

Plato's *Republic*

WEEK 4 –*The Decline of the Regime and the End of Things—Books VIII -X*

It makes no difference whether such a city now exists or ever will. But perhaps its prototype can be found somewhere in heaven for him who wants to see. Seeing it, he will declare himself its citizen. The politics of this city would be his politics and none other.

—Plato, *Republic* (595b)

I. BOOK VIII – FIVE REGIME TYPES (236-37)

- A. **City/Soul:** “If there are altogether five forms of government, there would also be five forms of soul in the human personality.” (544e)
- B. **REMINDER:** Socrates is still responding to Thrasymachus (545b)
- C. **Aristocracy: Government of the Best (545a)**
- D. **Timocracy: Honor-Loving Rule (545d)**
 1. **Revolution** originates in dissensions among the ruling class (545d)
 2. **Bronze and Iron vs Gold and Silver:** “Iron and bronze were attracted toward money-making and the acquisition of land and houses and gold and silver. The other coalition, gold and silver, not being poor but rich by nature, tried to draw the opposition back to the inherited order.” (547b)
 3. **Private Ownership:** Results in slavery, coercion and warmaking (545c)
 4. **Honor-Loving Soul:** Initially disdains wealth, fond of physical prowess – as he ages he begins to love wealth more. (549b)
- E. **Oligarchy:** A regime based on property ownership in which only the rich hold office and the poor have no share in government (550d)
 1. **Timocracy collapses as warriors hoard gold:** “The ruin of timocracy is the gold that accumulates in the coffers of private persons.” (550d)
 2. **Antagonism between wealth and virtue** (550e)
 3. **City is always divided** between rich and poor. (551d)
 4. **The Rise of the Consumer** (552c)
 5. **Oligarchic Soul:** Sees the warrior fail, turns to moneymaking for security, indulges greed, uses reason to advance appetite – but only those that are profitable. He’s a hoarder, and has self-control when it comes to money; as a result he appears just – but stingy (553a-e). He is an “odious fellow, ever on the lookout for bigger profits.” (554b)
- F. **Democracy:** The greatest freedom—“Of all constitutions, this is perhaps the fairest . . . a many-colored cloak.” (557c)
 1. **The next generation spends the wealth.** “There is no limit to what the young prodigals may spend and waste.” (555c)

2. **Numb?** Habituated to luxury and idleness, can't deal with pleasure or pain. (556c)
3. **Democratic Soul: Inversion of virtues** – he lives with the Lotus Eaters . . . “Shame they call naïveté . . . Temperance becomes cowardice . . .” (560d)
4. **No fixed character/fecklessness:** “So he lives his life day by day, indulging each appetite as it makes itself felt . . .” (561c-d)
5. **Liberty:** “Democracy’s greatest good . . . in a democratic city you will hear that this is the most precious of all possessions and for this reason is the only place a truly free man would want to live.” (562c)
6. **Youth Celebrated:** “Father will acquire the habit of imitating his children, he will fear his sons . . . teachers fear and flatter their students. . . the old descend to the level of youth.” (563b)
7. **Lawless/Hates Authority:** “The souls of the citizens [are] so hypersensitive that they cannot bear to hear even the mention of authority . . .” (563e)
8. **Origins of Tyranny:** The mightiest and most savage form of slavery results from pushing freedom to the extreme (564a)
9. **Tyrant Emerges as “The People’s Protector and Champion.”** (565c-d)

G. BOOK IX – THE TYRANT

- A. **Unleashing the Id?** “Those that stir when the soul is otherwise asleep...” (571c-d)
- B. **Tyrants** “live their whole lives without friends. They are always one man’s master or another man’s slave. Tyrants never learn friendship or freedom.” (576a)
- C. **The Tyrannical Soul is a Slave (577e)**
- D. **Return to the Discussion of the Best Life and Justice (Thrasymachus):** “We are here addressing the greatest of all questions: the difference between the good life and the bad.” (578c)

H. BOOK X – A REBIRTH?

- A. **Imitation: Imitative artists have no place in the just city**
 1. **Artists create things but they are only copies** – artists can confuse and deceive us
 2. **Imitation is far from truth (288b)** it only deals with appearances
 3. “We have arrived at a justification for not admitting the poet to a well-ordered state. Because he calls forth the worst elements in the soul and then nourishes them and makes them strong, he destroys the soul’s reasoning part” (605b)
 4. **Poetry** “makes [passions] grow great instead of drying them up. It establishes them as our governors when instead they should be the ones governed if we are to become men who are better and happier instead of worse and miserable.” (606d)
 5. **“Pleasure and pain will become kings of the city” (607a)**
 6. **“We are engaged in a great struggle, a struggle greater than it seems. The issue is whether we shall become good or bad.”**
- B. **Immortality of the Soul - The Myth of Er (614b)**
 1. **618c** “The moment of choice is the time of man’s greatest peril. It admonishes each of us— even if we neglect all other studies—that a man should be concerned first of all with searching out and studying that which enables him to discern the good.”
 2. **Odysseus** – searches for the life of an ordinary man who would mind his own business (620d)