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## Plato and Trumpism: Look at Trumpism via the lens of Plato's Republic

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Plato and Trumpism: Look at Trumpism via the lens of Plato's *Republic*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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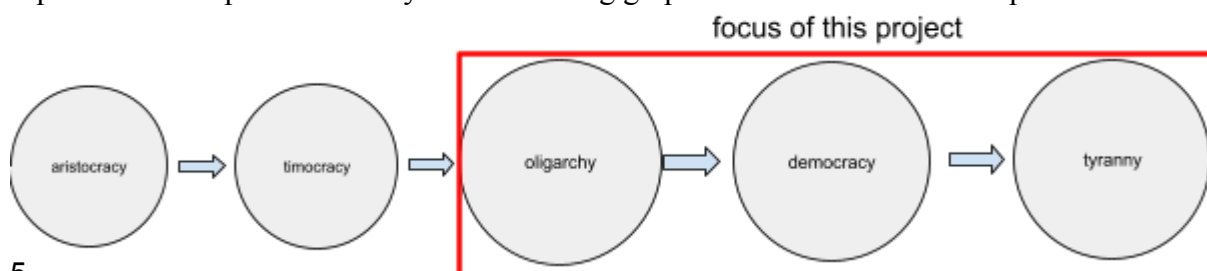
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## Introduction:

On November 8th 2016, Donald J Trump won the 2016 American Presidential Election. The newspaper title has claimed the winning of Donald Trump as a political earthquake, marking an alarming general rightward shift in politics and the rise of populist sentiments in American society. Trump is famous for his extraordinary political power among far-right low-income white males and defiance of political norms. To many people's relief, Trump's presidential term ended in 2020 after he lost the American presidential election to Joe Biden. But the influence of Trump still remains, together with an ever-increasing political polarization and conflict inside American society.

Interestingly, when I read *Republic* in one of my undergraduate courses, I can't help but notice so many interesting parallels between Plato's concept of the "tyrant" and Donald Trump as a political figure. In the *Republic*, Plato charted a trajectory connecting democracy and tyranny, arguing democracy is a flawed political system that is prone to degenerate into tyranny. In Plato's argument, a tyrant will appear in a divided and factionalized democratic society. He will harness the collective will of the citizens by appealing to citizens' populist sentiments, grasping all power in hand, and finally enslaving the whole city. It is worth noting that Plato lived over two thousand years ago and Donald Trump is a modern political figure. But Plato's narration of the tyrant still shares many interesting similarities with Trump. Trump also represents a similar populist and anti-establishment sentiment, and his appeal to the desires and emotions of the masses echoes the tyrant's strategies to take power in Plato's *Republic*.

The process of political degeneration from aristocracy to tyranny constitutes a key aspect of Plato's political theory. The following graph summarizes the overall process.



In Plato's theory of political degeneration, the degeneration from oligarchy to tyranny is the focus of my investigation. I made this decision based on two observations. First of all, after oligarchy, transformation of the kallipolis, the ideal city, is largely caused by a bottom-up civil revolution. Plato calls this set of political movements "a civil war between the rich and the poor." It echoes with the Right-Wing grassroots movement that Trump represents. Secondly, in Plato's description, the tyrant is a populist leader who arises as the leader of poor people who suffer from the wealth gap in the oligarchy. The tyrant gains power from poor people, makes himself the "special champion" of the people, and promises he will free the city from the ruling of greedy oligarchic elites. Oligarchy is the tyrant's birthplace, democracy is his battleground, and tyranny marks his victory. The degeneration of the city from oligarchy to tyranny describes a society that is surprisingly similar to the social background of Trump's campaign in 2016. Trump is also considered the leader of people who were disproportionately affected by the economic globalization and decline of manufacturing industries. And under this social context, Trump makes himself an anti-establishment "special champion" by appealing to people who were "left behind" economically under the previous "Washington elite" administration.

This surprising similarity makes me wonder whether Plato has found a problem inherent in the essence of democracy, which is beyond the restriction of time and space. It is possible that his prophecy of democracy will be fulfilled in today's America, and another more competent version of Trump is Plato's "tyrant" who will bury American democracy. To find out the validity of Plato's prophecy, this paper investigates Plato's political theory in the *Republic* and uses Plato's theory as a lens to understand Trumpism. In the first chapter, with the help of writings from Professors Jonathan Lear, G. R. F. Ferrari, and Zena Hitz, I will find out the driving force beneath the degeneration of politics in Plato's *Republic* and conclude by sketching a model that summarizes Plato's political theory. Then in the second chapter, I will



investigate several major factors that caused the populist movements in the *Republic*---including the role of unnecessary appetites, debt, and anti-intellectualism in society. And in the third chapter, I will look at the image of the tyrant with regard to three psychological traits he has---outlaw appetites, ontological insecurity, and erotic passion. Finally, in the last chapter, I will use Plato's *Republic* as a lens to understand Trumpism as a psychological struggle between appetites and reason.

## Chapter 1: City and Soul Analogy

In the *Republic*, Plato builds a famous analogy between the city and the individual. The analogy first appears in Book IV, right after Plato finishes talking about the importance of education to achieve justice. That is when Plato starts to compare the city with the soul by saying “We thought that, if we first tried to observe justice in some larger thing that possessed it, this would make it easier to observe in a single individual.”<sup>1</sup> In this statement, Plato uses the city and soul analogy as a method to better comprehend the concept of justice. In his opinion, a just city should be seen as a larger version of a just individual, and, by looking at the city, the essence of justice would be easier to discern on a larger scale. To a certain extent, he claims that the essence of political justice and the essence of individual justice are the same because “a just man won’t differ at all from a just city in respect to the form of justice; rather he’ll be like the city.”<sup>2</sup>

In most people’s understanding, the concept of justice is completely different on individual and political levels. When we talk about individual justice, it refers to the exercise of virtue and moral principle. But when we talk about political justice, it is more likely to be related to social welfare, respect for human rights, and social equality. It is difficult to see the similarity between a high-welfare state and a virtuous person. But Plato successfully creates a connection by looking into the similarity between the composition of a just city and a just soul. He has divided one’s soul into three parts---appetitive part, the rational part, and the spirited part. And he finds there are three classes in a city that correspond to three parts of the soul that “just as there were three classes in the city that held it together, the money-making, the auxiliary, and the deliberative.”<sup>3</sup> The money-making class corresponds to the appetitive part of the soul; the auxiliary class corresponds to the spirited part of the soul; and the

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 435b, 110.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 435b, 110.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 441a, 116.

deliberative class corresponds to the rational part of the soul. The way to be a just person is to achieve harmony between the three parts of one's soul, and, on the city level, a city will achieve political justice by harmonizing three classes in the city and giving each class the proper role.

The similarity between city and soul is that justice in both cases requires the better element to rule over the worse element. A just man would use calculation and self-discipline to restrain the inordinate expansion of his appetite and spirit, just like a just city would let the deliberative class enact policy and take control over the auxiliary and money-making class. Individual justice is a product of the conflict between reason and appetite, which Plato named "the civil war in the soul." Justice comes as a result of the victory of reason in that "civil war." A similar "civil war" also exists in the city, where the conflict between money-making classes, deliberative classes, and auxiliary classes takes place. When deliberative classes win over others, there will arise a just constitution---aristocracy. But when the city deviates from the ruling of the deliberative class to money-making and auxiliary classes, there will arise four forms of unjust political regimes----timocracy, aristocracy, democracy, and tyranny, due to their deviation from reason-ruling. By making the correspondence between classes and parts of the soul, Plato set up the basic framework of the city-soul relation.

However, to investigate Plato's theory of political degeneration, a much more complicated model needs to be developed to explain how public psychology, the status of individual souls, actively influences and changes politics. And with the help of work from Professor Jonathan Lear, Professor Hitz, and Professor G. R. F. Ferrari, the aim of this chapter was to understand this more comprehensive city-and-soul model.

## **The Platonic model: the city is a larger version of the soul**

It is important for readers to know that this chapter will still use Plato's basic city-soul framework as the cornerstone for my later interpretation. I don't intend to scrap Plato's initial theory, but instead add more branches and lines of argumentation to it to add additional support of Plato's overall political discussion of political degeneration. Plato creates many parallels between the compositions of the city and the soul building and the analogical correspondence between the two. One clear example would be the parallel between timocracy and spirited man. In the discussion of timocracy, the city ruled by warriors and motivated by a love of honor, Plato says "it will be afraid to appoint wise people as rulers, on the grounds that they are no longer simple and earnest but mixed, and will incline towards spirited and simpler people, who are more naturally suited for war than peace."<sup>4</sup> The ruling class of timocracy is spirited warriors, the auxiliary class. It is paralleled with the situation of a spirited soul, where the spirit part takes control of other parts. Plato intentionally chooses language like "spirited and simpler people" to illustrate the correspondence between a timocratic city and a spirited soul.

Moreover, Plato creates parallels between the detailed process of the formation of the timocratic man and the timocratic city. Plato describes the timocratic man's soul as a product of compromise between reason and appetite that "when he's pulled in these two ways, he settles in the middle and surrenders the rule over himself to the middle part--the victory-loving and spirited part---and becomes a proud and honor-loving man."<sup>5</sup> This process runs in parallel with the political transformation in timocracy, which is a compromise between rational rulers and appetitive rulers that "they (oligarchs and Philosophers) compromise on a middle way: They distribute the land and houses as private property, enslave and hold as serfs and servants those whom they previously guarded as free friends

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<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 547e, 218.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 550b, 220.

and providers of upkeep.”<sup>6</sup> The timocratic city came as a result of money-loving oligarchs conflicting with a reason-loving philosopher, and finally compromising to let an honor-loving warrior take the power and lead the city. It is the same with every detail of the formation of the spirited warriors, in whose mind appetites conflicted with reason, and finally let the spirit take the rule. The correspondences between appetites and oligarchs, spirit and warrior, and reason and philosopher are clearly stated in every part of the *Republic*. And that’s why this chapter is not intended to build a completely different theory, but to add details to Plato’s overall project.

But why should we add details and possibly unnecessarily complicate Plato’s model? The reason is that Plato’s model of analogical relation is not sufficient to cover everything that Plato says in his later political analysis. For example, it doesn’t leave room for other, quite likely interactions between the soul and the city. If it is really a simple metaphorical reference, Plato’s theory shall separate soul discussion from the city discussion and make them two irrelevant arguments of moral teaching and political theory. A just city is only an instrument to help us better understand a just individual. However, Plato clearly goes beyond this boundary and uses the interaction between city and soul as an important tool to describe and predict the political transformation in different constitutions. For example, in tyranny, tyrannical psychology offers the only lens to predict what will happen in tyranny. In that case, the political situation is not only a metaphorical symbol of the tyrant on a larger scale but also a product of the tyrant’s psychology. That’s why I believe a more psychologically nuanced relationship between the city and soul can be developed. And Jonathan Lear has provided a good angle to undertake this project in his book *Open-Minded*. He believes that, other than an analogical correspondence, there is also a causal relationship between the city and soul

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<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 547b, 217.

and it is made possible by a process called “internalization and externalization”. And that’s the first branch we will add to Plato’s theory.

## **The branch from Jonathan Lear: The City is an Externalization of the Soul and the Soul is an Internalization of the City**

In *Open-Minded*, Jonathan Lear builds a stronger connection between the city and soul by appealing to a causal-psychological relation between the social environment and individual psychology. Jonathan Lear describes this process as one that takes place “after we internalize our cultural roles by a process of education, we externalize them in our social role.”<sup>7</sup> Internalization is the process of society seeding a specific social role and moral values in individuals--largely, by education and social environment. And externalization is the payoff, in which the individual accepts the moral principle given by society and does his part to shape the social environment and educate the next generation with the values that he internalized.

We could find many good examples of externalization in Plato’s argument. In a timocratic city, the government “will be afraid to appoint wise people as rulers, on the grounds that they are no longer simple and earnest but mixed, and will incline towards spirited and simpler people, who are more naturally suited for war than peace.”<sup>8</sup> This change in the mechanism of selection is a product of the externalization of the ruler’s preference. The ruler has externalized his appetites and created a new social hierarchy. Also, the same thing can happen on the legislative level. In an oligarchic city, the appetite for money will make the rulers “find ways of spending money for themselves, then they stretch the laws relating to this, then they and their wives disobey the laws altogether.”<sup>9</sup> In Oligarchy, the ruler will enact laws that favor wealth accumulation. Those laws are a product of the externalization of rulers’ appetites for money. There are also many examples of internalization in Plato’s writing. For example, Plato discusses the harm of the ruler’s appetite for money to the

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Open-Minded*, 226.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 547e, 218.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 550d, 220.

citizens. In Oligarchy, when the powerful people actively create an oligarchic society and start to accumulate wealth, they will influence the public by giving them an equal thirst for wealth because “as one person sees another doing this and emulates him, they make the majority of the others like themselves.”<sup>10</sup> The decision made by oligarchs will actively create a social trend of money-worship and negligence of virtues because “when wealth and the wealthy are valued or honored in a city, and virtue and good people are valued less.”<sup>11</sup> Conspicuous consumption, not conspicuous virtue can describe such a society. We can see Lear’s theory of externalization and internalization matches with Plato’s narration of political transformation and public psychology.

Moreover, Jonathan Lear’s theory has also offered an explanation for the origin of the degeneration in political constitutions and reveals its inevitability. Lear says “the instability is manifest in the inability of inside and outside to maintain a mirroring relation---and the ensuing failure of the son to grow up in the image of the father.”<sup>12</sup> In Lear’s opinion, to maintain stability, the citizen’s desire must have a mirroring relation with the ruler’s desire. Because only when their desires have the same goal, citizens and rulers can then share a similar vision of the city's future. It is the prerequisite for citizens and rulers to cooperate and maintain a stable government. Otherwise, the conflict between the ruler and citizens will appear and push the city to conflict and political transformation. However, in Lear’s opinion, because the process of externalization and internalization is fluid and dynamic, the mirroring relation between citizens and rulers will never be achieved in a constitution where externalization and internalization have already happened. In that case, citizens’ desire is always one step ahead of the ruler’s desire because after internalizing, citizens will always grow a stronger and more radical form of appetite. There is an implacable conflict between rulers’ and citizens’ desires after the process of internalization and externalization has

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<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 550c, 220.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 551a, 221.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Open-Minded*, 239.



happened. And that's why an unjust constitution will inevitably evolve into a more unjust one, and its citizens will only fall into a more radical form of appetitive drive.

Jonathan Lear uses the democratic man's story in Plato's *Republic* to justify his explanation. In *Republic*, Plato uses this story to metaphorically explain the reason for the degeneration of the city from oligarchy to democracy. In the story, there is an oligarchic father who is a tradesman who "has been able to keep his unnecessary appetites in check"<sup>13</sup> to earn money. He keeps himself away from booze, sex, and any form of indulgence because they could prevent him from making more money. Naturally, the father imposes this forcible restraint on his son, thereby "the child is brought up in a miserly fashion without real education."<sup>14</sup> Because he has suffered from forcible restraint, the son will soon rebel against his father and decide to embrace all kinds of appetites and unrestrained freedom. That's how a democratic son was born out of an oligarchic family. Lear believes the same view can be applied to the political field. After internalizing his surrounding oligarchic environment, citizens will inevitably grow a more radical form of desire---desire for freedom, just like the son grows a desire for freedom in an oligarchic family. Therefore, when an oligarchic city grows to a certain stage, it will inevitably become unstable and create the context for the later appearance of democracy.

With no doubt, Lear's theory holds together. But it is in question whether Lear has over-emphasized certain dynamics between psyche and politics. It is possible that Plato can be read as making a more limited connection between individual psychology and political transformation. Another scholar G. R. F. Ferrari has raised this counter-argument to Lear by making distinctions between private experience and public political affairs in his book *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*.

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Open-Minded*, 235.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Open-Minded*, 235.

## **The counter-argument from G. R. F. Ferrari: internalization and externalization of city and soul are not a part of Plato's city-soul analogy**

In his book *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, G. R. F. Ferrari holds the view that the city-soul analogy does not intend to include the interaction between city politics and individual psychology. In response to Lear, Ferrari says "it is undeniable that internalization is important to the *Republic*-in the sense that the work makes much of the influence of culture on the individual, both for good and for bad, and gives education a central place among social institution-internalization is never invoked in order to ground the city-soul analogy."<sup>15</sup> In Ferrari's opinion, it is true that Plato has touched on the influence of the social environment on individuals. But it is not Plato's intention to include it in his political theory as a model to understand society and psyche, because there are differences between the reality of the political environment and one's individual experience of it. It is what Ferrari says, "we are certainly given an account of how their characters are formed, how they are corrupted by forces at work in their family and in their environment, but no connection is made thereby to the cities to which they correspond."<sup>16</sup> In Ferrari's opinion, there is little connection between one's personal experience in his private space and the social environment of the city in the public space. Living in an oligarchic city doesn't necessarily mean living an oligarchic life. There could be an aristocratic political and moral character in a democratic city. When Plato talks about individual psychological formation, it is supposed to be separated from the political portrait of the city. And Ferrari's point is that it was a mistake for Lear to conflate the formation of individual psyches with the political environment.

For example, in *Open-Minded*, Jonathan Lear uses a democratic son's rebellion to explain the origin of democracy. The root of the son's democratic sentiment is the forcible restraint imposed by his father. In Lear's opinion, the democratic son's rebellion represents an

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<sup>15</sup> G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, 52.

democratic revolution in the political field, showing the democratic sentiment in the city is a product of the internalization of certain forcible restraint in the oligarchic city. This argument might overstate the case. The figure of an “oligarchic father” is absent in the oligarchic society. The oligarchic city doesn’t require every father in the city to be oligarchic and educate children in the same brutal way. Then who will take the role of that important “oligarchic father” figure? The oligarchic rulers clearly don't fill that vacancy. He is too busy with money-making, and it is not his duty to impose restraint and urge his people to make money. Instead, as merchants and creditors, oligarchs will remove restraints and encourage indulgence so that they can make more money.

In essence, Lear comes too close to the fallacy of composition by equating the imbalance in the city with the imbalance in the family. We could use an example to illustrate the logical problem in it. Let’s imagine the relationship between an NBA player and an NBA team. Many connections could be spotted. With players with better skills, the NBA team is more likely to be a better team. At the same time, a good NBA team will also put great effort into finding out and cultivating players with potential. However, it would be absurd to build a theory to claim that the training of a good player is the same as the building of a good team. Good players require training, hard-work, and rehabilitation after injury; while a good team requires money, a good manager, and many completely different factors. In Ferrari's opinion, the same mistake might apply to Lear’s theory when he directly translates personal experience into political portraits. Individual psychology describes a part of the city, but political transformation describes the city as a whole. What is true of the whole is not always true of the part, and it is why Ferrari says “Socrates pursues the causal relations between whole and part on a separate track”<sup>17</sup> and “The relations between the elements of the human soul and the classes of Kallipolis, however, are analogical.”<sup>18</sup> In Ferrari’s understanding,

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<sup>17</sup> G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, 60.

<sup>18</sup> G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, 60.

psychological discussion and political discussion might have an intersection, but Plato doesn't intend to build a casual relationship between two. Instead, he pursued these two topics in separate tracks. Therefore, in Ferrari's opinion, Jonathan Lear's theory might be thought to be conceptual overreach, and the process of externalization and internalization is only an observation of the social phenomenon, rather than a normative law of Plato's political theory.

## **Response to G. R. F. Ferrari's conclusion: the role of appetites in discussions of individual psychology and politics**

I question Ferrari's conclusion and the route he follows to reach his view of Lear. I can not convince myself that "The relations between the elements of the human soul and the classes of Kallipolis, however, are analogical."<sup>19</sup> The relationship between the human soul and the city clearly goes beyond this boundary and is much more complicated than simple analogy. I believe Ferrari has neglected the role of appetites which exists in both the discussion of soul and the discussion of politics in Plato's *Republic*. In fact, Lear's externalization-internalization theory can be seen as a summary of the role of appetite in politics and psychology. Jonathan Lear uses externalization to summarize the influence of appetites on the city---political discussion----and uses internalization to summarize the influence of the city on one's appetites---psychological discussion. The concept of appetites connects elements of the human soul and the classes of Kallipolis, showing that the origin of political degeneration is the degeneration of the human soul. Therefore, Ferrari can't reject Lear's conclusion unless he denies the appearance of appetites in both soul and city discussions and completely removes it from the political discussion.

However, it is clearly not the case in the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, appetites are the direct cause for degeneration in forms of government and serves as an important criterion for Plato to determine the order and stability of political constitutions. Another scholar Zena Hitz has pointed it out clearly in her book *Degenerate Regimes in Plato's Republic*. She says the fundamental reason behind degeneration in political regimes is "as reason loses its grip, and the appetites gain, so do we also find a decrease of order and structure."<sup>20</sup> Together with the degeneration of the government, Plato always demonstrates a rise in appetite of the public. For example, Plato believes appetites for honor are the dominant appetites of the timocracy

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<sup>19</sup> G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Zena Hitz, *Degenerate regimes in Plato's Republic*, 123.

that “because of the predominance of the spirited element, one thing alone is most manifest in it, namely, the love of victory and love of honor.”<sup>21</sup> Then when timocracy degenerates into oligarchy, the social trend of desire for honor then becomes a desire for wealth “wealth and the wealthy are valued or honored in a city.”<sup>22</sup> We can see, together with the degeneration of the city from timocracy to oligarchy, there is a growth of appetites from the desire for honor to the desire for wealth. And it is a law of Plato’s political theory----with degeneration of the city, that there is a growth of appetites. Zena Hitz creates a table in her book to illustrate that the appetites and desires are at the core of every political regime that Plato discusses.

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

Figure 2

Therefore, Lear’s theory of externalization and internalization is an elaboration of Plato’s law of appetites and political degenerations, explaining how appetites and politics affect each other. And as a fundamental part of Plato’s political discussion, it is impossible to deny the role of appetites in Plato discussion of politics. That’s why I said I couldn’t agree with the conclusion of G. R. F. Ferrari’s theory. The role of human appetites is a critical point that evinces why Plato pursues politics and individual psychology on an intertwined track. And regarding the absence of “oligarchic father” and “forcible restraint,” I would say they should be understood metaphorically. They are the analogical representations of oligarchic government and oligarchic law. Also, regarding the fallacy of composition, I believe it could

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 548d, 218.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 551a, 221.

also be the case that Plato's intent was to build a city-soul theory that can fall into the fallacy of composition. In doing so, Plato drew attention to how his concept of "appetite" is transcendental and can be applied to both the city as a whole and soul as a part. By showing appetites is inherent in the nature of things and can harm city and soul in a similar way, therefore he could be read to resolve this challenge.

## **Response to G. R. F. Ferrari's doubt: externalization and internalization in the bottom-up civic revolution**

The previous chapter pushed back on Ferrari's conclusion and attempted to answer some of Ferrari's challenges. However, there is one more challenge from Ferrari that gives me a chance to clarify the details of Lear's model. The challenge is targeted at the cause of the political degeneration. Ferrari says that "Timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical individuals do not get to be that way by virtue of having internalized the culture of theocracies, oligarchies, democracies, and tyrannies."<sup>23</sup> In this sentence, Ferrari has made an accurate observation, stating that, in the *Republic*, the process of internalization was not illustrated in every political constitution. Lear believes that every political transformation happens with the citizens internalizing their cultures to possess a stronger desire. And the non-mirroring relationship between citizens' and rulers' desires leads to the degeneration of the government. But Ferrari spots a discontinuity of the internalizing process in the *Republic*, which I have also noticed when reading Lear. Generally, Plato talks about the role of public psychology in oligarchies, democracies, and tyrannies, but avoids this topic in aristocracy and timocracy. This discontinuity, or absence of discussion, suggests that the theory of internalization and externalization is not a universal rule of Plato's theory.

In my opinion, to resolve this discontinuity, Lear's statement about internalization might be divided into two parts. In aristocracy and timocracy, the process of internalization accompanies political transformation. But in oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny, the process of internalization has a casual relationship with political transformation. I make this distinction because there is a fundamental difference between political transformation before oligarchy and after oligarchy. In aristocracy and timocracy, the change of the constitution is mainly a top-down reform, caused by a change in the ruling class. But in oligarchy,

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<sup>23</sup> G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, 58.



democracy, and tyranny, the political reformation is mainly a bottom-up revolution, in which the citizens overthrow the old rulers and build a new social order with force. I have drawn the following graph to illustrate their differences.

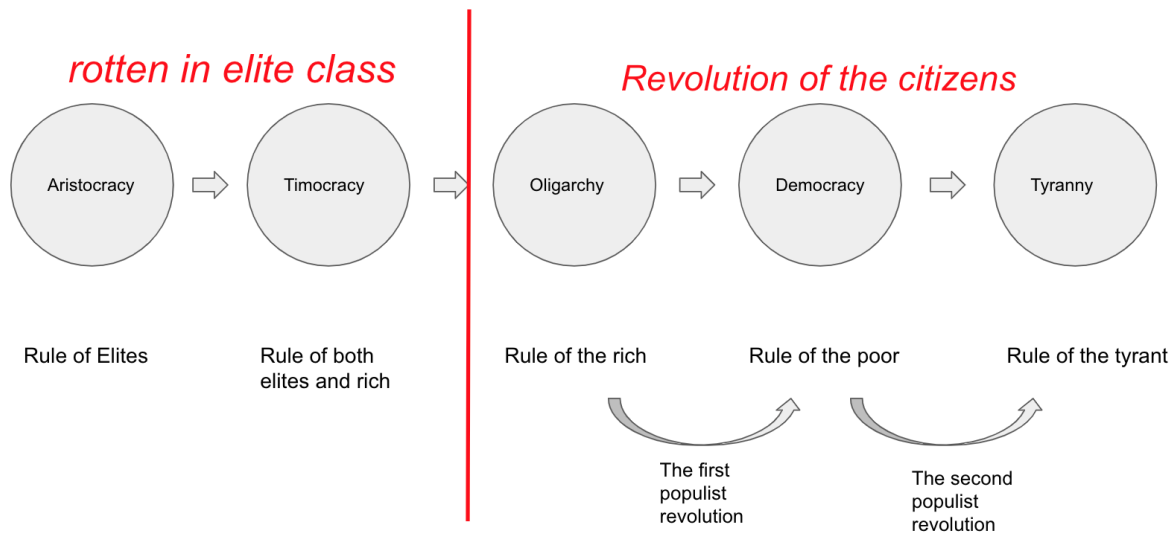


Figure 3

Plato’s narrative of these two types of political transformation is radically different. The first one is attributed to the corruption of the ruling class, in which appetitive people replaced the city leadership. I call it “top-down reformation.” A good example would be Plato’s description of aristocracy falling into timocracy. The scenario Plato set for the degeneration of aristocracy is the war. When the war happens, people with a desire for money join the ruling class. Plato describes this transformation as “both the iron and bronze types pull the constitution towards money-making and the acquisition of land, houses, gold, and silver, while both the gold and silver types---not being poor, but by nature rich or rich in their souls---lead the constitution towards virtue and the old order.”<sup>24</sup> From Plato’s account, we can see the degeneration of the aristocracy is due to a power struggle that happened in the leadership. After money-loving people join the leadership, they clash with the old guard of oligarchs, pull the constitution towards money-making, and finally turn aristocracy into

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 547b, 217.

timocracy. In this process, citizens don't play any role and passively experience this political degeneration. However, when the political regime comes to oligarchy, the situation is different, and citizens become an active participant in the political transformation. And I will call it a "bottom-up revolution." It is an example of political transformation after oligarchy when Plato describes the birth of democracy that "democracy comes about when the poor are victorious, killing some of their opponents and expelling others, and giving the rest an equal share in ruling under the constitution, and for the most part assigning people to positions of rule by lot."<sup>25</sup> In this narrative we can see an exchange of roles between rulers and citizens." In the "top-down reformation," citizens acted as passive of political change. But in the "bottom-up revolution," citizens initiated and were active participants in the political revolution.

By clarifying this distinction between reformation after and before oligarchy, we could then give an explanation to Ferrari's challenge. Plato intentionally ignores the process of internalization in political change before oligarchy, because citizens' psychology doesn't have the chance to undertake any role in the "top-down reformation." But it doesn't mean the process of internalization never happens in this process. Plato never denies this process. He only skips this part of the discussion before the argument of oligarchy because public psychology is not the cause of the political transformation yet. And when citizens start to get involved in political transformation after the oligarchy, the internalizing process immediately shows up in the *Republic* because public psychology is an essential part of the "bottom-up revolution."

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<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 557a, 227.

## **Conclusion: A comprehensive Model of City and Soul**

To put it in a nutshell, Plato's city-soul analogy creates two parallels. The first is an analogical comparison, aiming to help people understand justice on both political and individual levels. It was explicitly stated by Plato and made the political investigation a tool to understand justice on an individual level. The second parallel has created a causal relationship between individual psychological activities and political transformation. The casual relationship came from the power of human appetites to change the political constitution with the process of externalization and internalization.

Jonathan Lear's theory of externalization and internalization comprehensively explained how human appetite influenced politics. On one hand, rulers externalized their appetites to enact laws and shape the city based on their moral principle. On the other hand, citizens internalized the social environment shaped by rulers and re-mold themselves to grow stronger desires. Before oligarchy, the externalization of rulers' appetites caused political degeneration. But after the oligarchy, it was mostly the citizens' appetite, which was a product of internalization, that caused the political degeneration.

## Chapter 2: Underlying Driving Forces behind Populist Movements

Populist movements are political movements that challenge the established elites and aim to represent the interests of ordinary people. In the *Republic*, “Bottom-up” revolution appears twice and both in the form of populist revolutions against oligarchs.

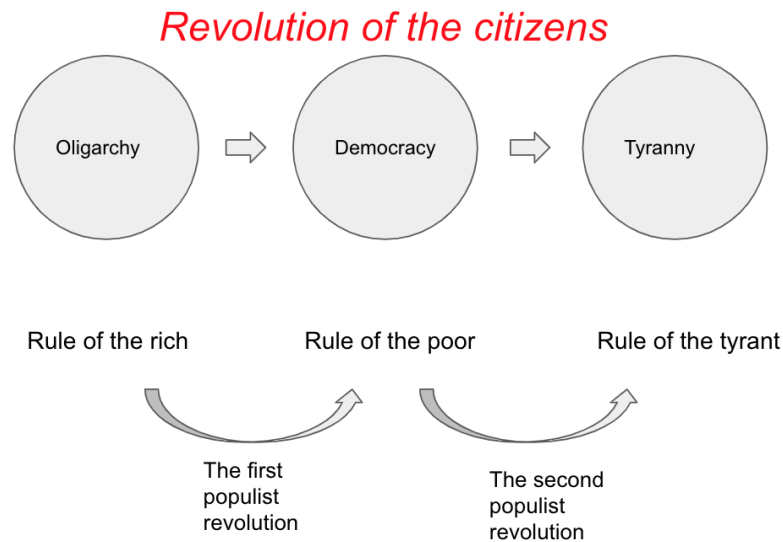


Figure 4

The first one turns an oligarchic constitution into democracy, and another turns democracy into tyranny. As we can see, populist sentiments and tyranny are closely related. Populism is the very force that leads to the establishment of tyranny. Populist sentiments come from poor people’s dissatisfaction with the wealth gap in oligarchy and their intense hatred and resentment towards the rich. And those poor people are the first group of populists that “these people sit idle in the city, I suppose, with their stings and weapons---some in debts, some disfranchised, some both---hating those who’ve acquired their property, plotting against them and others, and longing for a revolution.”<sup>26</sup> They use the first revolution to build democracy in the dream of removing the wealth gap, but fail in the end. So they started the second revolution and finally built tyranny.

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<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 555d, 226.

Populist sentiment is important for us to understand tyranny, because based on Lear's theory of externalization, tyranny can be seen as the product of externalization of populism. By looking into the populist sentiment, we also look into the social origin of tyranny. Therefore, this chapter is going to investigate the detailed composition of populist sentiments. At the same time, my investigation will follow Jonathan Lear's tradition. Based on his theory of internalization, populist sentiments are a product of citizens internalizing the oligarchic and democratic social environment. It means every feature of populist psychology shall have its corresponding social origin. Therefore, in this chapter, I will not only talk about the features of populist psychology, but also its social origin. I have picked three important populist psychological traits and its sociological cause, including the capitalized social environment and unnecessary appetites, debt and class awareness, universal suffrage and anti-intellectualism.

## **The capitalized social environment: from necessary appetites to unnecessary appetites**

Plato's concept of oligarchy as a political constitution has two important features. The first is the defining feature of oligarchy---wealth as the threshold to rule. In an oligarchic government, only rich people have the right to vote and rule that "the constitution based on a property assessment, in which the rich rule, and the poor man has no share in ruling."<sup>27</sup> The second feature is the government's institutional allowance and support of free trade, and its advocacy of wealth accumulation. On the legislative level, oligarchic rulers "find ways of spending money for themselves, then they stretch the laws relating to this."<sup>28</sup> These laws permit free trade and encourage the accumulation of personal wealth. These two features actively create an oligarchic lifestyle and money-worship social value in the city. The city discriminates against poor people as incompetent because "they praise and admire wealthy people and appoint them as rulers, while they dishonor poor ones."<sup>29</sup> And they abandon virtues and take money as the only pursuit of life that "when wealth and the wealthy are valued or honored in a city, virtue and good people are valued less."<sup>30</sup>

This mammonist lifestyle influences public psychology by creating a harmful desire for money. Plato categorizes it as unnecessary appetites and distinguishes it from necessary appetites. To make a distinction between two types of appetites, Plato uses one's desire for bread as an example of necessary appetites. He says "the desire for bread is necessary on both counts; it's beneficial, and unless it's satisfied, we die."(Republic, 559b, p.229) From Plato's statement, we could see a very important feature of necessary appetites. They should be beneficial in the way of satisfying one's basic human needs, like hunger or thirst. I conclude the first feature as---necessary appetite is an appetite for necessity. And, in Plato's definition,

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<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 550d, 220.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 550d, 220.

<sup>29</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 551a, 221.

<sup>30</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 550e, 221.

necessary appetites are “those we can’t desist from and those whose satisfaction benefits us rightly called necessary, for we are by nature compelled to satisfy them both.”<sup>31</sup>

And there is a second feature of the necessary appetite---necessary appetites shall have a clear goal. The second feature is implicit, but we could still see it from Plato’s later statement when he says “what about the desire that goes beyond these and seeks other sorts of foods, that most people can get rid of, if it’s restrained and educated while they’re young, and that’s harmful both to the body and to the reason and moderation of the soul. Would it be rightly called unnecessary?”<sup>32</sup> In this sentence, when Plato talks about the restrained desire for food, he referred to a clear boundary of that desire---the achievement of well-being and the stopping of hunger. But when we go beyond this boundary and the end of desire becomes unknown, this appetite then becomes harmful and unnecessary. Therefore, we can conclude two features of the necessary appetite-----1. it should be an appetite for necessity; 2. it should have a clear goal and a boundary not to be exceeded.

Two features that Plato has proposed have an interesting relationship. In my opinion, The second feature was a necessary condition for the first feature, because necessity for survival is a clear goal; but the goal of desire doesn’t have to be necessity. We could make a conditional statement to state their relation that “if one has desire for necessary things for survival, he has a clear goal of desire.” And we can draw a venn graph on the right to illustrate that the first feature is actually contained in the second feature. Therefore, a clear goal becomes the defining feature of the necessary appetite, because a desire for necessity is also a desire with a clear goal.



Figure 5

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<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 558d, 229.

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 559b, 229.

Then why does Plato bother to propose the first feature, which is already included in the second one? I believe that it is because Plato has implicitly suggested a form of appetite that is prior to the necessary appetite. I call it “deficient appetites,” and it refers to the situation when people have too little desire and can not satisfy their basic need for living. I have drawn a graph below to show the full spectrum of appetites in Plato’s theory. The first feature “satisfy basic human need” marks the boundary between necessary appetites and deficient appetites. When people live below that boundary, they won’t eat enough food, or drink enough water to survive. Only when their appetites reach the basic human need, their deficient appetites will turn into necessary appetites. And the second feature “have a clear goal” sets the boundary between necessary appetites and unnecessary appetites. When people’s appetites don’t have a clear goal and fall into unordered expansion, it lands on the realm of unnecessary appetites.

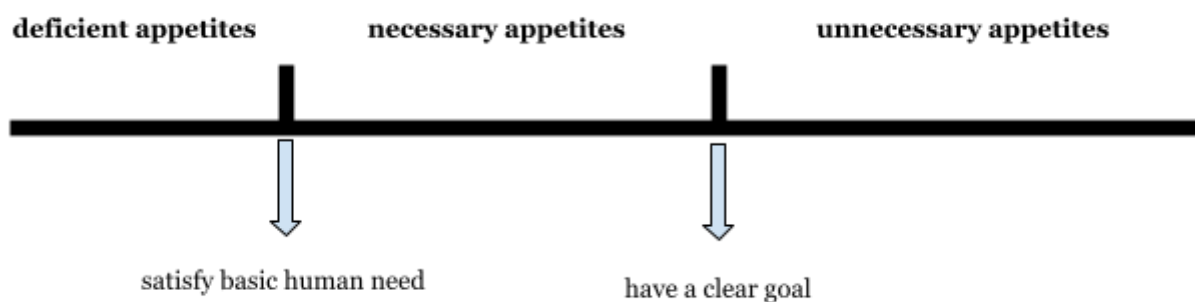


Figure 6

When we apply the spectrum of appetites to an oligarchic city, the desire for money has clearly gone beyond the boundary of necessary appetites. It neither has a clear goal nor acts as a satisfaction of basic human need. Wealth accumulation is a competition to obtain as much money as possible, and there is no end in it. Notably, Plato offers a seemingly different interpretation from mine in Book VIII, saying “he(democrats) is ruled by the unnecessary ones, while a thrifty oligarch is ruled by his necessary desires.”<sup>33</sup> But I will still stick to my conclusion. Apparently, oligarchs fail to fulfill the second requirement--having a clear goal.

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 559d, 230.



Their desire for money has no end, and, to pursue as much wealth as possible, they even use power to change law and exploit poor people. If we deny this very fact, the whole degeneration of oligarchy to democracy won't exist.

To solve this incoherence between Plato's definition and description of oligarchs' appetites, I will offer two angles to understand his statements as something else. Firstly, he uses the word "necessary" in the sense that oligarchs' appetites are less radical than democrats'. It is only limited inside the comparison between democrats and oligarchs. Oligarchs' unnecessary desire is only targeted at money, but democrats have unnecessary appetites for everything. Rhetorically speaking, oligarchs' appetites are indeed necessary when compared to democrats' appetites. At least, most part of oligarchs' lifestyle, other than the money-making part, is still contained in an acceptable range and represented necessary appetites, compared to democrats. Secondly, Plato uses the word "thrifty oligarch." We can also say that Plato's description is only targeted at a specific subgroup of the class of oligarchs---thrifty oligarchs. And only this small group of thrifty oligarchs contains their appetites in a necessary range and has a clear goal in money-making. Except those thrift oligarchic gentlemen, all oligarchs have unnecessary appetites.

Therefore, in the graph, I still put most of oligarchy in the realm of unnecessary necessary appetites.

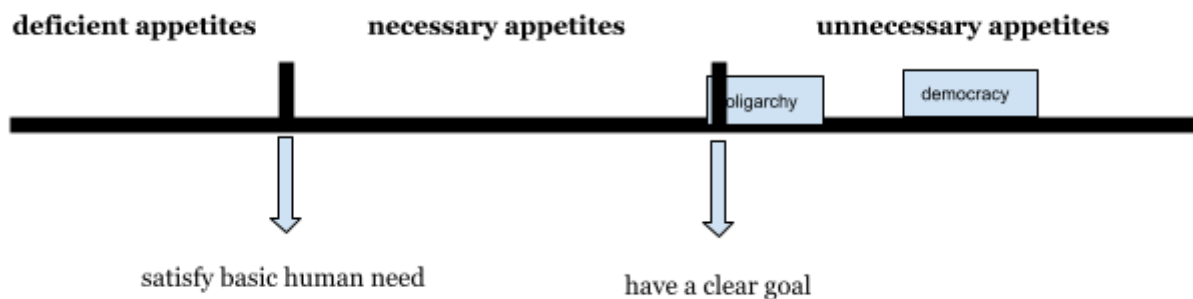


Figure 7

In Oligarchy, the public psychology is a mixture of rulers' unnecessary appetites for wealth and citizens' growing appetites from wealth to everything. This change from appetites for

wealth to appetites for everything is the origin of the democratic sentiment. Because when having the desire for everything, citizens will naturally want the freedom to do anything to satisfy every specific desire.

It is how Plato describes the growth of democratic sentiments that “when a young man, who is reared in the miserly and uneducated manner we described, tastes the honey of the drones and associates with wild and dangerous creatures who can provide every variety of multi-colored pleasure in every sort of way, this, as you might suppose, is the beginning of his transformation from having an oligarchic constitution within him to having a democratic one.”<sup>34</sup> There are two reasons behind this deterioration of appetites from wealth to everything---a lack of education and a metaphorical “creature” offering enjoyment. The lack of education could easily be understood, but it is in question what the “wild and dangerous creatures” that offer multi-colored pleasure are. I believe it is a metaphor of the highly capitalized social system or a market and consumer economic order. On one hand, the free trade in the city gave young people the opportunity to obtain all kinds of enjoyment with money. On the other hand, the money-worshipping social environment that followed diminishes the importance of self-restraint as a virtue. Even though some thrifty rulers might be self-disciplined to effectively gain wealth, they definitely won’t educate their citizens about self-restraint.

Therefore, an oligarchic society will inevitably produce citizens with unnecessary appetites for everything due to the social value and capitalized social order it builds. The internalization of money-worship as a social value and the highly capitalized social environment creates money-loving rulers and freedom-desiring citizens. Freedom-desiring citizens are the first generation of the populists and the difference in the aims of rulers’ and citizens’ appetites leads to the endless conflict and revolution.

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<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 559d, 230.

## Counterargument

But it is notable that Plato's theory was built on a rough observation of public psychology. In his opinion, rich people only have one fundamental characteristic of unnecessary appetites for wealth. It, in fact, ignores the possible difference between rich people. When applying a one-fold description to such a huge group of people, its accuracy is in doubt. Plato has imagined a universal route to wealth that every rich person has been through. And based on this universal route, Plato concludes a universal psychology shared by all rich people. Then based on the psychology of rich people---the ruling class, he concludes the political situation of the oligarchy. However, I don't think his description of rich people is accurate, not to mention its universality. For example, Plato believes oligarchs would neglect education because "money is valued above everything by both the city and the man."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Plato "don't suppose that such a man (oligarch) pays any attention to education."<sup>36</sup> However, it is not a convincing argument since in my opinion, education is highly relevant to one's financial success. And the reality is wealthy individuals will normally pay more attention to education because good education is essential in acquiring knowledge and skills that lead to professional success and financial prosperity. If that's the case, Plato's whole theory of growth of appetites in oligarchy will be untenable.

Even from the aspect of exploiting and indulging poor people, oligarchs don't necessarily share any similar characteristics, because rich people can make their fortune in completely different ways. Some of them might, like Plato says, "encourage bad discipline" to reduce people to poverty. But some of them can also get rich by creating social value and getting a fair share from their positive contribution to society. Wealth can be inherited, stolen, etc. It is arbitrary to conclude that every oligarch makes living on people's indulgence. Also, it is absurd to put all rich people in the same camp. We shouldn't forget that the nature of the

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<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 554b, 224.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 554b, 224.

market is competition. In general, Plato doesn't convince me in believing rich people are psychologically identical, sharing the same interest, and will inevitably unite to encourage bad appetites and exploit poor people. Not to mention, Plato has made a much more arbitrary summary by attributing "unnecessary appetites for everything" to an even larger social group--poor people.

## **The Role of Debt: Debt as Source of Class Consciousness**

In Plato's political theory, democratic revolution is not only a struggle between populist citizens and elitist rulers. But at the same time, it is also a war between two socio-economic groups---the rich and the poor. Plato keeps using terms like "poor people," "rich people," "creditor," and "debtor" to emphasize that the democratic revolution has an important sociological origin of dissatisfaction with the wealth gap and disproportionate share of economic power. Plato believes the wealth gap is the ultimate cause of the conflict because "that of necessity it isn't one city but two---one of the poor and one of the rich--living in the same place and always plotting against one another."<sup>37</sup> But how do poor people grow class-awareness and why do they have the consensus to blame rich people for their poverty? In my opinion, the answer to both questions is the introduction of credit and lending activities. Lending creates debt, and debt has not only enlarged the wealth gap, but also given poor and rich people new identities of "creditors" and "debtors," which impose explicit social traits. People may not know who is rich, but they definitely know who owes them money. The new identities have created a shared experience of being both poor and in debt. Therefore, by reinforcing existing economic hierarchies and giving poor people a shared experience, normalizing credit and lending activities have given poor people class-awareness, leading to a strong sense of solidarity, and hatred and resentment towards their debtors, who are mostly the rich people.

In Plato's writing, lending activities are a part of oligarchic legislation, a tool used by oligarchs to exploit poor people and accumulate wealth. Though other oligarchic activities, like trades, also creates a wealth gap, they are still contained in an acceptable range. But debt is different. It gives people the access to advanced consumption, in which they overdraft their future to satisfy their current desire. In Plato's opinion, debt is an evil creation because "by

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<sup>37</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 551d, 222.

lending money they disable any of the reminders who resist, exact as interest many times the principal sum, and so create a considerable number of drones and beggars in the city.”<sup>38</sup> After debt is made, poor people will draft their future income and pledge their property for loans. It means, when things go wrong, poor people will not only lose their money but also their property and means of production.

The profound influence of debt is that it creates a new class of beggars and also gives citizens a new identity of debtors. Right now, we have three sets of identities given to rich people and poor people--- democrats versus oligarchs, rulers versus citizens, and oligarchic creditors versus debtors without properties. Poor and rich people possess more and more explicit traits with the development of the oligarchy. The first set of identities is on the psychological level. Before the establishment of the oligarchic regime, the difference between rich and poor people is that rich people have appetites for money, and poor people have appetites for freedom. This psychological difference is implicit and private, people won't even know their difference. The second set of identities is on the political level. After the establishment of the oligarchy, rulers enact the law that “proclaims that those whose property doesn't reach the stated amount aren't qualified to rule.”<sup>39</sup> A set of new identities with explicit social traits has been created. It turns psychological differences into a difference in political status, in which everybody can see that rich people are rulers, and poor people are citizens.

Now, debt has given poor people and rich people an even stronger and more explicit set of identities--debtors without property and oligarchic creditors. With the help of debt and systems of credit, rich people have acquired properties and means of production from poor people. Just like Plato says, they make poor people homeless and “create a considerable number of drones and beggars in the city.”<sup>40</sup> It has given beggars an even more explicit trait,

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<sup>38</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 555e, 226.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 551b, 221.

<sup>40</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 555d, 226.

because people can easily see the difference between homeless people wandering in the street and oligarchs living in their mansions. More importantly, without property and means of production, poor people also suffer an existential crisis in this money-worshipping oligarchy. Just like Plato says, “when wealth and the wealthy are valued or honored in a city, virtue and good people are valued less.”<sup>41</sup> In oligarchy, everybody has been alienated as money-maker because wealth is worshiped as the only virtue. In the beginning, poor people are only bad money-makers. They do low-income work and only lose their political rights. However, when debt and credit systems are created, poor people lose their property and means of production. Just like Plato says, they become beggars. Beggar is very different from poor people, though both suggest poverty. Being a beggar means a total loss of one’s social role. In this money-worship oligarchy, poor people are bad money-maker, then beggars are not money-makers at all. Their meanings of existence in this city have been denied. That is why Plato emphasizes beggar is “neither a money-maker, a craftsman, a member of cavalry, or a hoplite, but a poor person without means.”(552a) Beggars are “poor people without means.”

We could create a graph to illustrate this transition in poor and rich people’s social identities and transition from their difference in psychologies, to difference in political roles, and then to difference in social identities.

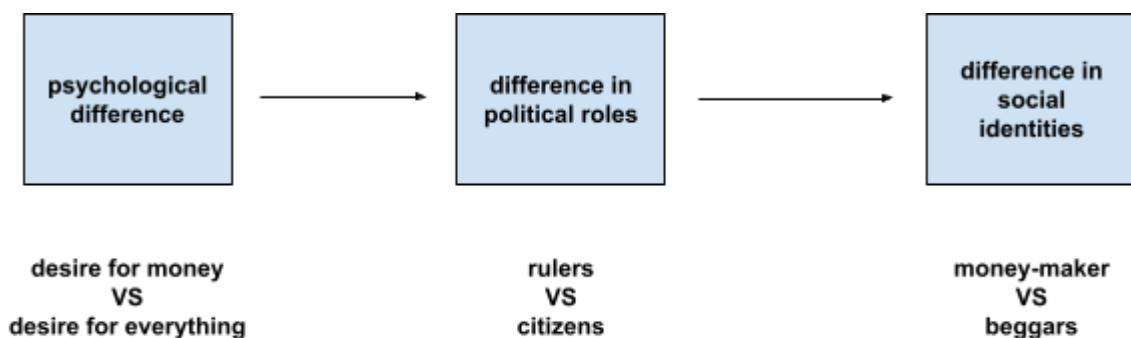


Figure 8

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<sup>41</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 551a, 221.

By depriving poor people's identities as a working human, debt has completed the creation of poor people's class-awareness. The difference in appetites starts the whole process by creating a fundamental difference between poor people and rich people; the oligarchic government has created a class system with people holding different political power; and finally, debt appears and gives poor people an even more explicit trait and a reason to resent rich people. In this way, lending activities in oligarchy have given birth to poor people's class-awareness and their hatred towards rich people.



## Counterargument

However, there is a possible mistake that Plato has made in his argument. He creates divisions between poor people according to their level of poverty, but neglects their differences and puts them in the same class. There are four levels of poverty that Plato has created----loss of political power, debtor, loss of means of production, and loss of property. With no doubt, there is an order of poverty existing in Plato's argument. I painted a graph to show their difference in poverty.

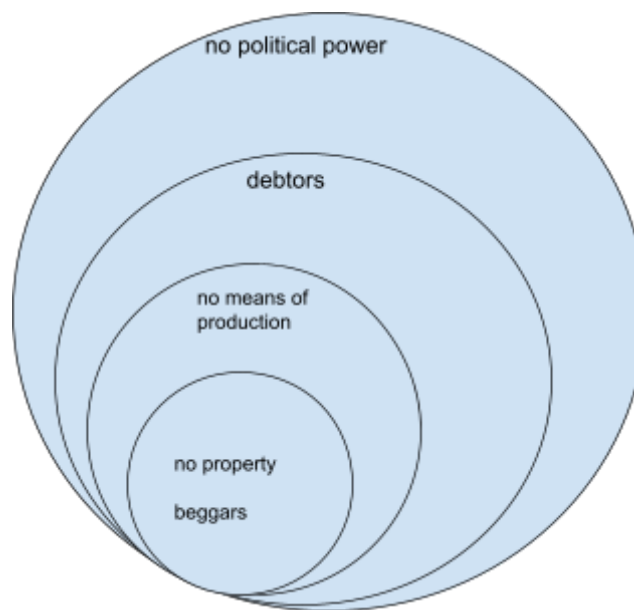


Figure 9

In Plato's concept of poor people, there are middle-class people who are simply not rich enough to be rulers; there are creditor who have debts but aren't necessarily overwhelmed by it; there are jobless people, who are unemployed but not necessarily homeless; and only below that, there are beggars, who lose everything and suffer an existential crisis. The problem is, in the last part of the argument, Plato uses the situation of the extreme poverty--beggars--to describe the overall condition and psychology of the whole class of poor people. However, beggars only represent a small portion of poor people. It is in question that all poor people will eventually share the same feeling and unite to revolt against the rich.

## **Belief replacing knowledge: the origin of anti-intellectualism**

With unnecessary appetites and class-awareness, poor people only need a spark to ignite these piles of straw and start a revolution. The spark they need is a belief that a new political system will open the door to a good life. In Plato's opinion, the concept of "good" is a transcendental idea that is about the knowledge of justice and happiness. The problem of the populist revolution is that it doesn't bring people any closer to the concept of "good," but pushes it further away. It creates a worse form of government---democracy characterized by rules of demagogues and a lack of discipline. The failure of revolution is shown in two aspects. On one hand, it didn't remove the wealth gap and inequality in the city. Democratic movement doesn't change the oligarchic social environment. So "when everybody is trying to make money, those who are naturally most organized generally become the wealthiest."<sup>42</sup> and the wealth gap continues to exist. On the other hand, it escalates the conflict between the rich and the poor and leads to the second revolution. Plato described the process as "the people act as they do (hate the rich) because they are ignorant and are deceived by the drones, and the rich act as they do because they are driven to it (hate the poor) by the stinging of those same drones."<sup>43</sup>

But why did the revolutionaries fail to achieve their aims? Poor people pursue their notion of good life, but only get further away from it. And I believe it is due to the anti-intellectualist sentiments that arise among poor people. In Plato's opinion, goodness is objective and external knowledge that exists independently of human beings. However, the building of democracy was based on the ground of belief rather than knowledge, and it leads to their failure. In the Book V of Republic, Plato makes a distinction between belief and

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<sup>42</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 564d, 235.

<sup>43</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565c, 236.

knowledge. He says to Glaucon “Is opinion, then, darker than knowledge but clearer than ignorance?”<sup>44</sup>

In Plato’s opinion, knowledge is based on an understanding of an eternal and objective form of truth. But belief is a subjective form of understanding based on sensory experience, emotion, and opinion, which was not necessarily verified. Knowledge must be a belief, but not all beliefs are knowledge. We could draw a graph as follows to show their

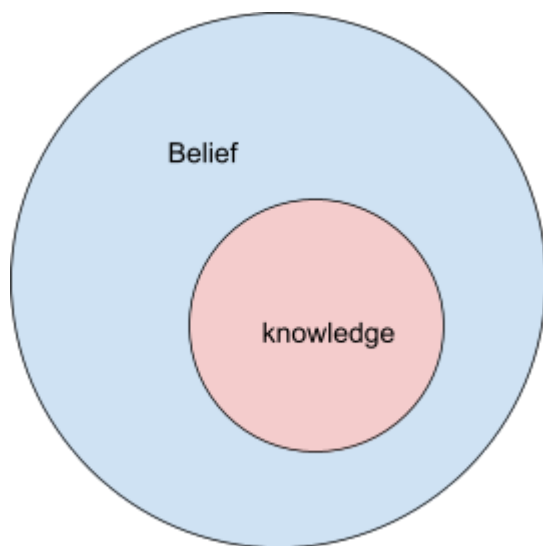


Figure 10

relationships---knowledge is verified belief. In Plato’s opinion, anti-intellectualism prevails in the democratic revolutions. In my opinion, the appearance of anti-intellectualism was reflected in two respects. First off appetites replace reason as the driving force behind the political reformation. And second is that citizens replace political elites as the policy makers and leaders of

the city. I believe they represent a loss of two types of knowledge--philosophical knowledge and political knowledge. The first represents a lack of philosophical knowledge---a misunderstanding of common good and the notion of happiness. And the second represents a lack of knowledge of political skill---an inability to effectively navigate and influence the political landscape to achieve one’s goal.

Just like scholar Zena Hitz summarizes in her book *Degenerate Regimes in Plato's Republic* that “as reason loses its grip, and the appetites gain, so do we also find a decrease of order and structure.”<sup>45</sup> Anti-intellectualism has a long history. It starts with a deviation from the common good in the ruling class when the elite class starts to value their desire over reason and turns aristocracy into timocracy. Plato describes this overall process as “both the

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<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 478c, 154.

<sup>45</sup> Zena Hitz, *Degenerate regimes in Plato's Republic*, 123.

iron and bronze types pull the constitution towards money-making and the acquisition of land, houses, gold, and silver, while both the gold and silver types---not being poor, but by nature rich or rich in their souls---lead the constitution towards virtue and the old order.”<sup>46</sup>In Plato’s opinion, human desire can never be a part of true happiness. Desire is essentially a painful experience, and the satisfaction of it is only a temporary repose from the pain it brings. And oligarchic rulers falsely believe that “the absence of pain and relief from it is most pleasant.”<sup>47</sup> They go on a wrong path based on a false belief and have to constantly exploit their citizens and accumulate wealth to feel pleasure.

Therefore, the mistake of appetites is the ultimate cause of conflict and anti-intellectualism in the city. True happiness can only be obtained “when the entire soul follows the philosophical(rational) part, and there is no civil war in it, each part of it does its own work exclusively and is just, and in particular, it enjoys its own pleasures, the best and truest pleasures possible for it.”<sup>48</sup> When the elite class, as the most knowledgeable people in the city, misunderstands the concept and deviates from the right path towards happiness, there is no way for citizens to conduct any intellectual pursuits. They follow the lead of elites, worship money, only to find out they are being exploited. Then they start to distrust authority and come to believe political elites are the sources of their suffering. It is true that poor people’s suffering came from the corrupted elite class. But poor people choose a worse path that they don’t target the harm of appetites, but expertise itself. What they essentially did was deny the rule of expertise and let the uneducated public continue to rule with appetites.

The trend of anti-intellectualism reached its peak after the foundation of democracy. A significant mark of it was the appearance of idle class, which Plato describes as “its fiercest members do all the talking and acting, while the rest settle near the speaker’s platform and buzz and refuse to tolerate the opposition of another speaker, so that, under a democratic

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<sup>46</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 547b, 217.

<sup>47</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 583d, 254.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 586e, 258.

constitution, with the few exceptions I referred to before, this class manages everything.”<sup>49</sup>

The fundamental principle of democracy is majority rule. In Plato’s opinion, it means a valuation of opinions over knowledge, persuasive skills over truth. After the democratic movement, as long as a certain belief wins the most votes, it would be taken as truth and be promoted to the whole city. When the idle class starts to manage everything based on their persuasiveness rather than knowledge, the city’s governance is based on emotions, instincts, and personal beliefs over objective facts and evidence. With belief completely replacing knowledge, anti-intellectualism appears in timocracy, grows among citizens in oligarchy, finally reaches every corner of the society in democracy.

Notably, the anti-intellectual discourse held by democratic populist in the *Republic* is surprisingly similar to many claims held by Trump supporters. Plato's explanation of anti-intellectualism is also an explanation of anti-elitism within the Trump movement. Trump supporters have also used their subjective beliefs rather than verified knowledge to deny scientific consensus on issues such as climate change and responses to Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in the anti-vaccine movement, we can easily argue that its cause is the false belief in the linkage between vaccines and autism and neglect of scientific research which debunked this conclusion. And the anti-elitist sentiment is built upon this trend of anti-intellectualism. By using belief rather than knowledge to make decisions, Trump supporters grow a distrust of expertise and a rejection of the elitist establishment, who mostly used knowledge rather than belief as guideline for their actions. Therefore, just like the democratic movement, anti-intellectualism is also one of the innate drives of the Trump movement.

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<sup>49</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 564d, 235.

### Chapter 3: Personal Characters of the Tyrant

As we can see, Plato approaches the degeneration of public psychology from two directions ---1. the degeneration of the citizen class 2. the degeneration of the ruling class. The overall degeneration of the city can be divided into two and explained as the growth of bad citizens and bad rulers. In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated the degeneration of citizens by showing how appetites make citizens indulgent, poor, and anti-intellectual. Populists are the end product of the degeneration of the citizen class. They are aggressive political participators, who would start violent revolutions to create new political regimes to satisfy their desires. The degeneration of the citizen class leads to the degeneration of the constitution. And after populist movements, the worst citizens create the worst political regime---tyranny.

In Plato's description, tyranny refers to a form of government, in which a single individual, the tyrant, holds absolute power and exercises it oppressively. Tyranny is born out of democracy, and Plato explains this radical transition as "excessive action in one direction usually sets up a direction in the opposite direction."<sup>50</sup> The first populist movement created democracy, and its aim was to solve the wealth gap and eliminate poverty by giving everybody equal political rights. However, democracy was proven to be a failure, because "when everybody is trying to make money, those who are naturally most organized generally become the wealthiest."<sup>51</sup> The wealth gap continues to exist and the conflict between the rich and the poor escalates. And it is the reason for poor people to start another revolution to achieve the political vision that was failed by the first one. The second revolution is similar to the first one in the way of sharing the same goal that it "promises both in public and in private, freeing the people from debt, redistributing the land to them and to his followers, and

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<sup>50</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 563e, 234.

<sup>51</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 564d, 235.

pretending to be gracious and gentle to all.”<sup>52</sup> But it takes a completely different approach by appealing to authoritarianism and a charming populist leader to free his followers from poverty and debt.

The concept of the tyrant is an important topic in Plato’s philosophy and political theory. His idea of the tyrant is not just a political figure, but also a psychological state. The social environment of tyranny can be seen as a product of the tyrant’s political decisions, and the political decisions are a product of the tyrant’s unchecked impulses and distorted psychology. Therefore, in this chapter, I will investigate the tyrant as a psychological figure and use it as a vantage point to understand the tyrant as a political feature. The tyrant’s psychology has an interesting relationship with the populists’ psychology. On one hand, as the leader of the populist movement, the tyrant’s psychology can be seen as a collective representation of populist desire. But on the other hand, as an oppressive dictator, the tyrant is in a struggle with his people, and this struggle has given rise to some peculiar personal characteristics. The overlap between the tyrant’s and populists’ psychologies is his **outlaw appetites**. And the struggle between the tyrant and citizens gives rise to the tyrant’s **ontological insecurity**. Aside from that, the tyrant also possesses a unique psychological trait---**erotic passion**. Therefore, in this chapter, I will focus on the tyrant’s outlaw appetites, ontological insecurity, and erotic passion to unveil the tyrant as a political and psychological figure.

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<sup>52</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 566d, 237.

## Outlaw Appetites: a Continuation of the Populist Desire

Plato first brings in the concept of outlaw appetite in the Book IX of *Republic* by saying “Some of our unnecessary pleasures and desires seem to me to be lawless. They are probably present in everyone, but they are held in check by the laws and by the better desire in alliance with reason. In a few people, they have been eliminated entirely or only a few weak ones remain, while in others they are stronger and more numerous.”<sup>53</sup> What Plato seems to suggest is that outlaw appetites are among unnecessary appetites, but they are naturally restrained by reason and other better desires, so the fulfillment of them rarely happens.

Therefore, I change the graph that I drew in chapter 2 and add a boundary to the right of the graph to illustrate that there is a subsection of the unnecessary appetites.

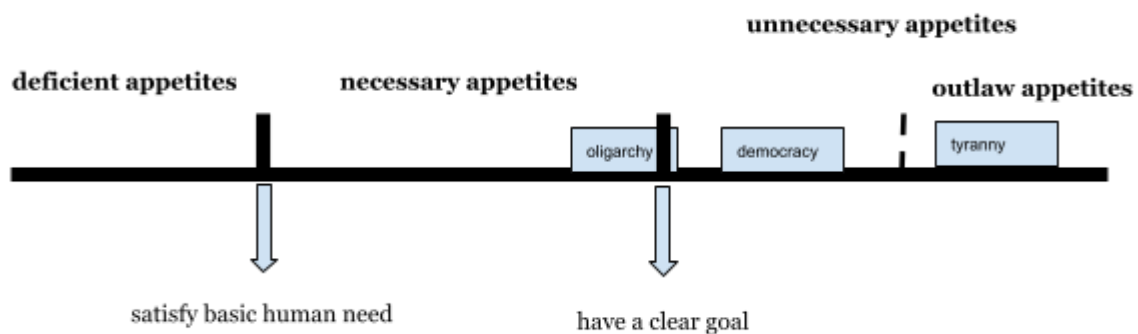


Figure 11

It is important for us to understand the difference between outlaw appetites and other unnecessary appetites. From Plato’s description, we can know that outlaw appetites are naturally constrained by other parts of the soul and, therefore, rare among people. I believe the constraint comes from human morality, and Plato concludes it as a collective operation of reason and other better appetites. Therefore, the outlaw appetite manifests itself with a total ignorance and abandonment of basic moral principles. Plato’s description of the outlaw appetites corroborates my conclusion. For example, Plato says that the outlaw appetite comes from “the beastly and savage part, full of food and drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a

<sup>53</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 571b, 241.



way to gratify itself,”<sup>54</sup> and Plato gives an example that “it doesn’t shrink from trying to have sex with a mother, as it supposes, or with anyone else at all, whether man, god, or beast.”<sup>55</sup> Morality allows humans to make choices based on principles of right and wrong, rather than just on instinct or self-interest. The beastly part of the soul represents a complete submission to self-interest, with no regard to any principles of right and wrong. Outlaw appetites are a product of unleashing the beastly part of the soul, which only seeks to fulfill survival and reproductive instincts. That’s why outlaw appetites only appear in very few people, because morality is a key part of human nature for Plato, thereby the fulfillment of outlaw appetites would cause natural disgust from most people. The example of having sex with a mother has this disgust.

Now I hope to use a new graph to show the relationship between necessary, unnecessary, and outlaw appetites. As we can see, as the level of appetites increases, the aim of appetites is targeted at increasing intake of pleasure. The boundary between different forms of appetites is determined by what bottom line can be broken through. When man can break the promise to bring people common good, he then possesses unnecessary appetites and becomes an oligarch. And when man can completely overthrow moral principle and can do anything to satisfy his desire for pleasure and power, he then possesses outlaw appetites and becomes a tyrant.

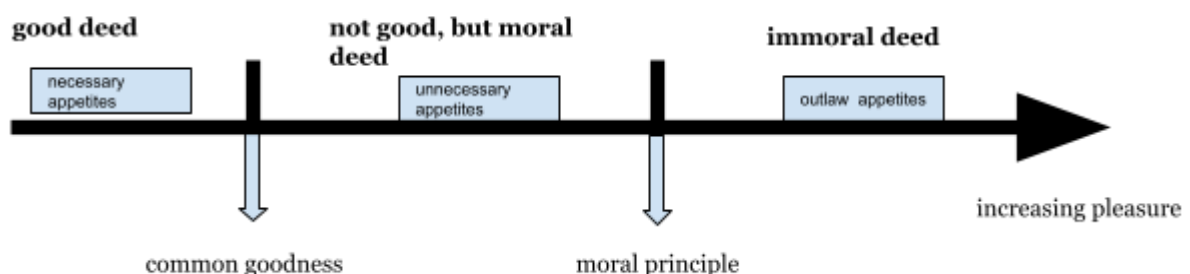


Figure 12

<sup>54</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 571c, 242.

<sup>55</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 571c-d, 242.

But where do the tyrant's outlaw appetites come from? I believe he inherited it from the populist movements. The growth of outlaw appetites is composed of two parts---1. the increase in desire 2. the weakening of morality. The first part comes from the development of the populist movement in democracy. Due to the failure of achieving equality in democracy, poor people start to grow stronger appetites and exploit rich people. According to Plato, there is a group of populist leaders who "always get a share, through the leaders, in taking the wealth of the rich and distributing it to the people, keeping the greater part for themselves."<sup>56</sup> The tyrant is the leader of the populist movement, so his appetites are strong and essentially the same with his members', targeting at the exploitation of the rich people.

However, the exploitation provokes retaliation from the rich people because "when they see the people trying to harm them, they truly do become oligarchs and embrace oligarchy's evil, whether they want to or not."<sup>57</sup> We could imagine this oligarchy's evil as an unlawful attack on poor people. As the leader of the populist movement, the tyrant will have no choice, but to respond with counter-attacks. Just like Plato says that a tyrant is "the one who stirs up civil wars against the rich,"<sup>58</sup> the war starts. This war between the rich and poor is accompanied by blood, murder, and prosecution. The tyrant will inevitably break the law and commit crimes. It is the first step for him to become a beast and express and satisfy outlaw appetites. Plato uses a story to illustrate this process that "anyone who tastes the one piece of human innards that's chopped up with those of other sacrificial victims must inevitably become a wolf."<sup>59</sup> The unlawful revenge is his first step, and then the tyrant, just like the man who tastes human flesh, gets used to this breaking of morality and frequently uses it later to win the war.

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<sup>56</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565a, 234.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565c, 236.

<sup>58</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 566a, 236.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 566d, 236.

The war between the rich and the poor creates a zero-sum game, the end of which can only be the survival of one group. It also urges the tyrant to continually commit greater crimes. After all, the tyrant lives in a conflicted world, in which he “either to be killed by his enemies or to be transformed from a man into a wolf by becoming a tyrant.”<sup>60</sup> To a certain extent, he was forced to attack rich people and the elite in the beginning, either due to the instigation from his followers and the aggression from his enemies. But later, the tyrant didn’t need outside motivation to commit crime, because he had done it so many times that he started to neglect the existence of morality. The savage crimes have given him a positive response and provide him with the reward of power, reputation, and admiration from his followers. It has created a fearful mindset that makes tyrants believe that it is tolerable to break moral principles for pleasure and power.

All in all, the cruelty and intensity of outlaw appetites comes from the victory of appetites over moral principle. When we get back to Plato’s example of man eating human flesh, we can then see the implication clearly. On one hand, eating human flesh is immoral and beastly; but on the other hand, eating human flesh stops his hunger and satisfies his desire for food. In this case, beastly people’s desire for food has overcome his morality and made him eat human flesh. Similarly, a tyrant’s negligence of moral principle comes from his desire to survive and win the war between the poor and the rich. To win the war, “he brings someone to trial on false charges and murders him(as tyrants so often do), and, by thus blotting out a human life, his impious tongue and lips taste kindred citizen blood.”<sup>61</sup> This overcoming of moral restraint in wartime constitutes the origin of tyrant’s outlaw appetites.

As we can see, the beginning of the tyrant’s outlaw appetites drive to win the war and it, to a certain extent, has good intentions. However, after the tyrant wins the war and gains the rulership, this outlaw’s appetite continues and becomes an evil desire for personal gain.

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<sup>60</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 566d, 236.

<sup>61</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565e, 236.

Under the tyrannical regime, the aim of the tyrant's outlaw appetites is no longer the defeat of the enemy since the war is already over. Therefore, it is projected onto something else and turns itself into a desire for bodily pleasure, power, and blood.

## **Ontological insecurity: Tyrant's Suspicion and Killing of his Friends and Enemies**

After the tyrant has gained power, his relation with populists has changed dramatically. The difference comes from a change in his position from revolutionary to ruler. In the past, a tyrant was the leader of the revolution and populists were his allies to overthrow the rule of oligarchs. But in the tyranny, tyrants take the position of oligarch, and populist revolutionaries become a potential threat to his ruling. It constitutes the origin of tyrants' greatest insecurity--fear of losing power. However, in this chapter, aside from power struggle, I hope to make a further investigation into tyrannical, oligarchical, and populist psychology and find out a common fear they shared before, during, and after the populist revolution. I call it "ontological insecurity." The noun of this phrase is "insecurity." It represents a fear of losing and a wish to create order and secure an imagined satisfying future. And the adjective word is "ontological." It suggests this insecurity appears as a result of an existential crisis, in which people seek for re-affirmation and defense of particular values and traditions inherited from the past.

Conflict comes from differences in their political projects, which is a figurative reflection of one's appetites. Poor people's appetites for everything make them believe in a utopian world with complete freedom and zero wealth gap because "it is the only city worth living in for someone who is by nature free."<sup>62</sup> And rich people's appetites for money makes them believe in a capitalist society with free trade and protection of private property. Poor and rich people in Plato's writing possess different values and their conflict in values is the origin of their ontological insecurity. And ontological security is the reward for the party who wins the fight and achieves their vision of the future. Interestingly, Plato seldom describes the group of democrats and oligarchs from the angle of their visions and political principles.

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<sup>62</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 562b, 232.

Instead, Plato focused on the drive behind their goals and made their appetites the focus of his study. With no doubt, appetites are a better angle to pursue for a theory of political transformation, because in Plato's theory, appetites are the origin of one's goals, and it is the underlying drive in one's political project<sup>63</sup>. Fear and insecurity of people, as they live their lives, come from ideological conflicts and differences in political discourse.

The war between the rich and the poor comes from a need to defend each group's political project. The problem of the oligarchs stems from their need to defend the value of oligarchy, like free trade, private property, and capitalistic lifestyle. The democratic revolution came from the democrat's need to achieve their political project and create a world of equality and freedom. Both parties are afraid that their opposition would deprive them of what they value and "there are impeachments, judgments, and trials on both sides,"<sup>64</sup> so that they face great insecurity, fear losing their value and status and getting prosecuted. And the young tyrant, as the leader of democratic revolution, suffers most of the oligarch's retribution in this process. Ontological insecurity tortures the tyrant's soul, because as the target of rich people, he is dangerously threatened, thereby he is forced to sometimes take unlawful acts to protect himself. Just like Plato said, when the leader of populist movement gets attacked by rich people, it is "the beginning of the transformation from leader of the people to tyrant."<sup>65</sup> To avoid getting killed by his oligarchic opposition, the leader of a populist movement descends into a bloodthirsty beast and starts to possess outlaw appetites.

If we follow the narrative of "ontological insecurity," we could then understand tyrant's insecurity in tyranny as an inheritance of the insecurity from his struggle with democrats. The difference in appetites creates a shared "ontological insecurity" among

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<sup>63</sup> I try to find a word similar to the concept of "自我价值" in Mandarin. If we translate it directly, "自我价值" would mean "self-value." It means a political project that will contribute to the welfare of the whole community, an act of altruism. As a neutral word, I find "political project" won't completely cover my thoughts. It doesn't reveal the hypocrisy underneath democrats' and oligarchs' endeavors. They pretend the aim of their project is to save the community from the harm of the other side, but in fact, they are using it to satisfy their self-interest.

<sup>64</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565c, 236.

<sup>65</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565b, 235.

people, represented by a fight between capitalists and democrats. Due to the increasing hostility and extremity in their response, the insecurity also increases from a worry of losing power and position to a fear of getting persecuted and murdered. The figure of the tyrant is the ultimate product of this “ontological insecurity.” He is the most anxious and suffering human being in this catastrophe because of his role as the leader of democrats. This insecurity passes on to the regime of tyranny. On one hand, it is a mental issue that makes tyrants grow the habit of being suspicious and paranoid due to the past traumatic experience in the war. But on the other hand, tyrants’ insecurity is also due to the fact that he has a self-interest that was opposed by everyone else in the tyrannical city.

Plato describes tyranny as a regime that is “the most severe and cruel slavery.”<sup>66</sup> After the tyrant gains power, he loses all his comrades and exploits the whole city. No slave will like his master. Therefore, just like Plato says, The tyrant is “all the more readily hated by the citizens.”<sup>67</sup> In tyranny, the ontological insecurity is no longer a product of a conflict between two groups, but a product of the conflict between one tyrant and all citizens. It means, in tyranny, the tyrant had no one to trust. Together with the traumatic experience in the past, this struggle with the whole city makes the tyrant feel paranoid and insecure with everybody around him. The tyrant is afraid that someone will challenge his authority, grasp his power, and prosecute him, just like what he did to his enemies. Plato has thoroughly described the tyrant’s insecurity in the Book IX of Republic. Plato says tyrants “must keep a sharp lookout for anyone who is brave, large-minded, knowledgeable, or rich. And so happy is he that he must be the enemy of them all, whether he wants to be or not, and plot against them until he has purged them from the city.”<sup>68</sup> And Plato also says that “if tyrant suspects some people of

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<sup>66</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 564a, 234.

<sup>67</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 567b, 238.

<sup>68</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 567c, 238.

having thoughts of freedom and of not favoring his rule, can't he find a pretext for putting them at the mercy of the enemy in order to destroy them?"<sup>69</sup>

All in all, the origin of ontological insecurity comes from the war between the rich and the poor. The suspicion and antagonism between rich people and poor people gives rise to the first ontological insecurity among people. As the leader of democratic movement, the tyrant suffers the greatest fear among democratic because he is the target of rich people. And this insecurity passed on to tyranny when he gained the ruling power, because the conflict in interest doesn't disappear. On the contrary, the conflict has escalated and became a war between the tyrant and the whole city, because tyranny is essentially a political system of tyrants enslaving everyone else. That's why the tyrant possesses the strongest sense of insecurity and lives in the constant fear of being overthrown. He has to be cold-blooded, ruthless, and immoral to protect himself. He has to repeatedly neglect correct moral values and purge both his enemies and friends "until he's left with neither friend nor enemy of any worth."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 567a, 238.

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 567b, 238.



## **Erotic Passion: the Madness and Unruly Conducts by the Tyrant**

In our previous discussion of the tyrant's outlaw appetites and ontological insecurity, we have looked into the reason behind the tyrant's ruthlessness and bloodthirstiness. From the angle of outlaw appetites, it is a behavioral pattern and habit for tyrants to do unlawful things in the pursuit of power and pleasures of the body. And from the angle of ontological insecurity, it then becomes a need for self-protection to purge his possible enemies and commit crimes. However, beneath those motivations for unlawful acts, there is a desire for inhumane and monstrous deeds hidden in the tyrant's soul. This unconscious bundle of desires is implied in Plato's description of outlaw appetites when he says "our dreams make it clear that there is a dangerous, wild, and lawless form of desire in everyone."<sup>71</sup> The universality of this lawless desire suggested bloodthirsty deeds can appear even when they have no instrumental value. There is a hidden evil drive in the human soul, exerting its influence not only for personal gain, but also for the satisfaction of impulsive desires for blood and savage killing. Plato has called this desire "erotic love."

Plato firstly brings in the concept of "erotic love" and talks about its origin near the end of Book IX. Plato says "when those clever enchanters and tyranny-makers have no hope of keeping hold of the young man in any other way, they contrive to plant in him a erotic love, like a great winged drone, to be the leader of those idle desires that spend whatever is at hand."<sup>72</sup> From Plato's statement, we can know erotic love is born out of parents' indulgence of children's appetites, just like Plato says "when the other desires---filled with incense, myrrh, wreaths, wine, and the other pleasures found in their company---buzz around the drone, to be the leader of those idle desires that spend whatever is at hand. Then this leader of the soul"<sup>73</sup> This love of unruly conduct comes from one's indulgence of unnecessary appetites and bodily pleasure. Indulgence of unnecessary appetites gives tyrants a thirst for

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<sup>71</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 572b, 242.

<sup>72</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 572e, 243.

<sup>73</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 572e, 243.

blood, which can only be satisfied with unruly conduct. And when this thirst for blood dominates tyrant's soul, then he became a madman, of which Plato says "if it finds any beliefs or desires in the man that are thought to be good or that still have some shame, it destroys them and throw them out, until it purged him of moderation and filled him with imported madness."<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, we could draw a graph to illustrate the development of a tyrant's soul. It is

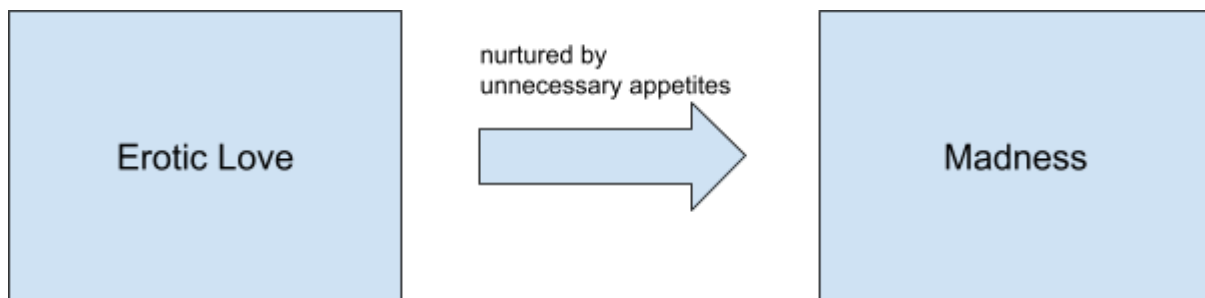


Figure 13

important to make a distinction between unnecessary appetites and erotic love. Though Plato has used descriptions like "a dangerous, wild, and lawless form of desire" to characterize the concept of erotic love, we shouldn't consider erotic love as a deteriorated form of unnecessary appetites. I make this claim for two very important reasons. First of all, erotic love has a different origin. In Plato's description, appetite is an essential part of the human soul, which explicitly presents and constantly functions to sustain one's daily life. However, Plato depicts erotic love as a hidden evil part of the human soul that is only awakened in sleep. Plato says erotic loves are "those that are awakened in sleep, when the rest of soul---the rational, gentle, and ruling part--slumbers. Then the beastly and savage part, full of food and drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify."<sup>75</sup> Unlike appetites, erotic love is a hidden trait, an unconscious part of the human soul. Therefore, it shouldn't be considered as a deteriorated form of appetites, because appetites are explicit and constantly functioning when people are awake.

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<sup>74</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 573b, 243.

<sup>75</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 571c, 242.

Secondly, appetites and erotic love aim at different things. The growth of unnecessary appetites is built upon necessary appetites, and both of them are aimed at things that people want to have, like food, drink, and money. They share the same target, and the difference is that unnecessary appetites go beyond the boundary and target excessive satisfaction. For example, necessary appetites target the right amount of regular food to stop hunger, while unnecessary appetites target fine dishes, like steak, ice-cream, and coca cola, and large amounts of food that will give people satiety. However, the aim of erotic love doesn't follow the logic of deterioration from necessary appetites to unnecessary appetites. If it does follow, erotic love should have targeted finer dishes, like Wagyu Beef, 24-Carat Gold Ice Cream, and Lafite wine, and even larger amounts of food that will give people diabetes. However, Plato's description of the object of erotic love is radically different that "it doesn't shrink from trying to have sex with a mother, as it supposes, or with anyone else at all, whether man, god, or beast. It will commit any foul murder, and there is no food it refuses to eat. In a word, it omits no act of folly or shamelessness."<sup>76</sup> Erotic love disobeys the natural development of appetites and targets things that are not desired by normal people. Rather than deterioration of appetites, it is more like a mutation of appetites caused by erotic love.

Therefore, in my opinion, erotic love is a hidden disease of the soul that is outside the tripartite structure of the soul and grows with one's indulgence of appetites. It influences one's mind by changing the subject of desire from normal bodily satisfaction to shameless and beastly thirst for blood. That's why Plato says erotic love makes people mad instead of saying erotic love makes people greedy. Madness is the end product of erotic love that "this leader of the soul adopts madness as its bodyguard and becomes frenzied. If it finds any beliefs or desires in the man that are thought to be good or that still have some shame, it destroys them and throws them out, until it purges him of moderation and fills him with

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<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 571c-d, 242.

imported madness.”<sup>77</sup> The horror of erotic love is that it can change one’s perception of things and drive people to pursue abnormal pleasure.

I have drawn the following graph to conclude the origin and development of erotic love. Erotic love is an evil hidden beneath the tripartite structure of the soul. With the nourishment of excessive appetites, it starts to grow and damages the proper functions of reason and spirit. When it completely destroys one’s reason and morality, erotic love changes the subject of appetite from normal satisfaction to abnormal pleasure. Then after erotic love completely takes control of tyrant’s soul, the tyrant gains a thirst for incest and blood and becomes a madman.

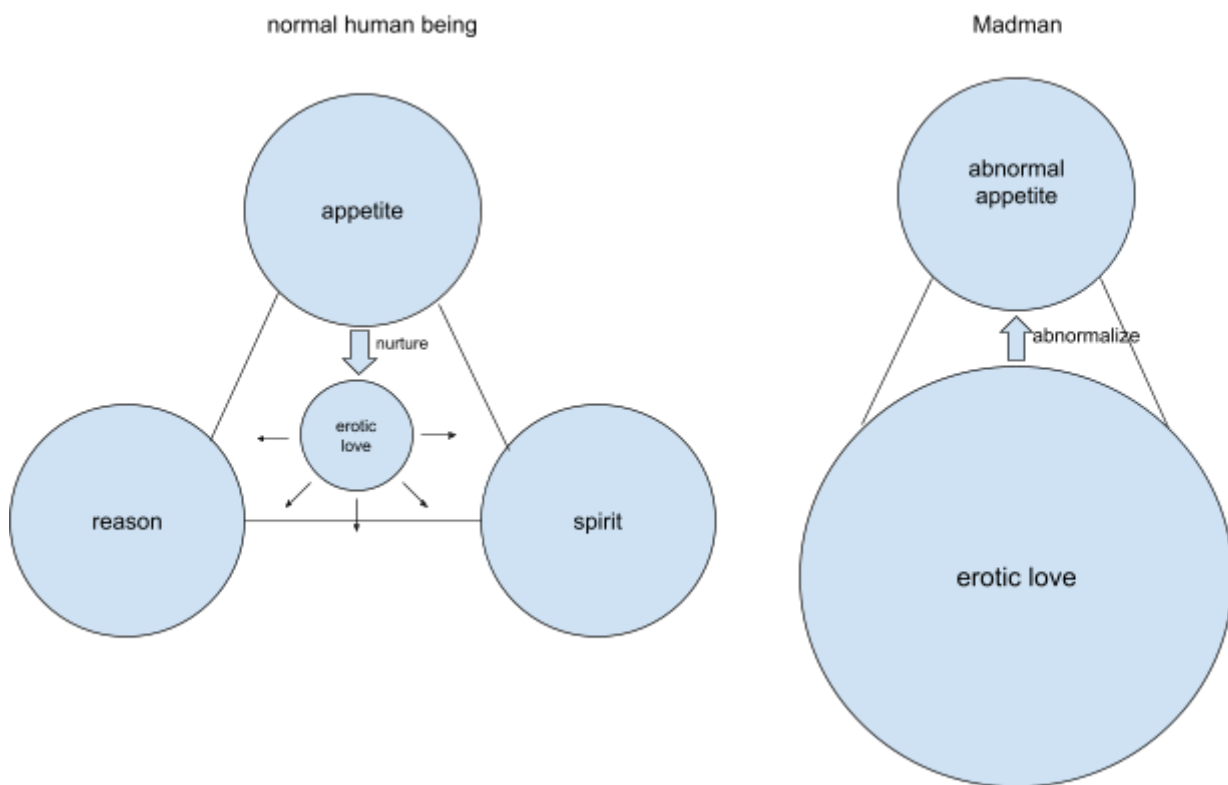


Figure 14

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 573b, 243.

## Chapter 4: Plato's *Republic* and Trumpist Movement in modern America

My research of Plato's *Republic* can be divided into two parts. The first part discussed the underlying force beneath the decline of the political regime, and the second part focused on the personal traits of citizens and rulers developed in populist movements that happened in oligarchy and democracy. There are many overlaps between personal traits of Trump and the tyrant, Trump supporters and democratic populists. In fact, it is so explicit that I can easily demonstrate their linkage by simply footnoting Trump-related photos with quotes from the *Republic*.



Photo 1: Trump face on the half-naked Rocky Balboa [credited to Donald J Trump's Twitter]

**"They contrive to plant in him a powerful erotic love, like a great winged drone, to be the leader of those idle desires that spend whatever is at hand."** (*Republic*, 572e, p.243)



Photo 2: Trump's support attack the US capitol [credited to Los Angeles Times]

**"the first thing he does is to stir up a war, so that people will continue to feel the need of a leader."** (*Republic*, 566e, p.238)



Photo 3: Trump's Luxury Life in his Mansion [credited to Wordpress]

**"I think that someone in whom the tyrant of erotic love dwells and in whom it directs everything next goes in for feasts, revelries, luxuries, girlfriends, and all that sort of thing."** (*Republic*, 573d, p.244)

It is surprising to see a depiction of “tyrant” from two thousand years ago echoes with a political figure in modern America. Plato’s claims about tyrants and populist movements have made some surprising predictions about Trump and his supporters----inflammatory rhetoric, luxurious life, anti-elitist stand, and obsessions for masculinity. Plato has even correctly foreseen Trump’s oligarchic background as the son of a wealthy multi-billionaire.

Nevertheless, Plato’s theory of degeneration of constitutions has also made some missteps in his overall argument and his depiction of democracy. Plato’s criticism of democracy, in many ways, contradicts the reality of American democracy. Plato builds his entire critique on the assumption that uneducated masses are irrational and lack the wisdom necessary to compromise and make collective decisions with the rich. And that’s why they will inevitably choose a tyrant as their leader to fight rather than cooperate with oligarchs. However, it would be inappropriate to apply this pattern directly to the Trump movement and argue Trump is a modern Platonic tyrant. First of all, Trump’s base of support is diverse and includes individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. It is hard to simply conclude that Trump was supported only by uneducated poor people. Though Trump drew large support from groups that are traditionally less educated, like white working-class and farmers from rural areas, there are many well-educated and high-income voters who also support Donald Trump. It is not accurate to summarize the Trumpist movement as a simple uprising of poor people, thereby it doesn’t accurately fit Plato's political theory. Secondly, it is far too early to say the Trumpist movement is an advocate for tyranny. With no doubt, this movement emphasizes the personal charisma and authority of Donald Trump, and it definitely has a tendency to undermine democratic values and institutions. But it is still largely a publicity strategy inside democratic framework rather than a true advocacy for tyrannical rule. The Trump movement might be read as far less severe than Plato’s narration of the pro-tyrant

movement in the *Republic*. At least, Donald Trump came into power by winning the presidential election rather than by winning the civil war between rich and poor people.

As we can see, there are both similarities and differences between Plato's theory and the situation in modern America. It poses to us a vital question---how should we understand Plato's political theory and use it to guard our democracy from the tyranny and the passions of the mob? In this chapter, I will firstly refute a common misinterpretation of the *Republic* which mechanically applies Plato's spectrum of political regimes and elitist political stand and conclude *Republic* as a total negation of democracy. After that, I will discuss my interpretation of the *Republic* as a teaching of personal responsibility and rational use of political power. And I will argue Plato's overall argument of politics as a struggle between reason and appetites can be a meaningful angle for us to understand the Trumpist movement and to define the principles of democracy from the erosion of tyranny.

## **An Impractical Use of Plato: The Decline of Constitutions and the Negation of Democracy**

It would be a mistake, and also absurd, to rigidly apply every aspect of Plato's theory to the modern world. In my opinion, Plato's spectrum of political regimes has little practical use and his overall comment on democracy is not a precise reflection of reality in modern America. In fact, it is ridiculous to go into the discussion of whether Plato's political theory is practical in its entirety. Let us not forget it is a piece of writing from ancient Athens. It shouldn't be a surprise for Plato not to make accurate descriptions of democracy two thousands years later. Nonetheless, if we try to comment on Plato's missteps, I believe there are limitations on Plato's overall argument---failure to notice racial and immigration issues, incomprehensive understanding of modern democratic capitalism, and ignorance of technological innovations.

First of all, Plato didn't consider the racial issues and immigration issues as possible points of political conflict. In the *Republic*, Plato has never touched on the issue of immigrants. The closest discussion Plato has was on the treatment of barbarians and prisoners of war. However, issues of race and immigrants are a significant factor in the emergence of Trumpism. In fact, instead of saying the Trumpist movement is a figurative war between the rich and the poor, it is better to be characterized by a nationalist agenda and the conflict of interest between conservative white Americans and new immigrants. If we put the issue of immigration into Plato's theory, it will recast his entire logic of political deterioration from oligarchy to tyranny, which is solely based on economic inequality and conflict between oligarchs and the general public.

Secondly, Plato's understanding of democracy and capitalism is complex and nuanced for his time, but it has limitations in the application to the democratic capitalism in the modern world. Plato considered both democracy and capitalism to be inferior systems. He



critiqued democracy as an inherently unstable and ineffective government, and his only perception of democratic system is a city ruled by mobs and demagogues. However, if we look at major developed countries in the world, most governments maintain a democratic ruling, and in a large part, have a mechanism that ensures rational-decision making and a certain degree of elitism in the government. For example, the media as the fourth estate ensures that voters are well-informed about the issues and candidates they are voting for. And it largely prevents a democratic country from falling into the rule of demagogues. At the same time, Plato's doubts of capitalism are also unsupported. He saw the potential for a society with free trade to turn itself into a greedy and appetitive oligarchy. He believed oligarchs are naturally organized to exploit poor people and destined to fall into conflict with the poor. I find his narrative neglecting the competitive nature of the capitalist market, in which businessmen are also prone to compete with each other for self-interest. It is arbitrary to put all rich people on the same team and expect them to unite and fight against poor people, who are very likely to be their customers.

Last but not least, Plato didn't foresee the technological innovation of the internet and social media that fundamentally changes the ways of communication and citizen participation in politics. The creation of social media has created a huge gulf between Plato and the modern world, but not necessarily in the way of disproving Plato's theory. On one hand, social media has played a significant role in democracy by providing a platform for people to voice their opinion, get access to information, and hold elected officials accountable. It helps connect elected officials with citizens, brings elections closer to people's lives, and promotes freedom of speech. But on the other hand, social media can also harm democracy in the way of spreading misinformation and creating "information bubbles," where people are only exposed to opinions that confirm their existing beliefs. From this perspective, the technological innovation of social media has helped create a platform that

perfectly reflects Plato's description of demagogues that "its fiercest members do all the talking and acting, while the rest settle near the speaker's platform and buzz and refuse to tolerate the opposition of another speaker, so that, under a democratic constitution, with the few exceptions I referred to before, this class manages everything."<sup>78</sup> When I read Plato's description of demagogues, I immediately recall Trump's twitter which looks exactly like a speaker's platform with his followers buzzing under the stage. However, even though social media can promote populist sentiment on a large scale, Plato's prediction of democratic spirit as a complete rule of demagogues doesn't reflect the reality in America and his overall argument of decline of democracy is groundless.

All in all, from a political standpoint, Plato's discussion of democracy is not practical. His overall comment on the spectrum of constitutions is mostly subjective, and due to the limitation of the history era he lived in, his subjective opinion of democracy should not be taken as a definitive account of the strengths and limitations of democratic government. But does that mean Plato's *Republic* has no substantial content and can only be used as a historical text? The surprisingly accurate similarity between Plato's conception of the tyrant and Trump, populist movement and Trumpist movement suggests otherwise. From the perspective of psychological analysis, Plato has provided an interesting angle for us to look at America as a struggle between reason and appetites.

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<sup>78</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 564d, 235

## **A Practical Use of Plato: the Restraint of Appetites and the Rule of Reason**

When we look at the fundamental argument of Plato's political theory, we see a constant struggle between reason and appetites, between good appetites and bad appetites. In timocracy, the politic proceeds with a struggle between Philosopher's reason and oligarch's appetites for money. In oligarchy and democracy, it proceeds with a struggle between oligarch's appetites for money and democrat's appetites for freedom. Finally, in tyranny, politics is a struggle between citizen's appetite for liberty and tyrant's outlaw appetite for everything. The struggle between reason and appetites has created different political phenomenons. And Plato's whole theory of degeneration of constitutions could be concluded by a quote from Zena Hitz's *Degenerate regimes in Plato's Republic* that "as reason loses its grip, and the appetites gain, so do we also find a decrease of order and structure."<sup>79</sup> The essence of political regimes is a collective public psychology, where appetites and reason have achieved a short balance. And Tyranny, as the end of political degeneration, is a product of the domination of excessive appetites in every aspect of the society.

If we look at American politics from the perspective of reason and appetites, we can understand the birth of Trumpism to be a result of the public rejection of reason and pursuit of appetitive satisfaction. And by using Plato's explanation of political degeneration as a lens, we can conclude that Trumpism is motivated by overfocus on self-interest and a desire for political disruption to satisfy that self-interest. Plato's solution to this political disorder is educating people to use reason to pursue the common good. I agree with Plato's use of reason to prevent the growth of tyranny, but I disagree with the second half on the narrative of common good. In my opinion, the belief in a common good constitutes the origin of Trumpism, in which Trump supporters believe that they need a populist leader to bring that common good back to America. The slogan "Make America Great Again" is inherent with an

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<sup>79</sup> Zena Hitz, *Degenerate regimes in Plato's Republic*, 123.

appealing concept of a common good which has been destroyed by democrats, immigrants, and globalization. This magic word of common good can be more destructive than Plato thought. Moreover, it is in doubt whether a transcendental concept of common good really exists, so I would rather leave it out of political discussion, and end it with a quote from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* that "One has to get rid of the bad taste of wanting to be in agreement with many. 'Good' is no longer good when your neighbor takes it into his mouth. And how could there exist a 'common good'!"(section 43)

After we understand today's democratic crisis is a result of rule of appetites and the cultivation of reason is a possible solution, Jonathan Lear's externalization-internalization theory then can be of good use. Like Lear's theory of externalization shows, citizens can affect the government by externalizing their appetites. We can arguably say that the Trumpist movement is a case of externalization in which personal appetites influence politics and lead to political events like *Roe v. Wade* overturned, slow response to Covid-19, and trade wars. At the same time, like Lear's theory shows, citizens can also internalize the rhetoric of political figures, and Trump's rhetoric has also led to populist movements and civil unrest, like the January 6 United States Capitol attack, anti-vaccine movement, and anti-abortion movement. With the help of *Republic* and Lear's interpretation, we could understand Trumpism as a vicious cycle of public psychology and politics. Trumpism is on one hand, an externalization of voter's appetites, but on the other hand, also a sentiment internalized by people and escalating the political polarization.

Therefore, a fruitful use of Plato's *Republic* would be promoting use of reason and breaking the vicious cycle of public psychology and politics. Using the *Republic* as an angle, we can resolve the influence of Trumpism from two directions. First of all, we can stop the internalization of Trumpist sentiments by regulating the media to stop the spreading of hate speech and misinformation. Also, we can recommend official candidates and promote public

intellectuals who seek to bridge the division and achieve bipartisanship, instead of simply pursuing partisan interests. Secondly, it is also important to stop the externalization of populist sentiments of the public. We can achieve it in the long run by educating people to use the democratic mechanism to voice opinions rather than using violence to promote political change.

## **Conclusion:**

The three main goals of this project are first off building a comprehensive model to explain the degeneration of political regimes in Plato's *Republic*. I have done so by building upon Jonthan Lear's theory in *Open-Minded* and addressing criticisms from G. R. F. Ferrari's *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*. In the end, I conclude with a political model of externalization and internalization to understand the degeneration of the city as a product of psychological degeneration of the public and ruling-class. The second goal of this project is to find out the psychological traits of populists and the tyrant. By looking into the populist psychology of unnecessary appetites, debt, and anti-intellectualism and the tyrant psychology of outlaw appetites, ontological insecurity, and erotic passion, we depict the social situation before and after the populist revolution in the *Republic*. And then in the final chapter, I use it as a lens to interpret Trumpism in modern America, thereby achieving my third goal. By understanding American politics as a product of public psychology, I reckon that populist sentiments are a product of the struggle between appetites and reason and understanding Trumpism as a product of externalization and internalization of populist sentiments.

There are many possible future directions for the development of this project. First of all, the discussion of contemporary politics is limited. I have put too much focus on the development of Plato's political theory and don't elaborate well on details of American society and the social trend of Trumpism. Also, the similarity between Plato's tyrant and Trump as a political figure is definitely a topic that deserves more exploration. It would be interesting if I have the chance to compare in detail Trump's political philosophy with the political psychology of the tyrant in the *Republic*. Secondly, the theory of externalization and internalization provides a theoretical ground for my investigation. Though this model can successfully explain and cover certain parts of Plato's political theory, there are still many possible criticisms to it that need to be addressed. A major challenge I can see is that the

theory of externalization and internalization doesn't explain the formation of stable political regimes in the *Republic*. It might comprehensively explain the origin of revolution, but it doesn't explain why the government has achieved relative stability in different stages of degeneration and created oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical governments. Other than the issue of instability, the origin of stability is also a question worth exploring.

In my view, the first chapter is the most satisfactory part of my paper. With the help of Jonathan Lear, I have developed an interesting argument on the relationship between psychology and political transformation by showing politics is a product of externalized appetites, and psychology is a product of internalized politics. In the second half, I mainly discussed the application of this model and, by supposing my theory is true, I use it as an angle to understand Trumpism. It is, of course, a fruitful way to make use of Plato's *Republic*, and we do reach some interesting conclusions in the end. But it would be even more profound and powerful writing if I, in the end, build my own modern political theory of psychology and politics based on the *Republic* in the end to thoroughly explain politics in modern America.

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