

The Psychological Profile of the ‘Decent Man’ (ἀνὴρ ἐπιεικῆς) in Platon’s *Politeia*

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IN BOOK 4 of the *Politeia*, the Platonic Sokrates famously designs a state made of three social classes—philosopher-kings, warriors, and producers—and argues that the state is just only if the members of every class tend to the class-specific activities they are by nature best suited for. By analogy, the individual soul is composed of the same three ‘parts’, namely a reasoning, a fighting, and a desiring one. This soul model explains justice in the soul as a hierarchy in which the reasoning part is in command and cares for the entire soul, the fighting part obeys and executes the decisions of the leading part, and the desiring part acknowledges the superiority of the other two and provides the means for their subsistence. Moreover, Sokrates suggests that this tripartite soul model applies not only to the citizens of the ideal state, but to all humans. At one point he even proposes an ethnographic typology according to which Thracians, Scythians, and other northern peoples excel in their eagerness to fight, Greeks are lovers of wisdom, while Phoenicians and Egyptians represent the love of wealth (435E–436A).¹

In Book 10 Sokrates argues that mimetic art, which mainly includes painting and poetry, is not suitable for the perfectly just constitution which he and his friends have just designed. Here, he claims that the human soul is made not of three but of two ‘parts’, namely a better, rational one and a worse, non-rational one. Moreover, his point is that mimetic art addresses, and

¹ All references are to the *Politeia* unless otherwise specified.

affects, the lower component. The impact of artistic imitation is so powerful that it is able to harm even the best people. This is apparently the worst thing about (poetic) imitation (605C5–7):

οὐ μέντοι πω τό γε μέγιστον κατηγορήκαμεν αὐτῆς. τὸ γὰρ καὶ τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς ἱκανὴν εἶναι λωβᾶσθαι, ἐκτὸς πάνυ τινῶν ὀλίγων, πάνδεινόν που.

We haven't brought the most serious accusation against it² yet. For to be able to harm even the decent ones (τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς), with a few exceptions, is indeed a very terrible thing.

In this paper I examine the meaning of the phrase 'decent people' (οἱ ἐπιεικεῖς), designating those individuals whose susceptibility to poetic imitation makes poetry especially dangerous for the city. My aim is to show that this is not a casual or vague expression but one with a precise meaning that can be articulated in terms of the tripartite psychological typology of the *Politeia*. To support this claim I will examine not only the immediate context of the quoted lines, but also other places in the dialogue where Sokrates uses the expression to refer to a particular philosophical type, namely individuals who in the ideal state belong to the ruling class. My argument unfolds in four stages. In §2, I discuss the characterization of the 'decent man' in the context of the critique of mimetic art in Book 10. In §3, I examine previous scholarly attempts to identify this group in terms of the tripartite typology. §4 presents my own interpretation, according to which the 'decent man' has the psychological profile of a philosopher. Finally, §5 outlines some broader consequences of this reading.

² The nearest possible referent of αὐτῆς is ἡ μίμησις 'the imitation' at 604E6. However, since this passage does not involve an explicit accusation against (the art of) imitation, it seems that we have to go back as far as ἡ μιμητικὴ 'the art of imitation' at 603B–C in order to find the accusation compared to which the present one is more grave. J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato II* (Cambridge 1902) 413 (ad 605C), and S. Halliwell, *Plato. Republic 10* (Warminster 1988) 143 (ad 605C6), refer αὐτῆς mainly to poetry, which is indeed the subject matter since 603B.

2. What does Sokrates tell us about the ‘decent man’? In Book 10, in connection with the critique of poetry, the expression is first mentioned at 603E4, where a distinction is made between the ‘decent man’ and other people. The ‘decent man’, Sokrates says, will bear the loss of his son or some other dear thing with more serenity than others. This does not mean that the ‘decent man’ feels less pain than others but only that he can better control his feelings, that is, he can better control himself. This follows from the observation that when he is all by himself the ‘decent man’ (suffering great distress) will do and say things which he refrains from doing in public. Self-control is therefore first and foremost a social matter because it is connected with shame (αἰσχύνοιτο 604A6, 605E4; αἰσχρόν 606B2; αἰσχνοῖο 606C3), repute (δόξαν 606C6), reason (λόγος 604A9, 606A8), and the law (νόμος 604A9). Indeed it is the law itself that compels one to keep calm in adversity and misfortune (604B) and to consider the situation with a clear mind. ‘Decent’ is the man who makes the most of the circumstances, no matter how troublesome, because he has a detached view of human affairs³ and because he knows that what appears bad can eventually prove to be good (and the other way around). Therefore, he is able to assess (βουλεύεσθαι 604C5) anything that might happen to him and to plan his next moves based on an objective evaluation, taking into account exclusively what reason (λόγος 604C7) tells him to be best.

Pain and sorrow, on the other hand, prevent reason from seeing clearly. Indulging in grief means acting like a child who is screaming and clutching the hurting limb. According to Sokrates, there is something in us that never has enough of wailing and moaning (604D, 606A). This counterpart of reason is not just non-rational but also idle and cowardly (ἀλόγιστον καὶ ἀργὸν καὶ δειλίας φίλον 604D8–9). Anything that stimulates this part of us which longs for lament and anger is harmful; therefore, poetry

³ 604B10–c1: οὔτε τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἄξιον ὄν μεγάλης σπουδῆς, “no human thing is worth being taken too seriously.”

and the other mimetic arts are harmful.⁴ At this point, Sokrates' description of the contrast between the two parts of the soul recalls the language of the ontological difference between true, eternal, invisible being and apparent, sensible, changing things: the thinking and calm aspect of the soul (τὸ φρόνιμὸν τε καὶ ἡσύχιον ἦθος 604E2) is always identical with itself and difficult to recognize (with the sensible eye, as we might suppose), while the angry and variegated aspect (τὸ ἀγανακτητικὸν τε καὶ ποικίλον ἦθος 605A5) is easy to represent through imitation and has no connection with the truth (ἀλήθειαν 605A9, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς 605C3). Unsurprisingly, it is the inferior component of the soul which the motley crowd (παντοδαποῖς ἀνθρώποις 604E5, τοῖς πολλοῖς 605A4) holds in high esteem.

Remarkably, in Book 3 Sokrates uses the expression 'decent man' in a similar context. In a perfectly just state, he says (387), citizens should not be encouraged to regard death as something terrible. For this reason, poets will not be allowed to depict heroes lamenting or suggesting, in any way, that any life is better than death. In this connection, a 'decent man' is someone who does not believe that, for another 'decent man' like himself, death is a dreadful thing.⁵ Therefore, the 'decent man' will bear the loss of a son or brother more easily than others (387E4–5).

Sokrates' description of the 'decent man' in Book 10, which is based on a bipartition of the soul, suggests a very simple typology. Humanity is basically divided into two groups: some people are rational because they keep their non-rational component under control (φυλακὴν 606A8), while other people are non-

⁴ 605B1–3: ἐν δίκῃ οὐ παραδεχοίμεθα εἰς μέλλουσαν εὐνομεῖσθαι πόλιν, ὅτι τοῦτο ἐγείρει τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τρέφει καὶ ἰσχυρὸν ποιῶν ἀπόλλυσι τὸ λογιστικόν, "we are right not to accept him [= the mimetic poet, 605A2] in a city that is supposed to be well governed, since he stirs up, nourishes, and strengthens this part of the soul while destroying the rational part."

⁵ 387D5–6: φασὲν δὲ δὴ ὅτι ὁ ἐπιεικὴς ἀνὴρ τῷ ἐπιεικεῖ, οὐπὲρ καὶ ἐταῖρός ἐστιν, τὸ τεθνάναι οὐ δεινὸν ἡγήσεται, "what we say is that a decent man believes that for some other decent man who happens to be his comrade death is not something dreadful."

rational because they allow their inferior component to dominate their souls. The members of the former group are called here ‘decent people’. To the other group belong mimetic artists like the poet and the painter and everyone who acclaims them, that is to say, most people, or the crowd (οἱ πολλοί).

‘Decent’ is not someone who lacks a non-rational part but someone who succeeds in keeping it under control. This self-discipline (ἐθίζειν τὴν ψυχὴν 604C9, πεπαιδευμένον 606A8) is not at all an easy thing. At 604A2 the ‘decent man’ has to fight the pain and to struggle with it (μαχεῖσθαι τε καὶ ἀντιτείνειν), while at 606A3 the natural desire for lament has to be repressed by force (βία κατεχόμενον). Behind the calm appearance, there is the inner conflict. By the same token, ‘decent people’, whom Sokrates calls at 605C9 “the best of us,” are also susceptible to being affected by poetry. When they listen to a moving story, e.g. by Homer, they cannot help feeling sympathy with the characters (συμπάσχοντες 605D3, ἐλεεῖν 606B3). Pain and satisfaction are mixed up in a peculiar way in the aesthetic experience.⁶ The ‘decent man’ feels that he may innocently indulge in an otherwise forbidden pleasure (ἡδονὴν 606B4) and does not realize how harmful the apparently harmless play with feelings can be.

Taking for granted this vulnerability, Sokrates advises ‘decent people’ to acknowledge that unlike misfortunes, which are unavoidable—and bring distress which *must* be faced and fought—poetry *is* avoidable. This suggests that ‘decent people’ are precisely the public which the critique of poetry addresses. Sokrates’ aim here is to unmask mimetic art and expose it for what it really is: a seducing trickery which stirs up the part of us that has nothing to do with the truth. Thus, the critique of poetry presents itself as the very alternative to poetry: as the poet addresses the inferior and non-rational part of the soul, Sokrates addresses its

⁶ *Philebos* 50B1–4: ἐν θρήνοις τε καὶ ἐν τραγωδίαις, μὴ τοῖς δράμασι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ τοῦ βίου συμπάσῃ τραγωδία καὶ κωμωδία, λύπας ἡδοναῖς ἅμα κεράννυσθαι, “in lamentations and tragedies, not just in those on the stage but in the whole tragedy and comedy of life, pain is mixed with pleasure.”

superior and rational part. At 607B6–7 he frames the entire discussion of the nature of poetry as part of an ancient conflict between philosophy and poetry (παλαιὰ τις διαφορὰ φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ποιητικῆ). In this connection, ‘decent people’ are definitely on the side of philosophy.

3. The question of the identity of the people called by Sokrates ‘decent’ has been dealt with by E. Belfiore, M. Erler, and G. R. F. Ferrari.⁷ Besides, several other authors have occasionally expressed views on this matter without dealing with it extensively. In this section I will discuss, and reject, the interpretations of the ‘decent people’ proposed by these three scholars.

3.1 Belfiore believes that the bipartition in Book 10 has a different object than the tripartition in Book 4, and claims that the bipartition rational vs non-rational divides people into *three* groups: one in which the superior element rules, one in which the inferior element rules, and one in which each element can rule in turn or in part. In her view, the ‘decent people’ is a designation for the third of the three groups.

I think that this is a misreading of Platon’s text, for several reasons. First, Sokrates makes no distinction between people who feature both parts of the bipartition and people who feature only one of them after the stronger part (whichever that is) has ‘eliminated’ the weaker one. Second, in Belfiore’s typology ‘decent people’ are obviously only the second-best people. This does not match Sokrates’ description that they are “the best of us.” Third, Belfiore’s suggestion that people of her second category (= mimetic artists, poets, and their public) are “fairly rare”

⁷ E. Belfiore, “Plato’s Greatest Accusation against Poetry,” in F. J. Pelletier et al. (eds.), *New Essays on Plato* (Calgary 1983) 39–62, at 54–61; M. Erler, “La felicità delle api. Passione e virtù nel *Fedone* e nella *Repubblica*,” in M. Migliori et al. (eds.), *Interiorità e anima. La psychè in Platone* (Milan 2007) 59–71, at 68–70; G. R. F. Ferrari, “The Philosopher’s Antidote,” in A. E. Denham (ed.), *Plato on Art and Beauty* (Hampshire 2012) 106–124, at 107–118. M. Erler, “Platon: Affekte und Wege zur Eudaimonie,” in H. Landweer et al. (eds.), *Klassische Emotionstheorien. Von Platon bis Wittgenstein* (Berlin 2008) 21–43, at 31–34, reiterates the same arguments as in *Interiorità e anima*.

(55), while her third category (= ‘decent people’) is “the most common and the most important” because it includes most of us (56) is not consistent with Platon’s text either. As I have shown in the previous section, at 604E–605A Sokrates explicitly mentions the success of mimetic artists among the people from the crowd. On the other hand, at 603E he explains that a ‘decent man’ bears the loss of a son more easily than others. Here the ‘decent man’ is the exception and the others are the rule (one may read τῶν ἄλλων at 603E6 in the sense of τῶν πολλῶν), not the other way around.⁸ For all these reasons I think that Belfiore’s interpretation of the expression ‘decent people’ is mistaken.

3.2 Erler (67) rightly points out that the motif of composure in misfortune connects the critique of poetry in Book 10 of the *Politeia* with the *Phaidon*. Sokrates’ case against useless and unwise anger (μὴ ἀγανακτεῖν *Politeia* 604B8, *Phaidon* 62D4) is indeed very similar in both dialogues.⁹ Yet, despite this similarity, Erler believes to perceive an important difference in the treatment of passions in these two dialogues. In his opinion, the *Phaidon* urges the philosopher to entirely free himself from passions, while the *Politeia* teaches how to rationally deal with them. Therefore, Erler argues that the expression ‘decent people’ cannot mean philosophers like Sokrates, because Sokrates both in the *Phaidon* and elsewhere shows no sign of any commotion whatsoever. Then, Erler points out (69) that at *Politeia* 387D Sokrates uses the expression in connection with the education of the guardians, and concludes that ‘decent people’ must be the guardians, more specifically the second social group of the *Politeia*. In his opinion (70), Phaidon is such a ‘decent man’, or an auxiliary, because,

⁸ J. C. Shaw, “Poetry and Hedonic Error in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Phronesis* 61 (2016) 373–396, at 390 n.46, also rejects in passing Belfiore’s interpretation that Platon’s expression ‘decent people’ refers to most of us. However, he does not suggest any alternative solution.

⁹ Halliwell, *Plato. Republic 10* 138 (ad 604B9), and *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton 2002) 107; S. Gastaldi, “La mimesis e l’anima” in M. Vegetti (ed.), *Platone. La Repubblica. Traduzione e commento VII* (Naples 2007) 93–149, at 132. See also Erler, in *Interiorità e anima* 63.

without being a philosopher like Sokrates, he succeeds in controlling his passions with help from outside.

In my view, Erler's interpretation of *Politeia* 3 and *Phaidon* supports neither his distinction between philosophers and 'decent people' nor his identification of the 'decent people' with the auxiliaries.

First, Erler claims that Sokrates is not a 'decent man' because he shows no sign of passion, especially of fear of death. However, as mentioned in the previous section, the capacity of controlling oneself when being among others, especially among peers, is the main characterizing feature of 'decent people'.¹⁰ The fact that Sokrates shows no weakness does not entitle us to suppose that he does not feel anything. Quite the contrary, I would say: his knowledge of the private behaviour of a publicly impeccable man (604A) is *per definitionem* something that cannot be gained by observation, which is why we may assume that it originates in self-experience.¹¹ This approach is not incompatible with the *Phaidon*, where Sokrates repeatedly suggests (e.g. at 68B) that pure thought can only be experienced after the separation from

¹⁰ As Ferrari, in *Plato on Art and Beauty* 108 (whose views on the matter will be discussed below), puts it: "The demeanour and behaviour of the true philosopher ... may, in fact, be outwardly indistinguishable from the demeanour and behaviour of any respectable person." The expression 'respectable person' translates here the Greek ἀνὴρ ἐπιεικής.

¹¹ G. F. Else, *The Structure and Date of Book 10 of Plato's Republic* (Heidelberg 1972) 47, commenting on 605C–D, observes that "the note of personal confession is unmistakable here"; see also Halliwell, *Plato. Republic 10* 143 (ad 605C7). On the other hand, H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within. Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 2006) 63 n.7, believes that the passage 604A proves that *Glaukon* is a 'decent man' because *he* knows from self-experience what the 'decent man' does when no witnesses are around! On this approach one may well attribute all statements made by Sokrates to any dialogue figure as long as they are accepted by his interlocutor(s). The view that *Glaukon* is the best example of a 'decent man' is also championed by P. Destrée, "Poetry, Thumos, and Pity in the *Republic*," in *Plato and the Poets* (Leiden 2011) 267–281, at 278. Ferrari seems at first (107) to endorse this view as well, but a few pages later (123 n.10) he implicitly distances himself from it.

the body, which means that even he, as long as he has a body, is not entirely free from passions. Generally speaking, the *Phaidon* is concerned with the contrast between philosophers and common people (οἱ πολλοί 64A–B, 82D)¹² rather than the contrast between philosophers and would-be philosophers (= auxiliaries, in the sense of the *Politeia*). At *Phaidon* 68B–C the contrast between philosophers and common people is expressed in tripartite terms as the contrast between the upper soul part and the lower two soul parts taken together.¹³ This means that if Phaidon were typologically an auxiliary, that is a lover of honours, he would be a lover of the body (φιλοσώματος), or a non-philosopher altogether. This would compel us to regard *Phaidon* as a conversation between a philosopher (Sokrates) and non-philosophers (= φιλοσώματοι), a conclusion which is obviously untenable (cf. *Phaidon* 64A–B, 82D). Moreover, Phaidon’s being a plain non-philosopher would make it impossible to classify him as a ‘decent man’ since ‘decent people’ are called at *Politeia* 605C9 “the best of us.” If, on the other hand, we agree that *Phaidon* is a conversation between philosophers, we only have to admit that philosophers, too, have passions (like fear of death) although Sokrates of course manages to conceal them better than the others.¹⁴ This means that the difference between Sokrates and the other characters in the *Phaidon* is to be regarded as a difference of degree within the group of people who love wisdom (φιλόσοφοι) rather

¹² C. Enache, “Der unsichtbare Totengott. Platons Namendeutung des Hades im *Phaidon* (80d–81c) und im *Kratylos* (403a–404b),” *RhM* 151 (2008) 61–82, at 71–73.

¹³ *Phaidon* 68B8–C3: “Is this not a clear sign, when you see a man who is vexed because he has to die, that he loves the body above wisdom (ὅτι οὐκ ἄρ’ ἦν φιλόσοφος ἀλλὰ τις φιλοσώματος)? Such a man usually also loves riches and honours (φιλοχρήματος καὶ φιλότιμος), namely either one of them or both.”

¹⁴ As E. A. Austin, “Plato on Grief As a Mental Disorder,” *AGPh* 98 (2016) 1–20, at 12–16, convincingly argues, even the philosopher-king of the *Politeia* should not be seen as being entirely free from inner conflict.

than a difference of kind like that between philosophers and non-philosophers.

Second, Erler regards the mention of ‘decent people’ at 387D–E (see the previous section) as evidence that this expression refers to the middle class of the ideal state. However, since at this point in the *Politeia* no distinction between the upper two social classes of the ideal state has been made yet, his conclusion is not justified. Notoriously, Sokrates’ use of the expression ‘guardians’ is not unambiguous. In the wider sense, the term designates any member of the upper two classes. However, in a narrower sense it designates only members of the leading class, called ‘guardians in the highest degree’ (φυλακικώτατοι) at 412C11 and ‘perfect guardians’ (φύλακες παντελεῖς) at 414B1, while their class is simply called ‘guard’ (φυλακή) at 415C4 (as contrasted with ἐπικουρία).¹⁵ Moreover, as Erler also notes, the guardians in the wider sense are expressly called ‘lovers of wisdom’ (φιλόσοφοι) at 375E–376C. This fluid terminology shows that the passage 387D–E is not an argument in favour of the unequivocal identification of the ‘decent people’ with the middle social class of the *Politeia*. For all these reasons I believe that Erler’s interpretation of the term ‘decent man’ is mistaken.¹⁶

3.3 Ferrari also makes a case for the distinction between ‘decent people’ and philosophers. In his view (107), lines 605C5–7 (quoted at the beginning of this paper) introduce precisely this distinction because there ‘the few’ who are not susceptible to poetry (and who are to be identified as philosophers) are contrasted with the ‘decent people’, who *are* affected by poetry. Moreover, from the passage 606A7–8 he concludes that ‘decent people’ are inadequately educated, something that cannot apply to philosophers. He also points out (108) that the self-control

¹⁵ An echo of this very special meaning of the word (the philosopher-rulers as guardians) is φυλακὴν at 606A8, where it designates the activity of the upper part of the soul.

¹⁶ On the argument which misleadingly opposes (inner) reason to (outside) law and tradition, an argument also adduced by Ferrari, see below.

featured by the 'decent man' is not the 'real thing' because it is imposed from without by society, custom, and law, while the philosopher is always in control of himself due to his inner soul structure. Nevertheless, Ferrari admits (118) that the philosopher is not entirely invulnerable to poetry either, although he is affected by it in a different way, and to a lesser extent, than the 'decent man'. Also, he notes in passing (117) that the lower soul part addressed by poetry includes both the *θυμοειδές* and the *ἐπιθυμητικόν*.

I will start the discussion of Ferrari by considering again the lines quoted at the beginning of this paper. Far from contrasting 'decent people' (that is, people who are susceptible to poetry) with people who are not susceptible to poetry (and whom Ferrari identifies as philosophers),¹⁷ the passage 605C5–7 indicates that the group of people who are not susceptible to poetry are a subgroup of the people called 'decent people'. The claim that poetry is able to harm even 'decent people' "with a few exceptions" literally means that there are 'decent people' who are invulnerable to poetry, not that the people invulnerable to poetry are different from the 'decent people'. In other words, some 'decent people' are not affected by poetry, while most of them are, which means that it is possible to call someone who is immune to poetry, e.g. Sokrates, a 'decent man'. This misreading of 605C5–7, which creates a non-existing contrast between the 'decent man' and the philosopher, overlooks the fact that Platon introduces the concept of 'decent man' in opposition to the many, or the crowd, or the others (*τῶν ἄλλων* 603E6, *δύω* 604B2, *παντοδαποῖς ἀνθρώποις εἰς θέατρα συλλεγομένοις* 604E5, *τοῖς πολλοῖς* 605A4), an oppo-

¹⁷ This misinterpretation of 605C5–7 is older than Ferrari and seems to have influenced the approach to the term 'decent man' considerably. Ferrari (122 n.2) refers to Halliwell, *Plato. Republic 10*, and P. Murray, *Plato on Poetry* (Cambridge 1996). Murray 224 (ad 605C6–8) reads indeed: "The 'very few' good men who will be able to resist the corrupting power of poetry are those who are true philosophers." However, the comment in Halliwell 143–144 (ad 605C8 and C10) seems to me less clear on this point.

sition that suggests, if anything, at least a functional similarity between the ‘decent man’ and the philosopher.

Next, let us take a closer look at 606A7–8 (τὸ φύσει βέλτιστον ἡμῶν, ἅτε οὐχ ἰκανῶς πεπαιδευμένον λόγῳ οὐδὲ ἔθει),¹⁸ which Ferrari and others take to mean that ‘decent people’ have a deficient education.¹⁹ I think there are two distinct points to be considered in this respect. First, if it is true that some ‘decent people’ are invulnerable to imitation and poetry, as I have just claimed that lines 605C5–7 suggest, then it is impossible that (all) ‘decent people’ are deficient in education, since the only thing that reasonably provides protection against mimetic poetry *is* education, especially the education of the better half of the soul. Therefore, 606A7–8 could only refer to those ‘decent people’ who *are* susceptible to mimetic poetry but not to all ‘decent people’. This means that the lack of education cannot be adduced as an essential feature of ‘decent people’, or used as a definition of them, as often happens. Of course, it can still be objected that insufficient education, even if characterising not all but only some ‘decent people’, makes it impossible for this expression to refer to philosophers. Therefore, I will now come to the second and more important point regarding the interpretation of 606A7–8.

This passage should not be read isolated from the context of the critique of poetry and the other information Platon gives us about the ‘decent people’, as I have shown in §2. In particular, the terms λόγῳ ‘reason’ and ἔθει ‘habit’, which specify the decisive factors in keeping the lamenting part of the soul under control, clearly echo the previous discussion. At 604A9 Sokrates suggests that the forces opposing the drive towards indulging in grief are reason (λόγος) and the law (νόμος). He then adds that the law (νόμος 604B5–7) teaches us that the misfortunes which

¹⁸ On the meaning of this sentence see C. Enache, “Plato, *Republic* 606a7–606b2: Syntax and Meaning,” *CQ* 74 (2024) 317–320.

¹⁹ E.g. V. Harte, “*Republic* 10 and the Role of the Audience in Art,” *OSAPh* 38 (2010) 69–96, at 90.

may occur in a lifetime should not deter us from following the voice of reason (λόγος 604C7), and that this can only be attained through continuous exercise (ἐθίζειν τὴν ψυχὴν 604C9). This equation of reason with the law is not uncommon in Platon (*Politeia* 587A11, 571B5–6; *Laws* 645A1–2; cf. also *Kriton*; *Gorgias* 504D1–2). It indicates that the law is a product of reason and that acting according to reason and acting according to the law are one and the same thing.²⁰ Ferrari (108–109), however, prefers to interpret νόμος at 604B–C as ‘custom’, and introduces a discrepancy between νόμος as an outside authority keeping the lower soul part of the ‘decent man’ under control by force and reason which controls the soul of the philosopher from the inside. Needless to say, the passage 604A–C does not support any such discrepancy between νόμος and λόγος. In fact, 606C clearly states that the force that represses the inclination to make an exhibition of oneself out of fear of losing one’s reputation (δόξαν 606C6) is reason (τῷ λόγῳ κατεῖχες 606C5). What is more, Ferrari assumes (109), without providing evidence, that the detached view of human affairs described at 604B7–C3 and expressly attributed by Sokrates to the ‘decent man’ is merely a superficial attitude. He claims this because, in his view, only the true philosopher can fully grasp the meaning of existence as a whole—an argument that seems to beg the question. Indeed, Ferrari does not take into consideration that at 604C5 the aim of the ‘decent man’ is said to be “to deliberate (about what has happened in the past),” while at 604C7 and 604D4 the ‘decent man’ is said to follow reason (λόγος, λογισμός) in his choices (see also τὸ λογιστικόν at 605B3).²¹ Moreover, the attitude towards adversity

²⁰ On the convergence of reason and the law in the *Politeia* see J. Annas, *Virtue and the Law in Plato and Beyond* (Oxford 2017) 16–17; R. S. Liebert, *Tragic Pleasure from Homer to Plato* (Cambridge 2017) 166–167.

²¹ In the discussion of the ‘decent man’, Sokrates often uses the first person plural, which suggests that Sokrates sees himself and his interlocutors as ‘decent people’. As a matter of fact, Ferrari reads some of Sokrates’ assertions in the first person plural as referring to ‘decent people’ (e.g. 109 on 604C2

and distress prescribed by Sokrates in these lines is qualified at 604E2–3 as “the prudent and quiet character” (τὸ φρόνιμόν τε καὶ ἡσύχιον ἦθος) which is “almost always identical with itself” (παρὰ-πλήσιον ὃν ἀεὶ αὐτὸ αὐτῷ). Such expressions refer elsewhere in Platon to the realm of eternal being, which means that if the ‘decent man’ is indeed insufficiently educated and only simulates virtue in public, we must regard their use here as either accidental or even misleading.²² However, if the ‘decent man’ is someone whose λογιστικόν governs both his θυμοειδές and his ἐπιθυμητικόν, as Ferrari also acknowledges, then we have no reason not to take these expressions at face value. Furthermore, as mentioned in §2, in the conflict between philosophy and poetry (607B6–7) the ‘decent man’ is undoubtedly on the side of philosophy.

But if ‘decent people’ are true philosophers, as I claim, why are some of them said at 606A7–8 to be insufficiently trained in reason and habit? A short answer would be that Sokrates is referring here to individuals who possess a ‘philosophical’ or ‘just’ soul structure—where the λογιστικόν, θυμοειδές, and ἐπιθυμητικόν function properly according to their natural hierarchy—but have not undergone the kind of education prescribed for the ruling class in the ideal state. Sokrates himself, along with other real-life philosophers, serves as an example of this category.

However, I think it is also possible to read 606A7–8 in a stronger sense—as referring to the philosopher-kings of the ideal state. In this case, the expression ‘decent man’ would include individuals who have effectively been trained as described in Books 2–3 and 5–7 of the *Politeia*. As mentioned in §2, at 387D–E Sokrates calls the guardians ‘decent people’.²³ If this expression

and 116 on 605D3) and some of them as referring to philosophers (e.g. 112 on 607C7 and 117 on 608A3–4) without explaining the reason for this different treatment.

²² See also the parallels with the *Phaidon* discussed above.

²³ In the next section I argue that Sokrates is likely referring to the ruling,

carries the same meaning and refers to the same group of people in both Book 3 and Book 10, as I believe,²⁴ then we are bound to accept that at least the education outlined in Books 2 and 3 (but probably also that of Books 5–7) must be compatible with the suggestion at 606A7–8 that (some) 'decent people' are insufficiently trained in reason and habit. How is this possible?

The lamenting part of the soul, Sokrates says, is fuelled by both unhappy circumstances and (bad) poetry. The philosophers of the ideal state are educated to deal with the former but not with the latter. As we already know, the worst thing about poetry is that it affects even the best people. Despite their training in regarding all things human as not being worth too much (604B–C)—a training that seems to take a lifetime (ἀεὶ ἐθίζειν τὴν ψυχὴν 604C9)—it is not implausible to assume that even such people bemoan the death of their offspring when they are all alone.²⁵ Clearly, the lower soul part cannot be simply annihilated once and for all. If such people, whose soul structure is otherwise impeccable, are exposed for the first time and without any previous preparation to bad poetry, e.g. tragic performance, their upper soul part will tend to relax its control over the lower part (ἀνίησιν τὴν φυλακὴν 606A8). This happens because those people, no matter how wise and educated otherwise, believe that it is a harmless thing to sympathise with a great man who whines in misfortune (606B1–3, cf. 605C9–D3) and notably because the dangers of identification with a character on the stage have never been pointed out to them (since they did not have the chance to read Platon's critique of poetry). As I see it, lines

philosophical class alone and not to the auxiliaries (as e.g. Erler, in *Interiorità e anima*, claims), despite the fact that at this point no explicit distinction between the upper two classes has yet been made.

²⁴ Austin, *AGPh* 98 (2016), advances a strong case in favour of this view (see e.g. 8 n.13).

²⁵ I will come back to this often misinterpreted point in the next section. Austin, *AGPh* 98 (2016) 10–16, presents compelling arguments to the effect that the (perfect) virtue of the philosopher-kings is not incompatible with grief or a different behaviour in public and in private.

606A7–8 (τὸ φύσει βέλτιστον ἡμῶν, ἅτε οὐχ ἰκανῶς πεπαιδευμένον λόγῳ οὐδὲ ἔθει) refer to people who have not been trained to realise the insidiousness of poetry either in a theoretical (λόγῳ) or in a practical way (ἔθει). Such a naiveté about poetry is, however, not inconsistent with the status of philosopher-rulers, whose education does not include any explicit warning regarding mimetic art. I conclude, therefore, that lines 606A7–8 do not provide evidence that the education of the ‘decent people’ is so incomplete as to disqualify them from being philosophers—or even philosopher-rulers.

For all these reasons, I think that Ferrari’s interpretation of the term ‘decent man’ is mistaken.

3.4 Besides Belfiore, Erler, and Ferrari there have of course been other views on the nature of the ‘decent people’, though these have often been expressed only in passing. A few examples: Lorenz, *The Brute Within* 64, writes that they are “morally imperfect individuals”; Destrée, in *Plato and the Poets* 275, writes that they are “average virtuous persons”; Liebert, *Tragic Pleasure* 159 n.109, writes that they have an “imperfect psychological condition”;²⁶ and D. Storey, “The Translation of *Republic* 606A3–B5 and Plato’s Partite Psychology,” *CP* 114 (2019) 136–141, at 136, writes that they “fall short of being truly virtuous.”²⁷

Two more points before concluding this section.

Austin offers what I consider to be the most detailed and accurate discussion of the ‘decent man’ in the *Politeia*. However,

²⁶ Unlike most other scholars, Liebert does attempt to explain the expression “the best of us” (605C9), which she interprets in passing as referring not to the best people in the ideal state, but rather to those in existing societies. This, however, would appear to make Sokrates and other philosophers ‘decent people’, something most supporters of the distinction between ‘decent people’ and philosophers reject. Liebert’s view is in fact based on the mistaken assumption that Sokrates never calls the philosopher-kings ‘decent’, and on the unjustified belief that philosopher-kings are “presumably immune to poetry’s charms.”

²⁷ More examples in this vein can be found in Austin, *AGPh* 98 (2016) 1–2 n.2.

although her aim is to show that Platon’s depiction of the ‘decent man’ in Books 3 and 10 makes a crucial contribution to our understanding of the philosopher-kings and their inner life, she does not, as far as I can see, explicitly claim that the ‘decent man’ is a philosopher or a member of the ruling class in the ideal state.²⁸ Nevertheless, her argument that the philosopher of the ideal state, who in the *Politeia* is the embodiment of perfect virtue, should not be understood as possessing a conflict-free psychic life challenges a common view in Platonic scholarship and is an important one. As I will show in the following sections, my own argument points in the same direction.²⁹

Moreover, M. Untersteiner simply assumes that the ‘decent man’ is the wise (*il saggio*) or the philosopher (*il filosofo*), without feeling the need to adduce any argument in support of his opinion.³⁰ A possible echo of this view is in S. Gastaldi, who also believes that the ‘decent man’ is “un individuo dotato della perfetta compiutezza etica.”³¹ It is this interpretation of the ‘decent man’ that I will defend in the next section.

4. Having explained, in Book 2, that the perfectly just state must include a class of workers, Sokrates then introduces the class of warriors or guardians (374). Later (412), he argues that the best among the warriors are selected to rule the city. Between these two moments (374–412), Sokrates outlines the education

²⁸ The closest she comes to this claim is in the following assertion (12): “My argument already provides some *prima facie* reason to treat the philosopher at least roughly like the decent person.” If I understand her correctly, the subtitle “The philosopher is superior to the decent person” does not reflect the author’s own position, but rather a possible objection to her view—one that she in fact rejects.

²⁹ Austin, *AGPh* 98 (2016) 3: “I will not unnecessarily concern myself with the interesting debates about the cognitive architecture and capacities of the lower parts of the soul.” In my view, the soul tripartition is the key element in the comparison between the ‘decent man’ and the philosopher.

³⁰ Platone. *Repubblica Libro X* (Naples 1966) 142.

³¹ “*Mimesis e psiche nel libro X della Repubblica*,” in *Interiorità e anima* 109–122, at 110.

that prepares all future warriors for their class-specific duties. Within this pedagogical section no explicit distinction is made between mere warriors and those who will later become the philosopher-kings. Significantly, although the distinction between the upper two classes of the ideal state will later appear as clear-cut as that between the lower two, at this stage the difference between the future leaders and those who will later be called their auxiliaries seems to be one of degree rather than of kind. This impression is reinforced by passages like 412C11 and 414B1, where the future philosopher-kings are introduced as φυλακικώτατοι “guardians in the highest degree” and φύλακες παντελείς “perfect guardians.”

Against this background, it is worth noting that a number of passages in this pedagogical section (374–412) appear inconsistent with the argument’s later development if taken literally. For instance, at 375E–376C Sokrates argues that the guardians must be both courageous (θυμοειδής) and lovers of wisdom (φιλόσοφος).³² Here, despite Sokrates’ apparently peculiar understanding of the expression φιλόσοφος (376B6–7), it seems difficult not to see the later distinction between the higher two classes already anticipated, and to assume that the love of wisdom cannot be, in fact, equally distributed among all the warriors. Similarly, at 383C Sokrates points out that the aim of education is to produce guardians who are as god-fearing and divine (θεοσεβείς τε καὶ θεῖοι) as possible for a human being.³³ Yet, this goal, which recalls to some extent the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ in *Theaitetos* 176B, can hardly be a realistic one for the mere warriors who receive only the basic education. Otherwise, the higher philosophical training outlined in Books 5 to 7 would be superfluous. Another

³² 376C4–6: φιλόσοφος δὴ καὶ θυμοειδής καὶ ταχὺς καὶ ἰσχυρὸς ἡμῖν τὴν φύσιν ἔσται ὁ μέλλων καλὸς κἀγαθὸς ἔσεσθαι φύλαξ πόλεως, “The man who is to become a good guardian of the city must by nature be a lover of wisdom, ambitious, quick, and strong.”

³³ 383C3–5: εἰ μέλλουσιν ἡμῖν οἱ φύλακες θεοσεβείς τε καὶ θεῖοι γίνεσθαι, καθ’ ὅσον ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ὄιον τε.

example is the passage 389B, where Sokrates contends that although truth is a core value in the ideal state, certain citizens may be permitted to employ lies if doing so is beneficial and advantageous for the city. At 389B8, these citizens with special rights are called “the rulers of the city” (οἱ ἄρχοντες τῆς πόλεως), which at this stage can only mean the warriors, as opposed to the workers.³⁴ Yet, at 414B–C, where Sokrates explicitly refers back to the passage in which the possibility of a ‘noble lie’ was first introduced (414B8), the same expression ‘rulers’ (414C1, D3) clearly designates only the philosopher-kings. In light of the myth of the metals, one is therefore inclined to conclude that at 389B, too, despite the immediate contextual meaning of the expression ‘rulers’, Sokrates does not in fact allow all warriors to make use of lies.

These preliminary observations are necessary as we now return to the passage 387D–E, where Sokrates first argues that the ‘decent man’ bears the loss of a relative more easily than others. The reason he gives is particularly significant (387D11–E2):

ὁ τοιοῦτος μάλιστα αὐτὸς αὐτῷ αὐτάρκης πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν καὶ
διαφερόντως τῶν ἄλλων ἥκιστα ἑτέρου προσδεῖται.

Such a man is self-sufficient in the highest degree when it comes to the good life and, unlike others, has the least need of someone else.

Even if we did not have the other hints in the pedagogical section of Books 2 and 3, it would still seem highly unlikely that Sokrates intends here to ascribe the crucial quality of autarky to all members of the warrior class. In fact, if the ‘decent man’ is self-sufficient in the highest degree, and if the best life is the life of virtue, then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the ‘decent man’—at least as depicted in this passage—must possess virtue in the highest degree. For this reason, I propose interpreting

³⁴ 389B8–10: τοῖς ἄρχουσιν δὴ τῆς πόλεως, εἴπερ τισὶν ἄλλοις, προσήκει ψεύδεσθαι ἢ πολεμίων ἢ πολιτῶν ἔνεκα ἐπ’ ὠφελίᾳ τῆς πόλεως, τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις πᾶσιν οὐχ ἄπτεόν τοῦ τοιοῦτου, “It is appropriate for the rulers of the city, if for anyone at all, to lie for the benefit of the city because of enemies or citizens, but for all others such a thing must not be touched.”

these lines in the same vein as the passages discussed above: not as referring to all warriors but only to the best of them, namely the philosopher-kings. This reading is supported by another passage that deals with self-sufficiency, 381A3–4: “The most courageous and prudent soul (ψυχὴν τὴν ἀνδρειοτάτην καὶ φρονιμοτάτην) is least troubled and altered by an incident from the outside (ἔξωθεν πάθος).” Although Sokrates does not use the expression ‘decent’ here, the idea clearly parallels that of 387D11–E2. Moreover, since in the ideal state a soul cannot be prudent without also being courageous (because the philosopher-kings are a subgroup of the warrior class), while the auxiliaries do not possess the virtue of prudence, it follows that the quoted statement effectively refers to the philosopher-kings.³⁵ This conclusion aligns not only with the passage 387D–E, suggesting that a ‘decent man’ is a philosopher-king by virtue of his autarky, but also with the broader context of the *Politeia*, in which the philosopher-kings represent the pinnacle of virtue and self-sufficiency.

Certainly, one might still object that even if the expression ‘decent man’ refers to a philosopher-king in Book 3, this does not necessarily imply that the ‘decent man’ in Book 10 must exhibit a similar psychological profile. However, the fact that Sokrates uses this expression in both instances in connection with the self-control of someone who has suffered the loss of a close relative, especially a son, provides strong reason to believe that his choice of words is not accidental. Furthermore, as mentioned above, in the *Phaidon* the attitude towards death is the touchstone of philosophy. As Sokrates puts it there, to practice philosophy rightly means to care and prepare for death (μελέτη θανάτου, *Phaidon* 80E–81A). Notoriously, this is not just what he preached but also what he himself practiced.³⁶ In the same line

³⁵ In other words, the condition ἀνδρειοσύνη is redundant and, therefore, emphatic. On the important point that “least troubled” does not mean “not troubled at all” see, once again, Austin, *AGPh* 98 (2016) 3–8.

³⁶ Halliwell, *Plato. Republic 10* 138 ad 604A10 and 604B9; Erler, in *Klassische Emotionstheorien* 25–27.

of thought, the ‘decent man’ keeps his balance in any misfortune, even when confronted with the death of his own son, because he knows that in this life anything can happen and no earthly thing is worth being taken too seriously (*Politeia* 604B–C). It should be noted that the example chosen by Platon—arguably one of the most devastating things one can experience in a lifetime—is illustrative of the composure of the wise man already in the Pre-socratic tradition. Diogenes Laertios (2.13) writes that Anaxagoras, as he heard about the death of his sons, said no more than “I knew they would die one day.”³⁷ Platon’s allusion to this tradition is hardly an accident.

Moreover, if we take a closer look at the argument that occasions this example in the first place (603D–604A) we observe that Platon’s aim is to prove the existence of the soul parts, and that to reach this conclusion he proceeds in the same manner as in Book 4, namely by adducing an inner-psychoic conflict.³⁸ Since such a conflict is obviously not a matter of empirical observation, Sokrates chooses an example in which the behaviour of a person (something that *can* be observed) is determined by the two parts of the soul alternatively. Thus, the contrast between the public and the private behaviour of a ‘decent man’ is the evidence needed that the inner conflict *is* there and that the soul does have two distinct parts. Platon’s focus lies, therefore, neither on the calm public appearance of the ‘decent man’ (that is, on the domination of his superior soul part over the inferior part) nor on the

³⁷ ἤδειν αὐτοὺς θνητοὺς γεννήσας. Diogenes adds that other sources attribute this reaction to Solon or Xenophon. For more on the reaction to the death of one’s own child in antiquity (including the death of Cicero’s daughter Tullia) see D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks. Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto 2006) 253–255.

³⁸ Like the epistemic conflict (κατὰ τὴν ὄψιν 603D1) discussed before, there are also inner-psychoic conflicts regarding the course of action (ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι 603D2). The key words are ὁμοιοητικῶς ... ἢ ... στασιάζει τε καὶ μάχεται αὐτὸς αὐτῷ (603C11–D3). This important point, which alone justifies the discussion of the effect of dramatic poetry on the soul, can be easily missed, as the comment by Murray, *Plato on Poetry* 217–218 ad loc., illustrates.

private expression of his feelings (that is, on the inferred presence of the inferior soul part), but on the gap between the two. Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that this gap is made possible by the presence of a strong upper soul part in ‘decent people’, that is, by the fact that ‘decent people’, unlike everyone else, successfully suppress their grief in public. Thus, the fact that ‘decent people’ give in to their feelings in private is in this context an indication that they do feel grief and that their serenity is not a trivial insensitivity but the praiseworthy (temporary) outcome of a (permanent) hard-fought struggle.³⁹ It seems, therefore, rather cynical to regard the private outburst of anger following the death of a son as a sign of weakness or imperfect virtue, as scholars often do. Such an approach does not take into consideration Platon’s intention in choosing as an example this extreme trauma. Moreover, it ignores the immediate context where the (decent) man suffering severe pain is contrasted with a child clutching the hurting limb (604C8–9).

As the self-sufficiency of the ‘decent man’ is linked in Book 3 with the good life (τὸ εὖ ζῆν 387E1), so too is his composure in distress associated with virtue and happiness in Book 10. As discussed in §2, the bipartition of the soul introduced in the critique of poetry divides humanity into two types: in some individuals the rational part dominates the non-rational part, while in others the non-rational part dominates the rational. Broadly speaking, the former group includes ‘decent people’, whereas the latter includes the crowd. At 606D6–7 Sokrates suggests that this typology bears directly on the central question of the *Politeia*, namely the nature of happiness (and justice). When the non-rational part is (contrary to nature) in control, the person is not just inferior but also unhappy. Conversely, when the soul is

³⁹ 603E8–9: “will he feel no pain at all, or is this rather impossible?” Otherwise, the presence of witnesses whose opinion of oneself counts is a natural incentive that Platon even recommends in his ideal state, see 466E–467A (and also *Symposium* 178D–E). Moreover, two-facedness as a feature of guardians, dogs, and philosophers (375C–376C) is not a problem in the *Politeia* (see also 414B and 415D–E as well as *Laws* 647B–C).

governed by the part that is by nature fit to rule, the person is not just better but also happier. A few lines later, Sokrates adds a new dimension to this typology by associating rationality with philosophy and non-rationality with poetry (607B6–7). Taken together, this context suggests that ‘decent people’ owe their happiness to a harmonious, or ‘philosophical’, soul structure (ἡ ἐν αὐτῷ πολιτεία 608B1) in which the three parts function according to their natural hierarchy.

It is noteworthy that, at one point in the *Politeia*, Sokrates uses the expression ‘decent people’ in a tripartite context to refer to the best among the three types of individuals. In Book 1, he argues that no one rules willingly.⁴⁰ His reasoning is that anyone who takes on public office does so in expectation of some form of recompense for neglecting their private affairs. This recompense, he says, may consist of either money or honours or punishment. When Glaukon expresses confusion about how punishment can be a form of recompense, Sokrates explains (347B1–C6):

You don’t understand the recompense of the best people (οἱ βέλτιστοι), which makes the most decent (οἱ ἐπιεικέστατοι) assume a public office, when they do assume one. Or don’t you know that the love of honours and the love of money are considered a disgrace, which they indeed are?

Of course I know.

This is why good people (οἱ ἀγαθοί), I said, don’t wish to hold public office for the sake of either money or honours: they are unwilling to earn money openly for serving in public office and be called mercenaries, or to take it by stealth and be called thieves; on the other hand, they don’t serve for honours either, because they are not lovers of honours. Only compulsion or penalty can make them agree to assume a public office. And the greatest penalty is to be ruled by someone worse than yourself, when you refuse to rule; in my view, this is what decent people (οἱ ἐπιεικεῖς) fear when they finally accept a public office.

⁴⁰ 346E8: μηδένα ἐθέλειν ἐκόντα ἄρχειν, a variation of the Socratic principle μηδεὶς ἐκὼν ἀδικεῖ, “no one willingly does wrong.”

As has been observed,⁴¹ this passage in Book 1 anticipates the tripartition developed in the subsequent books. Moreover, it also connects with *Phaidon* 68B (see above). Clearly, the assumption that there are three, and only three, types of recompense for taking on public office is essential for Sokrates' argument, so much so that if this assumption is not true the argument is not valid.⁴² As Sokrates puts it, punishment (or threat) *is* the reason why some people choose to take on public office against their will *because* the other two motivations do not apply to them. The tripartition is thus not an incidental feature of the argument but its very foundation—just as is the tripartition of the soul and the state in the following books. In this passage, those who are neither lovers of honours nor lovers of money are called 'the best', 'the most decent', 'the good', and 'the decent'. Just as this tripartite typology of citizens prepares the reader for the later construction of the ideal state, so too does the expression 'decent people' take on a special meaning that will be invoked again within the framework of the ideal state. For instance, at 431C–D, in the midst of the discussion of the four cardinal virtues, 'the more decent' people in the city (οἱ ἐπιεικέστεροι) are distinguished by their superior nature and education—qualities that ensure that their desires are governed by reason and right opinion and that they are guided by reasoning (μετὰ νοῦ τε καὶ δόξης ὀρθῆς λογισμῶ ἄγονται 431C5–6).

Indeed, if the 'decent people' were morally or intellectually deficient, it would be difficult to see why their susceptibility to poetry should be considered part of the gravest accusation against poetry and mimetic art (605C5–7).

⁴¹ G. J. Boter, "Thrasymachus and πλεονεξία," *Mnemosyne* 39 (1986) 261–281, at 276 n.49; C. H. Kahn, "Proleptic Composition in the *Republic*, or Why Book 1 Was Never a Separate Dialogue," *CQ* 43 (1993) 131–142, at 138 with n.24.

⁴² Compare the method of elimination explained at 427E–428A and based on the presupposition that there are only four virtues in a perfect state.

5. In this final section I will outline some consequences that follow from my thesis that the 'decent man' possesses the psychological profile of a philosopher.

As I have already mentioned, the argument against mimetic arts in Book 10 is based on a division of the soul into a rational and a non-rational part (called at 604D λογισμός and ἀλόγιστον, respectively). Although some scholars have argued that this bipartition, unlike the soul tripartition in Book 4, concerns only the highest third of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν), I believe that this view has largely been abandoned and will therefore not dwell on it here.⁴³ Instead, I assume that Book 10 contains sufficient references to the tripartition developed in Book 4 to justify the conclusion that the bipartition into rational and non-rational parts concerns the entire soul, just as the tripartition does.⁴⁴

Most scholars who read the soul bipartition in the critique of poetry in Book 10 as a simplification of the tripartition introduced in Book 4 agree that the upper half of the bipartition corresponds to the upper third of the tripartition (τὸ λογιστικόν), while the lower half includes the lower two thirds of the tripartition (τὸ θυμοειδές and τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν).⁴⁵ This interpretation is

⁴³ I wish to note, however, that, in my opinion, this debate has focused too narrowly on the passage 602E (τούτῳ 602E4), the interpretation of which is in fact the only reason why some scholars are inclined to doubt what seems the most natural reading of the bipartition. To give just one example, J. Moss, "Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul," *OSAPh* 34 (2008) 35–68, at 35–37, invites the impression that soul partitions can be found in the *Politeia* only in Book 4 and in the critique of poetry at 602–605. An overview of the bibliography in English on both sides can be found in Moss 36 n.1 and D. Storey, "Appearance, Perception, and Non-Rational Belief: *Republic* 602C–603A," *OSAPh* 47 (2014) 81–118, at 82.

⁴⁴ This has been shown especially by Lorenz, *The Brute Within* 59–73, and Moss, *OSAPh* 34 (2008) 35–68.

⁴⁵ G. Lesses, "Weakness, Reason, and the Divided Soul in Plato's *Republic*," *HPhQ* 4 (1987) 147–161, at 149, 152, and 156; G. R. Carone, "Akrasia in the *Republic*: Does Plato Change His Mind?" *OSAPh* 20 (2001) 107–148, at 130 n.48; Moss, *OSAPh* 34 (2008) 42–44; T. S. Ganson, "The Rational/Non-

typically based on the epistemological dimension of the critique of poetry: as Sokrates points out at 602C–603E, the rational part of the soul has access to truth and knowledge, while the non-rational relies on the senses and appearances.⁴⁶ However, given that (1) the ‘decent man’ is by definition someone whose upper soul half keeps the lower half under control,⁴⁷ and (2) a soul in which the thinking part rules over the fighting and desiring parts has a philosophical profile, it may seem surprising that the natural conclusion that the ‘decent man’ must be a philosopher has so far failed to attract attention. The reasons why scholars have resisted this conclusion likely have to do with the prevailing image of the Platonic philosopher in the *Politeia*.

It is a widespread view that, in the *Politeia*, the middle part of the soul is an ally of the rational part.⁴⁸ This view is grounded in the tripartition outlined in Book 4, especially in the passage 441A2–3, where Sokrates explicitly states that the fighting component of both the soul and the city naturally assists and supports the ruling component unless it has been corrupted by bad education. Since the philosopher is precisely the individual who enjoys the best possible education, this claim seems, if anything, to suggest that the honour-loving and competitive part of the philosopher’s soul stands in harmony with his rational part. Accordingly, someone who, like the ‘decent man’, is described as needing to repress both his thymoeidetic and his epithymetic

Rational Distinction in Plato’s *Republic*,” *OSAPh* 36 (2009) 179–197, at 190 n.33; R. Singpurwalla, “Soul Division and Mimesis in *Republic X*,” in *Plato and the Poets* 283–298, at 297; Ferrari, in *Plato on Art and Beauty* 117; J. Wilburn, *The Political Soul. Plato on thumos, Spirited Motivation, and the City* (Oxford 2021) 260; T. A. Szlezák, *Platon. Meisterdenker der Antike* (Munich 2021) 393.

⁴⁶ Moss, *OSAPh* 34 (2008) 35–68.

⁴⁷ See e.g. 605B3 τὸ λογιστικόν.

⁴⁸ E.g. M. D. Boeri, “¿Por qué el θυμός es un ‘aliado’ de la razón en la batalla contra los apetitos irracionales?” *RCCM* 52 (2010) 289–306; R. Singpurwalla, “Why Spirit Is the Natural Ally of Reason: Spirit, Reason, and the Fine in Plato’s *Republic*,” *OSAPh* 44 (2013) 41–65.

impulses by means of his reason may appear, at first glance, not to qualify as a philosopher.

I think, however, that Platon’s view of the philosophical soul in the *Politeia* is more complex than the impression given by the passage 441A. In addition to the critique of poetry, the final books of the *Politeia* contain at least two other passages in which the tripartite soul is effectively presented in bipartite terms—with a sharp boundary between the upper third and the lower two thirds. Significantly, neither of these passages deals with corrupt or non-philosophical souls: quite the contrary.

The first passage is 571B–572B, where Sokrates distinguishes waking life from sleep as a reversal of the powers governing the soul.⁴⁹ Initially framed in dualistic terms, the contrast is drawn between “the thinking, gentle, and ruling” element and “the beastly and wild” element, which assert themselves during waking and sleep, respectively. That this dualism is shorthand for the fuller tripartition becomes clear in the lines that follow (571D–572B), where the rational part (τὸ λογιστικὸν μὲν) is explicitly opposed to the lower two thirds (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικὸν δὲ ... ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ θυμοειδές).⁵⁰ Notably, reason’s aim in appeasing the lower components is “to [be able to] examine [reality] in all purity, all by itself, and to pursue the knowledge of what it doesn’t know, either of past, present, or future things.” This sounds very much like the activity of a philosophical soul. However, since the θυμοειδές is grouped here with the appetites as a source of psychic disturbance, it follows that the middle part,

⁴⁹ See C. Enache, “Dualism and Tripartition in Platon. Unlawful Desires, Sleep, and Shame in Book 9 of the *Politeia*,” *MusHelv* 81 (2024) 34–53. Cf. Liebert, *Tragic Pleasure* 162–163. I disagree, however, with Liebert’s suggestion (162 n.120) that “poetry appeals to appetite exclusively” and that Sokrates “denies the relevance of the thumoeidic category under conditions when the two nonrational parts of the soul are in alliance” (163).

⁵⁰ See also 572A5–6: “to calm down the two [inferior] parts (τὸ δύο εἶδη) and stir up the third in which thinking takes place.” Note the grammatical dual, which echoes τὸ ἀρχομένω at 442D1.

even in a philosophical soul,⁵¹ is not always an ally of reason.⁵²

The second passage is 611B–612A, where the wisdom-loving element of the soul (φιλοσοφία 611D8) is identified as the soul's true essence or nature (ἀληθῆ φύσιν 612A3). Whether this should be taken as an indication that only the rational part is immortal is a much debated question that does not need to be addressed here.⁵³ What matters is that the rational element is portrayed as essentially different from the lower two parts. Unlike the picture suggested at 441A, this passage implies that the lower two soul parts share more with each other—in their distance from philosophy—than either does with reason.

I mention these two passages because, together with the notion of 'decent man', they shed light on an aspect of Platonic psychology that can easily be misunderstood on the basis of Books 2–7, namely the inner life of the perfectly virtuous man. As has been recently argued, the widespread assumption that complete virtue, as outlined in Book 4, and ideal education, as outlined in Books 5–7, guarantee a conflict-free and harmonious psychic life deserves to be called into question.⁵⁴ Rather than constituting a state of undisturbed serenity, virtue appears as a dynamic equilibrium in which the hierarchy of the three soul components must be constantly reaffirmed. Hints in this direction already ap-

⁵¹ Liebert, *Tragic Pleasure* 155, rightly observes the alliance of the lower two parts of the soul in this passage, but she is mistaken in suggesting that Platon is here describing a lawless soul.

⁵² At 571B5–6 the lawless pleasures and desires that arise from the lower two parts of the soul are said to be typically restrained by laws and by better desires that are accompanied by reason, while at 571D1 they are explicitly identified as the opposites of shame and prudence. This is the very same language used at 604A to describe the forces that oppose the non-rational part of the soul in a 'decent man' (αἰσχύνονται, λόγος, νόμος).

⁵³ T. M. Robinson, "Soul and Immortality in Republic X," *Phronesis* 12 (1967) 147–151; A. Graeser, *Probleme der platonischen Seelenteilungslehre* (Munich 1969) 29–40; T. A. Szlezák, "Unsterblichkeit und Trichotomie der Seele im zehnten Buch der Politeia," *Phronesis* 21 (1976) 31–58.

⁵⁴ Austin, *AGPh* 98 (2016) 1–20; Liebert, *Tragic Pleasure* 157–158.

pear in Books 3 and 4. For instance, at 415D–E Sokrates argues that the guardians—meaning the upper two classes—should establish their headquarters in the part of the city from which they can best control (κατέχουεν) the other citizens, in case any of them proves unwilling to obey the laws (εἴ τις μὴ ἐθέλοι τοῖς νόμοις πείθεσθαι 415E1–2). Here, Sokrates clearly acknowledges the possibility that, even in the ideal state, some citizens may fall short of the ideal to the point of requiring military restraint. Similarly, at 442A he characterizes the lowest part of the soul in the following terms: “One must beware (τηρήσειτον) that, filled with the so-called bodily pleasures, it [= τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν] doesn’t grow too large and strong and, forgetting about its own business, attempt to enslave (καταδουλώσασθαι) and rule what it wasn’t born to rule,” namely the upper two soul parts. This advice (τηρήσειτον) is not directed toward individuals whose soul structure is fundamentally disordered; in fact, it would make little sense in that case. Rather, it seems addressed to those who do possess the correct psychic hierarchy, such as philosophers, alerting them to the ongoing threat posed by the lowest element of the soul. Even the term σύμμαχος “ally,” by which Sokrates describes the role of the middle soul part (e.g. at 441E5), implies a continual inner struggle (μάχη). It should therefore come as no surprise when in Book 10 Sokrates contends that even the philosopher must resort to force (βία 607E5) in order to suppress his non-rational love of poetry. This internal violence within the philosophical soul seems to be no different from the inner conflict experienced by the ‘decent man’ when his upper soul half subdues his lower half (βία 606A3)⁵⁵—especially since in both cases it is precisely the love of poetry that has to be smothered.

That Platon did not regard the philosopher as necessarily exempt from inner struggle is further supported by the following detail found in two passages in Books 9 and 10. At 605C6–7 (the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper) Sokrates observes that ‘decent people’ are susceptible to poetry *with a few excep-*

⁵⁵ As Ferrari suggests, in *Plato on Art and Beauty* 115–116.

tions.⁵⁶ As discussed in §3, this phrase implies that while most ‘decent people’ are affected by poetry, a minority are not. A similar distinction appears at 571B, where Sokrates remarks that among those who keep their lawless desires in check, in some individuals these desires have been entirely eradicated, whereas in others they persist but are weak and manageable. Since only those in whom the rational part of the soul is in control can successfully restrain their lawless desires, this distinction suggests that some philosophers still harbour lawless pleasures and desires (which they suppress with greater or lesser effort), while others do not possess them at all. In my view, these two passages indicate that philosophers—called in the critique of poetry ‘decent people’—achieve and sustain psychic harmony not through the absence of conflict, but through a continual effort to master the unruly tendencies present in every human soul.

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⁵⁶ See also ὀλίγοις at 606B6.