

SLEEPING WITH MOTHER, MEN, GODS, AND BEASTS
VIRTUOUS RULE AND VICIOUS DREAMS IN *REPUBLIC IX*

This paper concerns Plato's use of dreams in *Republic*. Its focus, chiefly, is a small chunk of text in *Republic IX* (571c-572b), where Socrates, after elaborating on the degeneration of character and constitution that begins in Book VIII, appears to stray toward the beginning of Book IX and begins to talk about dreams. Treated at least stylistically as a digression by Plato, this bit of text, I shall argue, plays a significant role in vividly illustrating the nadir of a degenerating personality. Plato's analysis of dreams here enables him to penetrate incisively and deeply into the human soul—thereby revealing some of its most profound, disturbing secrets. These discoveries, in turn, shed light in various ways on the confusion and debasement of the tyrannical life.

In this manner, I shall argue, the text of 571c-572b enables Plato to complete his depiction of the human soul, given mostly in Book IV, in a most efficient manner. First, it allows Plato to flesh out his contrast between the life of a philosopher and that of a tyrant—a contrast that itself functions as part of a lengthy argument, throughout the work, for the desirability of the philosophical or just life in contrast to that of the tyrant. Secondly, it paves the way neatly for the three arguments from 580a to 586e in Book IX that also aim to show the desirability of the philosophical life.

Moreover, the length and vividness of *Republic IX*'s account of dreams offer some evidence that Plato himself had a well-articulated grasp of the psychogenesis of dreams and some notion of how he could best categorize them within the confines of his moral psychology.

Dreams and Moral Degeneration

Republic IX, following up on the discussion of constitutional and personal degeneration in Book VIII, begins with an examination of desires and pleasures so as to shed light on the nature of the tyrannical person. All too soon and quite unexpectedly, it seems, the conversation turns to dreams.

Of the unnecessary pleasures and desires,¹ Socrates says, some are unnatural (*παράνομοι*) and occur in everyone, though to various extents. In moderate people, they are held in check by reason and laws, while in intemperate sorts, such as tyrants, they are stronger and more numerous and, consequently, incapable of restraint.² Socrates uses dreams to illustrate just how these unnecessary, unnatural desires take hold of people in sleep. He says:

¹Necessary desires are those of which we cannot rid ourselves and which are beneficial when satisfied, such as simple food. Unnecessary desires are those from which we can free ourselves and which do us harm when satisfied, such as more delicate food or other luxuries (558c-559d).

²571a-b.

Whenever the intellective, tame, and the ruling part of the soul sleeps, the bestial and wild part, full of food or drink and sleepless, leaps up and seeks to go and satisfy its pleasures. You know there is nothing at such a time that this part of the soul—freed from all control by shame or reason—would not dare to do.³

Acting without shame and deliberation, Socrates adds, the bestial part within each person shrinks from no act in our dreams, however unspeakable. In such circumstances, people dream of having sexual intercourse with their mother, other men, gods, and even beasts.⁴ To this, Adeimantus replies: “You say the truest things”.

Why does Socrates choose dreams to show the type of degeneration that a tyrant has undergone? Though Adeimantus is no tyrant, he sleeps and he dreams like everyone else. Like everyone else, he too gives vent to unnecessary, paranomic desires in certain of his dreams. Socrates is relating to the tyrant within Adeimantus and within each person, yet one that comes out for most people mainly during sleep, with the relaxation of the check of intellect.

Socrates continues on the topic of dreams, though it seems he has made his point. Not all people are invariably plagued by desire in their dreams, he adds. Those who, before sleep, stir their intellective faculty (τὸ λογιστικόν) with noble thoughts and satisfy the appetitive part of their soul (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) moderately are least likely to have wicked dreams and more likely to learn something about past, present, or future things.⁵ One “grasps the truth in this way especially and the images of dreams (αἱ ὄψεις... τῶν ἐνυπνίων) show themselves then to be least unlawful”.⁶ At 571b7-8, Socrates remarks that some men have so tamed their bestial soul that wicked dreams no longer or only infrequently occur to them.

After these remarks, as if to get back to the discussion from which they had inadvertently deviated, Socrates adds, “We have, in speaking of such things, been carried further than we intended”.⁷ This remark, I show below, ought not to be taken seriously.

Socrates next relates how a tyrannical man begins his decline from a democratic (neither moderate nor excessive) personality to that of a tyrant. Coming from a niggardly father and having ἔρωσ⁸ kindled in him by tyrant makers and clever soothsayers, just as

³571c-d. My translations throughout.

⁴571d. Cf. Oedipus’ concern of staying away from his mother’s bed because of a prophetic dream and Iocasta’s reply in Sophocles’ *OT* 976-980. Cf. also Io’s dream of sex with Zeus in Aeschylus’ *Pr.* 648-666.

⁵571b-572a.

⁶At *EN* I.13, Aristotle comments that, since the nutritive soul is relatively active in sleep, happy people are no better off than those who are miserable in sleep (except when to a small extent some small movements of the excellent part of the soul trickle into awareness) (1102b5-12).

⁷572b. The Greek reads, Ταῦτα μὲν τοίνυν ἐπὶ πλείον ἐξήχθημεν εἰπεῖν. Shorey treats this as an actual digression on the part of Plato. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 339.

⁸The nature of ἔρωσ enables it to be leader of and tyrant over the other desires (572e, 573d). Nicholas White says: “The idea as it appears in 572e-573a is evidently that whereas other unnecessary appetites are insistently active whenever their objects are at

some great and winged drone, he comes to waste away his possessions, abuse his parents, and even eventually defile his own polis. With each day, a tyrant's depravity and impiety become more acute. In short, the newer passions he has bestirred through lust, those that previously surfaced only infrequently in dreams, now predominate in wakefulness and dominate the better desires.⁹ Socrates sums up at 576b the nature of this exceedingly degenerate person, ὁ κάκιστος: "He is, perhaps, one who is of such kind in waking life (ὕπαρ) as we have described in a dream (οἷον ὄναρ διήλθομεν)". The longer he remains as a tyrant, Socrates adds, the more he lives as in a dream.¹⁰

At 574d-e, Socrates compares democratic and tyrannical personalities. A democratic personality is formed by newly emancipated (mostly erotic) opinions that have overcome his boyhood views of what is noble and shameful. Still these are held in check in waking life by regard for his father and regard for the laws. They only come out in sleep through his dreams. Once the democrat slides toward tyranny, however, he begins to live constantly the sort of life that earlier had only surfaced in his dreams. Socrates says, "Under the tyranny of ἔρωσ, he has become the type of person at all times in waking life that he used to be at some times in sleep [through dreams]" and will not hold back from any act, however shameful.

Here now we have three references to dreams in *Republic IX*. How are we to interpret them? What Plato is intent on demonstrating, through dreams, is the complete (or nearly so) lack of rational governance that characterizes a tyrant's waking life. While even the best people have some dreams of shameful content that flit by uncontrollably during sleep, for a tyrant, the very distinction between what is shameful and what is noble is perverted, if not meaningless. His waking life, characterized by the loss of rational governance, has become always every bit as base as his dreaming life sometimes used to be.

To make sense of this loss of rational governance in a tyrant, a few hypotheses seem possible. I entertain three below.

hand, lust is the sort of nagging appetite that, once it arises, is just as insistent whether its object is present or not". So, lust focuses on its own satisfaction to the detriment of the other desires. Nicholas P. White, *A Companion to Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979), 220-222.

⁹572b-575b.

¹⁰There is general agreement today among translators and commentators on how this passage is to be taken. The key is a proper grasp of διήλθομεν, which must be taken to be referring back to the dreams of a tyrant at 571c-d—especially in light of what Socrates says at 574e, which, as Adam notes, would have been fresh in the minds of readers by the time they reached 576b. See Plato, *The Republic of Plato* (trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 302; Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (rev. C. D. C. Reeve) (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), 246; Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Richard W. Sterling & William C. Scott (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 267; Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguins Books, 1983), 397-398; and Plato, *The Republic: Books VI-X*, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 353; and James Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 415.

Rational Emasculation Thesis: Reason mostly functions as a vehicle for the appetitive soul, but it periodically essays to function prohibitively, with little or no effect, in the life of a tyrant.

Weak Rational Incapacity Thesis: Reason is so affected by the desires of the appetitive soul over time that it comes to function exclusively as a mechanism for satisfying the desires of the appetitive soul of a tyrant.

Strong Rational Incapacity Thesis: Reason is so overwhelmed by the desires of the appetitive soul over time that it comes to have no role whatsoever in dictating a tyrant's behavior.

According to the *Rational Emasculation Thesis* (hereafter, RET), reason's almost exclusive role is to be a slave to and vehicle for the inflamed desires of the appetitive soul. In spite of its emasculation, reason does retain a slight capacity, though an exceedingly feckless one, to look after the good of a tyrant's soul as a whole. In effect, this "governing" capacity can have little or no impact on the actions of a tyrant, but it may turn up, on rare occasions of lucidity, in incontinent behavior—an exceptional case of recognition that what one is about to do is wrong before one inevitably does it.

According to the *Weak Rational Incapacity Thesis* (hereafter, RIT_w), reason is so overcome by the appetitive soul over time that it has completely lost its capacity to govern the soul. Still it has not lost its capacity to regulate behavior, though this directive capacity is subordinate to and at the behest of the appetitive soul.

Last, according to the *Strong Rational Incapacity Thesis* (hereafter, RIT_s), reason has been so incapacitated by the desires of the appetitive soul—especially lust—that it no longer has any role whatsoever in guiding one's actions. On this account, a tyrant lives the life of pure pleasure, without intellect—the "life of a jellyfish", as Plato says in *Philebus*.¹¹

Of these possibilities, it seems easy to rule out RIT_s. Even the most tyrannical person has *some* capacity to form judgments, however skewed they may be on account of the corruptive impact of lust.¹²

Deciding between RET and RIT_w, however, is not so easy. The description Plato gives of the path of tyrannical degeneration between 571c and 579c seems to contain no indecision, no regret.¹³ This might suggest that RIT_w is preferable to RET. Such a judgment, though, is hasty. Plato's account of degeneration of character here focuses exclusively on the *behavior* of a tyrant and not the reasoning behind his actions. About the only thing Plato tells us that is relevant to intentions is that democrats, out of some regard for what is fine and shameful, do not freely act on their lascivious desires, while

¹¹*Phlb.* 21c. Seneca compares the life of a vicious person to one who sleeps deeply. He says, "[H]eavy slumber blots out even dreams and plunges the mind too deep for the conscious self. Why does no one admit his failings? Because he's still deep in them. It's the person who's awakened who recounts his dream, and acknowledging one's failings is a sign of health". *Letters from a Stoic* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 102.

¹²The possibility of a life of pure pleasure, without reason, is never taken seriously by Socrates or his interlocutors in *Philebus*. *Philebus*, however, is a later work and deviates in many key respects from the moral psychology of *Republic*.

¹³At 572c, Plato mentions that the democrat is pulled in two directions, just prior to his becoming a democrat.

tyrants do.¹⁴ This, by itself, gives us no reason to prefer RIT_w to RET. Between the democratic personality and the extreme tyrant, who has lost all capacity for regret (RIT_w), there is room aplenty to accommodate tyrants of lesser sorts—one at the level of RET and perhaps even one in between the RIT_w and RET tyrants (i.e., one who follows lust though he is constantly confused about ends).

In this manner, a tyrant is not one without a capacity to deliberate about ends. He is one whose rational soul, over time, has lost its capacity to govern the soul of the person, as a whole, for the good of the person, as a whole. A tyrant's reason has ceded control to the most lascivious part of the appetitive soul and functions to feed its vile appetites. So, the reference to dreams at 576b proves a fit summary of the type of moral degeneration that the tyrant has undergone.

Dreams and Epistemic Confusion

A question of a different sort remains: Why does Socrates choose dreams to illustrate a tyrant's ethical degeneration? To answer this question, we must first look back to Plato's larger aims in *Republic*.

Ostensibly, the *Republic* is a work on the nature and benefits of justice as they apply both to the polis and the individuals in it. At the political level, Plato states that justice requires that each part of the polis does what it does best, under the dictates of law and well-educated, excellent rulers.¹⁵ At the personal level, Plato states that justice is a settled dispositional state that directs all of one's actions. This state is characterized by harmony of the soul—each part of the soul doing what it does well and acting, under the governance of reason, for the good of the person as a whole.¹⁶ To tie together the political and personal levels, he adds baldly that political justice is isomorphic to personal justice.¹⁷

Does Plato take this isomorphism seriously? The tendency in modern scholarship has been to deny that Plato was really serious about any such isomorphism and treat the similarities between a person and a polis analogically. John Cooper, for instance, does just this. For Cooper, for an individual to be just “is to be in a psychological state which shapes and directs one's voluntary actions, one's choices and one's preferences over a very wide range of practical concerns”.¹⁸ In contrast, for a polis to be just entails not that most or all of its citizens are just, but that each class sticks to its own work, and this is only a commitment to *behaving* justly, not being just.

Bernard Williams, in contrast, takes the isomorphism quite seriously. Williams has argued that Plato runs into difficulties as a result of two propositions, derived from 435e

¹⁴574e.

¹⁵432d-435a.

¹⁶441e-442b & 586e.

¹⁷435a reads: Καὶ δίκαιος ἄρα ἀνὴρ δικαίας πόλεως κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς δικαιοσύνης εἶδος οὐδὲν διοίσει, ἀλλ' ὅμοιος ἔσται. See also 441c-d.

¹⁸John Cooper, “The Psychology of Justice in Plato”, *Plato's Republic*, ed. Richard Kraut (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997), 18-20.

and 435a respectively, that are inconsistent. The first, we may call the *principle of reduction*, which reads:

(a) A city is F if and only if its men are F.

The second may be called the *principle of identity of form*, which reads:

(b) The explanation of a city's being F is the same as that of a man's being F (the same εἶδος [form] of F-ness applies to both).

Adherence to these propositions lead to a host of difficulties. Most notably, identity of form entails that a polis is just when only a small number of its citizens are just (i.e., the ruling class), which is inconsistent with the principle of reduction, requiring that all or at least a large part of its citizens must be just for a polis to be just.¹⁹

Jonathan Lear has argued that identity of form can be salvaged by denying that Plato holds on to reductionism. Reductionism cannot be maintained, he argues, because the relationship between persons and their polis is dynamic and interactive, not reductive and reactive. Both persons and their polis are shaped through the joint processes of internalization, where members of a polis take on attributes of their society through conditioning, and externalization, where the same members project on to and shape their polis by their own perception of the way things are or ought to be.²⁰ Instead of the principle of reductionism, Lear maintains that a proper grasp of Plato's psychology commits him only to their being some members who have the exact same psychopolitical predicate, or:

If a polis is F, there must be some citizens whose psyches are F who (with others) have helped to shape the polis.²¹

Lear's thesis, which I think is correct, has important implications for how moral degeneration (or progress) occurs. To flesh these out, let us assume that each of the parts of the soul, throughout change of personality, has an active (i.e., agentive) role. On such a view, any change of personality is to some extent a voluntary affair.²² Let us also assume that the type of personal degeneration that a tyrant undergoes is only likely in the type of society in which a good amount of degeneration is occurring as well—at least, in some part of the polis.²³ Now the key step to a tyrant's becoming a tyrant is his prior adoption of a radically egalitarian sense of justice, when he was a democrat, which is in effect

¹⁹Bernard Williams, "The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's Republic", *Plato's Republic*, ed. Richard Kraut (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997), 51-52.

²⁰Especially noticeable through the activities of philosopher-kings, whose activities, more than others, conform to realities. See Jonathan Lear, "Inside and Outside *The Republic*", *Phronesis* Vol. XXXVII/2, 1992, 184-215.

²¹Lear, "Inside and Outside *The Republic*", 191 & 197.

²²Following Terence Irwin. *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 285-287.

²³Following Lear, "Inside and Outside *The Republic*".

adoption of a form of radical pluralism with respect to values.²⁴ It is then this step that ultimately proves his own undoing, for indiscriminate acceptance of all values cannot countenance the rejection of tyrannical values, which he comes to embrace.

On the progressive side of things, for justice to take root in the polis, insofar as this is realizable,²⁵ philosophers must become rulers and rulers must become philosophers.²⁶ Beyond this, the key to ensuring stability is ensuring that the guardians, especially the rulers, must be properly educated.

The aim of proper education is to separate those who see beautiful things, φιλοδόχοι, from those who see beauty itself, φιλοσόφοι. Only the latter, as true philosophers, transcend the realm of seeming and enter, via intellect, the realm of being. Only the latter, having knowledge of the beautiful, are fit to rule.

Socrates and Glaucon expand on this point analogically through another reference to dreams that Plato gives in Book V. Socrates compares sleep to opinion—which has views, grounded in sensibles, that are both true and false²⁷—and wakefulness to knowledge—which has views grounded in truth. Socrates begins:

And so does he—who believes in beautiful things, but does not believe in beauty itself and cannot follow someone who could lead him to the knowledge of it—seem to you to be living in a dream (ὄναρ) or in a wakened state (ὑπαρ)? Consider, is this not dreaming, when someone, whether awake or asleep, believes that what is a likeness is not a likeness but the thing itself to which it is a likeness?

I would surely say that this is dreaming, he [Glaucon] said.

Take the opposite case—someone who believes in this [i.e., beauty] itself and can behold both it and the things that participate in it and who believes that neither are the participants it nor is it the participants—again, does this man seem to you to be living in a dream or in a wakened state?

He is very much awake.²⁸

Unlike the references in Book IX, this reference to dreams does not function as a means of illustrating, *per se*, a tyrant's ethical degeneration. It is given to illustrate analogically the epistemic confusion of anyone who does not grasp that there is an independently existing form, say F or G, for each of the many visible things that are said to be "F" or "G". The same, of course, can be said for one who does not know that, for each visible object, there are many possible sensible representations of that object.²⁹

There follows a description of true philosophers.³⁰ The possibility of true philosophers is clear in that the very study of what is ordered, divine, and unchanging disposes men to order, divinity, and stability in their own souls. The true difficulty comes in inducing philosophers, who are by disposition reluctant to rule, to take charge of a

²⁴561b-c.

²⁵Plato tells us at 437a that the best we can hope for is a close approximation.

²⁶473e.

²⁷The notion being the compresence of opposites in visible things that may lead one to say both "x is heavy" and "x is light".

²⁸476c-d. Cf. 534c.

²⁹Cf. 534b-c. For a similar point, see Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 267.

³⁰485a-486d & 487c-496e.

polis.³¹ At 502b, Plato states flatly that one such philosopher is enough to bring about such monumental changes in a polis, provided that its citizens are willing. Overall, the ideal of a perfectly just polis (or one nearly so) seems inspired by a distinct and most *wakeful* vision of the beautiful.

We are now ready to return to the issue of how dreams tie into the issue of personal and constitutional degeneration of *Republic* VIII & IX.

A polis, Plato says, is like an individual person. When a person hurts his finger, it is not merely the finger that feels pain; the entire organism, body and soul, suffers it. A polis with good government and good laws suffers similarly whenever any one of its citizens is harmed or does harm. Socrates says: “What greater evil can there be for a polis than that which breaks it apart and makes it many instead of one? What greater good than that which binds it together and makes it one?” The best polis, like the best person, is most noticeably one, not many. The goodness of both resides in their unity.³²

Likewise, it is personal disintegration that characterizes a tyrant’s behavior. First, Socrates notes that as a person slides toward tyranny, he lives in the manner of a normal person who sometimes experiences lustful dreams in sleep.³³ Soon, however, lustful impulses predominate in his waking thoughts and activities until he becomes a slave to lust. In less extreme cases of tyrannical thralldom (RET), the rational soul still has a capacity to communicate prohibitively with the appetitive soul, though the latter generally takes no heed. In extreme cases of tyrannical thralldom (RIT_w), the rational soul completely serves the ungovernable desires of the appetitive soul. In the latter, a tyrant’s degradation, like that of the Pamphylian tyrant Ardaius³⁴, is so complete that he lacks any clear and true notion of unity, permanence, harmony, goodness, and beauty. Blinded by lust, he lives completely in the realm of visibles—that is, he is without any promise of the conceptual unification and internal stability that an understanding of true realities can make possible. It is even possible that at certain moments, in the most severe cases of tyrannical degeneration, such a tyrant may not be capable of differentiating between the transitory and insubstantial likenesses of visible things, like the fleeting images in dreams, and the visible things themselves.

The tyrannical man, then, is a “stranger to freedom and friendship, faithless and superlatively unrighteous...the living embodiment of the monstrous lusts we found in dreams, and the longer he rules, the worse he becomes”.³⁵ In such complete degradation and disunity, the notion of “getting what one wants” no longer makes sense.³⁶

Given that a tyrant lives as a slave to erotic love, what Plato considers the vilest and most paranomic of the unnecessary desires, and given Plato’s references to a tyrant’s manner of living as that of living in a dream,³⁷ it is clear that a tyrant has the worst grasp

³¹499a-d.

³²462a-e.

³³576b.

³⁴Whose crimes include killing his aged father and older brother (615c-616a).

³⁵*The Republic of Plato*, vol. ii, ed. James Adam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 325.

³⁶See Julia Annas, *Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 303-304.

³⁷476c-d, 574e-575a, & 576b.

of the distinction between reality and unreality and, in extreme cases of dissipation, may even live at times at the lowest level of opinion—εἰκασία.

If this is plausible, then Plato feels that the complete confusion of an extreme tyrant, one whose soul is wholly controlled by the lustful part of appetite, can best be illustrated by a reference to certain representations of lower-level visible objects—dreams. In a sense, for such a tyrant, oneiric reality and waking reality converge: The viciousness of his waking activities becomes indistinguishable from the viciousness of his dreams. It stems, as Rankin correctly argues, mostly from “his inability to separate ὕπαρ and ὄναρ”.³⁸ He rules over others only insofar as others fear his wickedness.³⁹ Such “rule”, of course, must itself be arbitrary, unsteady, and, more often than not, short-lived.

In contrast to a tyrant, one who trains his intellect to tame the bestial part of his soul avoids the slide toward a tyrant’s degenerative life. Having obtained psychological stability, he has the clearest understanding of the difference between true reality and what merely appears to be real. He is, thus, best suited to rule and maintain the stability that is required for a just polis.

A Model of Dreams?

At this point, I too wish to digress a little, as it seems that Plato’s reference to dreams from 571c to 572b, though presented chiefly as a means of illustrating the ethical instability of the tyrannical person, also suggests a model of dreams in keeping with his tripartitioning of soul and five character states.

We have found for Plato that there are two faculties of the soul involved with dreams, each of which corresponds to a particular type of dream: the intellective soul, which allows sleepers (principally of the virtuous sort) to see the truth in dreams, and the appetitive soul, responsible for the vicious dreams that everyone has in some measure. Yet at 572a, Socrates says that true dreams are most likely to occur in one who has quieted both the spirited part (τὸ θυμοειδέες) and the appetitive part of his soul—thereby allowing the undisturbed motion of the rational soul. This, of course, implies that the spirited soul, when it is not quieted prior to sleep, functions to hinder true dreams. Just what sort of hindrance is this? Unfortunately, Plato is silent here.

Given Plato’s teleology, the hindrance of the spirited part, in general, can best be cashed out in one of two ways. The spirited soul can be a hindrance to the rational soul by either:

- 1) preventing the rational soul, wholly or in part, from generating true dreams and, thereby, enabling (or creating a gap for) the appetitive soul to generate vicious dreams, or

³⁸He adds, “The tyrant did not recognize the modality of dreams, but with a complete lack of discrimination proceeded to realize in waking life the images that came to him in his sleep, even if they involved such acts as incest”. H. D. Rankin, “Dream/Vision as Philosophical Modifier in Plato’s *Republic*”, *Eranos* LXII, 1964, 82.

³⁹575a-576a.

2) preventing the rational soul, wholly or in part, from generating true dreams, *without* enabling (or creating a gap for) the appetitive soul to generate vicious dreams.

According to option one, the disturbance of the spirited soul creates psychical conditions inhospitable for true dreams, but quite favorable for vicious dreams. It is also in keeping with Plato's explicit mentioning of only two types of manifest dreams from 571-572a—true dreams and vicious dreams. It, however, suggests collusion between the spirited part of the soul and the appetitive soul to the detriment of the rational soul, which seems unlikely, as Plato often makes it plain in *Republic* and elsewhere that the spirited soul is of such a disposition to work with the rational soul, not the appetitive soul.⁴⁰ The second alternative, then, seems most plausible.

According to option two, the disturbance of the spirited soul creates psychical conditions inhospitable for true dreams, without thereby generating vicious dreams. On the one hand, such conditions, in turn, could merely result in dreamless sleep. If so, then the spirited soul would be interfering with the rational soul, essaying to generate true dreams, in order to promote dreamless sleep. That seems wholly unlikely for two reasons, however. First, as I noted above, the spirited soul is by nature, when properly cultivated, disposed toward obedience to, not interference with, the rational soul. Second, *thymos* is that part of the soul responsible for angry, courageous, and bold behaviors, which are anything but quiet. It therefore seems an unlikely psychical agent to promote dreamless (i.e., quiet and undisturbed) sleep. On the other hand, if the gap is filled, then it must be filled by the spirited soul aiming to generate a third type of dream—one with thymic content.

I take such hindrance to be the influence of the spirited soul during sleep on the manufacture of a third type of dream that moves the sleeper into fits of anger and perhaps also courage, boldness, shame, resentment, and other such things in keeping with *thymos*.⁴¹ If that is correct, then there is a third part of the soul involved in the generation of dreams—the spirited part.⁴² While the appetitive soul shapes the dreams of those whose desires go unchecked and the intellective soul shapes the dreams of those whose passions are kept in check through right living, the spirited part predominates in shaping dreams of those whose spirited element has superior strength.

Thus far in this section I have tried to show that Plato's references to dreams in *Republic*, though given chiefly to shed light on the nature of the tyrannical man, shed additional light on the nature of the human soul. For each of the three faculties of the soul, there corresponds a type of dream. Dreams indicative of past, present, or future

⁴⁰E.g., 440b-e.

⁴¹Plato here specifically mentions only anger (ὀργή).

⁴²Adam notes (*The Republic of Plato*, vol. 2, 322) that the language used to describe the three faculties of the soul (δυσχίσις, ἐγείρας, ἐστίασις, πράυνας, κινήσις, etc.) has been taken by others to imply a fourth psychic principle that excites or quiets the others (i.e., Schleiermacher) or a separate and distinct "ego" (i.e., Krohn). However, if Plato had thought that there was an additional, controlling agency that oversees the others, it is likely that he would have mentioned it here. He does not. Cf. also Aristotle's κοινὴ δύναμις τις, his solution to how all the particular senses can each shut down at the same time during sleep (*Somn. Vig.* 455a9-455b2).

events come about through the agency of the intellectual part of the soul. Dreams occurring by means of the spirited soul are characterized by anger, pride, courage, ambition, shame, and indignation. Those from the appetitive soul are recognizable by images of excesses—especially lust.

Given the three kinds of dreams referred to in *Republic*, does Plato give criteria for distinguishing among them?

What Plato does give us, which may be of some help in distinguishing the three types of dreams about which he talks in *Republic*, is a psychogenetic account of them: The three types of dreams correspond to and arise out of each of the three parts of the soul. Yet is an account of oneiric origins a way to distinguish the kinds of dreams? It is, in a sense.

In the *Republic*, oneiric content itself should indicate the predominant psychological element involved in the formation of a dream and, thus, the kind of dream. It follows that dreams, by their very content, reveal the part of the soul that remains vigilant during sleep. When the appetitive part is in control, dreams are appetitive—concerned with sex, gourmandizing, squandering funds, drunkenness, and so forth. When the spirited part predominates, sleepers have dreams of anger, courage, daring, and boldness. Last, when the intellectual part is awake and sleepers are especially disposed to see the truth, dreamers often see past, present, and future events in sleep. So, it seems, one can judge not only the kind of dream but also the state of the soul at the time of the dream from oneiric content alone.

A question remains: Who has what types of dreams? In *Theaetetus*, Socrates talks of how philosophers, unlike others, do not hear spoken or written laws and decrees in their dreams. Furthermore, they do not suffer the troubles of political assemblies, meals, and *symposia* in dreams.⁴³ It seems that they are, by elimination, disposed to dream of philosophical affairs of the sort that preoccupy them in waking life. In keeping with this, in *Cratylus*, Socrates mentions that he often dreams about the good and the beautiful.⁴⁴ If the reference here is to dreams during sleep (instead of daydreams), and I think it is, then it suggests that people often dream about their daily preoccupations, and this too is just what Plato suggests in *Republic*.⁴⁵ If so, then laborers, who are predominantly under the dictates of the appetitive soul, would mostly have appetitive dreams; auxiliaries would customarily have spirited dreams; and rulers would generally have true dreams or, to draw from *Cratylus*, dreams of timeless things.

How would Plato in *Republic* account for dreams containing a mixture of elements? What would he say of a dream where one both fights courageously to overpower an adversary in war and then revels in drunken debauchery over the spoils of victory? He certainly would not want to say that no one has ever had such a dream or that no such dream is possible. Clearly, both the spirited soul and the appetitive soul would be recognizably at play here, and, from the depiction above, it is not clear just how both agencies could be recognizably at play in one dream, as the text from 571c to 572b does not seem to allow for more than one vigilant part of the soul during sleep.

⁴³173d.

⁴⁴439c-d.

⁴⁵571b-d.

At *Republic* 572a-b, however, Socrates states that when the intellectual soul is stirred while the other two parts are quieted, the dreamer “seizes the truth in this way especially and the visions of dreams show themselves to be *least* unlawful (ἥκιστα παράνομοι) then”. Plainly, here, paranomic elements in dreams can still occur when the intellectual soul alone is vigilant during sleep; they merely have a diminished impact on oneiric formation. The same must be true when either the spirited or the appetitive soul is vigilant during sleep. The other “dormant” faculties still impact oneiric formation, though to a lesser extent. What enables one part to predominate during sleep? The keys here are one’s disposition of character while awake and the condition of one’s body and soul just prior to sleep.⁴⁶

The account I have sketched suggests that, among the three types of dreams Plato alludes to in the *Republic*, there are insensibly many gradations. When one part of the soul is awake in sleep, the other two, though perhaps quieted, are not entirely without influence. If this is so, then that *Republic* IX gives us an account of dreams where at any one time in a dream one of the three parts of the soul will be *predominant*: rulers tending to have intellectual dreams; auxiliaries, spirited dreams; and laborers, appetitive dreams. Therefore, the overall content of a dream will betray the predominant part of the soul and the character of the dreamer, though the other parts may affect content to a lesser extent.

Though there are likely three parts of the soul that are responsible for the *generation* of dreams, does this mean that we should adopt a psychogenetic account of the *kinds* of dreams? In other words, does the account that Plato sketches necessitate a categorization of dreams following his tripartitioning of the human soul?

I think not. The account of dreams comes toward the end of a lengthy depiction of personal and political degeneration in Books VIII and IX, where Plato elaborates on five types of characters and constitutions. It is just after this analysis that Plato turns to rating the various sorts of personality types by reference to their happiness.⁴⁷ The suggestion here is that oneiric types might best be grasped through a categorization that follows the various personality types: For each of the five personality types depicted there exists, at least prototypically, a corresponding type of dream. The relatively settled sleep of the kingly or philosophical lifestyle is ideally suited to restful sleep and philosophical or *logistical* (i.e., both noble and true) *dreams*. The timocratic person, guided by his spirited soul, will tend to dream of glorious battles and deeds of heroism (*thymoeidic dreams*). The oligarchic person, dominated by his necessary appetites, will tend to dream of money and commercial transactions (*higher epithymetic dreams*). The democrat, under the control of unnecessary desires, will dream of multifarious things indicative of instability like freedom, equality, license, an abundance of foods and drink, and all sorts of excess (*middle epithymetic dreams*). Finally, the extreme freedom of democracy gives rise to “the most severe and cruelest slavery”, tyranny, and the dreams of a tyrant are, as we have seen above, unspeakably vicious and corrupt (*lower epithymetic dreams*)—perhaps little distinguishable from his waking life.

Could a model such as this be what Plato had in mind in his somewhat lengthy digression to dreams, if only implicitly? We shall never know definitively, but I hope to

⁴⁶571c-572b.

⁴⁷580a-c.

have shown that the length and oneiric detail in this digression leave room for an affirmative answer.

Concluding Remarks

I have argued that Plato chooses dreams in Book IX to illustrate a tyrant's ethical degradation for the following reason. Dreams themselves, when considered as mere representations of the primary entities of the world of change, occupy the lowest rung of Plato's ontological ladder.⁴⁸ Consequently, in arguing that a tyrant lives as if in a dream, Plato can most efficiently illustrate a tyrant's ethical degradation and epistemic confusion. More than this, a tyrant's complete surrender to pleasure is typified by the psychical disunity and loss of control that characterize the images of dreams.

Overall, *Republic IX*'s reference to dreams is no digression. As *Republic* is, in some measure, a contrast of two contrary contenders for the good life—the life of a tyrant and the life of a philosopher—the reference to dreams allows Plato to complete his depiction of degeneration of character in a manner that vividly illustrates the disunited personality of a tyrant. Dreams thus are part of Plato's overall argument for the preferability of the philosophical life.

In addition, I suggest that Book IX gives us a classification of dreams. Plato offers a picture of dreams where, at any one time during sleep, one of the three faculties of the soul remains wakeful and predominates in the formation of dreams. The other two parts influence oneiric content, though only to a lesser extent. Here three causes of dreams are in principle determinable, for the content of any dream should betray the predominating faculty of the soul. Moreover, since people tend to dream about what preoccupies them during the day, Plato's account suggests a straightforward classification that he could have had in mind—for each of the five main types of personality, there exists (at least roughly) a corresponding type of dream.

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⁴⁸Plato's overall attitude, however, seems ambivalent. For instance, the *Cratylus* passage at 439c-d, if indeed a reference to dreams and not daydreams, shows that Socrates philosophizes while asleep. Such dreams are not unimportant.