuously left unsaid, Plato reiterates his argument that the best and freest way to live is the philosophical life.

Through the myth, Socrates tells the story of a man, named Er, who died in a war and was revived after twelve days to be a messenger to human beings.<sup>103</sup> He begins the tale by mentioning that “It isn’t, however, a tale of Alcinous<sup>104</sup> that I’ll tell you but that of a brave Pamphylian man [son of Armenius]<sup>105</sup> called Er” (614b). There may be some

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<sup>100</sup> A recent notable exception to this is Dorter 2003, 132, who calls the myth of Er “the first formulation of the problem of free will.”

<sup>101</sup> Annas 1981, 349 and 1982, 135.

<sup>102</sup> Halliwell 2007, 470-472.

<sup>103</sup> Socrates does not explain why Er, in particular, was chosen to relay the message about the afterlife. Er may have been chosen because warriors slain in battle had a special status in post-Homeric Greece. See Bremmer 1983, 105.

<sup>104</sup> In *Odyssey* IX-XII Odysseus tells King Alcinous of the Phaeacians his adventures, including his descent into Hades. The phrase is proverbial for a long story. See Cornford 1951, 351n1. See also Ward 2002, 70.

<sup>105</sup> Addition from Bloom 1991, 297.

wordplay in effect here that would render the sentence as follows: "It isn't a tale that shows strength of understanding that I'm going to tell but one that shows the strength of the Muse of storytelling."<sup>106</sup> This meaning could imply that the story is not to be taken literally, on account of being a myth. On the other hand, the invocation of the Muse may suggest divine inspiration, giving the myth more credibility.<sup>107</sup>

In the myth, Er travels with the rest of the newly dead to arrive at a "marvellous place" where they encounter souls about to enter new earthly lives.<sup>108</sup> After the dispensing of rewards and punishments, those who will return to earth again for another incarnation take a journey to a column of light from which hangs the spindle of Necessity [ἀνάγκης]. Er is told by the afterlife judges that he was "to be a messenger [ἄγγελον] to human beings about the things that were there." (614d)

Next, the souls arrive at the three Fates, where souls are arranged in order and the lots for choosing one's next life are thrown among them. Each soul picks up the lot that fell next to him to determine the order of choosing. Each person chooses the life "to which he will then be bound by necessity [ἀνάγκης]" (617e1-2). The group is told that they are completely responsible for their choice of life. There are more lives than souls present. Each person, no matter his position in the lottery, will at minimum have the choice of a satisfactory [ἀγαπητός], and not bad [οὐ κακός], life. It is noted that "the

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<sup>106</sup> Grube 1992, 285n24. The word translated by 'brave' is *alkimou*. This word is very similar to *Alkinou*, which is translated into English by the name Alcinous. Grube speculates that *Alkinou* may be a compound of *alke*, meaning strength, and *nous*, meaning understanding. *Alkimou* may be a pun on *Alkinou*, with the compounding of *alke* and *Mousa*, standing for a 'Muse.'

<sup>107</sup> Alternatively, Bloom 1991, 471n13 offers a different rendering of this sentence: "a story of a man not strong of mind, but strong."

<sup>108</sup> This descent into Hades provides symmetry to the beginning of the *Republic*, which began with Socrates' descent to the Piraeus to say a prayer to the Thracian goddess Bendis, an escort to the underworld. See Voegelin 1957, 54. See also Albinus 1998, 91-105; and O'Connor 2007, 55-89.

arrangement of the soul was not included because the soul is inevitably altered by the different lives it chooses” (618b2-4). Thus, the choice of life will determine the arrangement of the soul in that life.

Socrates says that there is an interchange of goods and evils for most souls. Those coming down from heaven are untrained in suffering [πόνων ἀγυμνάστους], in contrast to the souls coming up from the earth. Thus, the souls coming from heaven tend to rush their selections. The souls coming up from below choose more carefully since they wish to avoid the suffering that they have experienced so recently. We are told that “For the most part, their choice depended upon the character<sup>109</sup> [συνήθειαν] of their former life” (620a2).

#### **a. The Tyrant’s ‘Luck’**

Plato bookends his description of the life selection process with two opposing figures. The first soul chooses tyranny, while the final soul chooses a just life. The prominence and order of these choices serve to highlight them as worst and best choices. Both descriptions are relevant to a discussion of Platonic freedom. The first soul that receives the lot to choose his new life represents the crude conception of freedom as the ability to follow any desires unhindered. He has choices of lives “of all kinds” available to him. He has the tyrant’s unbridled power to choose whichever kind of life he wishes, with the option to satisfy any of his desires. It is significant that this first soul to choose makes the worst possible choice—the greatest tyranny. Thus, the Speaker’s speech prior to choosing becomes immediately relevant, and perhaps prophetic: “There is a

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<sup>109</sup> Shorey 1935, 513.

satisfactory [ἀγαπητός] life, rather than a bad one [οὐ κακός] available even for the one who comes last, provided that he chooses it rationally . . . Therefore, let not the first be careless [ἀμελείτω] in his choice nor the last discouraged [ἀθυμείτω]” (619b3-6).<sup>110</sup> Even with this caution the first chooser picks the most ethically repugnant life, while the final chooser, Odysseus, picks a quintessentially just life. Since the former chose without adequate examination [ἀνασκεψάμενον] through folly [ἀφροσύνης] and greed [λαίμαργίας] the soon-to-be-tyrant discovers, after making his choice, that his new life will involve eating his own children (619b8-9).<sup>111</sup> Plato gives a further explanation for the soul’s poor choice: “He was one of those who had come down from heaven, having lived his previous life under an orderly constitution, where he had participated in virtue through habit and without philosophy [ἔθει ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας ἀρετῆς μετεληφότα]” (619c5-7).

Although Er holds the soul responsible for his own choice, the soul attributes his terrible choice to “chance [τύχη], daimons, or guardian spirits, and everything else . . . but himself” (619c3-5). Er reiterates that he ignored the warning about carelessness by the Speaker (619c3), thus confirming that the soul was in fact responsible for his own choice. However, the soul’s addition of chance as a possible cause of his own bad choice is interesting because chance is often used as an explanatory factor within human life. Yet according to the myth, much of what humans put forward as resulting from chance—including life circumstances—is in fact the result of our own choices at some time.

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<sup>110</sup> For more on the Speaker/Prophet see McPherran 2010, 132-146.

<sup>111</sup> This story echoes the tragic character Thyestes, subject of several known tragedies. See Halliwell 2007, 451.

By contrast, a philosopher would have known that choosing to become a tyrant would have terrible consequences, especially for the inner state of the soul. For as Plato shows in Book 9, the tyrant is governed by lawless and unnecessary appetites. As such, the tyrant will behave in lawless and licentious ways. Thus from the philosopher's perspective it is unsurprising that the choice of the tyrant's life might lead to acts such as eating one's children. Tyranny entails the commission of such violent acts. The soul himself only regrets his choice after learning about some of the abhorrent acts he would commit. He did not fully understand the consequences of tyranny, as a philosopher might, and he was overtaken by the riches and power that he would have. The description of his choice as being made in folly and greed suggests both. Thus, by discounting chance as a possible explanation for life circumstances, Plato points to a causal ethical link between the state of the soul, his past experiences, and his choice of new life. Likewise, daimons and guardian spirits should not be blamed for the result of the soul's choice since the Fates state that they too are chosen by the soul (620d7).

When the realization of all aspects of his new life began to sink in, the soon-to-be-tyrant "beat his breast [κόπτεισθαι] and bemoaned his choice" (619c1-3).<sup>112</sup> Plato indicates that regret over hasty decisions is common among many souls (619b7-d2). The first soul's reaction to learning more about his new life is irrational and purely emotional. Instead of using wise calculation to plan how he might mitigate the effect of some of the

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<sup>112</sup> Significantly, this is the same language that Socrates uses just prior to the myth at 606c8-d3 in his criticism of poetry: "When even the best of us hear Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of the heroes sorrowing and making a long lamenting speech or singing and beating his breast [κόπτομένους], you know that we enjoy it, give ourselves up to following it, sympathize with the hero, take his sufferings seriously, and praise as a good poet the one who affects us most in this way." Halliwell 2007, 451 also notes the affinity of the other souls' self-pitying reactions to tragic heroes at 605d, and shows this as a further affront to poetry.

terrible acts on his soul, he simply wallows in his choice. His reaction further strengthens the lower parts of the soul, thus ensuring an even worse life as a tyrant from the ethical standpoint. If he had taken the route advocated by Socrates at 605d6-7 to “keep quiet and master our grief” he would have improved the state of his soul before his foray into the tyrannical life. However, in preparation for the chosen life the soul must be altered so it is driven by the appropriate desires, whether they are appetitive, spirited or philosophical.<sup>113</sup> Tyranny requires strong desires of the unnecessary appetites. The presence of these desires may block the tyrant’s ability to react philosophically to his situation.

The tyrant’s afterlife punishments were mentioned in the myth before the first soul chooses, so the reader knows what the end result of this choice will be. Tyrants are shown to suffer in the afterlife in addition to suffering for their actions in life. The latter point was made in Book 9 by arguing that the soul of the tyrant comes to be ruled by lawless and unnecessary desires, making him a prisoner of his own appetites (577d). As I showed above in the section on tyrants, they embody the crude conception of freedom as unconstrained choice. Here, again, Plato uses the tyrant as an extreme example of freedom misconstrued. The myth confirms the terrible consequences of holding the wrong beliefs about freedom. The tyrant’s belief that freedom is unrestrained submission to the desires of one’s lower soul leads to terrible consequences that further enslave the tyrant to his lower desires rather than making the soul more free. The philosopher fares better in the afterlife as well as in embodied life by holding to his rationality and retaining control over his actions.

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<sup>113</sup> See Dorter 2003, 131.

Plato acknowledges that a person may live a virtuous life through habit and compulsion to obey laws. Such a person will be rewarded in the afterlife for living a virtuous life (619c5-7). However, the myth confirms the view stated earlier in the *Republic* that it is best to be self-governing so that one moderates one's choices oneself, instead of having one's activities regulated from without through laws, customs, or habits (590d2-4).<sup>114</sup> The first soul choosing illustrates the latter deficient form of virtue. For he lived a life of virtue through habit but without philosophy (619c6-7). This soul is rewarded in the afterlife for his virtuous behavior. However, living the life of virtue through habit does not stand the soul in good stead for choosing the next life because he does not fully understand the value of living a life of virtue. He lived virtuously due to the external incentives of reward and avoidance of punishment by abiding by the laws of his city. Therefore, he did not have a rational understanding of virtue and its intrinsic value. Hence, this soul ends up choosing to become a tyrant in the next life because he is charmed by the tyrant's absolute ability to follow any of his desires.

Plato seeks to show that his hedonistic focus on pursuing desires fails to recognize that only some of the soul's desires are worthy of pursuit. The pursuit of the reasoning part's desires should be the focus of the soul. Thus, Plato wishes to introduce an ethical element into the concept of freedom. In this revised concept of freedom one is free when pursuing the desires of the highest part of the soul, so that the reasoning part rules the soul. Plato sees these as the true desires of the soul, but also as the appropriate desires one should have. Thus, Platonic freedom is a normative concept.

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<sup>114</sup> Slavish virtue is discussed in *Phaedo* 68c5-69c; see also Irwin 1995, 194-195.

### **b. Odysseus' Choice**

The very last soul to choose in the selection of new lives is Odysseus'. Odysseus is poised to represent wise choice in the afterlife. His choice is contrasted with all the other choices in that it embodies Plato's ideal use of reason. Odysseus' process of life selection is described as follows:

. . . since memory of [his soul's] former sufferings had relieved [λελωφηκυῖαν] its love of honor [φιλοτιμίᾳς], it went around for a long time, looking for the life of a private individual who did his own work, and with difficulty it found one lying off somewhere neglected by the others. He chose it gladly and said that he'd have made the same choice even if he'd been first. (620c3-d1)

Odysseus' choice emphasizes the point made twice in the myth that there are more model lives to be chosen than souls to choose them (617e9-618a1, 619b3-6). This underscores the souls' choice of lives as unconstrained by external factors. For if there were an equal number of souls and life choices, the later choices would be severely limited and the final choice would be determined as there would only be one life left to "choose". Thus, even though Odysseus receives the last lot, he makes a prudent and happy choice. He takes his time to consider the remaining options and persists until he finds a suitable life. His full satisfaction of his former desire for honor in his previous incarnation now permits his rational soul to guide his decision-making. Now reason, rather than love of honor, drives his choice, allowing for truly free choice since the rational element of the soul is the soul's natural ruler (441e3). When the rational element is in its natural place as ruler of the soul, the chooser is able to choose freely, without the impediment of the lower soul's

desires. Thus, he is able to act in line with the rational part's desires, which are aligned with the Good. Choosing well is thereby equated with choosing rationally.

Indeed, the Speaker emphasizes rationality when he tells the souls that they all, even the last to choose, will find a satisfactory life if they “choose it rationally and live it seriously [νῶν ἐλομένῳ, συντόνως ζῶντι]” (619b4-5). Thus, a first hurdle is overcome by making a rational choice. However, the second hurdle is overcome by *living* the life seriously. Hence care must be taken in the choice of life, but also in the *living* of the chosen life. This second necessary condition precludes determinism or fatalism because it implies that souls retain some choice in how they live out the life they are born into. Thus, there are some pre-determined components of life, such as major life events, profession, and family. As was discussed with the first soul's choice of tyranny, some life events that are thought of as choices are in fact predetermined by the soul's choices, according to the myth. However, souls maintain flexibility in other aspects of life. Hence, the myth shows a connection between afterlife decision-making and choices made during life. This makes the myth immediately applicable to its readers, whose current choices can prepare the soul for its afterlife decisions.

The myth states that external and material circumstances such as wealth, health and ancestry are part of the life models. However, the arrangement of the soul is not included in the choice because the soul itself is altered by whichever life it chooses. If the soul were included in the choice, this would pose a problem for the already tenuous sense of personhood for the entity choosing because the old soul would be replaced entirely by the new soul. Additionally, it would raise the question of where the old soul goes,

especially since Platonic souls are eternal. The fact that the choice of new life has an immediate impact on the soul's makeup allows for some continuity of the person and for the new choice to be part of the history of previous choices already making up the person's soul. However, it is odd that Plato only mentions recall of the previous life or even only the previous afterlife experience of reward and punishment. Non-philosophical souls are depicted as having relatively short memories even though they have had many previous lives and afterlife interludes.

Odysseus' past life plays a part in his choice of a private life. His story depicts the use of past experiences in a reflective, rational way as opposed to making choices with a focus on avoiding past painful or pleasurable experiences, as many of the other souls do. The hedonistic approach of most souls will cause souls to regress, in effect, by choosing lives that will hamper the practice of virtue. All of the other life choice examples that Plato gives in the myth are of this sort.<sup>115</sup> These "pitiful, funny and surprising" scenes of souls choosing hedonistically suggest that Plato is criticizing traditional eschatology's heavy focus on reward and punishment.<sup>116</sup>

Odysseus represents the ideal chooser because he makes his choice by employing the rational, best part of his soul. His choice of "a private individual who did his own work" (620c5) exemplifies Plato's earlier description of noble, philosophical people who "lead a quiet life and do their own work" (469d5). This also matches the description of justice earlier on as "doing one's own work and not meddling with what isn't one's own"

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<sup>115</sup> For instance, Agamemnon chooses the life of an eagle because he has come to hate the human race for the suffering it inflicted on him, or the musical Thamyris chooses to become a nightingale which presumably would enable him to sing, 620b2-4, a6-7. Animal lives, in particular, seem to be extremely poor life choices because animals cannot practice philosophy and rank lower than human souls.

<sup>116</sup> This point will be discussed further on in the section 3c.

(433a8-9). Odysseus illustrates that the life devoted to honor and heroism does not lead to happiness. Given the opportunity to choose such a life again, Odysseus decides differently and is happy with his choice. The suffering Odysseus experienced in his previous life relieved him of his honor-love and taught him the value of the life of a private individual who does his own work.<sup>117</sup> Odysseus' story may also be meant to show that love of honor must be spent before it can be subdued fully.<sup>118</sup> His soul seems to be progressing according to its natural order, from second-best spiritedness towards the philosophical life. Odysseus, like Er, has lived a spirited life that now allows him to be receptive to philosophy.

Overall, the function of Odysseus in the myth may be to indicate that the myth is a philosophical revision of the *Odyssey*, where the perilous quest for home is replaced by the immortal soul's quest for eternal happiness.<sup>119</sup> Odysseus's new destination is wisdom. However, it is odd that Plato does not mention philosophy in his description of the model life chosen by Odysseus, even though we can infer that this is a philosophical choice by the description of Odysseus's manner of choosing his life. Odysseus knew in advance the type of life he wanted—"the life of a private individual who did his own work." His determination to find this life corresponds to Socrates' prescription for choosing a good life:

each of us must . . . be most concerned to seek out and learn those [subjects] that will enable him to distinguish the good life from the bad and always to make the best choice possible in every situation . . . And from all this he will be able, by

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<sup>117</sup> Bloom 1991, 436; Johnson 1999, 10.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. *Phaedrus* 254e6-9.

<sup>119</sup> On the Odyssean motifs in the myth, see O'Connor 2007, 55-89, and Halliwell 2007, 447.

considering the nature of the soul, to reason out which life is better and which worse and to choose accordingly, calling a life worse if it leads the soul to become more unjust, better if it leads the soul to become more just, and ignoring everything else . . . Hence, we must go down to Hades holding with adamant determination to the belief that this is so, lest we be dazzled there by wealth and other such evils, rush into tyranny or some other similar course of action, do irreparable evils, and suffer even worse ones . . . This is the way that a human being becomes happiest. (618b8-619b1)

Odysseus deftly avoids the pitfalls of the other souls by aiming for a fulfilling life by persevering until he finds it, without allowing himself to be distracted by all the other life models before him. Further, he exemplifies the freedom of reason ruling the soul in line with the Good. For in order to remain true to his decision to choose a just life, he has subdued the influence of the other two parts of the soul so that he may cling to his decision “with adamant determination.” The other souls’ choices are driven by their lower souls’ desires. Plato does not state that Odysseus has studied philosophy. However, it seems to be implied that one must undergo such study or reflection to be able to choose well, as Odysseus does. In addition, Odysseus has been exposed to many types of lives throughout his vast travels, an important factor that conforms to Socrates’ prescription for choosing the good life, above. Memory of his previous suffering (620c3) also plays a role in his choice.

There are no philosophers mentioned explicitly in the lineup of souls choosing. One reason may be that philosophers escape the cycle of rebirth ultimately if they

continue to pursue philosophy.<sup>120</sup> A second possibility is that Odysseus is meant to represent the beginning of the philosophical path once spirit has been subdued or spent.<sup>121</sup> Odysseus may simply be symbolic of the choices requisite for philosophical ascent to the Good, without being a literal representation of the actual steps required for ascent. It is significant that Odysseus is the only soul who is mentioned as happy with the new life that he has chosen, especially considering that he was the last soul to choose.<sup>122</sup> The wise choice of Odysseus stands up to later scrutiny, while the poor choices of the slavishly virtuous do not.

### **c. Reward, Punishment and Responsibility**

The myth of Er confirms the value of the just life by including the afterlife rewards of the just. One purpose of the myth is to convey the “prizes, wages and gifts” that the just receive in the afterlife (613e5-614a6). Er learns that the unjust are punished “ten times over”, while the just are “rewarded according to the same scale” (615a-b). Thus, the myth is a philosophical revision of childhood stories about afterlife punishment and reward that are alluded to in Book 1 by Cephalus.<sup>123</sup> The myth can be seen as a critique of traditional eschatologies which focus on reward and punishment as inducements to good behavior.<sup>124</sup> Although reward and punishment are mentioned in the

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<sup>120</sup> See *Phaedrus* 114c4-5: “Those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live in the future altogether without a body.”

<sup>121</sup> Bloom 1991, 435.

<sup>122</sup> Johnson 1999, 10.

<sup>123</sup> 330d4-331a1.

<sup>124</sup> Halliwell 2007, 448 suggests the myth as a “philosophical recomposition, not an outright rejection, of poetry.”

myth, they are not the focus.<sup>125</sup> The Er myth emphasizes that the philosopher's main goal should not be the pursuit of rewards and avoidance of punishment, but rather the care of the soul. Care of the soul entails always seeking out the Forms, or situating oneself so that one may best understand the Forms, which are the ultimate reality and truth. The philosopher must continue philosophizing after death in order to make the best possible choice of future lives. This continued philosophical activity in the afterlife in turn supports the rational part's rightful dominance of the soul. Through reason's wise choices the soul will be able to study philosophy in the future. Heaven is no place for resting on past philosophical achievements. The philosopher must continue to pursue the truth actively in order to ensure continued safety for the soul.

The myth makes clear that the choosing soul alone is to be held responsible for its choice of life: "The responsibility [αἰτία] lies with the one who makes the choice; the god has none [θεός ἀναίτιος]" (617e3-4). Thus, Plato states explicitly that the gods are not responsible for the souls' choices. However, the absence of divine influence on the choice does not necessarily make the choice free for Plato. Rather, the choice is determined by whichever part of the soul is most dominant, by how large a role reason plays, by the values of the soul, with regard to past experiences and knowledge of how specific lifestyles affect the soul. All of these elements influencing the soul's choice make the soul responsible for its choices because they causally connect past events to the soul's future events. Thus, the soul deserves whichever new life it chooses based upon its current composition. The life selection reveals the values of the soul at the time of

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<sup>125</sup> See Morgan 1990, 150; see also Ferrari 2009, 126, and Bussanich 2010, 297.

choosing, particularly whether it values conditions conducive to practicing philosophy. For instance, the choice to become an animal will immediately preclude the possibility of practicing philosophy, and would embolden the appetitive part of the soul. Hence, Socrates implores his interlocutors to focus their learning on subjects that will allow them to distinguish the good life from the bad at any point in time.

However, for most souls, who are also not philosophers, the choice of a new life is not an expression of the truest self, which is the rational part of the soul (611d). Most souls operate to fulfill the desires of spirit or appetite. Thus, in a crude sense their choices are free because they are not hindered by any forces outside of themselves. However, from the point of view of Platonic psychology, most souls are not free because the reasoning part is subservient to the lower soul's desires. Thus, the bondage comes from the soul's own improper ordering, which again is a result of the way the soul has lived out his life, as well as his choice of that life prior to incarnation. Hence, we are told that "the arrangement of the soul was not included because the soul is inevitably altered by the different lives it chooses" (618b2-4). The relationship between the choices that the soul makes and the soul's arrangement is one of causal determinism. For specific actions create specific changes in the soul's composition. Thus, since a form of determinism is present alongside Plato's concept of freedom, he can be properly labeled a compatibilist.<sup>126</sup>

The myth of Er shows that individual souls possess continuity between lifetimes. The souls depicted retain their experiences of life just lived and use these experiences in

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<sup>126</sup> See Dorter 2003, 138.

choosing the subsequent life. The experiences and choices in life affect the choice of the next life and the opportunities within that next life.<sup>127</sup> Even though the outward appearance and circumstances may change drastically from one life to the next, the soul's makeup is constantly evolving, while at the same time it is united from one experience or life to the next. However, the soul does not remember anything prior to its birth if it drinks too much from the River of Unheeding before being born again.

Thayer asserts that there is no "living link" between the succession of lives of a particular soul.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, Annas expresses concern that souls suffer the consequences for behavior in past lives that they cannot remember.<sup>129</sup> While I agree that there is generally no memory of what has occurred before birth, there is a link between the immediate past life and the soul choosing in the afterlife. The point of Plato's story of transmigration of souls is that one's choices have consequences, sometimes very long-lasting and damning consequences. The corollary that the reader is to draw is that all choices are important determinants of one's future, whether the choice is made in life or in the afterlife. The myth highlights Plato's contention that choosing to study and live a philosophical life is beneficial to one's future psychological well-being, in this life and beyond.<sup>130</sup> Further, the fact that souls do not remember previous lives after birth speaks to the interconnectedness of all souls in the universe. Just because the present "I" will not be remembered as the "I" of the next life, this does not give me permission to bungle my

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<sup>127</sup> Socrates compares the soul to the sea god Glaucus, encrusted with the trappings of bodily desires (611b8-612a6).

<sup>128</sup> Thayer 1988, 378.

<sup>129</sup> Annas 1982, 132.

<sup>130</sup> This is in addition to being intrinsically valuable, as is illustrated in the parable of the cave and the analogy of the sun.

choice of future life. Even if I will not recall that I made the choice to become a tyrant in this life, I will still be gravely affected by that choice made in the afterlife, just as the men that I will enslave as a tyrant will be affected negatively by my actions, though they are separate entities from me. Plato's point is that all actions are choices and they matter to our own souls and to other souls.

#### **d. Immortality and the Tripartite Soul**

The non-philosophical souls in the myth display traits of the spirited and appetitive souls in the afterlife. They use reason solely to calculate how to achieve the desires of these lower parts of the soul. Hence, Plato's portrayal of the afterlife in the myth suggests that the lower parts of the soul can survive physical death, along with the reasoning part. This squares with the tripartite image used for disembodied souls in the eschatological myth of the *Phaedrus*.<sup>131</sup> However, the *Timaeus* offers a more complex picture of the soul. It states that there are mortal and immortal parts of the soul (69c8-9). This description has produced controversy about how the mortal and immortal soul parts are paired with the body.<sup>132</sup> Further, some take the *Timaeus* passage as proof of Plato's developmentalism,<sup>133</sup> while others argue that it is consistent with his earlier views.<sup>134</sup>

Perhaps the discrepancies between the *Timaeus* on the one hand and the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* on the other can be resolved by consideration of the term 'mortal'

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<sup>131</sup> References to souls having lower desires are also present in two other eschatological myths. See *Phaedo* 81b1-c4 and *Gorgias* 524d1-525a9. The *Phaedrus* myth and its implications for tripartite immortality is discussed in a following chapter.

<sup>132</sup> Frutiger 1976, 92 argues that the mortal soul does not make it into the afterlife, although it will leave 'scars' of embodiment on the soul. See also Gerson 2003, 129. Robinson 1990, 103-104 argues for the continuation of the lower soul after death.

<sup>133</sup> Bett 1994, 3-36; Bobonich 1994, 3-36.

<sup>134</sup> Hall 1963, 63-82; Gerson 1987, 81-96.

[θνητός] which is applied to the lower soul parts. The human soul is created with a mortal element so as to distinguish it from the gods, whose souls are entirely immortal. However, the mortality of the lower soul may not coincide with the mortality of the human being.<sup>135</sup> Plato may have seen the mortal soul as persisting until the eventual release from the cycles of death and rebirth.<sup>136</sup> In this way, the lower soul is labeled mortal in the sense of being liable to death, even though this death may not coincide with the biological death of the human being.<sup>137</sup> In such a scheme, the individual would retain his lower soul in the afterlife until its potential release. This explains the actions of souls in the *Republic* myth, which exemplify the proclivities of the lower soul. This interpretation of the soul's mortality also explains the use of reward and punishment for souls in the afterlife. For the philosophical soul will not be greatly affected by reward or punishment. Souls with overdeveloped spirit or appetite will respond most strongly to reward and punishment. Hence, reward and punishment is part of a system most applicable to these latter types of souls.

#### e. Freedom and Virtue

The traditional system of eschatological reward and punishment is not based upon discerning virtuous intention, but only virtuous action. Thus, the first soul choosing was rewarded in the afterlife because he was virtuous, irrespective of the reason why he

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<sup>135</sup> Guthrie 1975, 423.

<sup>136</sup> See *Phaedo* 69c, 81a4-6, 82b10, 114c1-6; *Phaedrus* 249a1-5; *Republic* 519c, 540b. For more on this topic see Bussanich 2010, 293, 308-9.

<sup>137</sup> Robinson 1990, 103-104 raises the possibility that the tripartite soul could be everlasting by the grace of the Demiurge, but not immortal. However, he persists in also arguing that no part of the soul can escape the cycle of rebirth, an addition which does not account for the special status of the reasoning part.

behaved this way.<sup>138</sup> On the face of it this soul's fate smacks of cosmic cruelty, as commentators have noted.<sup>139</sup> Why does the universe allow a soul to be rewarded for just behavior, but then be vulnerable to making a poor choice of life? Plato's message seems to be that hedonistic external rewards, even the heavenly rewards of traditional eschatology, are in some sense meaningless and do not contribute to the soul's well-being. In fact, such rewards can hinder future just behavior.<sup>140</sup> However, this perspective does give a negative view of divine reward and punishment. This cosmos is purely consequentialist and disregards character, intention and the composition of the soul. Perhaps this depiction of reward and punishment is part of Plato's overarching critique of traditional religion.

The myth of Er sets up two parallel tracks of ethical systems: the consequentialist cosmic system of reward and punishment and the virtue ethics of the Good. It is only through the latter that one may attain lasting freedom. The ethical component of Platonic freedom is expressed in the statement by the Speaker before the souls choose their lives. He says, "Virtue knows no master; each will possess it to a greater or less degree, depending on whether he values it or disdains it. The responsibility lies with the one who makes the choice; the god has none" (617e2-4). It is through choosing virtue that one gains freedom. By grounding one's choices in virtue, with a full understanding of virtue, one escapes the vicissitudes of a life lived for reward and avoidance of punishment. For the focus of the consequentialist ethics depicted is attainment of pleasure, which is a

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<sup>138</sup> One wonders whether a person with virtuous intentions would be punished for a non-virtuous action by the gods of traditional religion postmortem. It seems that he would be.

<sup>139</sup> Annas 1981, 351-2.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Phaedo* 82a-b. See Halliwell 2007, 452.

transient good, whereas the focus of Plato's virtue ethics is the instantiation of the Good through action, which provides lasting good.

Talk of the Forms themselves is conspicuously absent in the myth. Plato spends time describing astonishing Pythagorean-laced scenes of the inner workings of the universe. Interestingly, these scenes focus heavily on the personification of Necessity in the cosmos and the actions of the Fates. All of this deterministic talk precedes the selection of lives, which marks the opportunity for souls to make use of their rationality to freely choose their subsequent lives. However, most souls do not exercise their rational freedom due to the pressures of their undisciplined lower desires. Thus, the lack of mention of Forms in the myth befits the fact that most souls are unphilosophical.

#### **f. The Moral of the Myth**

Socrates' explicit purpose in telling the Myth of Er is to convince his friends that the benefits of being just gained after death, in addition to those received during life, outweigh the advantages of being unjust. However, the example of the first chooser distinguishes between just action undertaken because of an understanding of its intrinsic value and just action carried out with ignorance of the value of justice. Thus, Bloom takes one sense of the Myth of Er to be merely reiterating the message of the rest of the work about the necessity and superiority of philosophy.<sup>141</sup> For the philosopher ends up in closest proximity to the Forms both in life and in the afterlife, even though the Forms are

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<sup>141</sup> Bloom 1991, 435.

not mentioned in this particular myth.<sup>142</sup> Further, the philosopher's rationality protects her from making poor choices that would negatively affect her in the future.

At the end of the myth, and the end of *The Republic*, Socrates gives a further indication of his intention in telling the myth:

And so, Glaucon, [Er's] story wasn't lost but preserved, and it would save us, if we were persuaded by it, for we would then make a good crossing of the River of Forgetfulness, and our souls wouldn't be defiled. But if we are persuaded by me, we'll believe that the soul is immortal and able to endure every evil and every good, and we'll always hold to the upward path, practicing justice and reason in every way. (621b-c)

The first scenario mentioned here suggests that the myth provides a blueprint for making a good crossing of the River of Heedlessness. By heeding the gravity of the punishments and the caution that we may lose some of our knowledge<sup>143</sup> gained in the afterlife by drinking from the river, we may resist drinking too much and thus remember more.

Although retention of knowledge is implied by this interpretation, this is a consequentialist interpretation of the myth that is more akin to the virtuous action by habit of the first soul choosing. For one would act in a way to avoid defiling the soul and to make a good crossing essentially to avoid pain of punishment.

The second scenario's focus on being persuaded by argument suggests a more philosophical understanding of the afterlife. Heeding Socrates' arguments throughout the *Republic* yields one eternal protection through all life and death cycles. For, on the one

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<sup>142</sup> The *Phaedrus* myth mentions the Forms in the afterlife, explicitly. E.g. 247c3-e5.

<sup>143</sup> We can infer that it is possible to gain knowledge of the Forms in the afterlife through the *Phaedrus* myth, e.g. 247d6-e3.

hand, the simple recognition of the immortality of the soul enables one to hold a big-picture, cosmic view of any situation, giving one the knowledge that any unpleasant situation is impermanent and that any enjoyable circumstances will likely be subject to change in the future. This knowledge of the fluctuations of pleasure and pain steels the philosopher from allowing avoidance of pain and pursuance of pleasure to drive her actions. Instead, the philosopher can focus on knowing the Forms through living justly with an understanding of the intrinsic worth of justice and ultimately the Good.<sup>144</sup> Thus, I interpret the above passage as suggesting two paths of virtue: virtue imposed from without (through threat of punishment) and philosophical virtue pursued for its own sake. These two paths are the only paths available if the just city outlined in the *Republic* comes into effect.

#### **g. Choice**

Socrates uses the idea of choosing one's next life to highlight the importance of the study of the good life as a science,<sup>145</sup> so that we may know how each factor presented will impact one's life:

each of us must neglect all other subjects and be most concerned to seek out and learn those that will enable him to distinguish the good life from the bad and always to make the best choice possible in every situation. He should think over all the things we have mentioned and how they jointly and severally determine what the virtuous life is like. That way he will know what the good and bad

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<sup>144</sup> This echoes Socrates' statements in the *Apology* that wealth and reward are the least important things, while virtue is the most important at 38a4.

<sup>145</sup> See Thayer 1988, 370.

effects of beauty are when it is mixed with wealth, poverty, and a particular state of the soul. He will know the effects of high or low birth, private life or ruling office, physical strength or weaknesses, ease or difficulty in learning, and all the things that are either naturally part of the soul or are acquired, and he will know what they achieve when mixed with one another. And from all this he will be able, by considering the nature of the soul, to reason out which life is better and which worse and to choose accordingly, calling a life worse if it leads the soul to become more unjust, better if it leads the soul to become more just, and ignoring everything else: We have seen that this is the best way to choose, whether in life or death. (618b8-e3)

The final line of this passage tells us that Socrates intends the myth to apply to embodied life as well as to the afterlife. Thus, philosophical study of the virtuous life will help a soul initially to choose a good life in the afterworld, but the knowledge gained can be applied immediately in the current life, as well. Just as the macroscopic view of the city encouraged a radical shift in government in line with the truth, so too on the more microscopic human scale Plato is encouraging radical change if it will bring souls closer to the truth. Socrates' own life is an example of single-mindedly following wisdom wherever the search for wisdom takes you, regardless of any pain endured.

The description of transmigration of souls, so prominent in the myth, provides a symbolic rebirth for the reader who lives through an inter-life cycle as she reads the myth. In experiencing the journey of the soul the reader also experiences the purification that happens after death, thus allowing her to begin her life afresh after her encounter

with the *Republic*.<sup>146</sup> The reader is allowed to clean her slate of her past actions in the current life and given permission to live her life anew, as though it is an entirely new life. The reader has been purified of her previous bad actions. This allows the astute reader to begin to live a life according to the new Platonic freedom, which entails action in line with reason and the Good. Having been made aware of the pitfalls of the desires of the lower soul, the reader can now pursue a more philosophical existence. If we interpret the myth in this way, the focus is on the factors that humans can control rather than the factors we cannot or that result from previous choices.<sup>147</sup>

While it is true that all souls given the opportunity to choose a life do in fact make a choice, this does not equate to freedom in Plato's view. The myth suggests the possibility of varying levels of freedom for each soul. For instance, the soul who chooses the life of the tyrant has in the crude sense chosen freely, in that it is made clear that the choice is made by the soul alone without external influence of the gods (617e3-4). In the Platonic sense of freedom the soul's choice is constrained by the desires of his lower soul, which are not checked by his rationality. Thus, Plato shows that even though there may not be any external constraints on choice, actions are not fully free unless they are chosen through wise exercise of rationality imbued with virtue. This first soul has further limited his true freedom because of his faulty definition of freedom.<sup>148</sup> This soul's choice of life being made in the afterlife parallels the situation of the tyrant within life. For this

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<sup>146</sup> Morgan 1990, 150 casts the myth as a tale of initiation.

<sup>147</sup> This interpretation counteracts Annas' view of the myth as "depressing" (1982, 135).

<sup>148</sup> Cf. *Phaedo* 82e: "Philosophy sees that the worst feature of this imprisonment [of the soul in the body] is that it is due to desires, so that the prisoner himself is contributing to his own incarceration most of all."

first soul to choose a life has every possible life type in front of him, just as the tyrant can do anything he wishes in life because of his absolute power.

Philosophers may also feel the initial tug of the lower soul in circumstances of temptation. However, the difference is that, having fully developed rational faculties, they know how to resist such immediate impulses. A choice in any direction aside from virtue is a choice towards the unknown that may gravely imperil one's soul. For the lower parts of the soul are unstable and unpredictable, leading one to a life of indeterminism. In this sense, choosing a virtuous life is a pragmatic stance as it ensures some stability against the vagaries of life. Any choice not imbued with virtue is unfree, for Plato.

#### **h. Chance and External Choice Constraints**

The fact that only one soul, Odysseus', is depicted as making a good choice of next life may be an indication of Plato's pessimism about the majority's ability to choose a virtuous life.<sup>149</sup> Although the apparatus of souls' life selection appears to be fair and unrestricted, the details Plato provides suggest that some external constraints may hinder the opportunities of the souls choosing. Firstly, the souls have lots thrown in front of them (617e5). The numbers of the lots in front of the souls determine the order of souls choosing lives (617e7-8), rather than the souls picking the lots actively themselves. The Speaker downplays the impact of the lot on the range of life choices saying, "There is a satisfactory life rather than a bad one available even for the one who comes last, provided that he chooses it rationally and lives it seriously" (619b3-6). This statement does allow the possibility that the earlier lots may fare better. However, the description of events that

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<sup>149</sup> See 494a: "the majority cannot be philosophic."

Er witnesses suggests that Plato is pessimistic about the choices most souls make. Some lines later, Socrates says that there is an interchange of goods and evils for most souls (619d6). This is due to the souls coming from heaven having no recent experience of suffering and hence no desire to avoid it, while the souls who had suffered beneath the earth were eager to avoid suffering in their next go around. The soul's recent experience of pleasure or pain is one reason for the interchange. Thus, most souls are short-sighted when choosing future lives.

Socrates seems to contradict the Speaker's downplaying of the lot when he includes "the chance of the lottery [τὴν τοῦ κλήρου τύχην]" (619d5) as another explanation for the interchange of good and evil. Thus, the two factors Socrates mentions for having a happy life and death are pursuing philosophy and not being one of the last to choose. Even though there are many more life models than souls choosing, it does seem possible that if all the souls choosing were philosophers, then perhaps there may not be any appropriate choices left for a philosophical soul choosing later. Thus, Odysseus' case is interesting to examine, since he is said to be the last soul choosing yet he is depicted as making the best choice according to the definition of justice laid out in the *Republic*. In the case of Odysseus, all the souls mentioned as choosing before him choose poorly. This enables Odysseus to find a suitable leftover life. However, if the previous souls had chosen wisely, Odysseus may have been out of luck. Alternatively, the gods may provide a different set of lives to a group of souls that is all philosophers, so that all may choose well.

McPherran questions the impartiality of the Speaker (or Prophet) given that he may know the outcome of the lots in advance.<sup>150</sup> However, I do not think that divine foreknowledge of events relieves responsibility from the chooser or that it is incompatible with having the lots be random. The important point for Plato is that the souls do not know any outcomes and so must react wisely to the hand they've been dealt. The slew of available lives is not necessarily random and that is where there could be divine influence. However, this does not affect the soul's responsibility for his choice. Plato highlights the significance of choices regardless of any known or unknown external limits imposed on the choices. Every choice has some limitations imposed on it. Souls must use their current knowledge of a situation, limited or not, to calculate the best choice.

These contradictory presentations of chance may be due to the varying perspectives of the spectators. Chance may simply be ignorant man's interpretation of events. All of the life elements that the soul chooses in the myth are typically thought to be given by chance. According to the myth, after the souls drink from the River of Unheeding, they will forget that they have chosen all of these elements in their lives. Thus, they will consider gender, social class, family, and genetics to be a matter of chance. However, the myth emphasizes a deeper order behind the seeming randomness of human lives. Plato might be suggesting that the idea of chance arises from a limited perspective so that what appears to be due to chance is actually due to choice or a set of choices made. In this way, Plato may be aiming to show that we as humans have much more control than we realize. Socrates' conclusion that the chance of the lottery plays a

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<sup>150</sup> McPherran 2010, 138.

role in the outcomes of souls may simply be meant to emphasize human ignorance of the divine workings of the cosmos. Alternatively, Plato may be prompting the reader to notice the discrepancy between Socrates' and the Speaker's statements. By reviewing the outcome of the last to choose, the reader may judge for himself the importance of the lottery.

Even the section about the River of Unheeding allows an opportunity for souls to choose. Here, the souls who use their reason drink only what they must, while the remainder of souls drink to excess. Presumably, the lighter drinkers will retain some memory of the Forms and the afterlife. This part of the myth is a poignant reminder of the use of thirst at 439a-d as an example of a necessary desire of the appetitive part of the soul. Reason must remain in control of the soul so that it does not drink too much. However, the souls that are not ruled by reason drink with abandon, regressing in the journey by erasing some knowledge of the Forms and adding to their ignorance. This will make it more difficult for them to gain knowledge in their next life.

Socrates also suggests a factor that is more in humans' control: studying philosophy. The path of philosophy that Socrates suggests employs wisdom that will lead to a good outcome for any soul in a benevolent universe. One may have guessed initially that Odysseus would have ended up with an undesirable life because he was the last to choose. However, Plato uses Odysseus to show that by employing reason and intelligent reflection upon one's previous life experiences one may choose well and even choose best. As Plato says, reason will allow us to endure anything (621c1-4). This interpretation provides some optimism, in that what matters most is the present choice. What matters in

the choice of lives is the present choosing and it has great consequences for the future. However, Plato's point is that we are always faced with choices. Yes, previous experiences and the current state of the soul do affect choices, but the message is that good choices at any point in the cycle of lives can have a long-lasting positive effect. Although poor choices are shown abundantly in the myth, they serve to highlight the single wise choice made by Odysseus. It is easy to choose poorly, but training in philosophy allows one to choose cautiously, seriously and knowledgeably. Readers are meant to want to emulate Odysseus, who ends up happy with his new life after a full examination of all his options.

#### **i. Good and Evil**

Why are souls presented with bad life choices by the gods to begin with? Why are souls given the power to choose their future lives? One benefit of allowing souls to choose future lives is that it enables a full display of the value of philosophy and education in virtue. Souls who have pursued wisdom will make better choices, while the rest of the souls are allowed the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. The souls who choose poorly will be self-imprisoned by the demands of their lower desires. Presumably, these souls will begin to seek freedom through virtue. Further, if poor choices are made, the soul will endure some suffering, which will purify the soul and allow it to make better choices in the future. For Plato says that the majority of souls coming up from earth were more cautious in their choices, having seen and undergone much suffering (619d3-5). If the gods are said to care for humans, this exercise in choosing lives and then living them out, even if they are very bad lives must serve the universe's purposes, which is the

improvement of the whole.<sup>151</sup> The entire apparatus of transmigration must ultimately be directed to good ends, even if its slow rate of progression of individual souls does seem depressing to our limited human view, as Annas declares.<sup>152</sup> Her concern that Plato presents a deterministic world view is alleviated by the option of achieving freedom through philosophy.

Although the souls are not constrained by external forces in making their choices, each individual soul will have varying degrees of freedom in his or her choice of life. Most souls are not capable of making a philosophically sound choice that has the prerequisites of having studied philosophy, having proper ordering of the soul and valuing philosophy. Without these factors, souls will choose badly, according to the myth. These poor choices seem to stem from rash decision-making based upon following lower desires and from having a limited perspective. For example, Atalanta is seduced by the honors of a male athlete (620b4-6). In contrast, Odysseus, the ideal chooser, takes his time to examine all the lives to find the type of life that he believes will be best, given his previous life experience. Secondly, Odysseus's previous life relieved his love of honor so that his rational faculty's desires can now drive his choice. However, Odysseus lived through an entire life devoted to gaining honor, suggesting that giving in to the spirited part of the soul may expend its pull and allowing him to arrive at a point where his soul would welcome a just life. Thus, although souls are not externally constrained in their choices, many have inherent psychological flaws that will restrict good life choices.

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<sup>151</sup> See *Laws* 903c5-6: "you exist for the sake of the universe" and 903d2-3: "your position is best not only for the universe but for you too, thanks to your common origin."

<sup>152</sup> 1981, 350-351; 1982, 132-133, 135.

Hence, non-philosophers experience a deterministic<sup>153</sup> relationship between the current state of their souls and their choices.<sup>154</sup> The philosopher, on the other hand, is free in his choices. For he knows how to manage any internal constraints that arise by keeping reason in control of his soul. 618b7-619a2 explains the correct way to prepare for choosing a life. Given one's place in the lottery, Plato's normative ethics suggests that there will be one correct life choice if one's rational faculty is being employed to its utmost capabilities. This results in the paradox of Platonic freedom, that there is a determinate right action that a Platonically free philosopher should take. Freedom guided by knowledge of the Good is not a set of random choices or choices based upon lower desires; rather it is singular right action in a given set of circumstances.

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<sup>153</sup> This could not be construed as hard determinism because souls always retain the possibility of moving towards a philosophical life.

<sup>154</sup> See Bussanich 2010, 306.

## 4. Philosophical Freedom as the Rule of Reason in the Soul

### a. The Educational Path Towards Freedom from the Cave

The *Republic* suggests that freedom can be achieved through a long educational program which begins by aligning the future philosopher's habits with the soul's true rational nature. Although every human being is born with the potential to be free, Plato shows that freedom is most reliably attained through philosophical education.<sup>155</sup> Thus, a look at the philosopher's education provides clues about the character of her freedom. I show that the moral psychology of the *Republic* should be taken as the foundation of Plato's philosophy of freedom. The myth of the cave connects the themes of education and freedom explicitly, providing further insight into the philosopher's educational path to freedom.

#### i. The Educational Path to Freedom in the *Republic*

The education of the guardians in the *Republic* is a long and arduous process, whose aim is to produce psychologically harmonious and free individuals ruled by their own rationality. The formation of guardians is of paramount importance for the city, since the guardians are demiurges of the city's freedom:

Guardians are to be craftsmen of the city's freedom [δημιουργοὺς ἐλευθερίας τῆς πόλεως], and be exclusively that, and do nothing at all except what contributes to it, they must neither do nor imitate [μιμεῖσθαι] anything else. (395b6-c2)

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<sup>155</sup> Socrates notes that it is possible for spontaneous philosophers to develop in society (520b1-2).

This remarkable passage highlights freedom as the guardians' main concern and *raison d'être*. The precondition for being a demiurge of the city's freedom is that the guardian must himself be free. Given that guardians are to rule the city, they must first rule their own souls with reason.<sup>156</sup> For, as Socrates states, "It would be absurd for a guardian to need a guardian" (403e). Mature guardians do not need paternalistic limits set on their choices. For reason always rules their souls. The guardian "is the best person both for himself and for the city" (413e4-5). The implication here is that the guardians replicate, on a political level, the freedom they experience on a psychological level.<sup>157</sup>

The proper function of reason is essential to becoming a free guardian. Hence, early education is geared towards aligning the child's soul with reason, so that "he will welcome reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship [οἰκειότητα] with himself" (402a). Socrates notes the potential of all to become educated: "the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body [and] the whole soul until it is able to study . . . the good" (518c3-d1).<sup>158</sup> Thus, education does not involve putting sight, or reason, into the soul, rather it "takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and tries to redirect it appropriately" (518d6-7). Hence, every soul is capable of freedom through education. Philosophical education encourages the proper ordering of the soul with reason as its ruler so that individuals act in

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<sup>156</sup> If guardians simply imitated freedom instead of being free themselves they would be too far removed from the truth. See 597b2-598d5.

<sup>157</sup> Guardians can also be seen as imitating the demiurge's creation of the universe. See *Timaeus* 29a2-10.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. 410a1-3, 615c4-d6, where incurably evil souls are mentioned; see also *Phaedo* 113e.

accordance with the Good.

In contrast, Plato explains the plight of the uneducated, and unfree: “Isn’t it likely . . . that they will never adequately govern a city? . . . [They] would fail because they don’t have a single goal at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim” (519b6-c2). Thus, the unfree lack what the ruler has: experience of the truth and direction of all of his actions towards a single goal, the Good. Therefore, education is the process of aligning the entire soul so that it is able to study the Good and align its actions with it. All of the soul parts must be aimed at the correct objects of study.<sup>159</sup> Hence, freedom can be achieved through learned habit.<sup>160</sup>

As such, young guardians are to be shielded from influences that counter this educational goal of producing free and freedom-loving guardians. The fear is that young guardians may imitate unfavorable behavior that they are exposed to. For Plato says that imitations practiced from youth can be dangerous because they become part of individual habit [ἔθνη] and nature [φύσιν] (395c-d).<sup>161</sup> Hence, Plato specifies the types of influences young guardians should be exposed to throughout their education, again naming freedom explicitly as a characteristic of guardians:

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<sup>159</sup> Books 8-10, in particular, demonstrate how non-philosophers lack proper ordering within their souls. For more on this see my Chapter 2, above.

<sup>160</sup> For a similar description of education through inculcation of habits, see also *Laws* 653b-c.

<sup>161</sup> The imitation discussed here is primarily in the form of experiencing music and poetry. Seemingly small educational influences can have a great effect. For instance, with music, any change in musical modes is said to threaten the entire legal system as “the musical modes are never changed without change in the most important of the city’s laws” (424c). Likewise, improper poetry threatens the guardian’s ability to rule himself and to have reason ruling his soul. Plato expands upon this idea in Book 10 of the *Republic*, where poetry is found to be an imitation that is three times removed from its original, the Forms (597e1-3). Further, poetry is said to strengthen the lowest part of the soul, threatening the rule of reason. See Lear 2006, 29. For further discussion of Plato’s view of the dangers of imitation see Nettleship 1906, 101.

If [guardians] do imitate, they must imitate from childhood what is appropriate to them, namely, people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free [ἐλευθέρους], and their actions. (395c2-5)<sup>162</sup>

This passage highlighting freedom comes, seemingly paradoxically, amidst the discussion of censorship of music and poetry in the education of the Guardians. However, this placement serves to underscore Plato's novel view of freedom as reasoned choice in line with the Good against the view of freedom as the ability to pursue any and all desires. Platonic freedom is the result of disciplined practice to pursue only the Good. Thus, censorship helps young souls to become free by shielding them from any possible influence of negative models of behavior. Plato connects freedom and censorship of inappropriate stories in Book 3 when he says "the more poetic they are, the less they should be heard by children or by men who are supposed<sup>163</sup> to be free and to fear slavery more than death [ἀνδράσιν οὐς δεῖ ἐλευθέρους εἶναι, δουλείαν θανάτου μᾶλλον πεφοβημένους]" (387b2-4). Without guidance towards or public endorsement of the philosophical life, the soul becomes easily distracted by the immediacy of satisfying lower pleasures. As a result, philosophical life may then be marginalized in favor of gratifying the increasingly dominant appetitive part of the soul. For the desires of the lower soul are more immediate and stronger than those of the reasoning element, which must be trained and developed.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> I contend that the prescription to imitate free people is not simply a descriptor used to identify non-slaves, but that this is a metaphysical notion of freedom that relates to the other qualities mentioned, which are marks of good character and harmonious souls. Plato does worry about the influence of slavery on young guardians. However, I aim to show that his concept of freedom is richer than the simple political designations of slave versus citizen.

<sup>163</sup> Shorey 1969 uses the word "destined" here for δεῖ; Bloom 1991, 64 uses "must be". I take Plato to be implying a logical necessity here rather than simply an aspirational suggestion.

<sup>164</sup> 442a4-9.

The imitation of slavishness by guardians is of particular concern. Guardians are barred from imitating “slaves doing slavish things [ὄσα δούλων]” (395e3). Slavishness, to Plato, represents a lack of control over one’s actions and goals. The slave is at the mercy of his master’s wishes, whether the slave agrees with them or not. Further, because the slave is serving the needs of another, he is not using his rationality in its most natural function to serve the Good. The slave’s rationality is working entirely in the service of the master’s needs. Thus, Plato correlates slavery in general with inoperative or corrupt use of rationality.<sup>165</sup> Freedom, in opposition to slavery, entails proper and willing employment of reason by the soul. For “nothing taught by force stays in the soul” (536e2-3).

Similarly, educators must guard against lawlessness, which can creep in unnoticed (424d). Plato explains the threat of lawlessness: “when lawlessness [παρανομία] has established itself there, it flows over little by little into characters [τὰ ἦθη] and ways of life [τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα]. Then, greatly increased, it makes its insolent way into the laws and government, until in the end it overthrows everything, public and private” (424d-e). Hence, lawlessness is dangerous because it changes the natural order of ruler and ruled, both for the state and the individual soul.<sup>166</sup> Further, lawlessness is the *modus operandi* of the tyrant and is a pseudo-freedom.<sup>167</sup> For ultimately, lawlessness prevents directed

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<sup>165</sup> See *Laws* 966b1-8. For further discussion of slavery in Platonic thought see the classic article by Vlastos 1941, 289-304, and also 1968, 291-295. Calvert 1987: 367-372 provides a more recent but unconvincing argument against Vlastos’ view that there is slavery in Plato’s *Republic*. He overlooks the slavish tendencies of the lower two parts of the soul.

<sup>166</sup> Plato suggests here that lawlessness threatens both individual and political freedom. This is consistent with Plato’s method of comparing city and soul, as well as his remarks that guardians must be free themselves in order to craft a free society. My focus, however, remains on individual metaphysical freedom. The political implications are touched upon by Samaras 2002; Schofield 2006, 100-135, and in Laks 2007, 134-143.

<sup>167</sup> Anarchy [ἀναρχίαν] is mentioned as a false form of freedom at 560e4.

action towards one's goals because it encourages too many competing desires to become prominent in the soul by satisfying them willy-nilly.<sup>168</sup> This contrast of freedom and lawlessness underscores the fact that freedom is disciplined and consistent action in line with the Good. The guardian focuses all of her actions towards instantiating the Good. The contrast of Platonic freedom with amoral lawlessness highlights the ethical and teleological nature of Plato's freedom.

Plato's insertion of freedom alongside the qualities of courage, self-control, piety "and all things of that kind,"<sup>169</sup> provides some room for speculation about the status of freedom within Plato's metaphysical system.<sup>170</sup> Is freedom a virtue or a Form, perhaps? Courage [ἀνδρείους] and self-control [σώφρονας] comprise two of the four cardinal virtues (427e4-428a8)<sup>171</sup>, as well as each having their own Forms along with piety. Indeed, all of these virtues are referenced in conjunction with freedom and seem to play a role in freedom. Freedom entails the courage to follow reason, the self-control to be able to resist the pull of the desires of the lower soul, the just ordering of the soul and the knowledge of the Good so that one may act on it. However, freedom remains a distinct concept from all of these virtues. It seems awkward to call freedom a virtue, since it is a state that allows one to be virtuous. For freedom is the ability to act in line with reason's desire for the Good. Virtue is the result of being free. At a minimum, Plato would likely

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<sup>168</sup> See for example the description of the democrat's life (one step away from tyranny) as giving in to a constant succession of competing desires, 561a4-b5; see also section 2b, above.

<sup>169</sup> Shorey 1969 translation, following the Greek: ἀνδρείους, σώφρονας, ὀσίους, ἐλευθέρους, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα.

<sup>170</sup> See also *Phaedo* 114d6-115a2, where Socrates links justice, along with other virtues, to freedom when he says "a man should be of good cheer about his own soul, if during life he has . . . adorned his soul not with alien but with its own ornaments, namely, moderation, justice, courage, freedom [ἐλευθερία] and truth" (Grube 1992 translation modified by me).

<sup>171</sup> The other virtues are wisdom and justice.

ascribe a Form to freedom, as he does with the other attributes mentioned here. The Form of freedom would be a high status Form, given that it is coincident with virtue.

## ii. The Freedom of the Good: The Cave Allegory

The allegory of the cave depicts in mythical form the freedom that arises through proper guardian education.<sup>172</sup> It is widely accepted that the cave allegory portrays education through knowledge of the Forms as liberating. However, I argue that this theme of liberation points explicitly to a more stringent philosophical concept of individual metaphysical freedom. The theme of philosopher as free here is a continuation of what has been said about freedom earlier in the *Republic*.<sup>173</sup> The character of Platonic freedom remains consistent here, too, as both an ethical and a metaphysical concept.

In the parable, the prisoner's freedom comes in stages, just as the educational program consists in stages. Each successive experience described in the allegory leads to additional freedom, culminating in the escape from the cave and the ability to look at the sun, or Good, in itself. Thus, there are levels, or gradations on the path towards freedom. Further, each stage begins with a sudden shock, perhaps suggestive of a flash of insight. Within the stages, the experience of understanding and accepting the reality before one is gradual, as indicated by the period of adjustment required after each transition.

Entry into each of the stages presented in the myth is involuntary in some sense, given the language that Plato uses.<sup>174</sup> The beginning of each stage is unpleasant, initially. During the first stage of freedom, after the release [λυθείη] from the chains, the prisoner

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<sup>172</sup> The allegory spans from 514a1–520a3.

<sup>173</sup> See the above section.

<sup>174</sup> For a philological discussion of the family of terms Plato uses for what is translated as 'compulsion' see Shields 2007, 21n3; 32n13.

is compelled [ἀναγκάζοιτο] to turn around and view the parade of statuary (515d4-7).

Again, he is compelled [ἀναγκάζου] to look at the firelight, though he wishes to return to the world he is used to (515e1-2). Finally, he is dragged up out of the cave and into the sunlight by force [βίβη] (515e5-6).

There is much conjecture about the agent that forces the prisoner up and out of the cave to experience the Reality of the Forms. The agent might be a Socratic teacher.<sup>175</sup> It may be the abstract subjects of study, primarily mathematics, that lead to the Good.<sup>176</sup> It could be the Good itself.<sup>177</sup> In the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* *erôs* plays a role in the ascent.<sup>178</sup> Finally, in addition to the preceding suggestions, I put forward that the drive to escape the cave may be the rational soul attempting to wrest control to take its natural place as ruler.<sup>179</sup> This may signify the moment that the philosopher comes to identify with the reasoning part of her soul and when reason ceases to serve the lower parts of the soul—the moment the philosopher becomes free and most authentically herself.<sup>180</sup>

Plato uses the language of compulsion again when he states that once the philosopher has seen the Form of the Good, she should be compelled to return to the cave and rule the city.<sup>181</sup> Although unhindered contemplation of the Forms is the activity most pleasing to the philosopher,<sup>182</sup> Plato makes clear that the ruler's goal is not to make

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<sup>175</sup> See Bloom 1991, 406. Mitchell 2006, 71 points out that not listening to philosophical teachers is the defining feature of the prisoners who deride philosophy. Hence, he concludes that the teacher alone cannot be the sole agent of transformation.

<sup>176</sup> Annas 1981, 259 proposes this explanation. However, she is unconvinced that mathematical study alone would in fact compel one towards the Good, suggesting that Plato himself did not have a good reason to explain the ascent.

<sup>177</sup> See Shields 2007, 37, who calls this nomic and hypothetical necessity.

<sup>178</sup> White 1979, 49.

<sup>179</sup> See 441e3-5 for the native rulership of reason.

<sup>180</sup> For a discussion of the ideal person as the disembodied cognitive agent see Gerson 2003, 124.

<sup>181</sup> 519d1-5; 539e2-540b6.

<sup>182</sup> 520e4-521b10; see also 540b4.

himself alone outstandingly happy [διαφερόντως εὖ πράξει].<sup>183</sup> In Socrates' imagined republic, each class should share the benefits that it can with the rest of the community, spreading the happiness to everyone as much as possible rather than hoarding it amongst one class (519e). The maximization of one's own happiness is not the goal of those who have seen the Good, rather it is the maximization of the instantiation of the Good.<sup>184</sup> This reasoned pursuit of the Good constitutes freedom, but does not coincide with happiness, necessarily.

There has been much discussion of the question of why the philosopher should return to the cave if it is less pleasurable for him than simply contemplating the forms.<sup>185</sup> I submit that Plato's philosophy of freedom offers a new approach to this question. Framing the issue in terms of the ethical freedom of the philosopher clarifies Plato's views. As I have shown, Plato does not view freedom as the ability to pursue any and all of one's desires unhindered. This is true even for the fully enlightened philosopher, whose desires one would imagine are the best a human being can have.<sup>186</sup> Instead, this freedom is an ethical concept that is characterized by the pursuit, knowledge, and desire to instantiate the Good. Thus, once he is released from the bonds of his prison-world and sees Reality, the philosopher is not able to remain in perpetual contemplation of the Forms, even though he finds this activity most pleasing. Rather, he is compelled to return

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<sup>183</sup> 519d. Happiness here should not be thought of as synonymous with pleasure, but rather as seeking one's own advantage. See Kraut 1992, 313; 332n4.

<sup>184</sup> For a discussion of how the philosopher's pursuit of justice through ruling allows her to imitate the perfect order of the forms see Kraut 1999, 245-249.

<sup>185</sup> Silverman 2007, 40-69 provides a good overview of recent views on this question. See also Kraut 1999, 235-54.

<sup>186</sup> Indeed, Kraut 1999, 239 demonstrates that even the philosophers may not act in the way that they think best, without regard for the good of the entire community.

to the cave-existence, albeit with a new, philosophical outlook, buoyed by his knowledge of the Forms.

The philosopher's understanding of the Good itself compels him back to the human community to share his knowledge and to shape the city and its people in the human form of the Good.<sup>187</sup> Thus, the compulsion experienced through Platonic freedom derives from the logical necessity and ethical normativity of carrying out the Good. Socrates says that the enlightened prisoner will not object to being ordered to return to the cave because a just person will always obey just orders (520e). Thus, the compelling force may be his own reason, as well as the Good itself, creating both internal and external compulsion.<sup>188</sup> For although the study of the Forms is most pleasing to the philosopher, her reasoning and the Good itself requires her to return to the cave. Ethics and logic trump pleasure for the enlightened philosopher.

We must look to the ethical component of the philosopher's freedom, in particular, to understand why the philosopher does return to the cave. Although the philosopher may have other strong desires, namely to contemplate the Forms, she is free only when following reason's desires for the Good. The pursuit of all other competing desires, if they are not in service of the Good, constitutes a lack of freedom. These alternative desires cannot offer the stable, logical consistency of acting for the Good that characterizes the philosopher. For the philosopher to stay contemplating the Forms would be for her to act in line with pleasure as her highest value, not the Good. As we saw with

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<sup>187</sup> Kraut 1999, 247-248; Silverman 2007, 51.

<sup>188</sup> A teacher-figure would also encourage compulsion from both the rational soul and the Good. For dialectic with him would help the rational soul to understand the Good in itself, when faced with it, thus strengthening reason's desire to follow it. Shields 2007, 29-32; 38 discusses four forms of internal and external compulsion in Plato, ultimately arguing that forms of both types are present for philosophers apprehending the Good and returning to rule the city.

the democrat and the tyrant, pursuing pleasure alone will lead to the strengthening of the lower soul, which leads one away from the autonomous self-rule that philosophical freedom gives. Further, it is questionable whether a philosopher who has seen the Good is capable of making the choice to stay contemplating the Forms. For that would not be part of the character of someone who had reached this level of philosophical ascent.

The contrast between slavery and freedom in the parable of the cave suggests that there are two paths for a human being to take: either one remains ignorant or one seeks the Good.<sup>189</sup> An individual is always heading towards one direction or the other. Whichever goal one's activity is directed towards is one's slave-master, in a sense. For even the philosopher is unwilling, initially, to pursue the Good. She requires some form of compulsion to progress towards it. Since the Good in Plato's metaphysical scheme is absolute and unchanging, becoming dedicated to it is almost another form of enslavement of the soul, perhaps better characterized as devotion. The philosopher's life is not her own, but rather she willingly turns it over to the pursuit of and instantiation of the Good.

Silverman argues that once the philosopher has seen the Good, she cannot become any happier or her soul more harmonious by more time spent contemplating the Forms.<sup>190</sup> He explains this concept as "no backsliding." If we take this to be true, then it also applies to the philosopher's freedom, which is intimately connected to her sight of the Good and her harmoniously-ordered soul. Thus, once the philosopher is fully free, she will not slip back into unfreedom. Hence, the return to the cave will not pose a danger to her freedom. Once free, always free. However, the distinct stages that the philosopher

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<sup>189</sup> Mitchell 2006, 135 illustrates these two paths nicely: "Man will either be dragged *out of* the Cave or dragged around *in it*...Man ceases to be at the mercy of the beast within him only when he is at the mercy of the Good, which illuminates his reason."

<sup>190</sup> Silverman 2007, 57. He employs this idea to show why the philosopher will return to "the cave" to rule.

passes through in the myth suggest that the philosopher may attain partial freedom before the final vision of the Good that enables a level of ultimate freedom.<sup>191</sup>

### **b. Chariots of Freedom: Reason's Struggle in the *Phaedrus***

The *Phaedrus* myth, at 246a-257a, illuminates Plato's concept of freedom by focusing on the struggles inherent in the tripartite psychology. Throughout the myth, each soul part is shown to have divergent drives and motivations. Yet, at the same time, the soul functions as a single unit. Do each of these parts have their own form of freedom? What is the true form of freedom that Plato wishes to endorse? I will argue that Plato's illustration of reason's battle to rule the soul underscores a rationally-focused theory of freedom. The myth also reveals the omnipresence of the reasoning part throughout the entire soul, even in cases where the other soul parts are said to rule the soul. Reason is shown to be the sole agent of the soul.

#### **i. The Struggles of the Disembodied Soul**

The myth is preceded by an argument for the immortality of the soul which defines soul as self-moving (245e).<sup>192</sup> This attribution establishes the soul as an autonomous self-ruler and introduces the more detailed mythic exposition of psychological freedom.<sup>193</sup> The argument for immortality of the soul carries over into the

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<sup>191</sup> This ultimate freedom may coincide with an escape from the birth and death cycles. See Guthrie 1975, 423.

<sup>192</sup> For a detailed analysis of the argument see Bett 1986, 1-16.

<sup>193</sup> Ficino 1981, 88 links self-motion and free will. Nicholson 1999, 162 compares Plato's proposition that the soul is a self-mover to Kant's notion of freedom as operating outside the causality of natural law.

theme of the subsequent myth, which illustrates the struggles of the soul both in life and in the afterlife.<sup>194</sup>

The myth begins with a comparison of the tripartite soul to a charioteer driving a team of two winged horses, one beautiful and good, the other wild and difficult to control. In the afterlife, the charioteer has an opportunity to view the Forms in “the place beyond heaven.” However, the bad horse can weigh the chariot back down towards earth.<sup>195</sup> This inhibits the charioteer’s experience of the Forms and “causes the most extreme [ἔσχατος] toil and struggle that a soul will face” (247b6). Yet, this is a battle that the charioteer can win through proper horse training and competent driving (247b, 248b). Thus, Plato’s description suggests a causal relationship between the charioteer’s skill or efforts and his ability to view the Forms in the afterlife. Hence, a poorly trained horse will restrict the soul’s ability to become a philosopher. The bad horse is depicted as a separate entity from the charioteer, but it is the charioteer who holds ultimate responsibility for the bad horse’s behavior. Plato depicts the horses and charioteer as discrete, and perhaps ultimately separable entities, but their destinies are inextricably linked while they are conjoined.<sup>196</sup>

As the myth progresses, Plato shifts his emphasis away from the charioteer’s responsibility for events that he experiences towards contingency and luck as causes.<sup>197</sup>

The myth now states that those who do not see the Forms could not keep up with the

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<sup>194</sup> Sinaiko 1965, 54 argues that the myth begins with the single generalization of the soul as a self-moving *arche* of motion.

<sup>195</sup> I agree with Bluck 1958, 158 who suggests that the heaviness described alludes to the effects of embodied existence, also mentioned in the *Phaedo*. This view does not preclude the notion that the lower soul, or some aspect of it, is intrinsically evil or prone to evil, against McGibbon 1964, 56-63.

<sup>196</sup> Just as the three components of city and soul are represented in Book 4 of the *Republic*. Compare also to the image of the many-headed beast at *Republic* 588c7-d5.

<sup>197</sup> For an argument that contingency is a central theme of the myth see Ferrari 1987, 137.

divine procession and “by some accident” [συντυχία] take on a burden of forgetfulness and wrongdoing (248c6-8). This results in those chariots being weighed down and shedding their wings, falling to earth (248c-d).<sup>198</sup> The emphasis on chance here may be due to a more cosmic or impersonal perspective, rather than the more personal vantage point of an individual soul.<sup>199</sup> Erroneous actions can be viewed as accidental if reason is recognized as the natural ruler of the soul. Cases where reason is not ruling the soul can be characterized as the accidental malfunction of reason in an ignorant soul, much like an illness can be seen as an unlucky occurrence.<sup>200</sup>

Even though soul errors can be labeled accidental from a cosmic vantage point, the charioteer still bears responsibility for his actions. For it is the charioteer’s ability to control his horses that determines his fate. The more he relinquishes control to appetite, in particular, the further he slips away from the possibility of philosophical life. Yet, the life controlled by appetite is rarely determined towards evil indefinitely.<sup>201</sup> Since the life ruled by appetitive desires is not natural for human souls, there will always be the chance that internal or external influences may alter the course of such a life in favor of philosophy.

Further, Plato’s scheme of transmigration of souls allows many chances for new lives. After a thousand years of reward or retribution souls arrive at a “choice and allotment of second lives, and each soul chooses the life it wants [κλήρωσίν τε καὶ

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<sup>198</sup> This image of the fall of the soul is suggestive of Orphic doctrine. See Hackforth 1952, 82. Compare also to *Republic* 519a8-b1.

<sup>199</sup> Ferrari 1987, 129. The impersonal, cosmic vantage point is even more pronounced in the *Laws* at 644d, 803b-c and 903d-e, where humans are compared to puppets, toys and chess pieces. See my discussion of these passages in 4c.

<sup>200</sup> Ferrari 1987, 135. See also *Protagoras* 358c6-d4; Segvic 2000, 36.

<sup>201</sup> The eschatological myths suggest that only a few souls are never released from Tartarus. See, for example, *Phaedo* 113e; *Gorgias* 525c1-3; *Republic* 615c4-d2. Hence, most souls receive the chance to come around to philosophy in a future life.

αἴρεσιν τοῦ δευτέρου βίου αἰροῦνται ὃν ἂν θέλη ἐκάστη]” (249b2-4). The mention of choice [αἴρεσις] twice in this sentence suggests a freedom, or lack of constraint, in the souls’ selection of next lives. However, the lottery [κλήρωσίν] alluded to has the same effect of restricting the freedom here as it does in the *Republic*’s myth of Er,<sup>202</sup> suggesting divine involvement or an element of luck.<sup>203</sup> Additionally, Plato’s description of this system as following the law of destiny [θεσμός τε Ἀδραστείας<sup>204</sup> ὄδε] lends a deterministic air to its workings, intermingled with the references to choice. In cases where a soul chooses to reincarnate as an animal, transmigration is more deterministic and less Platonically free. Here the desires of the lower soul dominate, limiting the freedom of reason to follow its desires. Hence, the determinism involved seems to be a causal determinism, whereby previous actions and current makeup of the soul determine where souls end up in the next life. The real danger to human freedom is shown to be overindulgence in the desires of the lower soul, which strengthens the lower soul and hinders the soul’s ability to see the Forms.

## ii. On Horses’ Wings

The wings of the horses are a curious element of the myth. Though they are attached to both the bad and good horse, they are also said to be akin to the divine, which itself is beauty, wisdom and goodness. These virtues nourish the soul’s wings, allowing

<sup>202</sup> For more on freedom in the myth of Er, see my section 3a, above, as well as McPherran 2010, 132-146.

<sup>203</sup> Several commentators have noted the significance of this passage for the subject of freedom. For Hackforth 1952, 88 the sentence means that “our lives are partly pre-destined, partly self-chosen.” Thompson 1868, 55 finds here a “mythical mode of reconciling freedom and necessity—choice being left free, but under limiting conditions.”

<sup>204</sup> The word used for destiny here is *Adrasteia*. This is a name kept alive by the Orphic tradition for a personification of Necessity (ἀνάγκη) who governs human conduct and punishes pride in particular. See Nehemas and Woodruff 1995, 35n78; also Adams 1902, 278; and Hackforth 1952, 82.

the wings to grow in their presence.<sup>205</sup> The wings seem to allow the soul to remain aloft in the afterlife to see the Forms, while they are shed when souls fall to earth and reincarnate into a new body. Ficino associates the soul's freedom with the presence of its wings.<sup>206</sup> This is a plausible symbolic association because the growth of the wings corresponds to philosophical growth attendant to true Platonic freedom. I take it that the sprouted wings on the good and bad horses keep the entire soul balanced and allow it to see the Forms. The wings overcome the heaviness of the bad horse that otherwise causes the soul to fall towards earth. Perhaps Plato intends a combination of both situations. In either case, the wings allow the soul the freedom to follow the desire of the charioteer for the Forms. The flexibility of the wings allows the soul to be measured and in control, ready to go where the charioteer leads. When the charioteer controls the response of the bad horse to Beauty, as depicted at the end of the myth, both horses sprout wings (255d1-2) and allow Reason to pursue the Forms.<sup>207</sup>

Strangely, Plato says that the entire soul had wings at one time (251b). Thus, the philosophical lover sprouts wings beneath every part of his soul. Yet, if we try to synchronize this point with the image of the charioteer and two horses, this results in the

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<sup>205</sup> Gotshalk 2001, 215 takes the wings to represent "eagerness and longing for the Forms, which takes wing." A lack of wings, on the other hand, Gotshalk thinks indicate an inability to see and a powerlessness of focal attentiveness due to the pull of the sensible (272n5). Along these lines, Sinaiko 1965, 78 thinks that the wings symbolize ability for "instantaneous motion to the realm of Being where they can find their proper nourishment through the direct contemplation of the Ideas." Lebeck 1972, 269 suggests that the wings symbolize "the concept of the soul as a self-moving entity capable of ascent." Nicholson 1999, 163-164 sees the wings as a symbol of each soul part having its own desire and love, as seen in the *Republic*; *Republic* 580d-581d.

<sup>206</sup> Ficino 1981, 102, 148.

<sup>207</sup> The image of the wings uplifting the chariot parallels the frequent talk of the ascent of the soul to experience the Forms in the *Republic*, e.g. 521c5. For a discussion of ascent in the *Republic* see Voegelin 1957, 59-62.

charioteer having the potential to grow wings too.<sup>208</sup> This aligns with Plato's description of the wings as being nourished by and akin to the Forms (246e1, 248c1-3). For of all the parts of the soul, Reason most fits this description of being similar in nature to the divine Forms. Hence, Reason should be most "nourished" by experiencing the Forms.

The fact that the horses and the charioteer all sprout wings illustrates the unity of the harmonious soul. I submit that the sprouting of wings, which are 'akin to the divine', on all three soul-parts is evidence that reason is active in all three soul parts. It is significant that all three parts are uplifted by the same type of object—wings—even though the horses are much inferior to the charioteer. The wings on the horses can be seen to represent reason's mastery of the lower soul parts.<sup>209</sup> For now spirit and appetite are fused to the will of reason and must follow its lead. This interpretation corresponds well with the mythical account of the embodied soul's encounter with the beauty of his beloved, which I will discuss next.

### **iii. The Struggles of the Embodied Soul**

Just as the bad horse can impede the charioteer's vision of the Forms in the afterlife, the lower soul can wreak havoc for the embodied soul. However, Plato depicts an odd role reversal between the reasoning element and the lower soul. The charioteer and the bad horse both use methods characteristic of the other when trying to get the other to act a certain way.<sup>210</sup> The charioteer resorts to violence to make the bad horse submit to the correct course of action, while earlier the bad horse uses persuasion and

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<sup>208</sup> The image of a winged charioteer may reveal the influence of similar representations in Greek art, where Eros himself is sometimes depicted as a charioteer. See De Vries 1969, 126.

<sup>209</sup> Griswold 1996, 93 notes that the charioteer's reason is needed to direct the wings, even if he is at the same time dependent on those wings to raise him upward.

<sup>210</sup> Ferrari 1985, 1 first comments on this oddity.

reasoning to try to bring the trio forward to proposition the boy.<sup>211</sup> As with the description of the wings, this role reversal may be highlighting the unity of the soul to show that in some sense the charioteer is the bad horse, and the bad horse is the charioteer. I see the above role reversals of the bad horse and charioteer as pointing to the unity of the soul under the reasoning part's agency. Thus, the charioteer should be recognized as a symbol of the reasoning faculty, as well as the ideal person potentially separable from the lower parts of the soul. Hence, each of the three parts of the soul symbolized in the myth is not an agent independent from the whole.<sup>212</sup> Indeed, when the chariot image is first introduced, Plato specifies that the three components together represent a single soul (246a6-7).

The description of divine chariots in the myth provides further evidence for this interpretation. Plato is surely presenting the divine chariots as divine paradigms of the human soul, given that the divine and human chariots are depicted with similar configurations. The myth presents the gods as charioteers separable from the horses and the charioteer represents the essential nature of each god depicted.<sup>213</sup> Thus, we must likewise see the human charioteer as the soul's essential nature, also perhaps at some point separable from the horses, or spirit and appetite.<sup>214</sup> Yet, until souls are fully purified through philosophy, they remain tripartite even in the afterlife, as represented by the horses and charioteer. Therefore, we see some references to souls having lower

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<sup>211</sup> The charioteer's violent actions could also be suited to the spirited part of the soul. See *Republic* 410d7-9: "the source of savageness is the spirited part of one's nature . . . if it's overstrained, it's likely to become hard and harsh."

<sup>212</sup> For an argument that the myth corroborates the view that each part can be a discrete agent of the soul unto itself see Ferrari 1987, 201.

<sup>213</sup> Ferrari 1987, 130-131.

<sup>214</sup> For the view that fully purified souls will at some point be able to escape the birth and death cycle, shedding their lower souls see Guthrie 1975, 423.

desires in the eschatological myths of the *Phaedo* (81b1-c4), *Gorgias* (524d1-525a9) and *Republic* (618e3-619a2).

However, if this is Plato's intention, then why do the divine chariots in the myth have horses at all? Does this mean that their souls are tripartite, and even imperfect? Ferrari takes the divine chariots to indicate "not the simple unity of pure reason but the perfect harmony of its parts."<sup>215</sup> Yet, he goes on to say that the divine charioteer equates to the god.<sup>216</sup> This results in a confused picture of divine souls. A more promising approach is to employ the concept of contingency central to the myth and apply it to the depiction of the gods. If we take the divine charioteers as the gods themselves, their horses become extensions of their wills,<sup>217</sup> or even simply tools with which the gods perfectly achieve their goals.<sup>218</sup> Perhaps the horses are needed for divine interaction with human souls, but are otherwise disposable. If the divine chariots are to be models for humans, then we can see the myth as advocating the installation of the charioteer's desires as the driver of his life. At the same time, the soul's desires must be maintained in their proper stations. The human soul's goal should be to use the lower parts of the soul as tools to achieve reason's desires while it is saddled with physical embodiment. However, the reasoning part remains the natural ruler of the soul.

Indeed, the appetitive and spirited parts cannot function without the aid of the reasoning faculty.<sup>219</sup> The non-reasoning parts, by their very description, do not reason and so must not have cognition. Thus, cognitive capacity belongs to the reasoning part of

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<sup>215</sup> 1987, 130.

<sup>216</sup> 1987, 130.

<sup>217</sup> The gods, being immortal and perfect, do not have *erôs* because *erôs* would be a desire for something they lack. See *Symposium* 200a3-b2; Dyson 1982, 309n4.

<sup>218</sup> Guthrie 1975, 424 takes the image of the divine charioteer and horses to be "a simple unity."

<sup>219</sup> Ficino 1981, 88.

the soul alone.<sup>220</sup> Deliberation is the sole province of the reasoning part. How do the non-reasoning parts come to rule the soul in certain cases then? Neither the spirited nor the appetitive parts of the soul are able to rule the soul independently.<sup>221</sup> There is always a charioteer. Reason is always active, even when the desires of these other parts drive the soul's actions. In the latter cases, the reasoning part becomes complicit to the desires of appetitive or spirited parts.<sup>222</sup> In this way, reason persuades itself to allow another part's desires to become the principle of the soul's action.<sup>223</sup> When one of the other two soul parts is said to be in control of the soul, reason is still active in that it has formulated beliefs in service of the desires of the non-rational soul parts. However, the principle of action is the desire of either appetite or spirit. The rational part has chosen to serve the desires of another part. This is a malfunction of reason in that it has formed false beliefs.

Thus, taking reason as the essential, if only ideal, person, all of the soul's actions occur with the consent of reason, whether they are in line with reason's native desires or not. The message in the role reversal passage of the myth is that reason can charm itself into following the soul's own base desires.<sup>224</sup> Thus reason must learn to guard itself against the enticements of appetitive desires. For the soul is in peril if appetitive desires drive the soul's actions exclusively. On the other hand, reason may have to resort to extreme methods when appetite cannot be assuaged through rational persuasion. The violence that the charioteer commits is a language that the bad horse responds to.<sup>225</sup> The

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<sup>220</sup> See Gerson 2003, 110.

<sup>221</sup> *Protagoras* 352b2-e2 corroborates this point against the view that reason can be completely overpowered by the other soul parts. Segvic 2000, 36.

<sup>222</sup> *Republic*, 553c1-d1.

<sup>223</sup> See Gerson 2003, 110-111.

<sup>224</sup> I take it that this is Ferrari's general point (1987, 198): "Plato is describing the deceptive signals that our soul can send us to tempt us into calling freedom 'repression' and intelligence 'good sense'."

<sup>225</sup> Ferrari 1985, 3 notes that the charioteer's violence is descriptively equine in nature. Plato uses the verb

bad horse “just barely yields to horsewhip and goad combined” (253e). This indicates that in some cases a stronger response may be necessary given the nature of the bad horse. Violence may not be akin to reason’s nature, but it is used as a last resort to prevent the total takeover of the soul’s direction by the bad horse’s desires, an event that would be detrimental to the soul’s well-being. I take the violence of the myth to be portraying what Plato views as a real, rather than purely symbolic, phenomenon<sup>226</sup> in that the myth shows the severity with which one must manage the appetitive soul. However, it is violence against oneself. For the appetitive soul is a part of the soul.

Although the charioteer is violent towards the black horse, this violence is described as an involuntary response to the beauty of the beloved.<sup>227</sup> I interpret this involuntariness as the compulsion felt in response to the Form of Beauty itself, the sight of which may dictate certain actions. This compulsion is characteristic of Platonic freedom, whereby one acts only in line with reason’s desires as informed by its knowledge of the Forms. Once the soul has understood the Forms, it is incapable of action opposed to virtue.<sup>228</sup> Hence, this concept of freedom is a more nuanced version of the popular conception of freedom as unimpeded ability to do whatever one wishes.<sup>229</sup> With this scene, Plato illustrates that his version of freedom includes an element of compulsion towards certain actions. However, this compulsion derives from the reasoned activity of the philosopher who deliberates about the motivating principle of his life. Thus, this form of compulsion is an enlightened version of the compulsion felt by the bad

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ἀναπίπτω for the motion of the charioteer twice, which Ferrari translates as to ‘rear back’, twice (254b8, e2).

<sup>226</sup> Against Ferrari 1987, 198 who thinks the violence is only appearance.

<sup>227</sup> 254b8-c3, e1-6.

<sup>228</sup> See my section 4a, as well as Silverman 2007, 57.

<sup>229</sup> The latter is championed by Callicles and Thrasymachus.

horse in the myth.<sup>230</sup> For the philosopher's reason acts in accord with the truth given by the Forms. Appetitive compulsion lacks this grounding force. With repeated submission to appetitive desires, the soul becomes unmoored by the obsessiveness of appetitive desires and loses the direction of reason that for Plato makes one free. Thus, although rational compulsion diminishes the attractions of self-destructive action,<sup>231</sup> Plato shows that this is true freedom. This underscores the fact that philosophical freedom is aligning one's will with the Good and the Forms, more generally. Just as the untrained bad horse seeks compulsively to satisfy his desires, the philosopher is compelled to act virtuously when he understands the nature of the Forms.

A second analogue to the philosopher's desire for the Forms is the lover's desire for his beloved. The lover's soul is described at 252a2-b2:

It forgets mother and brothers and friends entirely and doesn't care at all if it loses its wealth through neglect. And as for proper and decorous behavior, in which it used to take pride, the soul despises the whole business. Why, it is even willing to sleep like a slave anywhere, as near to the object of its longing as it is allowed to get! That is because in addition to its reverence for the one who has such beauty, the soul has discovered that the boy is the only doctor for all that terrible pain.

The description of the beloved as cure for pain exhibits the same devotion of the philosopher enthralled with the Forms.<sup>232</sup> The knowledge of the Forms provides the cure for the mortality of the human condition. Compare the above description of the lover to

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<sup>230</sup> Plato links the philosopher's compulsion to a special form of erotic madness. See Ferrari 1987, 197.

<sup>231</sup> See Ferrari 1987, 195.

<sup>232</sup> The beloved as eraser of pain also matches the ecstasy of participants in mystery cults. References to mystery cults permeate the myth. For more on how Plato incorporates the language of the mysteries in order to bolster the position of philosophy see Rinella 2000, 61-78. On references to ritual madness see Linforth 1946.

the account of philosophers in the *Republic* as “unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs . . . their souls are always pressing upwards, eager to spend their time above” (517c7-9), and the mention that the philosopher “behaves awkwardly and appears completely ridiculous if he’s compelled, either in the courts or elsewhere, to contend about the shadows of justice” (517d6-8).<sup>233</sup> In the *Republic*, we also find a comparison of erotically-inclined men to philosophers.<sup>234</sup> Eros underlies both the compulsion of the philosopher for the Forms and the compulsion of the lover for his beloved.

A concept of freedom is invoked in the description of the philosophical lovers. The myth states that if the lover and the boy give in to the better elements in both of their minds, which lead them to follow the assigned regimen of philosophy, their life here below is one of bliss and shared understanding. Remarkably, their situation is described as both the freeing of the good part of the soul and the enslavement of the bad part: “They are modest and fully in control of themselves [ἐγκρατεῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κόσμιοι] now that they have enslaved [δουλωσάμενοι] the part that brought trouble into the soul and set free [ἐλευθερώσαντες] the part that gave it virtue” (256b). Here we see self-control incorporated into Plato’s definition of freedom, along with continued mastery of appetite and spirit.<sup>235</sup>

Plato then contrasts the philosophically free life with the life of psychologically-divided unphilosophical lovers:

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<sup>233</sup> Compare also to Alcibiades’ desire for Socrates in the *Symposium* at 172d1-2 and 215d2 and following, where Socrates contrasts the philosopher as free man with the lawyer as slave.

<sup>234</sup> 485b2-3.

<sup>235</sup> Hackforth 1952, 98 notes that the attribution of self-control within the erotic context serves to highlight “the more positive aspect of σωφροσύνη: not a passionless self-suppression, but a passionate self-surrender, which is nevertheless a profound satisfying of self.”

If, on the other hand, [the lovers] adopt a lower way of living, with ambition [φιλοτίμω] in place of philosophy, then pretty soon when they are careless [ἀμελεία] because they have been drinking, or for some other reason, the pair's undisciplined horses will catch their souls off guard [ἀφρούρους] and together bring them to commit that act which ordinary people would take to be the happiest choice of all; and when they have consummated it once, they go on doing this for the rest of their lives, but sparingly, since they have not approved of what they are doing with their whole minds [οὐ πάση δεδογμένα τῇ διανοίᾳ πράττοντες] (256b-c).

The life depicted is that of the timocratic man. This unphilosophical lover holds ambition rather than love of wisdom as his goal, which places the desires of honor-loving spirit in charge of his soul. Since reason is not in its rightful, natural place of ruling the soul, the lovers will give in to their lust, though more sparingly than if appetite was ruling. The lovers' actions are not whole-hearted, as the spirited part feels shame and the reasoning part is opposed to the actions. From the description of the timocratic lover we can infer that the philosophical lover acts with the approval of his whole mind, in harmony with the entire soul. The descriptions of the timocratic soul, on the other hand, is a portrait of a soul divided. Such divisiveness will always be present, and felt, in a soul not directed by reason. By placing reason in the position of power in one's soul one can experience the true freedom of harmoniously directing one's life activities towards instantiating virtue. However, the spirited lover is closer to achieving true freedom than the soul driven by appetite, in that he feels shame at participating in dishonorable acts.

The portrayal of the lover ruled by appetite serves a different purpose than the description of the timocratic lover. The appetitively-driven soul is representative of the faulty freedom of the tyrant that Plato attacks with his doctrine of freedom. Plato says that the lover ruled by the appetitive part “sets out in the manner of a four-footed beast, eager to make babies; [he makes licence (ὑβρει) his companion],<sup>236</sup> he goes after unnatural pleasure too, without a trace of fear or shame” (250e-251a). The comparison to an animal is no doubt an intentional criticism of the tyrant’s view of freedom as hedonism, as well as perhaps a reference to the black horse.

Plato further describes the interaction between reason and the other two soul parts as a contest between two types of principles:

. . . each of us is ruled by two principles which we follow whatever they lead: one is our inborn desire for pleasures [ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν], the other is our acquired judgment [ἐπίκτητος δόξα] that pursues what is best. Sometimes these two are in agreement; but there are times when they quarrel inside us, and then sometimes one of them gains control, sometimes the other. Now when judgment [δόξης] is in control and leads us by reasoning [λόγῳ] toward what is best, that sort of self-control is called ‘being in your right mind’ [σωφροσύνη]; but when desire takes command in us and drags us without reasoning toward pleasure, then its command is known as ‘outrageousness’ [ὑβρις]. (237d-238a)

These two forces are also invoked in the *Gorgias*, where doing what one pleases or sees fit to do [ὅτι ἂν αὐτοῖς δόξη βέλτιστον εἶναι] is distinguished from doing what one

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<sup>236</sup> Insertion Shorey 1969 translation.

wants [βούλονται] (466e1-3).<sup>237</sup> Thus, a fight for power in the soul ensues when the pleasure-seeking element is at odds with the reasoning part.<sup>238</sup> There is a back and forth of power as one gains control, then the other. Although the idea of gratifying our pleasurable desires at will appeals to the hedonistic element in the soul, by dissociating this type of behavior from conscious, reasoned action, Plato shows that the life of hedonism ultimately lacks continuity and direction that the reasoning part gives by following its own desires. Hence, a person who lives a human life of hedonism will end up as an animal in the next life<sup>239</sup> because he has essentially given up his use of that distinctly human power of reasoning to simply float from pleasurable experience to pleasurable experience without the anchor of the Good to give meaning and direction to his life path.

Frankfurt offers the helpful distinction between free action and free will.<sup>240</sup> A free action occurs when an individual is able to satisfy first-order desires he has. A first-order desire takes the form of B wants C. A free will, on the other hand, necessitates a self-reflexive second-order (or higher-order) volition to have that first-(or lower-)order desire. A second-order volition takes the form of B wants/does not want to want C. Frankfurt argues that it is freedom of the will, not freedom of action, which constitutes a person. Hence, Ferrari argues that the bad horse is akin to Frankfurt's "wanton" who only has first-order desires and does not reflect upon whether he wants such desires at a second

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<sup>237</sup> See Segvic 2000, 5-15.

<sup>238</sup> I follow Gerson 2003, 134 in taking this passage as an adjunct to the tripartite theory, rather than a divergence from it.

<sup>239</sup> *Timaeus* 42c2-4.

<sup>240</sup> Frankfurt 1971, 11.

order.<sup>241</sup> However, Frankfurt does not preclude the wanton from being able to reason or deliberate in order to achieve his desires.<sup>242</sup> Rather, he simply lacks the ability or motivation to reflect upon his own desires.<sup>243</sup> This fits with my interpretation that for Plato reason is active even in cases where the desires of the lower soul are driving actions. The philosopher simply uses his reason to pursue the reasoning faculty's desires.

Frankfurt does not consider the wanton a person because he does not have a free will with second-order desires. This raises the question of personhood within Plato's theory of freedom. According to Plato, reason is the natural ruler of the soul. As such, we might say that every human<sup>244</sup> has a higher-order desire to have his first-order desires coincide with the desires native to reason. However, in most instances, Plato thinks that people have conflicting second-order desires or have an additional higher-order desire to identify with the desires of the lower soul. Either scenario has the effective result of having no second-order desire and thereby destroys an individual's personhood.<sup>245</sup> To be free, for Plato, is also to be a fully-formed person whose second-order volition is for the desires of reason to drive one's actions, and to accomplish those actions. However, most human beings are not free, by this definition, and hence are not persons. I have been arguing all along that Plato's requirements for freedom are very stringent and pertain only to relatively rare philosophers. Yet, the result that most human beings are not persons seems to cast the net too narrowly.<sup>246</sup> Hence, it is instructive to use Gerson's classifications of embodied and disembodied persons as different entities. To be a

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<sup>241</sup> Ferrari 1987, 273n74.

<sup>242</sup> Frankfurt 1971, 11. I think that Gerson 2003, 122 misconstrues Frankfurt on this point.

<sup>243</sup> Frankfurt 1971, 13.

<sup>244</sup> Excluding, as Frankfurt 1971, 11 does, young children and brute animals.

<sup>245</sup> Frankfurt 1971, 16.

<sup>246</sup> Frankfurt 1971, 11n5 concedes that his division of persons and non-persons is somewhat arbitrary.

Platonic person, for Gerson, is to be a knower, ideally and to identify oneself completely with one's rational part. However, one can only fully achieve this state as a disembodied soul. Thus, embodied persons are by virtue of their embodiment, divided souls, never fully able to identify with their rational soul parts due to the constant presence of desires of the lower soul inherent to embodiment.<sup>247</sup> Therefore, we can allow for degrees of personhood in Plato.<sup>248</sup> Correspondingly, this suggests degrees of freedom in Platonic thought, as well.

Returning to the image of the chariot, it is the horses, or lower parts of the soul, that prevent the soul from getting a good view of Reality in the afterlife.<sup>249</sup> However, the project of the philosopher is not to kill the horses, as evidenced by the presence of horses in the chariots of the gods. In looking to this divine model, the aim is to turn the horses into assets rather than liabilities. The growth of the horses' wings seems to reflect the fact that when properly ordered the other parts of the soul can aid reason to pursue its goals, namely to view the Forms. Thus appetite and spirit are not destroyed; however, the desires of these parts simply do not form the basis of the philosopher's actions.<sup>250</sup> The philosopher identifies with the second-order desire for reason's desires. The divine chariots have two<sup>251</sup> good horses instrumental to achieving the charioteer's goals. Their chariots "move easily since they are balanced [*ἰσορρόπως*] and well under control

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<sup>247</sup> Gerson 2003, 279.

<sup>248</sup> Following Gerson 2003, 280.

<sup>249</sup> One soul is said to view Reality just barely because it is distracted by the horses (248a). Another soul "rises at one time and falls at another, and because its horses pull it violently in different directions, it sees some real things and misses others" (248a).

<sup>250</sup> Segvic 2000, 36-7; Gerson 2003, 143.

<sup>251</sup> Hackforth 1952, 69n3 notes that Plato's language is vague on the exact number of horse attributed to the gods. Hence, McGibbon 1964, 62 suggests that the souls of the gods may be structurally different than those of humans. Even if this is so, the gods are still upheld as a paradigm for humans to imitate. Even if their souls are composed differently, the end goal of harmonious action is still the same.

[εὐήνια]” (247b2). Humans must learn how to transform and maintain their horses to be good horses.

However, as we saw with the difficulties of conferring Platonic personhood upon embodied souls, it is almost impossible to achieve the state that the gods exhibit. Hence, Ferrari takes the mastery of the contingency of our embodiment as the main point of the myth.<sup>252</sup> I agree with this general interpretation. The unpredictability associated with matter<sup>253</sup> ensures a certain level of contingency to be present as long as our souls are embodied. Hence, the trick is to learn to be a master of oneself, including one’s worse and challenging elements. This is where true freedom comes from. For if one aims one’s actions firmly and consciously towards reason’s desires, one is more likely to attain one’s goals in a predictable fashion. On the other hand, if one gives in to the demands of the lower soul parts more than necessary these parts are shown to lead one to erratic and unpredictable behavior. Although, in such cases, one may be doing what one pleases, it is not what the reasoning part wants, ultimately. True freedom comes with the self-control of the charioteer and his properly-trained horses that always support his goals, just as the divine horses do.

Socrates reiterates this message with his prayer at the end of the dialogue:

O dear Pan<sup>254</sup> and all the other gods of this place, grant that I may be beautiful inside. Let all my eternal possessions be in friendly harmony [φίλια] with what is

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<sup>252</sup> Ferrari 1987, 137.

<sup>253</sup> *Timaeus* 46e5-6.

<sup>254</sup> The invocation of Pan may be an allusion to Pan’s dual nature as half god, half beast, as well as a symbol of this dual nature of the philosopher himself, as part divine part mortal. Pan is also mentioned in *Cratylus*, 408b5-c9. See De Vries 1969, 265.

within. May I consider the wise man rich. As for gold, let me have as much as a moderate man [ὁ σώφρων] could bear and carry with him. (279b8-c2)

The final message of the dialogue conveys a wish for proper ordering of the soul so that reason's desires are heeded while the desires of the lower soul are moderated. Therefore, the *Phaedrus* myth has shown freedom to be contingent upon reason's rule of spirit and appetite so that it may act in line with its knowledge of the Forms. Once again this freedom is not liberty to follow any desires that arise, but rather it is the self-controlled rule of reason in the soul. The image of the puppet in the *Laws* will further bear this out.

### c. Gripping the Golden Cord: the Freedom of Divine Reason in the Laws

Plato's description of the image of the puppeteer occupies only a short section in the first book of the *Laws*.<sup>255</sup> However, it presents a striking image of humans as puppets of the gods and reveals a curious mixture of elements of both freedom and determinism. Once the contrary elements present in this myth and its related passages are untangled, it becomes evident that the myth reinforces the doctrine of Platonic freedom that I have been arguing for throughout.

The puppet image is introduced in the following passage:

. . . let's imagine that each of us living beings is a puppet of the gods. Whether we have been constructed to serve as their plaything, or for some serious reason, is beyond our ken, but what we certainly do know is this: we have these emotions in us, which act like cords or strings and tug us about; they work in opposition, and tug against each other to make us perform actions that are opposed

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<sup>255</sup> The myth spans from 644d-645c.

correspondingly; back and forth we go across the boundary line where vice and virtue meet. One of these dragging forces according to our judgment demands our constant obedience, and this is the one we have to hang on to, come what may; the pull of the other cords we must resist. The cord, which is golden and holy, transmits the power of “calculation”, a power which in a state is called the public law; being golden, it is pliant, while the others, whose composition resembles a variety of other substances, are tough and inflexible. The force exerted by law is excellent and one should always cooperate with it, because although ‘calculation’ is a noble thing, it is gentle, not violent, and its efforts need assistants, so that the gold in us may prevail over the other substances. (*Laws* 644d 7–645a8)

In this section I will focus on the particular mythical image presented in this passage as well as two passages of the *Laws* where Plato returns to the puppet image and the related themes of freedom and determinism. However, first I will examine the allusions to other poetic works that Plato may be drawing upon with the puppet image.

### **i. Poetic Allusions in the Myth**

Elements within the golden cord passage bear similarities to Homer and Hesiod. In Book VIII in Homer’s *Iliad*, Zeus dares the other gods and goddesses to attempt to pull him down from the sky.<sup>256</sup> Instead, Zeus brags that he could drag them all up with the earth and sea, as the victor in a divine tug of war. The image of the gods pulling a cord is similar to the one evoked by Plato in the *Laws*. Additionally, Hesiod’s myth of the five ages in *Works and Days*<sup>257</sup> may be a source for Plato’s symbolism of the various metals

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<sup>256</sup> 17-27.

<sup>257</sup> 110-200.

making up the cords.<sup>258</sup> The golden cord is the finest and best for Plato, just as the golden race is the best in Hesiod. Plato may be suggesting that clinging to the golden cord will give rise to an existence similar to the golden race. The golden cord may also represent this race which is now said to be *daimónia* of men. In the latter case, by gripping the golden cord humans are tapping into the goodness of these intermediary ‘pure spirits’ who are loved by the gods. In Hesiod, the other lesser cords that Plato describes as made of various substances evoke the subsequent inferior four ages of man, represented by the lesser metals silver, bronze<sup>259</sup> and iron. Hesiod places man in the fifth, iron age.<sup>260</sup> This age is characterized by suffering, though Hesiod says that they “have some good mingled with their evils” (175). Plato, too, has this view of humans as he demonstrates with his tripartite psychology which distinguishes one elevated part of the soul and two baser parts. This psychology is echoed in Plato’s myth in the variegation of the metals, with the golden cord being associated with divine reason in contrast to the “tough and inflexible” cords representing the emotions.

Finally, in the *Republic*, the myth of the cave mentions puppets and puppeteers as an analogy: “Imagine that along this path a low wall has been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers [θαυματοποιοῖς] above which they show their puppets [θαύματα]” (514b2-4). In front of the wall people pass carrying statues of people and animals, creating a kind of shadow puppet show with the fire behind them. This stage of the cave

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<sup>258</sup> Plato avails himself of the Hesiodic theme of the metals in some of his own works prior to the *Laws*. In the *Republic*, the myth of the metals (415a-c) claims that each stratum of society is suffused by a metal, namely, gold, silver, bronze or iron. Those with gold in them are the most valuable and most equipped to rule. Likewise, in the *Statesman* the kingly class is associated with gold (303d-e). The *Statesman* myth (268d-274e) likewise employs a categorization of cosmic ages similar to the Hesiodic ages of man.

<sup>259</sup> There are two brazen, or bronze, generations. The first self-destructs, while the second comprises the Heroic Age of Troy.

<sup>260</sup> 169-200.

myth is suggestive of imagination and belief.<sup>261</sup> The world of the puppets is inferior to the world of the Forms outside the cave. We shall see whether this ascription translates to the puppet of the *Laws*. However, it is striking that the only other place that Plato mentions puppets [θαῦμα] is another myth about being freed from the bondage of ignorance.<sup>262</sup> The *Laws* expands upon this image presented fleetingly in the *Republic*.

## ii. Analysis of the Puppeteer Passage

Just prior to the myth, the group of interlocutors is discussing moral education. The Athenian Stranger tells the puppeteer myth to Cleinias and Megillus in order to illustrate the problem of psychic forces operating on individuals and to recommend an avenue for self-control. Thus, again<sup>263</sup> freedom is associated with self-control. The myth begins with the suggestion that humans are puppets [θαῦμα] of the gods. Plato uses the word θεῖον, which can be interpreted in one sense as a substantive in the genitive, rendering the phrase ‘puppets of the gods.’ Alternatively, θεῖον can be taken as adjectival, meaning that humans partake in the divine, and thus are serious beings after all.<sup>264</sup> The Stranger plays up this ambiguity by suggesting that the question of the exact purpose that humans serve for the gods be put aside, whether it is a serious purpose or not (644d9-e1).

On the first reading, this puppet image gives a deterministic picture of human life. Typically, a puppet is controlled completely by the puppeteer who jerks the cords to

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<sup>261</sup> Taken in conjunction with the Divided Line.

<sup>262</sup> He uses the related term *thaumatopoiōi*, which connotes more of a conjurer or juggler but may refer to puppeteer, in several other places, which are discussed in Gocer 1999- 2000, 121-122. For a discussion of freedom in the cave allegory, see my section 4a, above.

<sup>263</sup> As in the *Phaedrus* myth.

<sup>264</sup> The dual possibilities of interpretation are noted by Bernadette 2000, 45.

produce the desired reactions in the puppet. However, a toy or puppet can also be seen as an imitation of something real. In this case, the puppet is a likeness of a human. The imitative aspect of the puppet image invokes Plato's discussions of *mimesis* in the *Republic*.<sup>265</sup> Plato uses this image to call us to be more than simple puppets living an illusory, unreal existence. He is trying to persuade us to acknowledge the native rationality within us and to take charge of aligning our lives with reason. By invoking the unreal existence of the puppet, Plato hints at the possibility and reality of freedom. The mimetic aspect of the puppet image also applies to the larger scale in reminding the reader that, just as a shadow puppet is an imitation of a human, the city of the *Laws* is an imitation of the best city, which is a city of gods.<sup>266</sup> Thus, the legislation of the city is an imitation of the grand cosmic order.<sup>267</sup> The mimetic aspect of the puppet image is a reminder that both individuals and cities are imitators of the divine order of the cosmos.

In the next few lines of the myth, the manipulating force shifts from being the gods to becoming our own emotions:

we have these emotions [πάθη] in us, which act like cords or strings and tug us about; they work in opposition, and tug against each other to make us perform actions that are opposed correspondingly; back and forth we go across the boundary line where vice and virtue meet. (644e1-5)

By substituting human emotions for the gods as the drivers of our actions, the image becomes less deterministic because the driving forces of human action have become

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<sup>265</sup> Particularly, *Republic* Books 2, 3 and 10. Bernadette 2000, notes the reality vs. imitation dichotomy, 46. Unfortunately, he uses this insight to formulate a self-admittedly strange interpretation of the myth, hypothesizing that the gods are becoming perfect through their interactions with humans, a position which I believe Plato would find sacrilegious.

<sup>266</sup> 739a-e.

<sup>267</sup> Mouze 2005, 345.

internalized rather than being imposed divinely from without. Clearly the image of the gods directing one's actions as puppet masters is deterministic. However, if the controlling forces are within a person, it is more difficult to label the situation one of straight determinism.<sup>268</sup>

What role do emotions play in constituting the individual identity and will? Here Plato is distinguishing emotions from the self and the will by describing actions driven by emotions as involuntary, even though they are states internal to the person and constitute a part of the soul.<sup>269</sup> Emotions [πάθη] force us to act in certain ways, seemingly against our own will. Yet, Plato does not want to go as far as saying that emotions determine our actions entirely. He distinguishes the force of emotions from the puppeteer gods and rationality by likening the emotions to cords, rather than puppet masters. This leaves open the identity of the pullers of the emotion-cords. Even though the focus has shifted from external puppet masters to internal forces driving human action, the change continues to give a somewhat deterministic picture of life as a struggle between opposing internal influences that drag the 'puppet' self from action to action, seemingly irrespective of, and distinct from, her own will. In this scenario, the human puppet is not acting in accordance with her true will. Rather, she is like a passive rope in a tug of war of emotions.

In the continuation of the myth Plato further mitigates the initial externally-based determinism of the image. The passage continues:

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<sup>268</sup> It could be labeled a form of psychological determinism, which is the view that desires of individuals can explain human behavior.

<sup>269</sup> This differentiation of emotions within the soul links back to the *Phaedrus* myth's division of the soul into three distinct parts, as represented by the charioteer and two horses.

One of these dragging forces according to our judgement demands our constant obedience, and this is the one we have to hang on to, come what may; the pull of the other cords we must resist. This cord, which is golden and holy, transmits the power of “calculation” [τοῦ λογισμοῦ]. (644e5-645a3)

These lines introduce a concept of freedom. We are being directed to hang onto the golden cord and to resist the pull of the lesser cords, suggesting that we do have the liberty to choose the forces that direct our actions. Plato implies that only those who choose to hold onto the golden cord are truly free because they are acting with divine rationality, while those who do not make this choice are led by their emotions like puppets. The action of gripping the golden cord changes the image from one of a puppet to a person who has the ability to control her life and actions.

The golden and holy cord is said to be the transmitter [ἀγωγήν] of the power of calculation. The word ἀγωγήν has senses of guiding, leading, and even educating or training,<sup>270</sup> while calculation is defined by the Athenian as the faculty “by which we judge the relative merits of pleasure and pain” (644d2-3). As such, by hanging onto the golden cord we become more rational and more virtuous, in that our judgements about the best way of life are fostered. What does this golden cord itself represent? A more straightforward interpretation is that the cord represents the rational part of the soul in battle with the other parts of the soul for dominion over our actions.<sup>271</sup> Hence, the golden cord is the highest, rational part of the soul, while the other cords represent its lower parts. The puppet signifies the personal identity which is besieged by many competing

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<sup>270</sup> See “ἀγωγός,” in Liddell and Scott, 1940, 10.

<sup>271</sup> I follow Gerson’s position that the *Laws* retains the partitioned soul (2003, 265-275) contra Bobonich’s (2002, 260-265).

drives trying to take hold in the soul. Whichever cord, or cords, are gripped by the puppet determine his identity. By beseeching us to grip onto the golden cord Plato is urging us to take control of our destinies, and ourselves, by choosing to have rationality govern our conduct. This will promote independence from the limitations of puppet life. For if the rational part does not rule, we are condemned to live a life dominated by our emotions. The Athenian confirms this interpretation when he states that the moral of the fable for the individual is that he “must grasp<sup>272</sup> [λαβόντα] the truth about these forces that pull him, and act on it in his life” (645b5-6). Plato constructs the myth so as to make the life of emotion sound deterministic in contrast to the freedom of choosing the path of rationality. Thus, the first step towards freedom is to understand the emotions acting within one’s soul. The second step is to counteract their influences by cultivating rationality resolutely. The emotional forces in the lower soul must be understood so that they may be resisted and oriented towards helping the highest soul act in alignment with the good.

This interpretation of the cords as parts of the soul accounts for one level of meaning in the myth, but it does not account for the puppet imagery fully. Although the metaphor works easily when the opposing forces are all internal, with the parts of the soul competing with one another as puppet masters. We must not forget that the myth is introduced with the gods as puppet masters, a very deterministic image. Do these two senses of the puppet master as god and as individual soul part cohere? Recognizing the cord as part of the puppet is important for solving the puzzle. Although the cord is a distinct element, in the case of a puppet the cord can be considered a part of the puppet

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<sup>272</sup> Following the Bury 1926 translation, which brings out the allusion to grasping the golden cord.

too. By deciding to go along with the golden cord, the puppet identifies himself with the cord. In this way, too, he identifies with the will of the gods. Hence, the determinism dissipates because the individual's will becomes part of the greater divine will. Since the puppet chooses to grip the golden cord, he is free even if the source of his actions emanates from elsewhere. Plato's shift towards speaking of the "gold in us" (645a8), confirms the human kinship with the divine and the possibility of freedom.

The golden cord itself is described as holy or divine [ἱερόν], an attribution not used in the description of the other cords, which he says are composed of various harder, less valuable metals. This distinction indicates that only the golden cord is linked to the gods, obscuring the identity of the puppet master, if there is one, who is pulling the lesser cords representing emotions. Indeed, Plato suggests that allowing the lesser cords to drive one's actions is to act aimlessly, with no direction at all, as he indicates in his description of the pull of the cords: "they work in opposition, and tug against each other to make us perform actions that are opposed correspondingly; back and forth we go across the boundary line where vice and virtue meet" (644e3-5). Here the subject is depicted as a true puppet, being jerked back and forth from action to action, with no self-control. This spontaneous action sounds more like radical indeterminism<sup>273</sup> rather than determinism because there is no rational singleness of purpose, but rather a succession of spontaneous actions.

By recognizing the superior constitution of the golden cord and by acting in accordance with it, we do remain puppets, and in fact truer puppets than those who are led erratically by their passions. The puppet master holding the golden cord provides

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<sup>273</sup> Indeterminism can be defined as a lack of any form of causation being present to explain an action. Such actions are due to pure chance.

rational and consistent direction in life, unlike the inferior cords jerking people about every which way following a series of emotional whims. The puppet gripping the golden cord is fusing her will with the will of the puppet master gods, thereby transitioning from puppet towards master of herself and possibly even divinity. Therefore, the Athenian says that the myth clarifies “the meaning of the terms ‘self-superior’ and ‘self-inferior’ [κρείττω ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἥττω]” (645b2-3). By identifying with the best, rational part of one’s soul, which is linked to the divine, one achieves self-determination and freedom. With this inversion, Plato transforms the idea of puppethood into a desirable condition in which the puppet consents to her position and her direction by the golden cord. Hence, the best puppets are the truly free.

The version of freedom that Plato presents is not the usual contemporary conception of freedom as simply being able to act according to one’s desires.<sup>274</sup> According to Platonic freedom, one is free when acting rationally in line with the desires of the higher good. This freedom is almost another form of determinism in that one is aiming to habitually adhere to the rational course of action at all times, rendering one’s choices predictable.<sup>275</sup> The gripping is really a letting go of all other competing passions. We have a choice about who our puppet master is; we can either be ruled by emotion or by divine reason. The choice is between being a rational or irrational puppet. In fact, there is only one choice to be made—the choice of rationality. For the alternative of being led by one’s emotions is not a choice at all, rather it is the state that one remains in until the choice of rationality is made. The person being led by her emotions is shown to

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<sup>274</sup> Plato’s notion of free will comes closest to the positions set forth by Wolf 1990, and Watson 1975, 205-220.

<sup>275</sup> For more on this see my section on the cave allegory.

have many incompatible masters ordering her about. She cannot be considered free because she is not acting with a single unified will. Yet, when she grips the golden cord, the pulls of the emotion-cords continue to exert their force on the soul. However, the more closely she aligns with reason, the less of an impact the lesser cords will have.

### iii. Related Passages in the *Laws*

In Book 7 of the *Laws*, the Stranger returns to the theme of the human as a plaything [παίγνιον] for God.<sup>276</sup> The Stranger says that this feature of being a divine plaything is the best aspect of man. As such, “every man and every woman should play this part and order their whole life accordingly, engaging in the best possible pastimes—in quite a different frame of mind than their present one” (803c5-8). Here the Stranger challenges the typical view that the end goal of serious work is leisure by observing that the consequences of warfare, for instance, are never real leisure or true education, which is the most important activity. Peacetime is more congenial to these activities. Thus, a man should spend his whole life at play “sacrificing, singing, dancing—so that he can win the favor of the gods and protect himself from his enemies and conquer them in battle” (803e1-3). Since men are now said to be toys of the gods, play and pleasing one’s master are the most appropriate activities for a toy. This instruction to be the best toy one can be is in keeping with my interpretation of the puppet passage. Just as with the puppet image, Plato inverts the usual sense of toy as an inanimate and determined possession into a being capable of rational choice, namely the choice to accept his role as a toy completely and to fulfill it as best he can. Again, Plato incorporates a conception of

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<sup>276</sup> 803b2. However, now he claims this as a fact, whereas he is agnostic about the purpose of human life at the beginning of the puppeteer myth. Compare to 644d9-e1: “Whether we have been constructed to serve as their plaything, or for some serious reason, is something beyond our ken.”

freedom into his account with his emphasis on choice; but the choice remains between two deterministic existences. Either one accepts the assigned role of divine toy and acts in harmony with the rational cosmic order or one lets irrational mortal passions drive one's actions toward harmful activities without any direction other than hedonism. The former choice allows one a share in divinity, although it is only a share, as the Stranger says that humans are "puppets . . . mostly, and hardly real at all" (804b3-4). This allusion to the puppeteer myth ties the two images of toy and puppet together, fittingly, since a puppet is simply a toy with strings. Freedom is achieved with the choice to accept one's position. By assuming the puppet role wholeheartedly the puppet can have a share in divinity and reality. The puppet must accept reason as the natural ruler of his soul. All other soul arrangements threaten his freedom.

The freedom that comes with acceptance of the puppet role seems to be part of a continuum, in that the more perfectly one plays one's role, for example by worshipping the appropriate divinities at the appropriate times, the more good will one engenders from the gods. Having the good will of the gods allows men to "live the life that their own nature demands" (804b3), making them better puppets of the gods and extensions of divine will. In doing so, the best puppets are fusing their wills with the divine will, in essence becoming more like the gods. However, just as with the myth of the cave, there is an initial gripping of the cord that represents a sudden event, like the prisoner's release from his bonds. Thus, although one can be more or less free by degrees, Plato suggests an uneven transition toward freedom, as was seen with the cave allegory.

In Book 10, the theme of divine intervention is capped with a discussion of the scope of God's interference in men's affairs. Plato states that God is involved in the minutest of details of the universe:

The supervisor of the universe has arranged everything with an eye to its preservation and excellence, and its individual parts play appropriate active [ποιεῖ] or passive [πάσχει] roles according to their various capacities. These parts, down to the smallest details of their active [πρόξεως] and passive [πάθησις] functions, have each been put under the control of ruling powers that have perfected the minutest constituents of the universe. (903b5-10)

This description of God's relationship to the universe sounds like a form of theological determinism, which is the thesis that God causes all events, including human actions, thereby preventing human freedom. However, the distinction between active and passive roles may be Plato's way of acknowledging the special human brand of freedom which allows for choice in determining one's actions, even if those actions are consistent with God's will. Still, human actions are a cog in the machinery of the whole universe, which is driving continually towards the good. Is one truly free in a paternalistic universe in which good is always victorious? The Athenian tells a hypothetical detractor of the view that gods show concern for humans, "you exist for the sake of the universe" (903c5-6), informing him "your position is best not only for the universe but for you too, thanks to your common origin" (903d2-3). In this way Plato cleverly circumvents the question of determinism by focusing on the assimilation of the human will to the purely rational divine will. The Good is the good for all. This response mitigates the deterministic aspects of the universe's design by emphasizing the connectedness of humans to the

universe and its originator. If one allies oneself with God's will, one is not being determined by external forces. Instead, one is becoming one's own master.

In order to explain the interconnectedness of living beings with the divine more fully, Plato embarks on a discussion of transmigration of the soul:

since a soul is allied with different bodies at different times, and perpetually undergoes all sorts of changes, either self-imposed or produced by some other soul, the divine checkers-player [τῷ πεττευτῆ] has nothing to do except promote a soul with a promising character to a better situation, and relegate one that is deteriorating to an inferior, as is appropriate in each case, so that they all meet the fate they deserve. (903d-e)

This brief excursus into eschatology broadens the theme of play, this time comparing humans to chess pieces. Even with this deterministic analogy Plato ensures that we realize that we, as chess pieces, are still morally responsible for the states we are in by mentioning self-imposed change and the legal notion of desert. Soul changes are said to be either self-imposed or produced by some other soul, presumably one whose company we have *chosen* to keep. This is in keeping with the theme of self-control and conquest of oneself that runs through the *Laws*.<sup>277</sup> Thus, the divine checkers player is merely directing souls to their appropriate stations, given their life choices. Once more, upon closer examination, the deterministic language that Plato uses cloaks a concept of freedom of the will in deciding one's life path. This final image portrays God as powerless to change the earned destiny of each soul and shifts the power back to the individual, again, suggesting the possibility of human freedom.

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<sup>277</sup> See, for example, 626d8-9: "Each man fights a private war against himself." Also, 634a6-b6 and 647d1-9.

The *Laws* begins with the statement that law has a divine, not human, origin.<sup>278</sup>

Initially, such a providential arrangement seems to put human free will into question. However, throughout the *Laws*, Plato emphasizes his own version of human freedom which is attainable by each individual within the ordered cosmic framework. By continually applying deterministic metaphors for humans such as toys, puppets and chess pieces, Plato is underscoring the interconnectedness of all beings in the universe, particularly the human connection to the divine. Everything in the universe originates from the divine and humans retain a link to the divine source via the rational, best part of their souls. At the same time, Plato holds humans morally responsible for their actions, individually, which explains why he emphasizes choice repeatedly. Choice is guided by the state of the soul. The more one allows the highest rational soul to rule, the more rationally one acts and the freer one is in the sense of being in control of oneself. If, on the other hand, the lower soul is allowed to rule one's actions through hedonism and pain-avoidance, then one is closer to a state of spontaneous indeterminism whereby true rational choice does not exist. By urging us to grip the golden cord, Plato is advising us to acknowledge our divine source. It is only when we merge our identities with the highest divine soul that we become free masters of ourselves. Thus, true freedom is becoming like a god. In contemporary terms, Plato could be labeled a compatibilist because he recognizes human freedom of choice to align one's will with the divine will, which is at the same time directing the universe providentially towards the good. Since this choice is not constrained, it is free. However, Plato thinks that it is the only moral choice to make, rendering Platonic freedom a fundamentally ethical concept.

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<sup>278</sup> 624a-b.

## 5. Conclusion

Plato's concept of freedom has been shown to be an answer to the challenges of competing concepts of freedom, namely conventional freedom, democratic freedom, and tyrannical freedom. Plato employs the ethical foundation of conventional freedom as well as its focus on restraining the appetite in his own concept of freedom. However, he also requires grounding in knowledge of the Good, not merely obedience to its laws. Plato criticizes democracy for its own faulty version of freedom, which lacks both the knowledge and normativity of the Good. He likens democratic freedom to wine, as it must be moderated by reason. The equality of all citizens, Plato thinks, will lead to the erosion of social mores and will encourage the city to be driven by the lowest desires of the souls of the majority of citizens. Ultimately, he says that the amorality and anarchy of democracy leads to tyranny. The tyrant, too, holds a false conception of freedom, this time as the ability to follow any desire unhindered. Plato shows that, once again, the amorality of this freedom actually enslaves the entire soul to the worst, most vicious lower parts of the soul. Tyranny is first broached in the *Gorgias* and with the thought experiment of Gyges' ring in the *Republic*. Hence, the topic of freedom pervades the Platonic corpus.

At the end of the *Republic* Plato answers the challenge to show that the just man fares best. The myth of Er shows that "virtue knows no master", or that the soul is most free when operating in line with reason's desire for the Good. However, even souls with diminished capacities for philosophical freedom are shown to be responsible for their choices. The depictions of souls in the afterlife suggest that the lower parts of the soul

can survive physical death so that they are present in the afterlife. Philosophers may ultimately achieve permanent liberation from the lower soul after a certain number of life cycles.

The first part of chapter four uncovered the philosopher's route to freedom through education. Philosophers are to be educated specifically to be free so that they may create and maintain the city's freedom. Slavishness and lawlessness threaten the goal of free ruling philosophers. I speculated that freedom may be a Platonic Form but not a virtue. However, freedom is necessary for virtue. The cave allegory depicts the educational pursuit of the Good in mythical form as a liberation tale. However, I argued that this theme of liberation points explicitly to a more stringent philosophical concept of individual metaphysical freedom. I believe that the rational part of the soul may be one of the compelling forces, along with the Good itself, that leads the philosopher out of the cave. The compulsion exerted within Platonic freedom derives from the logical necessity and ethical normativity of carrying out the Good. The *Republic* highlights the Form of the Good, and emphasizes knowledge of the Forms more generally, as the ideals which should inform free actions. The myth of the cave shows the process of understanding the Forms as freedom from the enslavement of imagination and belief. At the same time, this freedom entails an absolute allegiance to the Forms and necessitates action to instantiate them on earth. The myth of the cave underscores the idea, seen in Plato's critique of democratic freedom, that philosophical freedom is not liberty to pursue desires uninhibited.

The second portion of chapter four examines two other myths. The *Phaedrus* myth provides further detail about the interaction between the parts of the soul. It

emphasizes the natural position of reason as ruler of the soul. Spirit and appetite can help reason to achieve its goals in the best scenario but if reason becomes complacent, appetite or spirit may come to drive the soul's actions by enslaving reason for its purposes.

Although outside forces may affect the soul, the soul is shown to be responsible for its own activity. The passages of the *Laws* fill in the account of freedom already set forth in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. The image of the golden cord in the *Laws* gives us more information about the soul's relationship to reason. Action of the soul in line with reason puts an individual in the most control over her life, allowing her to be free in Plato's understanding of freedom. The divinity of reason links the philosopher to the gods, so that she is working to instantiate the Good that the cosmos is driving towards. The alternative is enslavement to emotion, which will lead to erratic and unpredictable action. The freedom of the philosopher is moderate, self-controlled and predictable.

Therefore, I have shown that Plato has a consistent concept of freedom evident in his corpus. This ethical concept of philosophical freedom bears further consideration in the contemporary free will debate, which might rightly be said to be "a series of footnotes to Plato."<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Whitehead 1979, 39.

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