

ARTICLE

Plato on the Enslavement of Reason

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Abstract

In *Republic* 8–9, Socrates describes four main kinds of vicious people, all of whose souls are “ruled” by an element other than reason, and in some of whom reason is said to be “enslaved.” What role does reason play in such souls? In this paper, I argue, based on *Republic* 8–9 and related passages, and in contrast to some common alternative views, that for Plato the “enslavement” of reason consists in this: instead of determining for itself what is good, reason is forced to desire and pursue *as good* a goal determined by the soul’s ruler.

Keywords: Plato; soul; reason; spirit; appetite; desire; vice

When David Hume famously claimed that “reason is, and ought only to be a slave to the passions” (*T.* II.3.3, 415),¹ he was deliberately inverting the idea, long influential in philosophy, that reason ought to rule over passion in the human soul. At the head of this long tradition stands Plato.² Like Hume, Plato thought reason can be “enslaved” to another part of one’s psyche. However, unlike Hume, he deemed the enslavement of reason neither inevitable nor appropriate. Rather, on his view, every soul ought ideally to be “ruled” (*archesthai*) by reason.³ But for Plato, what happens to a

¹In this paper, I use the following standard abbreviations for the titles of works discussed: Hume: *T.*—*Treatise of Human Nature*; Plato: *Rep.*—*Republic*, *Prot.*—*Protagoras*, *Tim.*—*Timaeus*, *Phd.*—*Phaedo*, *Symp.*—*Symposium*; Aristotle: *Pol.*—*Politics*. I refer to passages from the pre-Socratics using the standard numbering system of Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (6th ed., 1952). For Plato’s Greek, I read the most recent editions of the Oxford Classical Texts, including S. R. Slings’s 2003 edition of the *Republic* in place of the older Burnet edition. All translations of Plato are from J. M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, eds. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997; sometimes very slightly modified.

²Some earlier thinkers spoke of “mind” or “thought” (*nous, noësis*) “governing” or “steering” all things (e.g., Anaxagoras DK B12, Diogenes of Apollonia B5). However, pre-Socratic notions of *nous* should not be conflated with later notions of “reason” and, in any case, as far as we know, none of these earlier thinkers claimed *nous* ought to rule over human affairs but might fail to do so. While the historical Socrates *may* have spoken of the “rule of knowledge” (see, e.g., *Prot.* 352b–c), we have no good reason to think he systematically distinguished rational from nonrational elements in the soul and argued the former should rule over the latter as Plato does in the *Republic*. Plato is followed on this point by Aristotle (e.g., *Pol.* I.5, 1254b6–9).

³Kraut (1973) and Klosko (1988) usefully distinguish two senses of psychic “rule” in the *Republic*: a soul part rules in the first sense if it triumphs in some particular instance of motivational conflict, while it rules in the second sense if it determines the overall values of the person. Both label the second sense “normative” rule, in contrast to “nonnormative” (Kraut) or “direct” (Klosko) rule. Using their terminology, I am concerned in this paper with the *normative* rule of the soul. To denote this, Plato typically uses *archein* and related political terminology. Like Wilburn (2014), I believe this enduring, value-shaping kind of rule of the soul by one of its parts—rather than *akrasia*—was Plato’s main concern when writing about psychic “rule” in the *Republic*. It is widely observed that, in the *Republic*, having one’s soul “ruled” in an enduring way by one of its parts entails having certain overall ends, goals, or values. In addition to Kraut, Klosko, and Wilburn, see, e.g., Bobonich (2002, 46), Lorenz (2006, 33), Irwin (1995, 285), Ferrari (2007, 195), and Brown (2012, 68–69). The contentious feature of my account is my explanation of this alignment of a person’s overall goals and values with their soul’s ruler. Specifically, I argue that even in corrupt souls reason remains responsible for the person’s desires to do what they consider best overall: its desires are *reoriented*, not silenced or eclipsed, when it is enslaved. This idea of a reorientation of reason’s desires for the good in vicious people is not new—it is

person's reason when it is "enslaved"? The question is important for understanding Plato's conception of reason in the context of the divided soul, his psychology of action, and his theory of vice. In this paper, I answer it by examining Plato's depiction in *Republic* 8–9 of the four main kinds of vicious people, all of whose souls are ruled by an element other than reason. I focus most closely on the character type Socrates calls the "oligarchic man," whose reason is "enslaved" to his soul's appetitive part (553d1–7).⁴ I argue that the oligarchic man's reason not only remains active when it is enslaved, but also continues to give rise to his desires to do what he considers best overall. However, these desires now aim ultimately at a goal set by appetite: the accumulation of wealth. More generally, I argue that, for Plato, the "enslavement" of reason consists in this: instead of determining for itself what is good, reason is forced to desire and pursue *as* good a goal determined by the soul's ruler.

1.

At the end of book 4 of the *Republic*, Socrates claims there is only one form of virtue, but an unlimited number of forms of "badness" or "vice" (*kakias*, 445c6), four of which are "worth mentioning" (445c7). At the start of book 8, after the long "digression" of books 5–7, he proceeds to examine these four kinds of vice in detail.⁵ In each case, he first describes a corrupt city, then a corresponding kind of person. He also says not only what each city and person is like, but also how each comes to be. The result is a structured series of sixteen vignettes, extending well into book 9. Throughout this discussion, Socrates's focus is on internal organization and the distribution of power within both cities and souls. In all four corrupt cities—the timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical—power belongs to individuals or groups unsuited to wield it, rather than to the wise. By analogy, in all four corrupt souls, power belongs to an element in the soul unsuited to wield it, rather than to reason. Yet while the idea of a society ruled by those unsuited to hold power is familiar, the idea of a soul "ruled" by an element unsuited to hold power is less so. How should we understand this extension of political language to the sphere of psychology? In particular, how should we understand the idea that reason can be "ruled" by a nonrational element in the psyche? To answer this question, I begin with the "oligarchic man"—the second of the four kinds of corrupt person Socrates portrays. I then show how my account extends to the other character types he describes.

As Socrates presents things, the "oligarchic man" first emerges as follows (553a ff.). The young son of an honor-loving "timocratic man" initially emulates his father. However, everything changes after he witnesses his father, previously a person of high social standing, being ruined, both personally and financially, when false charges are upheld against him in court (553a9–b5). At this point:

The son sees all this, suffers from it, loses his property, and, being afraid, immediately drives from the throne in his soul the honor-loving and spirited part that rules there. Humbled by poverty, he turns greedily to making money, and, little by little, saving and working, he amasses property. Don't you think this person would establish his appetitive and money-loving part on

defended for instance by Lorenz, Wilburn, and Brown. However, these authors are all primarily concerned with other, related matters, and none develops and defends this view about the role of reason in corrupt souls with the specific arguments—or the level of detail—that I provide here.

⁴In this paper, I follow convention by using the term "part," as in "part of the soul." Socrates seldom uses *meros* ("part"), preferring, as Greek permits, to speak simply of "the appetitive" (*to epithumêtikon*), "the spirited" (*to thumoeides*) and "the rationally calculating" (*to logistikon*). However, English requires a completing noun. The word "part" seems unobjectionable, and Socrates does use *meros* at times (e.g., 442b10, 442c4). Some commentators prefer "element," a practice to which I have no objection. Regardless of which noun we use, the precise nature of the soul's "parts" must be inferred from the details of the text.

⁵Books 5–7 are marked as a "digression" at the start of book 8 (543c4–6). There, Socrates urges they resume the discussion where they left it at the start of book 5, where they had been about to consider the four main kinds of "wickedness" (*ponêrias*) in "bad" and "mistaken" cities and souls (449a2–5). That is what they do in *Republic* 8–9.

the throne, setting it up as a great king within himself, adorning it with golden tiaras and collars and girding it with Persian swords? (553b7–c7)⁶

Humbled by poverty and driven by fear (*deisas*, 553b8), the young man dedicates himself single-mindedly to the task of accumulating wealth. His turn from loving honor to loving money corresponds to a change of “ruler” in his soul. In the terms of Socrates’s image, he “drives” the spirited part (*to thumoeides*) from the “throne” in his soul and sets “the appetitive and money-loving part” (*to epithumêtikon te kai philochrêmation*) in its place, as if it were a Persian king.

Socrates next describes what happens to the two subservient soul parts—the spirited and rational parts—after appetite has taken control:

He makes the rational and spirited parts (*to logistikon te kai thumoeides*) sit on the ground beneath appetite, one on either side, reducing them to slaves (*katadoulôsamenos*).⁷ He won’t allow the first to reason about or examine anything except how a little money can be made into great wealth. And he won’t allow the second to value or admire anything but wealth and wealthy people, or to have any ambition other than the acquisition of wealth or whatever might contribute to getting it. (553d1–7)⁸

The resulting person is, above all, a lover of money or wealth (*ta chrêmata*). Thus, Socrates claims he resembles the oligarchic city first and foremost by “attaching the greatest importance to money” (554a2–3); Adeimantus adds that “money is valued most of all by both the city and the man” (554b2–3). However, the oligarchic man is not an extravagant spender, as we might expect of a money-lover. Rather, he is a “thrifty” (*pheidôlos*, 554a5) worker, who avoids all unnecessary expenditure. The reason for this restraint, we soon learn, is not true temperance, but rather his aversion to parting with his wealth, which is itself rooted in his desire to increase the size of his hoard. Thus, while he may be “the sort the majority admires,” in truth the oligarchic man is a “squalid” (*auchmêros*, 554a10) fellow, a miser who maintains his veneer of respectability only by forcibly holding his many “dronish” appetites in check (554b7–c2). His true nature, Socrates insists, will become evident whenever he has the opportunity to indulge his appetites without cost to himself.⁹

What is the relationship between the oligarchic man’s character and the “government” within his soul? Since Plato often associates appetite with bodily pleasure, we might expect a person whose soul is ruled by appetite to be a crass hedonist and lover of bodily pleasure. However, in the *Republic*, the appetitive soul part is also often associated with desires for wealth. Socrates even calls it the “money-loving” (*philochrêmation*) part of the soul.¹⁰ In book 9, he explains this label by noting that desires for food, drink, sex and the like are mostly (*malista*) satisfied by means of money (580d–581a). Some take this passage to show that Plato envisaged appetite as itself capable of means-end

⁶Ἰδὼν δὲ γε, ὃ φίλε, ταῦτα καὶ παθὼν καὶ ἀπολέσας τὰ ὄντα, δείσας, οἶμαι, εὐθὺς ἐπὶ κεφαλῆν ὠθεῖ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ ἐν τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῇ φιλοτιμίαν τε καὶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς ἐκεῖνο, κἄν ταπεινωθεῖς ὑπὸ πείνας πρὸς χρηματισμὸν τραπόμενος γλίσχρως καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν φειδόμενος καὶ ἐργαζόμενος χρήματα συλλέγηται, ἄρ’ οὐκ οἶει τὸν τοιοῦτον τότε εἰς μὲν τὸν θρόνον ἐκείνον τὸ ἐπιθυμητικὸν τε καὶ φιλοχρήματος ἐγκαθίσειν καὶ μέγαν βασιλέα ποιεῖν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, τιάρας τε καὶ στρεπτοὺς καὶ ἀκινάκας παραζωννύοντα;

⁷Cf. 442b1–2, where Socrates says that when the appetitive part of the soul gets too “big and strong,” it “attempts to enslave (*katadoulôsasthai*) and rule over” the other parts of the soul.

⁸Τὸ δὲ γε, οἶμαι, λογιστικὸν τε καὶ θυμοειδὲς χαμαὶ εἴθην καὶ ἐνθεν παρακαθίσας ὑπ’ ἐκείνῳ καὶ καταδουλωσάμενος, τὸ μὲν οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐᾶ λογίζεσθαι οὐδὲ σκοπεῖν ἄλλ’ ἢ ὅπόθεν ἐξ ἐλαττόνων χρημάτων πλείω ἔσται, τὸ δὲ αὐθραμάσειν καὶ τιμᾶν μηδὲν ἄλλο ἢ πλοῦτόν τε καὶ πλουσίους, καὶ φιλοτιμῆσθαι μηδ’ ἐφ’ ἐνὶ ἄλλῳ ἢ ἐπὶ χρημάτων κτήσει καὶ ἂν τι ἄλλο εἰς τοῦτο φέρῃ.

⁹Socrates claims the oligarchic man’s true appetitive nature would become apparent if he were given the chance do injustice with impunity; for example, if he were placed in charge of orphans (554c7–9). To this disturbing image, he adds that an oligarchic person would show no restraint in satisfying his many appetites should he have the opportunity to do so by spending other people’s money (554d5–7).

¹⁰In addition to 553c5–6 quoted above, see 442a6–7, where Socrates says appetite is “by nature insatiable for money,” and 581a6–7, where he calls it “money-loving” and “profit-loving” (*philokerdes*).

reasoning.¹¹ I doubt it shows anything so strong.¹² But in any case, the important point for present purposes is simply this: wealth is an object of desire characteristically (albeit derivatively) associated with the appetitive part of the soul. Hence, it is no great surprise that a person whose soul is ruled by appetite turns out to be a “money-lover.”

What role do the oligarchic man’s enslaved spirited and rational parts play in his life? As Socrates presents things, the spirited part of the oligarchic man’s soul is “allowed” (*ea[i]*) to “value and admire” (*thaumazein kai timan*) nothing but wealth and wealthy people, and to “be ambitious” (*philotimeisthai*) for nothing but the acquisition of money (553d4–7). Two features of this passage stand out. First, spirit clearly does not lapse into inactivity when it is “dethroned.” Rather, it continues to generate the oligarchic man’s desires to be looked up to and admired, and his aversions to doing whatever he regards as shameful.¹³ However—this is the second point—it is no longer permitted to desire *as* admirable the kinds of things his father once pursued: military honors, for example, or high public office. Rather, appetite allows spirit to regard and desire *as* admirable only wealth. Hence, the oligarchic man admires only wealth and those who have it.¹⁴

I turn now to the oligarchic man’s enslaved rational part. As Socrates presents things, this is no longer “allowed” to “reason about or examine” (*logizein kai skopein*) anything except how best to increase his wealth (553d2–4). From this description, it is clear that reason, like spirit, does not lapse into inactivity when it is enslaved. The oligarchic man’s reason, not his appetitive part, is responsible for his deliberations about how best to increase his wealth. Moreover, like spirit, reason has its activity *constrained* by appetite: it is *allowed* to deliberate only about how to acquire and keep wealth. But does its activity consist *only* in such deliberations? Or does it *also* give rise to desires? In what follows, I argue that the oligarchic man’s reason is best understood as continuing to give rise to desires. Specifically, it gives rise to his desires do whatever he reflectively considers best. However, what he now considers best, and pursues as such, is wealth—an object of pursuit characteristically associated with his soul’s ruling, appetitive part.

2.

How should we understand the role of reason in the oligarchic man’s soul? Two possible views can be quickly and safely ruled out. On the first, *all* of the psychological operations of the person (both conative and cognitive) are performed by the soul’s ruling part, whatever that is in each person. On this view, all of the oligarchic man’s desires and reasoning processes should strictly be attributed to his soul’s appetitive part.¹⁵ There are several problems with this interpretation. The first, and most serious, is that it is simply incompatible with the text. In particular, as already noted, Socrates is

¹¹See for example Moline (1978, 10), Annas (1981, 129–30), Kahn (1987, 86), Price (1995, 60–61), Carone (2001, 124), and Bobonich (2002, 244). Irwin (1995, 282) argues that the appetitive part is capable of recognizing means-end relations, even though all actual reasoning is done by the rational part of the soul.

¹²It is perfectly possible to understand this passage in a different way: for example, as claiming that the appetitive desire for wealth arises through the repeated association of spending money with securing bodily pleasures. This does not require attributing a capacity to engage in means-end reasoning (or, for that matter, to recognize means-end relations) to the appetitive part of the soul. For an interpretation of this kind, see Lorenz (2006, 47–48). In any case, nothing hangs on this issue for present purposes.

¹³Throughout the *Republic*, spirit is closely associated with desires to do what one considers honorable/admirable and with aversions to doing what one regards as shameful. For references, see footnote 32 below.

¹⁴In other words, Socrates presents us with a shift in the *orientation* of the spirited part of his soul, as wealth displaces traditional virtue as the object of his admiration. Note that this does not cause spirit to clash with reason since, in the oligarchic man’s soul, reason too is enslaved by appetite. On my account, this causes the oligarchic man’s ideas about what is good to be reoriented, just like his ideas about what is admirable.

¹⁵Among prominent Plato scholars, Bobonich comes closest to this view when he argues—largely with reference to the oligarchic man—that appetite has its own conception of the good, engages in means-end reasoning, and is able to delay gratification with a view to its long-run goals (2002, 247–57). This leaves little for enslaved reason to do. Bobonich embraces this conclusion in a recent article (2017), where he argues that for Plato reason is possessed by only a few, while most humans live by

perfectly clear that both spirit and reason continue to play active roles in the oligarchic man's soul when they are enslaved. In addition, this view fits poorly with the city-soul analogy and with the imagery of enslavement—rulers do not usually do everything themselves and masters usually put their slaves to some use. Finally, this view essentially requires reduplicating all of the capacities of the person in each soul part. It is, I take it, uncharitable to attribute such a fully “homuncular” view of soul parts to Plato unless the text requires it.¹⁶

On a second possible view—the “deflationary” view—all talk of one soul part “ruling” or being “enslaved to” another should be dismissed as metaphorical: when Socrates says one part of the soul “rules” the others, he means only that one kind of desire is stronger than the others.¹⁷ This view may appeal to some, since it enables obscure talk of “parts of the soul” to be eliminated and replaced with familiar talk about kinds of desires. However, it has not proven popular with interpreters. One problem is that it requires effectively ignoring (or dismissing as regrettably misleading) large parts of the text of the *Republic*, where the parts of the soul are regularly portrayed as interacting with each other and as *having* (not *being*) desires and other psychological states.¹⁸ A second problem is that this view seems incompatible with the stated aims (and, arguably, the details) of Socrates's argument for dividing the soul in *Republic 4*; for Socrates claims to show not merely that human desires are of three different kinds—he takes that to be evident—but rather that we learn, get angry, and desire the pleasures of food, drink, and sex “with” or “by means of” three different things “in us” (*en hêmin*), rather than “with the whole soul” (*holêi têi psuchêi*, 436b2).¹⁹ Finally, proponents of this view are poorly placed to account for the *effects* of psychic rule as depicted in the *Republic* for, as we have seen in the case of the oligarchic man, the operations of the subservient soul parts are affected—specifically, they are restricted and shaped—by the soul's ruler.²⁰

To this point, I have rejected two possible accounts of what the “enslavement” of reason amounts to in the *Republic* based largely on their incompatibility with passages describing the oligarchic man. These passages *are* however consistent with a third possible view. On this “Humean” view, an enslaved rational part forms no desires of its own, but works only to figure out how best to satisfy desires originating elsewhere in the psyche.²¹ Despite its appeal, I believe this “Humean” view does

the nonrational parts of their souls alone. Carone (2001, 144–45) defends a similarly robust view of the cognitive powers of spirit and appetite.

¹⁶Bobonich is the most sophisticated recent defender of a “homuncular” conception of soul parts in the *Republic*. He acknowledges this view faces insurmountable problems when it comes to, say, accounting for the unity of consciousness or avoiding a vicious explanatory regress (2002, 247–57). He concludes: so much the worse for the *Republic's* psychology. Bobonich softens the worry that he is being uncharitable by claiming Plato eventually recognized the problems with his view in the *Republic* and adopted a different (and better) view in the *Laws*.

¹⁷See, e.g., Thyssen (1998, 66): “The solution [to the absurdities entailed by a tripartite soul] I would suggest is basically to understand the doctrine of parts of the soul metaphorically. The three parts are then nothing but distinct types of desires and appetites. The domination of one part by another means that certain types of desires are satisfied, while others are not.”

¹⁸For instance, in the descriptions of the virtues in book 4; throughout the depictions of corrupt souls in books 8–9; and in the image of the human being as containing an inner human, lion, and hydra-like beast (588b–589b). Socrates explicitly assigns each part of the soul its own desires and pleasures in book 9 (580d6–7).

¹⁹Both Bobonich (2002) and Lorenz (2006) examine Socrates's book 4 argument for dividing the soul in detail, and conclude it is designed to show more than merely that there are three kinds of desire. In fact, both conclude it aims to show soul parts are the *subjects* of desires (Bobonich, unlike Lorenz, argues they are also the subjects of full-blooded beliefs and reasoning processes). By contrast, Stalley (2007) claims the details of Socrates's argument require only that each soul part be an independent *source* of desires, not a psychological subject. Yet even this weaker view is incompatible with the deflationary account, on which the whole notion of “parts” of the soul becomes dispensable. My thesis in this paper is compatible with the view that soul parts are psychological subjects, but requires nothing stronger than the view that they are independent sources of desires.

²⁰Arguably, the deflationary view also sits uneasily with the city-soul analogy. On Socrates's account, a change of ruler in the soul, like a change of ruler in the city, causes far-reaching changes in the behaviour of the subservient parts. Such changes are hard to explain if one kind of desire merely becomes stronger than another.

²¹A prominent defender of this “Humean” view is Terence Irwin (1995), who argues that the oligarchic man's reason, thinking about the good of the whole soul, chooses to assign itself a subservient role and hence abdicates its responsibility to

not provide the best way of understanding how reason functions for Plato when it is enslaved. Instead, we have excellent reasons to prefer a different account. On the account I prefer, reason is a source of desires in the oligarchic soul, as it is in every soul. Specifically, it gives rise to desires to do whatever the person reflectively considers best overall.²² However, when it is enslaved, reason no longer draws on its own resources to figure out what really is good. Rather, it is forced to regard and pursue *as good* an object characteristically desired by the soul's ruling part—whatever that may be in each kind of person. In what follows, I will call this the “reorientation” view since, on it, the person's desires for the good are reoriented as a result of their reason's enslavement.

To be clear, I am not attributing to my opponents the view that Plato presents the reader with a Humean view of practical reason throughout the *Republic*. In agreement with most interpreters, I take Plato's basic stance on the role of reason in action in the *Republic* (and elsewhere) to be non-Humean, not only because reason is described as a source of motivation in its own right, but also because its desires arise from judgments about value, rather than being “original existences” in Hume's sense (*T.* 2.3.3.5).²³ Rather, the issue here specifically concerns the operation of reason in corrupt souls. Advocates of the view I oppose argue that, in corrupt souls, reason's practical role is akin to that which Hume, as traditionally understood, took reason to play in *all* cases: it calculates means to ends, but gives rise to no desires of its own. By contrast, on my view, reason is *always* responsible—including in corrupt souls—for desires to do whatever the person considers best overall. These desires can then directly clash with the unreflective, short-sighted desires of spirit or appetite, for, say, revenge or food. Thus, in sum, the difference between the two views is as follows. On the Humean view, the oligarchic man's enslaved reason “steps aside,” with the result that, at least in his everyday life, he acts only on his appetites. By contrast, on my view, the oligarchic man often acts on his rational desires for the good, as he understands it—it is just that, as a result of his reason's enslavement, his conception of what is good has been reoriented towards the objects of appetite.

How are we to decide between these two views? Since both seem compatible with the passages in which the oligarchic man is described, I base my argument on considerations of charity and on consistency with what Plato writes elsewhere. The first way in which my view is charitable to Plato is that it obviates the need to subdivide the appetitive part of the soul. As noted, the oligarchic man often battles to keep his appetites in check to avoid spending his money. Imagine he desires to gorge on pastries and struggles to restrain himself due to his frugality. What are the parties to this conflict supposed to be? On the Humean interpretation, it seems they must both be appetites—that is, desires attributable to, or stemming from, the appetitive part of his soul. However, this motivational

determine the person's ends, restricting itself to merely deliberating about how best to satisfy the person's appetites (278–88). More recently, Irwin (2007) has claimed reason finds this abdication appealing because it “accepts the conception of practical reason that underlies the outlook of the nonrational parts” and hence “convinces itself that Hume is right about the scope of practical reason” (82). Similarly, Annas (1981, 134–35) argues that although for Plato reason remains *capable* of forming its own desires, in corrupt souls, like that of the oligarchic man, it “steps aside” and simply lets nonrational desires carry the day. Moss (2008) does not explicitly endorse this idea of reason electing to “step aside,” but does call assigning a vicious person's desires for the good to their soul's enslaved reason, rather than to the soul's ruler, “needlessly indirect” (63). For criticism of the view that reason *chooses* to enslave itself in corrupt souls, see Johnstone (2011).

²²My basic idea is that people sometimes form considered judgments about what it would be best for them to do overall, and that, for Plato, the desires of reason are desires based on such judgments. As such, they reflect the kinds of practical judgments people are willing to “stand behind” and endorse, and are responsive to reasons.

Incidentally, the idea that reason is distinctively responsible for desires to do what we reflectively consider best was widespread in antiquity. Arguably, it was common to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The claim that Plato envisaged “rational desires” in this way is not meant to be controversial. What *is* controversial is my claim that even vicious people have such desires.

²³Although I cannot defend the view here, I agree with others (e.g., Barney 2010) that Plato subscribed to what might be called a “cognitive” theory of desire. On this view, every desire is precipitated by a preceding cognitive state, such as a perception or judgment. An agent first takes some prospective course of action to be good (or pleasant, or admirable), then forms a corresponding desire to do it on that basis. By contrast, on the classical Humean view, a desire must be present *before* practical reasoning (about how to satisfy it) begins.

conflict is strikingly similar to that of the thirsty person who resists a desire to drink described in book 4 (439c–d). In both cases, a person fights a temptation to satisfy an immediate bodily appetite, having judged it would now be better to refrain. If the Humean interpretation is correct, it therefore seems Socrates should subdivide the appetitive part of the oligarchic man’s soul on pain of inconsistency: one part is responsible for his immediate desire for gratification while the other holds him back based on his judgment about the long-term good. Yet Socrates does not mean to subdivide the appetitive part of the soul. At least, he never argues for any such subdivision, and continues to treat the soul as having three parts later in the *Republic* (e.g., book 9, 580d2ff.), as does Plato in the *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*.²⁴

Of course, Plato may simply have failed to notice that the oligarchic man’s inner conflicts *should* lead to further psychic subdivision on his own principles. However, there is a ready alternative. For perhaps these conflicts are best construed as battles—not *within* appetite, but rather *between* his occurrent appetites for bodily pleasure and his corrupted reason, which aims at what he now considers best. In fact, the text not only permits such a reading, but positively recommends it. In particular, when describing the oligarchic man’s version of self-control, Socrates says he generally keeps his “dronish” appetites in check with “some decent (*epieikês*) part of himself” (554c). My suggestion, stated simply, is that this “decent” part is his soul’s rational part.²⁵ If this is right, there is no need to charge Plato with inattention or inconsistency. He knew what kind of conflict Socrates was describing in the soul of the oligarchic man and could explain it by drawing on the resources of his tripartite psychology. This is because the conflict is between two distinct parts of the oligarchic man’s soul: his appetite, which gives rise to his unreflective desires for immediate bodily gratification, and his reason, which holds him back based on its calculations about how best to achieve the good as he understands it.

The second way the reorientation view is charitable to Plato is that it frees him from the need to assign a robust self-conception and a conception of the long-term good to each lower part of the soul. Plato clearly envisaged vicious people as having a conception of the good and as pursuing it in action. For instance, the oligarchic man does not merely act on impulse, but doggedly pursues wealth, having set it before himself as the good. Yet on the Humean interpretation, the rational part of the oligarchic man’s soul is not responsible for his considered desires for his perceived long-term good or for the means to attain it. Rather, these desires belong to his soul’s appetitive part. Hence, advocates of the Humean view must conceive of the soul’s appetitive part as *having* long-term goals and, thus, awareness of itself as persisting over time. Yet this brings well-known problems. One such problem, already noted, is that if appetite pursues its own long-term good, there will inevitably be clashes *within* it between its long-term goals and its immediate impulses for gratification. In addition, the view that each soul part is self-aware and has its own conception of the good requires needless reduplication of labor among the soul’s parts. Finally, this view—on which each soul part is not merely a source of motivation, but also a distinct centre of awareness—is difficult to square with our ordinary experience of personal and agential unity.

By contrast, the reorientation view eliminates the need to attribute self-awareness and long-term goals all three parts of the soul. To be sure, on my interpretation, all three soul parts serve as independent sources of motivation: roughly, appetite of desires for what one regards as a source of bodily pleasure, spirit of desires for what one deems admirable, and reason of desires for what one

²⁴Socrates’s distinctions in books 8–9 between “necessary,” “unnecessary,” and “lawless” appetitive desires do not amount to a subdivision of the appetitive part of the soul (*pace*, e.g., Moline [1978, 24]; Kahn [1987, 83]; Blössner [2007, 352]). Socrates does not present his distinctions in that way (for instance, he never employs arguments from conflicting opposites akin to those he uses to divide the soul in books 4 and 10). Nor did he intend them in that way, as later passages in which he still treats the soul as tripartite make clear. Rather, it is perfectly possible—and clearly preferable in context—to understand him as claiming only that appetitive desires (desires attributable to, or stemming from, the appetitive part of the soul) come in three different kinds.

²⁵On this point, I am in agreement with Lorenz (2006, 46). This, of course, leaves open the possibility that the spirited part of the soul may also play a role in opposing the appetitive desires in question in cases where indulging them would be in some way shameful.

reflectively considers good.²⁶ However, the idea that there are distinct sources of motivation within us need not threaten personal unity, so long as every desire can be attributed to the person, who has a single view about what is best overall.²⁷ That view, I argue, resides in the soul's rational part, even when it is enslaved. This in turn allows for an appealing division of labor among the soul's three parts. In every soul, from the most virtuous to the most corrupt, appetite and spirit are responsible for immediate, unreflective desires and aversions, while reason gives rise to considered desires to do what one deems best overall. It is just that in corrupt souls, like that of the oligarchic man, reason, as a consequence of its enslavement, has come to desire and pursue *as good* a goal imposed on it by the soul's ruler.

Finally, the reorientation view is not only more charitable to Plato, but also conforms better with his representation of reason's desires elsewhere in the *Republic*. In particular, the Humean view seems incompatible with the analysis of certain motivational conflicts in *Republic* 4. There (434c ff.), Socrates builds his case that the soul has three parts by considering examples of inner struggle. These include resisting a desire to drink when thirsty based on rational calculation and resisting a desire to take immediate revenge based on the thought that it is not the right time. Although the cases are underdescribed, in each case the desires that hold the person back are clearly attributed to the soul's rational part, based on its reflections about what it would be best to do overall.²⁸ Presumably, vicious people experience these kinds of motivational conflicts. For one thing, Socrates presents the conflicts in question as commonplace and familiar to everyone and Glaucon accepts them as such.²⁹ It would also be peculiar for Plato to deny that vicious people ever, say, feel thirsty yet wish not to drink. Certainly, Socrates doesn't have virtuous people, with their harmonious souls, in mind. However, if the Humean account of enslaved reason is correct, Socrates cannot explain these everyday motivational conflicts in the same way when they occur in vicious people. This is because, on the Humean account, reason is not responsible for a vicious person's desires to do what they consider best overall. Rather, on that view, *both* their reflective desires to do what they consider best *and* their unreflective impulses for immediate gratification stem from the same source: their soul's ruling part—appetite, in the oligarchic man. As a result, these kinds of motivational conflicts cannot be explained by tracing impulses for immediate gratification and reflective desires to do what one considers best to different parts of the soul, as Socrates does in *Republic* 4. By contrast, on my view, the book 4 analysis of these common kinds of inner conflicts extends seamlessly to vicious souls.

3.

Let us take stock. To this point, I have focused on the oligarchic man, whose soul is ruled by its appetitive part. I have argued that the enslavement of his reason does *not* cause it to operate in a broadly Humean manner, giving rise to no desires of its own, but merely calculating how best to satisfy his appetites. Instead, I have argued, the rational part of the oligarchic man's soul is responsible not *only* for his calculations about how to acquire more money, but *also* for his desires to do what he reflectively considers best, with a view to his overall goal of increasing his wealth. This

²⁶I take this sketch to be relatively orthodox, if not uncontroversial.

²⁷I assume here that desires stemming from all three soul parts count among the desires the person has. Kamtekar (2017) argues—plausibly, in my view—that the tripartite view of the soul in the *Republic* provides a way of attributing desires to the person that arise independently of that person's rational desires for the good.

²⁸The rational part of the soul (*to logistikon*) opposes appetite in the thirsty person and spirit in Odysseus. In the former case, it forbids him to drink “as a result of rational calculation” (*ek logismou*, 439d1). In the latter, it is identified as “that which has reasoned about the better and the worse” (*to analogisamenon peri tou beltionos te kai cheironos*) in contrast to “that which is angry without calculation” (*tôi alogistôs thumoumenôi*) (441c1–2).

²⁹When asked whether there are sometimes thirsty people who do not wish to drink, Glaucon replies “Certainly, it happens to many people and often” (439c5). We have already seen that “oligarchic” people often battle temptations to indulge, in order to better pursue what they consider good.

view has the following main advantages. First, it alleviates pressure to subdivide the appetitive part of the soul. Second, it avoids the need to attribute self-awareness and views about the long-term good to appetite, with the problems that entails. Third, it allows for an appealing division of labor among the soul's parts: reason alone aims at the agent's long-term good, while appetite and spirit give rise only to immediate, unreflective desires.³⁰ Finally, it enables Socrates's basic analysis of commonplace motivational conflicts in book 4—where unreflective impulses and the reflective desires for the good that directly oppose them are attributed to distinct parts of the soul—to extend seamlessly to vicious souls. If these arguments are accepted, they suggest the following general picture. In every soul, reason generates desires to do what the person reflectively considers best. In some souls, it is free to draw on its own resources to determine and pursue what really is good. In others, however, it is enslaved and, as a result of its enslavement, is forced to regard and pursue *as* good a goal imposed on it from without.

Does the reorientation view fit the other character types described in the *Republic*? I believe it does. In this section, I consider the “timocratic,” “democratic,” and “tyrannical” characters—the other three corrupt characters Socrates describes in *Republic* 8–9. In each case, I argue, it is both reasonable and helpful to conceive of the role of reason in the way I recommend: as changing its orientation as a result of its servitude rather than being usurped as the source of each person's desires for the good. I then briefly consider the philosopher and, more generally, Plato's contrast between souls that are ruled by reason and those that are not. Finally, I examine some other passages in Plato that refer to psychological “enslavement,” and argue these also fit well with the present account.

The “timocratic man” is the first vicious person Socrates describes (548d ff.). His soul is ruled by its spirited part, while his reason occupies a subservient role.³¹ If my view is correct, we should expect his reason to remain the source of his desires for the good as he now understands it. We should also expect him to regard *as* the good, and to pursue *as* such, an object characteristically associated with spirit. These expectations are borne out by the text. In particular, the timocratic man is, above all, a lover of victory and honor—objects characteristically associated in the *Republic* with the spirited part of the soul.³² My proposal, then, is that this man's reason remains the source of his desires for what he now regards as good but has been reoriented as a result of its subservience. Why not instead attribute his considered desires for the good to his soul's spirited part? To reiterate, that view would create rifts within spirit (imagine, for example, that his overall goal of living honorably would be served by losing this one fight). It would require attributing considerable (and needless) cognitive resources to the spirited part of the soul, with all of the problems for agential unity that entails. And if his reason were *not* responsible for his desires to do what he reflectively considers best, it could not oppose his unreflective spirited and appetitive impulses when he judges it better to resist acting on them.

³⁰Here, I am in broad agreement with Moss (2008), who maintains—based largely on Socrates's argument for dividing the soul in *Republic* 10 (602c–603b)—that Plato operated with a basic distinction between rational and nonrational soul parts: the latter (*both spirit and appetite*) respond unreflectively to appearances, while the former is able to go beyond mere appearances to figure out how things really are. Incidentally, for the purposes of this paper, I remain neutral on the much-disputed further question of whether the lower parts of the soul also cognize their objects as good *in a way* (as Moss and, e.g., Kamtekar [2017] maintain). I insist only that they are not the source of people's considered desires to do what they deem best *overall, on reflection*—and that vicious people, as Plato envisaged them, *have* desires of this kind.

³¹The timocratic man is said to “surrender rule (*archên*) over himself” to the “victory-loving and spirited” (*philonikôi kai thumoeidei*) part of his soul (550b5–7).

³²In book 9, the spirited part of the soul (*to thumoeides*) is said to be “wholly dedicated to the pursuit of control, victory, and high repute” and is called “victory-loving” (*philonikon*) and “honor-loving” (*philotimon*) (581a9–b4), while those in whom it rules are described as “honor-lovers” (*philotimoi*) who disdain the pleasures of money-making as vulgar and the pleasures of learning as vacuous (581d5–7). In accordance with this description, the timocratic man of book 8 is “proud and honor-loving” (*hupsêlophrôn te kai philotimos*) (550b4–7), a competitive type who respects social hierarchies and adheres to the traditional values of an aristocrat and soldier. It is true that, as Scott (2015, 63–64) emphasizes, he also has powerful appetites; for his disdain for education leaves him without any effective “guard” over the growth of his appetitive desires (549a9–b7). Yet he still aspires to, and strives for, victory and honor above all other goals.

Next after the oligarchic man is the “democratic man,” who is “always surrendering rule (*archên*) over himself to whichever desire comes along, as if it were chosen by lot ... disdainful of none but satisfying all equally” (561b6–8). The resulting character is inconstant and mercurial: one day he is drinking heavily, the next he drinks only water and is on a diet; one day he is seeking to be a soldier, the next he is playing at politics, or pursuing wealth, or engaged in some other pursuit (561c6–d8). What role does reason play in his life? I submit that the best way to understand the democratic man, consistent with the way he is portrayed, is to envisage his reason as serving his ruling desire, whatever it is at any given time—not *only* by calculating how to satisfy it, but *also* by pursuing its satisfaction as good. Why is it best to understand him this way? For one thing, the democratic man clearly *has* views about what would be good for him to do at any given time. For example, he sometimes spends a period of time—perhaps not long, but clearly more than a moment—determined to become a soldier before changing tack on a whim. During that time, he presumably regards becoming a soldier as good. Another advantage of understanding the democratic man in this way is that, when so understood, he exhibits basic rational agency; he may be outstandingly fickle, and his life may lack order (*taxis*, 561d6), but he is a comprehensible psychological type, not a “psychological salad.”³³ Yet his desires to do what he considers good at any given time cannot be attributed to his soul’s ruler. This is because, as Socrates presents him, his soul is “ruled” by a procession of individual pleasures and desires.³⁴ While on some views (if not my own), the lower parts of the soul have their own views about the long-term good, no one thinks individual pleasures and desires have such views. Pleasures and desires *can*, however, *reorient* and *shape* one’s views about the good, which is all my view requires.³⁵

The last of the four vicious characters Socrates describes is the “tyrannical man.” As Socrates depicts him (571a ff.), this man is utterly shameless and depraved, exercising no shred of restraint over even the basest of human desires: the “lawless” kind others experience only in their dreams.³⁶ What role does reason play in his soul? In contrast to democratic people, tyrannical people are ruled not by a succession of different desires, but rather by a single, persistent, consuming desire: an *erôs*, or “lust.”³⁷ Although the text is not explicit, this “lust” is probably best construed as aiming not exclusively at sexual pleasure, but rather at the pleasure that comes from satisfying one’s appetites. At least, that reflects the way the tyrannical man is portrayed.³⁸ Thus, as Socrates describes him, this man is ruthless in his pursuit of money and power, but always and only as means to satisfy his numerous unnecessary appetites (some, but not all, of which are sexual). As a consequence, he *has* stable goals and pursues them doggedly, even though his soul is in turmoil. Indeed, although most tyrannical people remain petty criminals, some become actual tyrants, thereby attaining great power to satisfy their “unruly mob” (*thorubon*, 575a4) of unnecessary appetites—not that this benefits them in the end, Socrates maintains.³⁹ I therefore submit that the tyrannical man’s views

³³Pace Scott (2000, 23).

³⁴Socrates speaks, seemingly indifferently, of both pleasures and desires ruling the democratic man’s soul. For present purposes, there is no need to determine whether these temporary “rulers” are all unnecessary appetites or, rather, desires of a full range of different kinds. For a defense of the latter view—and more, generally, of the view that the democratic man’s soul has a succession of different rulers—see Johnstone (2013).

³⁵Indeed, I take it to be an important advantage of the reorientation view I defend that it readily explains what it means for a soul to be ruled by a *desire* (or by a pleasure) rather than by one of the three parts of the soul.

³⁶Socrates first introduces these debased “lawless” (*paranomoi*) desires at the start of book 9 (571b2–d5). His examples include desires to have sex with one’s parents or with gods and to eat any food whatsoever.

³⁷It is clear in the text that the tyrannical man’s soul is ruled by this single “lust,” which plays a role in his soul analogous to that of a tyrant in a city (576c5–7), and not, as some have maintained (e.g., Reeve [1988, 47]), by the multitude of his “lawless” appetites. I develop this point in detail in Johnstone [2015].

³⁸See Johnstone (2015) for a detailed defense of this claim.

³⁹Attaining such power does not benefit a tyrannical man because his unnecessary appetites merely multiply and, having become too powerful and numerous to satisfy, cause him constant pain. He lives only to serve them, continually suffering and fearful of the many enemies he has made.

about the good, and desires for it, reside not in his soul's ruler (the "lust" that rules like a tyrant in his soul), but rather in his soul's enslaved (577d4) rational part, which now regards and pursues *as* good the object of his ruling desire: the pleasure of appetitive satisfaction, and the money and power that will enable him to secure more of it.⁴⁰

In sum, for all the vicious people described in *Republic* 8–9, it is not only possible, but also helpful, to envisage the role of enslaved reason in the way I recommend. What about when reason is *not* enslaved? In the *Republic*, the philosopher exemplifies a person whose soul is ruled by reason. For present purposes, we need not consider philosophers' desires in detail. The main point I want to make is that Socrates presents progress toward wisdom as the *natural* development of reason—as *proper* to it, given its nature. This progress is not inevitable: in some people, reason lacks the requisite strength, while others are poorly raised. Yet Socrates seems to suppose that *if* people with "philosophical natures" are raised in a suitable environment, they *will* incline towards grasping the forms—objects to which their reason is naturally "akin."⁴¹ If all goes well, the "upward" journey initiated by their education culminates in knowledge of the good and, hence, of what *is* good. By contrast, those in whom reason is enslaved are compelled to look "downwards," toward money, status, and bodily pleasure—objects associated with the lower parts of the soul.⁴² This suggests Plato drew the following basic contrast between souls that are ruled by reason and souls that are not: if it is unimpeded and placed in a suitable environment, reason grows into its own nature, developing toward knowledge of the good; by contrast, when it is enslaved, its growth is stunted and warped, producing blindness about the good. In this way, reason's enslavement *causes* ignorance about the good.⁴³

I conclude by briefly considering two related contexts in which Plato refers to psychic enslavement. First, late in *Republic* 9, Socrates claims that when the "best part" in someone is "naturally weak," it is "unable to rule the beasts within him" but, instead, merely "serves" and "learns to flatter" spirit and appetite (590c1–5). What is best for such people, Socrates claims, is to be ruled by reason. If their own reason cannot rule them due to its weakness, it is best that each be a "slave" (*doulon*, 590c8) to someone whose soul *is* ruled by reason in the right way. What does this enslavement entail? Socrates is not thinking of literal slavery. Rather, as the continuing discussion makes clear, he has in mind something like the paternalistic control parents exercise over their children. I have argued that when reason is enslaved, it is forced to adopt a conception of the good—and hence its goals—from without. I now suggest this same basic idea extends to cases in which one person's reason is enslaved to another's. However, there is a difference between people paternalistically governed by wise rulers and vicious people, as described in *Republic* 8–9. In the latter, enslaved reason adopts its goals from spirit, appetite, or a nonrational desire and, hence, regards and pursues *as* good things that are not really good at all. By contrast, in the former, reason adopts its goals from the "divine" reason of wise rulers, presumably via education and laws. As a result, it is *well*-oriented with regard to the good, even if it lacks understanding. If this is right, it explains why Plato supposed—as he

⁴⁰I add as an extra consideration in favor of this account that the tyrannical man of *Republic* 9 resembles (at least in his aspirations) the person Callicles presents as ideal in the *Gorgias*, who unflinchingly secures the means (mainly money and power) to satisfy his great and numerous appetites and, thereby, to acquire pleasure. One of Plato's aims in the *Gorgias* was clearly to deflate the aspiration to tyranny, which he linked to the Calliclean form of hedonism—a hedonism that regards the pleasure of appetite satisfaction as the good.

⁴¹Socrates compares the "philosophical nature" to a seed that will grow into its natural state if planted in good "soil" in *Republic* 6 (497b1–c4). The rational part of the soul is said to be "akin" (*suggenei*) to the forms and "fitted" (*prosêkei*) by its nature to grasp them in *Republic* 6 (490a8–b7). Cf. *Rep.* 10 (611d8–e2); *Tim.* 90a–b.

⁴²Cf. Socrates's remarks in *Republic* 7 that "feasting, greed and other such pleasures" can "pull the vision of the soul downwards," like leaden weights (519b1–4).

⁴³It is an important part of my account that reason's enslavement *affects* it, stunting its development and warping its perspective. By contrast, on some alternative views (e.g., Irwin's), the warping of reason's perspective on the good *precedes* its enslavement and causes it to *choose* to enslave itself. See Johnstone (2011) for an account of how reason first comes to be "enslaved" in the soul if not by choosing this role for itself.

clearly did—that a person whose reason is “enslaved” to another’s could be better off than one whose reason is “enslaved” to their own spirit or appetite.

Second, although Socrates never speaks in the *Phaedo* of reason “ruling” or being “enslaved to” another part of the soul, he *does* speak there of the soul “ruling” or being “enslaved to” the body.⁴⁴ These passages anticipate the *Republic*’s language of psychic rule and enslavement. I submit they can also be understood along similar lines. Socrates’s basic idea in the *Phaedo*, it seems, is that those who are slaves to their bodies regard bodily pleasure (and related objects) as the good and pursue it on that basis. By contrast, those whose souls are *not* so enslaved disdain the body and the pleasures, pains, and other experiences that arise “through” it. In this way, those who are slaves to their bodies adopt their conception of the good from without. (In the context of the *Phaedo*’s soul-body dualism, I assume deriving one’s conception of the good from one’s body counts as deriving it in a way from “without.”) Indeed, Socrates sometimes suggests they adopt this conception of the good without ever consciously choosing it, merely by *having* experiences of bodily pleasures and pains.⁴⁵ Regardless, Socrates’s talk of the soul being “enslaved to the body” in the *Phaedo* fits well with my account of what it means for reason to be enslaved to another element in the soul in the *Republic*. Specifically, in both cases, that in us responsible for our considered desires for the good is enslaved and, consequently, has its perspective reoriented such that it now regards and pursues *as* good something that is not really good at all. On my interpretation of the *Republic*, I take this fit between the two dialogues to further support the thesis of this paper.⁴⁶

4.

In this paper, I have advanced a way of understanding what the enslavement of reason amounts to in Plato’s *Republic*. On the view I have defended, reason is distinctively responsible for each person’s desires to do what they reflectively consider best. This is true in every soul, from the most virtuous to the most corrupt. The most fundamental difference between the two kinds of soul lies in reason’s orientation. When it rules, reason draws on its own resources to determine what really is good. By contrast, when it is enslaved, it is forced to adopt a conception of the good from the soul’s ruler, whatever that may be in each case. As a result, it regards and pursues *as* good an object characteristically desired by a lower part of the soul, such as status, money, or bodily pleasure—none of which, according to Plato, is really good at all. In this way, for Plato, reason’s enslavement within the soul causes profound ignorance about matters of value.

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⁴⁴Socrates claims it is natural for the soul to “rule” (*archein*), “be master over” (*despozein*), and “lead” (*hêgemoneuein*) the body (79e8–80a5; cf. 94b–e). However, he claims, many people are instead “enslaved” (*douleuontes*, 66d1) to the care of their bodies and consequently forced to procure money (66c5–d3). Similarly, in some people the soul “serves” (*therapeuoussa*, 81b2) the body, having been “bewitched” (*goêteuomenê*, 81b3) by bodily pleasures and appetites, and many people “surrender themselves” (*paradidoasin* ... *heautous*, 82c4) to their bodily appetites, becoming “money-lovers” or “honor-lovers” as a result (82c2–8).

⁴⁵See for example Socrates’s remarks about one being “bewitched” by bodily desires and pleasures until one focuses only on what one can “touch and see and eat and drink and make use of for sexual enjoyment” (81b1–6).

⁴⁶There is no such fit between the two works on the Humean account of the role of enslaved reason—for Socrates’s idea in the *Phaedo* was clearly not that the *whole soul* “steps aside” and stops forming desires when it is enslaved to the body.

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